

## **Maitri Space Awareness**

*Maitri can be translated as 'love'. It means a warm, friendly attitude. In making friends with someone, it means accepting their neurosis as well as their sanity. Maitri is an all-encompassing friendship that relates with the destructiveness of nature as well as with its creativity. But the first step is trust in ourselves. Such trust can only come about when there is no categorizing, no judgment, but a simple and direct relationship with our being.*

Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche

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The Maitri program was developed by Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist meditation master. The program is designed to nurture compassion through participation in a meditative community. Students in the community practice sitting meditation, space awareness postures and meditation in action. These practices exaggerate both the neurotic and sane aspects of each individual. The exaggerated expressions are projected onto the screen of the community and are mirrored back. Thus community members can become more sensitive to their own and others styles of relating to the world.

In order to understand the Maitri approach it is necessary to review the basic principles of Buddhist psychology upon which the program is based. According to Buddhist psychology, the basis of neurosis is the tendency to solidify energy into a barrier that separates space into two entities, "I" and "Other", the space in here and the space out there. This process is technically termed "dualistic fixation". First there is the initial creation of the barrier, the sensing of other, and then the inference of inner, or I. This is the birth of ego. We identify with what is in here and struggle to relate to what is out there. The barrier causes an imbalance between inside and outside. The struggle to redress the imbalance further solidifies the wall. The irony of the barrier-creating process is that we lose track of the fact that we have created the barrier and, instead, act as if it was always there.

After the initial creation of I and Other, I feels the territory outside itself, determining if it is threatening, attractive or uninteresting. Feeling the environment is followed by impulsive action-passion, aggression, or ignoring--pulling in what is seductive, pushing away what is threatening or repelling, ignoring what is uninteresting or irritating. But feeling and impulsive action are crude ways of defending and enhancing ego. The next response is conceptual discrimination, fitting phenomena into categories, which makes the world much more manageable and intelligible. Finally, whole fantasy worlds are created to shield and entertain ego. Emotions are the highlights of the fantasies while discursive thoughts, images and memories sustain the story line. A story of ego's hopes and fears, victories and defeats, virtues and vices is developed. In highly neurotic people, elaborate subplots or "problems" then develop from the initial drama. The subplots become very complicated and compelling, often overshadowing the main drama. In psychotic people, the subplots completely overshadow the main drama. The different

stages of ego development -- the initial split of I and Other, feeling, impulse, conceptualization, and the various fantasy worlds are technically referred to as the five skandhas. From moment to moment the five skandhas are recreated in such a manner that it seems like the ego drama is continuous. Clinging to the apparent continuity and solidity of ego, ceaselessly trying to maintain I and Mine, is the root of neurosis. This effort clashes with the inevitability of change, with the ever-recurring death and birth of ego and, therefore, causes suffering.

If a person feels that his inner resources for coping with and appreciating life are very limited, then the world outside seems highly alien, seductive and threatening. He feels compelled to struggle to remove threats and draw in what is valuable. But the struggle is self-defeating. It intensifies the solidity of the barrier and results in feelings of inner poverty and restricted space. Thus, to a highly neurotic person, the outer world is extremely claustrophobic and confusing. The level of psychosis is reached when the fear of outside is so great that we panic and become absorbed in a fantasy world that has little connection with our surroundings.

The goal of the Maitri program is to give a student a sense of more inner space, more strength and intelligence, more acceptance of himself and the world. The clarity and calm possible with such an inner space is the first step toward sanity. The relationship of inner and outer spaces is stabilized sufficiently so that the struggle with the world is relaxed. Further psychological development involves clearly seeing how the emotions and fantasies develop, and how they are used as entertainment and defense. But before we can fundamentally question the dramas in which we are involved, there must be some calmness and clarity, some spaciousness in our inner world. Only then, after the turbulent waters become gently flowing and clear, can the barrier of itself be seen. So, in a sense, the goal of the Maitri program is to have the student become more familiar and comfortable with ego, to make friends with his neurotic ways. Thus, the process of becoming sane from the Buddhist point of view begins with clearly seeing. the transparency of the sub-plots, then the dramas, then the concepts and finally the barrier itself. One works with more and more refined levels of dualistic fixation.

