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## Knowing Body, Moving Mind: Ritualizing and Learning in Two Buddhist Centres in Toronto

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**Knowing Body, Moving Mind:**  
**Ritualizing and Learning in Two Buddhist Centres in Toronto**

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Department of Religion and Culture,  
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## Abstract

This book explores learning through ritualizing in introductory meditation courses offered at two Tibetan-based, western Buddhist centres in Toronto. Through interviews with several of the centres' newcomers, experienced members and teachers, it explores students' reasons for enrolling in meditation classes as well as their attitudes towards religion and ritual. The study's primary focus is on respondents' experiences of learning through formal practices such as meditation postures and techniques. Ritualizing is interpreted in part through performance theory, an approach which highlights the performative elements of ritual and the physical enactment of ritualized postures and gestures. Learning through ritualized activities creates a unique kind of understanding, a tacit type of knowledge that is located in muscle and bone rather than solely in the brain. But meditation involves forms of ritualizing in addition to its physical postures and gestures. The conception of ritualizing employed here thus extends beyond performance—those activities that are done to be seen—to include practices which take place in meditators' minds. Thus, meditative concentration techniques are also considered ritualizing. From this perspective, the mind is regarded as an aspect of the body that is also capable of ritualized behaviour. Respondents indicated that there was a range of different types of learning experienced in the meditation classes. With the aid of an influential learning model called Bloom's taxonomy, this study explores the distinct types or "domains" in which meditation students learned. They include gaining new factual or intellectual knowledge, experiencing changes in attitudes, emotions or values and developing new physical skills and techniques. Linking ritualized activities to learning theory illustrates the ways in which ritualizing contributes to new learning in these distinct domains.

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For my father.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: The Centres .....	23
Friends of the Heart .....	26
Chandrakirti Centre.....	34
Outreach.....	43
Chapter Two: Participants.....	45
Chapter Three: Classes.....	87
Introductory meditation class structure.....	88
Rituals of entry .....	90
Opening prayer.....	92
Meditation.....	94
Talks or lectures .....	105
Group discussion and socializing .....	110
Closing rituals .....	111
Ritual and introductory meditation classes .....	113
Ritualization and ritualizing.....	115
Performance theory and restoration of behaviour.....	121
Conclusion .....	123
Chapter Four: Learning.....	126
Bloom's taxonomy.....	130
Cognitive learning.....	131
Affective learning.....	134
Psychomotor learning .....	141
A fourth domain?.....	147
"Practice" as changing behaviour.....	156
Respondents' reflections on learning.....	160
Conclusion .....	173
Chapter Five: Ritualizing .....	176
Ritualizing and decorum .....	178
Prostrations.....	181
Learning, Experimentation and Invariance.....	187
Cognitive learning and ritualizing.....	191
Ritualizing and meditation.....	201
Meditation: learning through the body .....	204
Conclusion .....	227
Chapter Six: Change .....	231
Newcomers: learning and change.....	236
Teacher's objectives.....	254
Conclusion .....	260
Appendix A: Research Methods.....	270
Appendix B: Opening Prayers .....	274
Friends of the Heart .....	274
Chandrakirti Centre.....	274
References.....	276

## Introduction

*Ritual activity may serve as a mode of inquiry and discovery.*

Theodore W. Jennings

Ritual activity is ever present in human behaviour. From a simple handshake to complex religious ceremonies, we are all engaged in ritual activities, to one degree or another, just about every day. Despite their prevalence, the functions of ritual activities remain unclear, a fact that has much to do with the wide variety of behaviours we associate with ritual.

Scholars of ritual have speculated for some time about possible common functions that such widely disparate behaviours might serve. In an influential article entitled “On Ritual Knowledge,” Theodore W. Jennings proposes that an important function of ritual is the generation of new knowledge. In this view, ritual is a means by which its participants make discoveries about themselves and about their world.<sup>1</sup> This book investigates the idea that ritualizing, the behaviours through which ritual is formed, adapted, and preserved, may lead to new learning. The question I set out to answer was this: How or to what degree does ritualizing contribute to learning about a new spiritual tradition?

In popular usage, the term “ritual” has come to mean action that is redundant, routine or empty of meaning. This rather negative view is one reason many ritualists, people who participate in rituals, do not like the word. While ritual can have all these qualities, scholarly studies of ritual show that it can also be experimental, creative or even revolutionary. The term “ritual” is difficult to define, partly because of the wide variety of phenomena to which we apply the word.<sup>2</sup>

Definitions focus on either a few key qualities or a long, ostensibly definitive, list. Stanley J. Tambiah, for example, offers the following definition: “Patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotypy

(rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition).”<sup>3</sup> While this definition highlights important performative elements of ritual, particularly the acts and the media in rituals are presented, the qualities Tambiah selects portray ritual predominantly as rote repetition. Further, he can say only that the list of qualities he chooses apply to ritual “in varying degree.” In fact, any number of these qualities may be absent in any given ritual.

Roy A. Rappaport’s definition is more concise than Tambiah’s: “The performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers.”<sup>4</sup> While highlighting some of the same qualities of ritual—its usual invariance, formality, for example—Rappaport’s definition focuses on the idea that ritual acts do not fully originate with their performers. They are received and are essentially re-performed. This emphasis serves Rappaport’s overall purpose, which is to argue for ritual’s role in communicating, sanctifying and preserving human social order.<sup>5</sup> The idea that ritual activities are received and re-performed is also relevant for the current study of learning through ritualizing, but there are other, equally important, characteristics of ritual that I stress as well.

