

Hints on Study and Practice

Study

To study the virtues, we are using our intellect, logic, intuition, heart, emotion, bodily sensation, curiosity, memory, imagination, and any other way to think about, reflect on, contemplate, understand, feel, or mix our mind, emotions, and body with that we are getting to know. Some people are more naturally oriented toward understanding intellectually, others toward knowing through practice and in their body, and others through intuition and heart. It doesn't really matter which way you are naturally more oriented, as none are necessarily better than the other. We may start with how we are more naturally oriented trying to know as much as we can and then try to expand beyond that way. The most important part is that we are trying to get to know it and that we get to know it thoroughly, fully, and properly. In this way we bring it deeply into our body, speech, and mind. In this way we transform our body, speech, and mind to embody the virtue. Practically, you can use meditation, journal, sketchpad, quiet contemplative time, group discussions, readings, videos, among many other ways to record, reflect, and explore the virtue and our process. The following are suggested ways to contemplate.

- Read the contemplation on the virtue and find a word, phrase, or sentence that stands out during this reading of it. Allow your mind to think about, reflect on, contemplate that word, phrase, or sentence for an entire minute, 5 minutes, day, etc.
- You can also mix the above with the following:
 - Contemplate the overarching idea of generosity
 - Contemplate the other words pointing to the idea of generosity
 - Contemplate the overarching message of generosity
 - Contemplate each line and each word both in the contemplation itself and in the commentary
 - Contemplate other sources on generosity such as books, videos, and life itself doing the same kind of contemplation.
- Look to your own experience from the past remembering times you practiced that virtue and times when you didn't. Reflect on how each felt in the body and mind, how others felt or acted, and what the outcome was.
- Try acts of that virtue and study your experience. Reflect on your own experience before, during, and after. What did you experience: was it difficult, somewhat difficult, or not difficult?; what thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, etc. did you feel, come up against, or have to work with?; what was your body, speech and mind like when you either practiced the virtue or when you were not able to. Reflect on how it felt in the body and mind, how others felt or acted, and what the outcome was both if you were able to practice or when you weren't.

- Contemplate your experience of others from either the past or present when they practiced or not. Reflect on how each felt in your body and mind, how the other person felt or acted, and what were/are the outcomes.
- Contemplate the natural world of animals, plants, the planet, and cosmos, are there signs of the virtue beyond our normal ways of thinking about it and if so what are they and what are the outcomes.
- When you have the idea or experience of the virtue to whatever degree you do, bring it further into your mind and body by feeling what it feels like to be the virtue into the mind and body. Allow your awareness to drop out of just the conceptual and feel it as if from the inside out. This is developing a deeper and more stable knowing than just an intellectual one.
- Try to align your outlook and view of the world with deeper understanding.
- Then practice further and repeat.
- Memorize the contemplation, repeating it multiple times throughout the day, week, month, year and try to bring it with you everywhere.

Practice

In practicing a virtue we are setting an intention and following through with action in the practice of that virtue. No matter the virtue, when we set an intention it is based on first having at least a general idea what the virtue is, we then try to find a way to put it into practice. The more refined our understanding, the more we try to find refined ways to put it into practice. To put it into practice we may decide on one or more activities to practice the virtue. For example to practice generosity, we may choose to immediately give money to our favorite charity or decide to offer rides in our car to our classmates. We may also choose a time frame such as the next minute, hour, day, week, month, year, etc. and focus our energies on finding ways to enact the virtue. We may reflect on our relationship with the virtue and see one way in which we hold back, for example in generosity with our time or talent, and decide you are going to look for ways specifically to practice with sharing in that way. We may reflect on a close relationship realizing that you are not being generous with your care or understanding and commit to share your care or understanding purposefully in the next several interactions with this person. The more specific and committed you are, the more likely you will be successful in practicing.

I encourage you to find your own ways to practice the virtue. I also encourage you to continue reflecting and studying your own experience both when you are successful and when you are not. It is helpful to not only focus on when you are following through on your intention with actions matching the intention, but also when it is hard to set an intention or follow through on the intention. We learn a lot by being curious, honest, and kind with ourselves about what didn't work or how we faced an emotion or situation that was too much. Sometimes we just

easily forget, which is the point of practicing mindfulness, the ability of the mind to be present and to know and remember. Sometimes we reflect on why we don't follow through and realize that you are holding onto a resentment that is getting in the way or you have a habit of dissociating and therefore blank out forgetting. The kleshas of desire/greed, aggression/aversion, and ignorance/dissociation are powerful forces and practicing the virtues pits us against them. We are learning to hold and relate to ourselves and the kleshas with these same virtues. There is never a time we can't practice! As the mahasiddha Chogyam Trungpa stated, "We can never truly take a vacation." Even on vacation, we are still practicing!