The sub-plots and dramas are neurotic distortions of basic styles of relating to space. The meditative process is not to eliminate these styles of relationships but to cut through the ego game of territoriality associated with each style. The whole idea of Buddhist meditation is therefore to work with the core of the neurosis, clinging to territory, rather than trying to change a person's style of relating to the world. Individual differences in energy flow, and in cultural and historical circumstances are not problems. Released from the distortions caused by territorial clinging, the styles manifest as sane expressions of intelligence. Thus, we need not build up positive or sane qualities. If we part the clouds of confusion, the sun of sanity will Shine through.

The basic styles of relating to space are classified in terms of the "Buddha families" -- Karma, Vajra, Ratna, Buddha, Padma. According to Tibetan Buddhist Tantra, the Buddha families are fundamental patterns of energy, which manifest in all phenomenal experience. Thus landscapes, colors, sounds, foods, climates as well as personality types

can all be classified in terms of the Buddha families. In the following descriptions of the basic styles of relating to space the neurotic aspect will be emphasized.

Vajra movement Involves sweeping over and surveying the entire area facing you, clearly mirroring the field of vision. It is like clear water freely flowing over a surface. It fills all the space but the surface underneath it can be seen clearly. Vajra neurosis involves fear of being surprised, confused, or overwhelmed by outside, so one continually monitors the environment for threats. When a threat is detected, we respond by cold or hot anger -- pushing the world away by creating a cold wall that holds phenomena at a distance or a hot front that repels them. Vajra is associated with abstract intellect, with mapping relationships so as to have a clear, comprehensive view of a situation. In the neurotic state, the abstracting process becomes compulsive and loses contact with phenomena. One becomes self-righteous, justifying everything in terms of one's "system" and filtering out inconvenient facts. It also leads to intellectual frivolousness, getting caught up in word games divorced from experience, or compulsively figuring out how things fit together and what rule of conduct applies to a situation. On a bodily level it involves excessive visual and head orientation, always trying to see around the corner or behind your back, watching every corner.

Ratna is associated with substance. It involves expanding to fill up and solidify every container. Ratna neurosis is connected with feelings of not being substantial or solid enough. The world in here is insufficient, poor. The richness, the substance is out there. So the tendency of the Ratna neurosis is to expand its substance to incorporate the outside into its territory. There is a tendency to be overbearing, mothering, imperious- -trying to be the center of one's world, the principal object of affection, attention, approval. One is always hungry and needs the food of more possessions, more psychological gratification's, more confirmations of one's richness. Intellectually, Ratna neurosis manifests as indiscriminate collecting and spewing out facts, words, ideas, contacts, an overstuffed mind. The emotion associated with Ratna is pride. One is continually building monuments to oneself, reassuring oneself of importance and worth--you are heavy, significant, central in relation to your world. Physically Ratna is very concerned about material comfortable surroundings, much rich food, soft furniture. Life is a series of nourishing or unnourishing events.

In Padma neurosis one tries to draw things into one's world, to seduce phenomena. There is a sense of incompleteness, a seeking of something to entertain or enrich ourselves. The basic quality of Padma is relating to the immediate presence of "other". While Karma is associated with direct movement and Vajra with clear seeing, Padma is feeling presence. The more we panic about losing the presence of "other" the more we struggle to hold onto "other" so as to feel its presence. We want to draw "that" into "this" area and keep it here, possess it in order to feel it. Intellectually Padma neurosis involves getting caught in a succession of unrelated details, scattering one's attention. One gets lost in the surfaces.

Space Awareness.....

.....great breathing process is most common. Gradually our world becomes more spacious, our dramas less intense and all-consuming. The meditation carries over into everyday life and we begin to see more clearly how we create our worlds.

Space Awareness is a specialized meditation practice that focuses attention on the five basic patterns of relating to space. Students maintain a posture within a specially designed room for one hour, two to four times daily. Attention is focused on the space in the room. The rooms highlight the view of the world characteristic of each neurotic style and the postures highlight the neurotic response to that world. Of course, the inside and outside, "my response" and "the world's response to me" are intertwining parts of one process. To contract the space around you in response to claustrophobic surroundings intensifies the claustrophobic quality of the outside. To attack space in response to its seeming threatening quality invites more attacks. To grasp at phenomena intensifies their resistance to your clutches, which intensifies your struggle to hold on to them. Likewise, straining to know panoramically narrows one's perspective, which in turn leads to greater strain.