There is a large number of qualities that are commonly associated with ritual, few of which characterize all instances of ritual or ritual-like behaviours. Rather than establishing a hard and fast definition, therefore, it is more helpful to classify the large variety of phenomena we call “ritual” as a set of family resemblances, a notion inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein’s musings on the term games.<sup>6</sup>

Ronald L. Grimes has composed a comprehensive list of ritual’s most common qualities and their opposites. This means of characterizing ritual replaces the view of a definition as a set of boundaries with a view of it as a set of family resemblances.<sup>7</sup> His list shows that ritual is characterized by scholars as: performed rather than thought or said; it is more formalized and elevated than ordinary; more often collective, symbolic and



transcendent than individual, obvious or worldly.<sup>8</sup> We can understand ritual, then, as referring to a wide variety of enactments encompassing these among several other related qualities. None of these qualities alone is definitive but an increase in their number and intensity increases the degree of ritualization of the behaviours involved.<sup>9</sup>

Grimes employs a useful analogy: “Ritual is not ‘digital’; it does not operate with a simple off/on, yes/no logic in relation to ordinary activity. Rather, ordinary activities become more or less ritualized; ritualization takes place by degrees and in many forms.”<sup>10</sup> This perspective steers clear of black and white definitions that identify one activity as ritual and another not. Some activities are more ritualized than others. Thus, ritual and its related terms, “ritualization” and “ritualizing,” are best described in terms of a kind of sliding scale, from less to more. The sliding scale approach is useful for the current study because it allows for the investigation of a wider variety of behaviours without the need to determine whether or not they constitute rituals as such. The approach is also open to different participants’ interpretations of ritual since it allows for a range of different but relevant characteristics. While none of the characteristics of ritual is itself definitive, one is consistent. Ritual is something that is *done*: Grimes usually speaks of it as “performed” when the action is either observed or fictional and as “enacted” when the action puts something into force.

In my view, then, ritual may therefore be understood as an enactment that is typically repetitive, formal, embodied, special, set aside from ordinary time and space, elevated, and sometimes spiritual or religious. The rituals and ritualized behaviours discussed in this book are also sometimes described as stylized, communal, deliberate, received, traditional, symbolic, or reflexive. Sequences of behaviour that are associated with an increasing number of these qualities, or are more strongly characterized by a number of them, are more ritualized. Behaviours are less ritualized if few of these characteristics are

present or when their opposites dominate: when they are informal, one-time, diffuse, secular, invented, solitary and so on. This is not to say that any of these opposites necessarily disqualify something as ritual: Ritual studies scholars often study informal, secular and invented ritual. Hence my approach to describing ritual is meant to counter common conceptions that ritual is always rote, meaningless repetition since formality and repetition are only two among a number of qualities that may or may not be associated with a particular ritual. Further, it avoids identifying ritual strictly with religion or with a particular religious tradition.

The terms, ritualization and ritualizing, are described in more detail in chapter three. A brief description of ritualizing, however, will be helpful here. In its generic sense, “ritualizing” signifies performing a ritual. But throughout this book the term is used in a more specific sense: It refers to formative behaviour. This connotation follows on Grimes’s description of ritualizing as “nascent ritual,” activity that leads to the formation of new ritual.<sup>11</sup> “Ritualizing,” therefore, refers to more innovative, creative, or experimental behaviour than does “ritual.” Ritualizing consists of behaviours through which ritual is formed, adapted, and preserved. I distinguish this formative sense of “ritualizing” from a more general range of activities by referring to the latter as “ritual activities,” “ritualized behaviours” or “formal practices.”

Ritualizing can and does occur within the context of long-standing ritual, and it is the means through which such enactments are renewed or revitalized. But ritualizing may also occur in other contexts, such as theatre workshops and, I will argue, meditation classes.

In the greater Toronto area, there are literally dozens of meditation groups, dharma centres and Buddhist temples that offer teachings and meditation sessions to the general public. Some of these centres structure many of their regular public events not as services

or meditation sessions, but as meditation classes offered to individuals from non-Buddhist religious and cultural backgrounds. The centres at the heart of this study, Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti Centre, were two such organizations. Friends of the Heart is an independently run group founded and led by Lama Catherine Rathbun. Chandrakirti Centre is part of a large, international organization called the New Kadampa Tradition, founded by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso. Both based in Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism, the unique expression of Buddhism that developed in Tibet, the centres' teachers as well as most of their members hail from non-Buddhist backgrounds. Newcomers who participate in the introductory classes at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti Centre are introduced to a tradition and a set of ritual activities with which they are unfamiliar. Because of this, they have much to learn about Buddhist teachings and practices. Each centre's introductory course has a particular focus: at Friends of the Heart it is primarily on meditation practice, at Chandrakirti, the emphasis is on Buddhist teachings and ethics as well as meditation. Students participating in either course are exposed to new ritual activities which include the formal postures, gestures and techniques of meditation.

From October of 2006 to November of 2007, I conducted semi-structured ethnographic style interviews and participant-observation field research at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti Centre. Twenty-four people participated in interviews. Some were students in introductory courses; others had been participating at higher level courses and were long-term members. I also had the opportunity to interview some of the centres' teachers. Throughout this book, I refer to Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti as "western" Buddhist centres, and their members and visitors as "western Buddhist sympathizers." Scholars have often noted the difficulties in finding appropriate terms to refer to members of different Buddhist groups in North America. Most of the terms used to distinguish between groups that have family and cultural ties to Buddhist nations in Asia

and those who do not are vague at best and inaccurate at worst. For some time, the convention has been to distinguish two distinct communities of Buddhists in western nations. Sometimes referred to as “immigrant” and “convert” groups, these terms have rightly come under fire from scholars who point out that many of those identified with the first group—those with ties to Asia—are not, in fact immigrants. Moreover, many of those identified with the second group do not consider themselves to be converts. Many have an interest in Buddhism without identifying as Buddhist, a fact that is explored later in this book. Finally, and I think most importantly, a bipartite division of Buddhist communities<sup>12</sup> in the West is simply inaccurate. The former group is actually composed of a large number of ethnically and culturally diverse communities that greatly outnumber the second group. In fact, it is far more appropriate to regard the second group—Buddhist sympathizers from non-Buddhist backgrounds—as its own culturally-influenced expression that is one of the many, richly diverse Buddhist communities now thriving in the West.<sup>13</sup>

Even so, it is difficult to establish the boundaries that define those involved in this latter expression of Buddhism in North America. What I am calling “western” Buddhism is comprised of a disparate group of Buddhist centres or communities, based in a variety of different Buddhist schools, ranging from Theravāda to Zen to Vajrayāna.<sup>14</sup> It also includes many secularized or non-sectarian organizations. Westernized Buddhist groups in Canada include people from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Their members are individuals raised in regions commonly referred to as “the West” whose primary cultural influences consist of dominant western or, more specifically North American, worldviews. Western cultural attitudes that have significantly influenced the development of Buddhist groups in North America are individualism, democracy, gender equity and social and political activism.<sup>15</sup>

Western Buddhists, as identified here, are people raised in a culture unfamiliar with Buddhist practices and worldviews who have developed an interest in Buddhism. They are not distinguished by any particular ethnic or racial background. Instead, I identify western Buddhists by their non-Buddhist backgrounds and their experience of turning to Buddhism; that is, of seeking out Buddhist practices and teachings. References to western practitioners have less to do with ethnic heritage than with participants' experiences of taking on Buddhist practices and worldviews in a Canadian cultural setting. Although it is problematic, I use the term "western Buddhism" primarily because respondents use and are familiar with it.

Scholars of Buddhism in North America have pointed out several significant themes that relate to the underlying cultural conditions and worldviews influencing the development of Buddhism among western practitioners. Dominant among them are individualism, gender equity, democratic or egalitarian ideals, social activism, and a reduced emphasis on monasticism.<sup>16</sup> Friends of the Heart's teachings and practices, as well as the accommodations it makes for its western members, are no exception to these trends. The centre's founder, a woman, has taken a type of lay ordination, and both men and women are among the centre's other teachers. Friends of the Heart is governed not by its teachers alone but by a volunteer board of directors which includes other members. Further, the centre regularly hosts events that raise money for local charities and for Tibetan nuns in India. Individualism has a strong influence on Buddhist practice at Friends of the Heart and at Chandrakirti as well. Introductory meditation classes are very much structured towards a personal, self-directed, immediate experience of meditation.

Chandrakirti, however, departs somewhat from one or two of these trends. To my knowledge, the centre is not officially involved in social activism in the community, although its teachers regard disseminating the dharma (Buddhist teachings) through its

classes as a socially engaged activity. Its members undeniably value gender equity and egalitarianism, and the centre's authority figures are both male and female. But the centre is part of a large, international organization that is governed, unlike many independent westernized Buddhist centres, by a central, hierarchical authority, a fact that creates a disconnect between members' democratic ideals and the reality of how the centre is governed. Finally, the NKT seems to have had much more success recruiting and retaining members willing to take monastic ordination. Even so, laypersons tend to regard and treat monastics more as equals that would be the case among Tibetan Buddhists.

Most studies of Buddhism in North America focus on broad sociological trends. Robert Wuthnow and Wendy Cadge, for example, write about the scope of influence of Buddhism in the United States.<sup>17</sup> Working with a statistical survey conducted between September 2002 and March 2003, they explore supply and demand influences on the spread of Buddhism, and find that one in seven Americans claims to have had a fair amount of contact with Buddhists, while one in eight believes that Buddhist teachings or practices have had an important influence on his or her religion or spirituality.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, James William Coleman conducted a systematic survey of western Buddhist practitioners in the mid- to late 1990s. He summarizes his findings in his text *The New Buddhism*, which is a comprehensive discussion of the style of Buddhism developing among western practitioners, with respect to several of the trends touched on above.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike these broader, more sociological methodologies, the current project is one of very few studies that present detailed ethnographic data on western Buddhist practitioners in North America, let alone Canada. Drawing upon the personal reflections of individual participants, it explores some of their reasons for becoming interested in Buddhist teachings and practices and for seeking out a meditation centre. Moreover, few if any studies have explored ritual with respect to westernized expressions of Buddhism. This

study includes a detailed description of meditation classes at two westernized centres. It explores in some depth the reflections of western Buddhist sympathizers on their experiences in the classes, their responses to the variety of formal practices they encountered and their experiences practicing meditation.