In each case, struggle intensifies the solidity of the barrier, the imbalance of inside and outside, and the vulnerability and impoverishment of inside. From moment to moment one is faced with the alternative of letting go, of opening to a saner, more balanced relationship to the world, or panicking and intensifying the struggle to manipulate it.

The long period of holding the posture, the monotony of the surroundings and the task of attending to space, allow the possibility of being less caught up in habitual thought patterns. Furthermore, the postures are all somewhat uncomfortable and, therefore, demand attention to the body and ground as well. These conditions can break the chain of thoughts sufficiently so that a person glimpses his neurotic relationship to space. He may come to realize that the "external world" is always the same in these rooms and therefore his shifting perceptions of the room are his own creation. This insight may allow him to relax his struggle with space sufficiently to glimpse a sane way of relating; to it.

In the Vajra posture, one lies belly down, hands extended to the sides, palms flat on the ground, and face to the side. In the blue Vajra room the windows are small slits along the wall. Since a person with Vajra neurosis is always scanning his surroundings, facing the ground and looking at windows that only tease him can be very frustrating. He doesn't know what is above him or outside the room. The positions and rooms, thus force the practitioner to confront how he relates to his world by frustrating or exaggerating his ordinary style. The positive potential in the Vajra posture is to discover that you don't have to literally see what is above or around you. There is the conviction that you already know what is happening, excessive confirmation is unnecessary.

In Ratna posture the arms are perpendicular to the body, legs are spread wider than in Karma posture and the hands are flat down against the ground. The Ratna room contains a large circular window on one wall. Its color is gold. From the posture one sees the outline of the window without being able to see out. This suggests the possibility of expanding beyond the room, incorporating the richness outside, but one cannot.

Extending the arms and legs as much as possible also suggests expansiveness. But since the richness is outside one's reach it is very frustrating and poverty stricken. This exposes the Ratna tendency to compensate for feelings of poverty and insubstantiality by expanding its territory to feed itself. In the positive case, one feels rich, the external world doesn't especially need to feed you.

Padma posture is lying on the side, one arm extended out fully and the other resting on the hip. The room is square with large windows on two walls and is red. The room suggests something seductive outside it, and the posture suggests keeping your door open to seduce passersby to come and visit. But nothing passes by, nothing entertaining happens, there is no new presence to feel, your seductive gestures are futile. The positive potential is that one discovers an already existent presence to which nothing needs to be added.

The Karma position is lying flat on the back, hands close to the sides, the back of the hand flat on the ground, legs spread apart. The room has a 4' x 4' square window on top and is colored green. Attending to the limbs accentuates the Karma tendency toward movement and the window high above invites thrusting movement toward it. Thus, the Karma tendency to speedy movement is exaggerated. Furthermore, being forced to lie on the ground, motionless, frustrates the impulse to activity and heightens the Karma fear of vulnerability. The space seems to be cutting through you. The positive potential in this posture is that one gives up the struggling to defend oneself by jumping about and realizes that space is not attacking you and you need not attack space.

Buddha posture is resting on one's knees and elbows, chin between the palms of the hands. The room is small with no windows, a low ceiling, dim light and is colored white. The posture suggests contraction, drawing inward, protecting by closing up. The room reflects the ignoring of environment, the creating of a closed, secure space to cope with an acute sense of claustrophobia. Positively one discovers the possibility of being open even in such a potentially claustrophobic situation.

Usually students participate in the Maitri program for a three month period. During the first part of the program students practice all the postures. This enables them to discover the qualities of each of the Buddha families. During the second part of the program each student concentrates on becoming friends with his or her basic qualities.

The effect of the rooms is not limited to the time spent in them. The atmosphere created in the rooms is carried into everyday life. Especially when the same posture is done regularly, one's mental and emotional life becomes colored by the rooms. It is as if we put on yellow, red or green glasses each time we step out of a room. Tuning into these psychological spaces inspires a knowing acceptance, a sympathetic appreciation of oneself and others. It teaches one to respect the extraordinary subtle and limitless particularities of energy and the ultimate simplicity of its basic characteristics.