Where the literature on western expressions of Buddhism does explore ritual in any detail, it tends to focus on the differences between western practitioners' preferences and the practices of Buddhists with ties to Asian expressions of the tradition. Martin Baumann highlights some of these differences, noting that they are based primarily on religious concepts that the different groups hold.<sup>20</sup> Practitioners that Baumann calls "traditionalist"—those with ties to more long-standing traditions in Asia—hold monastic practitioners in higher esteem, participate more readily in devotional practices like offerings, chanting prayers and worship, meditate less often and include a range of different folk traditions such as divinations, the use of protective amulets and the like.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, Baumann claims, western Buddhists emphasize meditation in their practice, they participate less often in devotional worship and they work toward personal awakening rather than accruing "merit" as more traditional practitioners do.<sup>22</sup>

Some of the trends Baumann describes do hold among students at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti, although their members did participate in some practices Baumann more readily identifies with traditionalist Buddhists. Both centres taught introductory students about accruing and dedicating merit, for example, and several newcomers said that that practice was appealing. Participants at both centres were also involved in making the water offerings on the shrines. But, for the most part, the western practitioners to whom I spoke were not particularly interested in devotional practices or worship as such. Those who were engaged in devotional practices tended to interpret them in less devotional ways:

they interpreted the deities metaphorically, for example, or regarded the practices as personal means of development and realization.

Coleman notes that western Buddhists that he surveyed said they performed chanting or bowing to a statue because of “the ritual’s own intrinsic value” as a meditative practice, not because it was required by traditional authority.<sup>23</sup> Still, Coleman notes that the performance of devotional practices appeals to some and not to others. He speculates that those to whom the rituals of their childhood religions appealed would find more of an affinity with the Buddhist rituals they encountered.<sup>24</sup> In fact, some participants in the current study said that they were not interested in devotional practices involving offerings, bows, chanting and so on because those practices reminded them too much of a religious background from which they had fallen away.

Meditation also undergoes some adaptations in westernized Buddhism. B. Alan Wallace notes that, in Tibetan-based Buddhism taught in the West, the meditative practices are often based on more contemplative practices of Tibetan schools such as the Mahāmudrā than the discursive or analytical styles of other Tibetan forms. Thus the practices being presented to westerners are a little closer to those of the Zen school.<sup>25</sup> Western teachers, moreover, often present a mixture of different practices from traditions that were historically distinct.<sup>26</sup> I find that this is the case at both Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti: there is a wide range of different meditation practices taught; some derive from Theravāda and some from Mahāyāna as well as the Tibetan schools. Introductory classes focus on contemplative meditation more than the analytical techniques, but experienced members do report undertaking the latter types of practice.

Tibetan Buddhism has been profoundly shaped by several significant events in the twentieth century. The Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1949, as well as the exodus of Tibetan refugees, particularly that of the Dalai Lama in 1959, have brought the plight of Tibet and



the religion of the Tibetan people to the attention of the world. Displaced from its homeland, Tibetan Buddhism has been seeded by Tibetan teachers and their students in countries around the globe. Kelsang Gyatso, founder of the NKT, is one such teacher, as are the Tibetan lamas under whom Catherine Rathbun trained and was ordained.

While Buddhism has been present in Canada for some time, it was not until changes in immigration laws in the mid-1960s, which opened up immigration from previously restricted regions in Asia, that it came to the attention of the broader public. The first Tibetan Buddhists to come to Canada began arriving in the 1970s when the Canadian government agreed to accept 228 individuals and families. They were settled in four provinces. Some, like the group that settled in Lindsay, Ontario, were accompanied by a Tibetan monk. Monastics are necessary for maintaining a viable religious practice and community in among Tibetan Buddhists, and the Dalai Lama himself requested that each of the Tibetan groups that settled in Canada be accompanied by a monastic.<sup>27</sup> In 1999, there were approximately 133 Tibetans in Toronto, some thirty families. Janet McLellan notes that Tibetan communities in Canada maintain a strong sense of ethnic and religious identity that continues with the second and third generations.<sup>28</sup> The Lindsay and Belleville communities are still strong, and there is also a significant community in Barrie, just north of Toronto.

In 2000 and 2001, some 3,000 Tibetan refugees came to Canada via the United States and settled in the Toronto area. Their presence has augmented the small ethnic Tibetan community already present, and expanded cultural celebrations and political activism in the city.<sup>29</sup> Some Tibetan Buddhist temples in the city maintain parallel congregations<sup>30</sup>, serving Tibetan Buddhists in the community while catering to western practitioners as well. Other Tibetan-based centres are strictly westernized, having memberships comprised solely of practitioners from non-Buddhist backgrounds. Friends

of the Heart and Chandrakirti are two such centres. Friends of the Heart has a connection to Tibetan monk Karma Thinley Rinpoche, but neither it nor Chandrakirti have any ties to other Tibetan Buddhists in the city. Ties between western practitioners and other Canadian Buddhists are few, but Tibetan and westernized Tibetan-based Buddhist communities sometimes connect through political advocacy for Tibetan independence.<sup>31</sup> It is worth noting, however, that most independent westernized centres such as Friends of the Heart have little or no contact with other meditation or dharma centres. Individual members of different groups may read publications by a wide range of organizations and may visit a number of different dharma or retreat centres, but there is little if any official rapport between leaders or teachers of different organizations, a fact that contributes to the factionalism of westernized centres in Canada. While there is considerable interaction between Canadian NKT centres, few have any contact at all with non-NKT organizations.

The primary objective of this book is to determine how and what meditation students at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti are learning, and in what ways that learning relates to ritualizing. The investigation focuses primarily on respondents' reflections on their experiences at the introductory meditation courses. While my research included participant-observation at courses and other events at the centres, I was much more interested in what respondents had to say about what and how they had learned at the meditation classes. I asked interview participants to reflect on the ritual activities they learned and participated in and whether or not such activities were a means of learning something new.

Why study ritualizing, the behaviours that may develop into formal ritual, rather than ritual itself? My goal was to investigate learning among newcomers at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti Centre, and many of them did not participate in the centres' full-scale rituals. At Friends of the Heart, the *pūjās*, or chanted prayers, took place in the more

advanced Tibetan Meditation classes which were attended by few newcomers. Heart Jewel, the daily public *pūjā* at Chandrakirti, was so poorly attended during my fieldwork that I ruled it out as a research prospect. In the end, it was more informative to investigate the ritualized activities at introductory meditation classes and to see how and what newcomers learned through them.

This book bridges disciplines. Its research methods are those of ethnography and ritual studies. It focuses on the cultures of meditation classes at two Buddhist centres in Toronto, Canada. It thus links the study of Buddhism in North America to ritual studies and these, in turn, to learning theories. The primary theoretical framework on which the study draws, however, is performance theory. An approach that originated in the late 1970s with collaborations between anthropologist Victor Turner, sociologist Erving Goffman and theatre director Richard Schechner, and developed in much of Grimes's work,<sup>32</sup> performance theory is a relatively recent movement within the larger history of ritual studies.

Performance theory highlights the connections between ritual and other kinds of cultural performance such as theatre, play, games, sports, dance and music.<sup>33</sup> It is an approach that illuminates ritual by focusing on its enactment, comparing and contrasting it to other types of performance. What do people actually *do*? Where do they put their hands and feet, what gestures do they enact, what songs do they sing? What ritual spaces are involved? Who are the primary performers and what roles do they assume? Who, if anyone, is the audience? Performance theory, with its primary focus on action that is witnessed, can provide perspectives on such questions. It thus counters earlier methods in ritual studies that were strictly textual or liturgical. Studying ritual as performance makes us sensitive to embodiment and the reception of actions by audiences, and to the presence and significance of the body that performs ritualized activities.

Performance theory also has the advantage of viewing ritual as something innovative and changing, since it highlights enactments that disappear in the doing, as opposed to something immovable, preserved as text or myth.<sup>34</sup> My use of performance theory, therefore, is intended to push against the conception of ritual as invariant, conservative, unchanging. I look at ritual as something that can be fluid, changing, even in the face of its repetition and formality. I believe, with Jennings, that ritual's capacity for novelty and change is what enables new learning or a different kind of knowing.<sup>35</sup>

The performance theorists whom I follow most closely in this text are Grimes and Schechner. I borrow from Grimes his descriptions of ritual and ritualizing, descriptions that are firmly founded in a sense of ritual as enactment. For illuminating learning and experimenting with formal practices in meditation classes, I draw on Schechner's work on performer training, theatre workshops, and an experimental technique he calls restoration of behaviour, which I regard as comparable to ritualizing. Schechner highlights parallels between theatre and ritual that will assist the investigation of ritualizing and learning in this book. I argue that, similar to Schechner's theatre workshops, meditation classes are sites in which students learn formal practices, experiment with them, and may (or may not) later enact them as formally structured performances or rituals.

Restoration of behaviour, or ritualizing as I am calling it, produces a kind of learning which Jennings terms "ritual knowledge."<sup>36</sup> In Jennings's view, ritual transmits knowledge about ways of being and acting in the world through the ritual actions themselves. Taking the chalice during communion, he says, one's hand "discovers the fitting gesture," which, only later does one "cerebrally" determine as being right.<sup>37</sup> Another of Jennings's analogies for describing embodied knowing or what he calls ritual knowledge is the activity of cutting wood. "The axe 'teaches me' through my hands, arms and shoulders how it is to be used."<sup>38</sup> Through the activity, I learn the best way to hold and

swing the axe, as well as “how it is” with the axe, with my body, and with the world.

Through repetition, trial and error, I learn what to do and how it should be done. Ritual knowledge, in this view, is knowledge gained by the whole body, knowledge that is located in blood and bone and muscle rather than just the brain. Significantly, Jennings argues that this type of knowing gained in the ritual context is also applicable outside of the ritual space. We thus learn not only how to conduct ourselves during the ritual itself, but how to behave in the world as well.

Ritual knowledge, in the sense of something gained and known in or through the body, is also explored in studies by Nick Crossley, Michael L. Raposa and Kevin Schilbrack, who take a philosophical approach to the study of ritual.<sup>39</sup> According to Schilbrack, the usual view of what constitutes knowledge is based in a persistent sense of mind-body dualism, which limits knowledge to the mind or brain. In a dualistic perspective, movements, including those taking place in ritual, cannot constitute thinking.<sup>40</sup> Schilbrack’s goal is to open up the field of ritual studies to philosophical methods. He hopes to counter common notions that knowledge refers to accurate representation of the world, and thus to thinking, while ritual involves movement which is not. He argues that the body itself is a means of thinking and that knowledge is necessarily embodied.<sup>41</sup> From this perspective, we may begin to explore the ways in which new knowledge or understanding develops through the body by way of ritualized postures and gestures.

Crossley regards ritual as “embodied practical reason.”<sup>42</sup> He explores patterns of movement he calls body techniques that are ways through which we learn about ourselves and the uses to which we put our bodies.<sup>43</sup> Body techniques, according to Crossley, are forms of reason that are preconscious and inaccessible to our discursive minds.<sup>44</sup> Through repetition, they become habit, something with which we become so familiar that we perform them without thinking. In Crossley’s view, ritual becomes a way in which

embodied practical know-how is gained. This is not only the knowledge or understanding of how to perform the ritual, but, like Jennings's ritual knowledge, it is knowledge of how to relate to the world around us. Though preconscious, body techniques are significant, active learning experiences.<sup>45</sup> Raposa, like Crossley, observes that ritual can be regarded as a kind of thoughtful action. Rituals that teach and reinforce patterns of conduct through repetition can train one's perceptions and affect beliefs.<sup>46</sup> Raposa thus identifies ritual as a means of "thinking through and with the body."<sup>47</sup> What is helpful from Raposa's, Crossley's and Schilbrack's work is the notion of the thinking body; the idea, similar to Jennings's, that ritual activities may serve as inquiries or as a means of learning. One's body learns, but one also learns *through* the body. These ideas reference the "knowing body" of this book's title.

In addition to applying these philosophical perspectives, I take one other significant departure from ritual studies theorist Grimes and performance studies theorist Schechner. Performance theory typically concerns itself with embodiment, with posture and gesture and those activities that are done to be seen. Meditation postures and gestures fit within that framework quite easily, but the significant practices that take place in a meditator's mind—the concentration techniques employed in meditation—are not observable activities. Even so, I argue that they do constitute ritualizing. Meditation involves traditional, received practices in which one holds the mind in concentrative focus or moves the centre of attention around within the body: hence the "moving mind." I regard meditative concentration exercises as performative because they are received, re-performed techniques about which meditators are uniquely reflexive: in enacting them, the meditator is both performer and audience. More significantly, my findings indicate that the way meditators learn through concentration techniques is very similar to learning through movement or motor types of ritualized activities: it generates new skills through the

repetitive practice of received mental techniques. This, therefore, is where I expand on performance theory: by including techniques that, although they are not seen—and thus are not typically performative—they are very similar to other, more physical types of ritualizing. This book thus explores not only a different kind of knowing, it identifies a different kind of moving or performing, as well.

Given that learning theorists believe that all of our experiences have the capacity to generate new learning, the proposal that ritualizing contributes to learning is unremarkable in itself. As respondents spoke about what and how they learned, however, it became clear that there were different types of learning acquired through the ritualized activities in which they engaged. Their descriptions distinguished intellectual and factual knowledge from learning physical skills, and the attitudinal changes that they experienced as a result of their participation in the classes. Interview participants' reflections thus gave rise to the thesis that ritualizing involves different types of learning. Significantly, the types of learning described by respondents corresponded not only to descriptions of learning and change found in Buddhist doctrines and practices, but also to domains of learning set out in an influential learning theory called Bloom's taxonomy. The domains identified in that taxonomy—the cognitive, affective and psychomotor—distinguish intellectual knowledge from gaining new attitudes, emotions and values and these, in turn, from learning new physical skills. Interview data from this study indicate that a pattern existed in respondents' learning processes that cycled, to varying degrees, through these domains, and was driven, in part, by the ritualized nature of what and how they learned.

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In the chapters that follow, we will hear from interview respondents as they reflect on their experiences at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti Centre. As I selected from and summarized their responses, it was necessary to condense them as well. I made every effort

to maintain the context and meaning of the responses and to preserve interview participants' voices. To that end, I have focused on six individuals whose stories I follow closely. Selection of a core group of participants was not a simple task. Every one of my respondents had an interesting story to tell and informative insights on their learning experiences in the meditation classes studied here. In the end, I settled on two basic criteria for selecting principal participants. I chose respondents who had taken one of either centre's primary introductory classes and were available for a second round of interviews. I then selected an equal number of men and women, and an equal number of principal participants from each centre.

In addition to the interview participants, there is another character in this story. As the researcher on this project, my experiences at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti—what I learned through and about the classes—is as much a part of this study as the experiences of the other respondents. While academic studies sometimes obscure the voice of the researcher, this practice assumes a degree of distance and objectivity that is not possible in this kind of study. As researcher, I act as the narrator of this story and as a participant at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti classes I was also a student. When I refer to groups of students at the meditation classes, therefore, I frequently include myself.

Throughout this book, when referring to the two centres, I list Friends of the Heart first and Chandrakirti second. It is not my intent to preference one centre over the other: I consider Friends of the Heart to be my primary research site partly because it was the first of the two centres at which I began conducting any systematic fieldwork. Further, the closure of Chandrakirti for renovations in June of 2007 resulted in less fieldwork data and fewer interview participants from that centre. Despite this disparity, I felt it was important to include both centres in my study, so that one centre not bear the brunt of this kind of academic scrutiny, and so that there could be a comparison between two centres with



different approaches Tibetan-based Vajrayāna Buddhism. I have made every effort not to make value-laden comparisons between the style, the teachings and practices, the memberships or management of the two centres. Comparisons are intended only to illustrate different ways in which two different centres, both based in Tibetan-style Buddhism, approach meditation classes and other events offered to westerners. I want to make it clear to readers at the outset that Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti Centre are distinct from one another, having separate memberships, teachers, and deriving from different Tibetan teaching lineages.

In my analysis I often use the terms “spirituality” and “religion,” which, like “ritual,” are also difficult to define. For my purposes here, spirituality refers to a person’s ultimate concerns,<sup>48</sup> those which relate to the whole experience of the person. Spirituality refers to a felt connection to something beyond one’s immediate experience. It may be a connection to others, consisting of compassion or empathy concerning the human condition. For some individuals, spirituality refers to a connection to the transcendent, to deities or spiritual beings. It is not possible to separate spirituality completely from other aspects of one’s experience because spirituality refers to the wholeness of that experience. It encompasses all the particulars of every day, ordinary living and relates such particulars to that which we consider to be special or highly valued. Spirituality involves a quest for answers to life’s big questions such as: Who am I? How should I lead my life?

Religion refers to spirituality that has been organized or institutionalized into a formal tradition.<sup>49</sup> Each religion has its own, characteristic responses to the question of how we experience a connection to the human condition or to the transcendent. In this sense, then, spirituality is an orientation; religion is an affiliation. This use of the term “religion” differs in some respects from that of my respondents. Where respondents also make a distinction between religion and spirituality, they more often associate religion with

certain Christian expressions. Most felt that Buddhism was not a religion because they believed it to be non-theistic, not necessitating faith or belief and not based on the concept of sin. By contrast, I refer to Buddhism as a religion because it is a long-standing, organized and institutionalized spiritual tradition.

Before moving on to explore the classes at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti, I want to note the format of terms appearing in this book: There are several Sanskrit, Pāli and Tibetan terms that have become so familiar among English-speaking western Buddhist practitioners that they have been, for all intents and purposes, appropriated into English (e.g. Buddha, sangha). Where such is the case, the terms appear without italics or diacritics. Some terms which would not be pluralized in their original languages appear in the plural here because that is the way they are commonly used among participants at the centres involved in this study. Buddhist terms that are less familiar to English speakers appear in italics with the appropriate diacritics. Unless otherwise noted, such terms appear in Sanskrit.

Finally, unlike the lives and experiences of the people it describes, a text, once published, does not change. By the time this story was written, its characters and settings had already moved on. Friends of the Heart had changed its class structure and two of the teachers I interviewed had resigned. Chandrakirti Centre had closed for renovations. What is written here is a snapshot of a particular period in the histories of Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti Centre. It is my belief that that snapshot provides important and illuminating information for understanding the state of Buddhism and Buddhist-style practice in Canada. But it is still important to keep in mind, as Buddhist teachings remind us, that everything changes.

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore W. Jennings, "On Ritual Knowledge," in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, ed. Ronald L. Grimes (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 326.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Nick Crossley, "Ritual, Body Technique and (Inter)Subjectivity," in *Thinking through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kevin Schilbrack (New York: Routledge, 2004), 32; Ronald L. Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 11-14; Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 24-5.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley J. Tambiah, "A Performative Approach to Ritual," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1979 65 (1981): 119.

<sup>4</sup> Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, 24.

<sup>5</sup> See ———, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*.

<sup>6</sup> Ronald L. Grimes and Nick Crossley, for example, suggest this approach. See Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory*, 13; Ronald L. Grimes, *Rite out of Place: Ritual, Media and the Arts* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 163n.32; and Crossley, "Ritual, Body Technique and (Inter)Subjectivity," 32.

<sup>7</sup> Grimes also distinguishes between the terms "rite" and "ritual." The former refers to enactments that take place in specific times and places. Ritual is a more general term of which a rite is a specific example. See Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory*, 9-10. I agree that this is an important distinction to make, but I am inclined to use the terms "rite" and "ritual" as synonyms, following more common usages of the latter. In this book, I thus avoid the term "rite" and use "ritual" in both of the connotations that Grimes describes.

<sup>8</sup> ———, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> ———, *Rite out of Place: Ritual, Media and the Arts*, 163n.32.

<sup>10</sup> ———, *Rite out of Place: Ritual, Media and the Arts*, 55.

<sup>11</sup> Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 66-9.

<sup>12</sup> The first scholar to detail "two Buddhisms" in the United States was Charles S. Prebish. In his 1979 text, *American Buddhism*, he points out that it is not two kinds of Buddhism to which he is referring, but two distinct lines of development among American Buddhists. Since that time, however, the "two Buddhisms" rubric has frequently been taken as a means of categorizing Asian-based Buddhist expressions as one community and westernized expressions as another. See Charles S. Prebish, *American Buddhism* (North Scituate, MA: Duxbury Press, 1979), 51-2.

<sup>13</sup> See Victor S. Hori, "How Do We Study Buddhism in Canada?," in *Wild Geese: Studies in Buddhism in Canada*, ed. Victor S. Hori, John Harding, Alexander D. Soucy (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, forthcoming). Given that western cultural influences and identity are the primary means by which I identify "western" practitioners, children of such practitioners who may be raised as Buddhists would also be identified as "western Buddhists."

<sup>14</sup> Theravāda, Zen and Vajrayāna are distinct schools within the broader Buddhist tradition. The first is the earliest surviving school, and is found in South Asian nations such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Burma. Zen is a school of Buddhism which developed in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, CE in China and was later transplanted to Japan. Vajrayāna is a tantric form of Buddhism, developing largely from early Indian Hindu and Buddhist influences.

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of these and other western influences on the development of Zen Buddhism in North America, see David L. McMahan, "Repackaging Zen for the West," in *Westward Dharma*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, McMahan, "Repackaging Zen for the West," 218. and B. Alan Wallace, "The Spectrum of Buddhist Practice in the West," in *Westward Dharma* ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 35.

<sup>17</sup> Robert and Wendy Cadge Wuthnow, "Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States: The Scope of Influence," *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>18</sup> Wuthnow, "Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States: The Scope of Influence," 363.

<sup>19</sup> James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> Martin Baumann, "Protective Amulets and Awareness Techniques, or How to Make Sense of Buddhism in the West," in *Westward Dharma*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 52.

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- <sup>21</sup> Baumann, "Protective Amulets and Awareness Techniques, or How to Make Sense of Buddhism in the West," 57-8.
- <sup>22</sup> ———, "Protective Amulets and Awareness Techniques, or How to Make Sense of Buddhism in the West," 58.
- <sup>23</sup> Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*, 97.
- <sup>24</sup> ———, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*, 127.
- <sup>25</sup> Wallace, "The Spectrum of Buddhist Practice in the West," 45.
- <sup>26</sup> ———, "The Spectrum of Buddhist Practice in the West," 45.
- <sup>27</sup> Janet McLellan, *Many Petals of the Lotus* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 81.
- <sup>28</sup> McLellan, *Many Petals of the Lotus*, 74.
- <sup>29</sup> Janet McLellan, "Buddhism in the Greater Toronto Area: The Politics of Recognition," in *Buddhism in Canada*, ed. Bruce Matthews, *Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 89.
- <sup>30</sup> For a discussion of parallel congregations in Buddhist centres in the U.S., see Paul David Numrich, *Old Wisdom in the New World* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996).
- <sup>31</sup> McLellan, "Buddhism in the Greater Toronto Area: The Politics of Recognition," 102n.1.
- <sup>32</sup> See, for example, Ronald L. Grimes, "Performance Theory and the Study of Ritual," *New approaches to the study of religion* 2 (2004); Grimes, *Rite out of Place: Ritual, Media and the Arts*; and Ronald L. Grimes, "Performance," in *Theorizing Rituals: Classical Topics, Theoretical Approaches, Analytical Concepts, Annotated Bibliography*, ed. Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek and Michael Strausberg (Leiden: Brill, 2006).
- <sup>33</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (Routledge, 1988), 7.
- <sup>34</sup> Ritual studies dating from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, for example, were primarily concerned with ritual's origins in textual sources or myths (or, conversely, myth's origins in ritual) or with a proposed ancient, primeval ritual that was regarded as the source of all subsequent ritual and theatre. For a detailed discussion of the development of methods in ritual studies, see Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- <sup>35</sup> Jennings, "On Ritual Knowledge," 326.
- <sup>36</sup> ———, "On Ritual Knowledge," 325-7.
- <sup>37</sup> ———, "On Ritual Knowledge," 327.
- <sup>38</sup> ———, "On Ritual Knowledge," 327.
- <sup>39</sup> In Kevin Schilbrack, ed., *Thinking through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- <sup>40</sup> ———, "Introduction: On the Use of Philosophy in the Study of Rituals," in *Thinking through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kevin Schilbrack (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.
- <sup>41</sup> Schilbrack, "Introduction: On the Use of Philosophy in the Study of Rituals," 2.
- <sup>42</sup> Crossley, "Ritual, Body Technique and (Inter)Subjectivity," 31.
- <sup>43</sup> ———, "Ritual, Body Technique and (Inter)Subjectivity."
- <sup>44</sup> ———, "Ritual, Body Technique and (Inter)Subjectivity."
- <sup>45</sup> ———, "Ritual, Body Technique and (Inter)Subjectivity."
- <sup>46</sup> Michael L. Raposa, "Ritual Inquiry: The Pragmatic Logic of Religious Practice," in *Thinking through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kevin Schilbrack (New York: Routledge, 2004), 119.
- <sup>47</sup> Raposa, "Ritual Inquiry: The Pragmatic Logic of Religious Practice," 125.
- <sup>48</sup> Paul Tillich most famously coined the term "ultimate concern," but where he uses it to define religion, I apply it to spirituality as well. Paul Tillich, ed., *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 8.
- <sup>49</sup> See Ronald L. Grimes, "Forum: American Spirituality," *Religion and American culture* 9, no. 2 (1999): 151-2.

## Chapter One: The Centres

At a small Buddhist centre on Yonge Street in Toronto, a dozen or so people gather every Wednesday evening for ten weeks to participate in an introductory meditation class. In the small third floor unit that houses the centre, a shrine room has been set up. The shrine is adorned with candles, offering bowls and three gold-coloured *nīpas* or Buddha statues. The walls are decorated with several Tibetan-style devotional paintings (Tibetan: *thang ka*). On arrival, students take off their shoes and enter the shrine room. They pull out zafus (round, firm meditation cushions) and a variety of other cushions from a pile beneath the windows and lay them out in a semicircle facing the shrine. A few of the students choose to sit in chairs. The teacher sits on a cushion with her back to the shrine, and begins the class by reciting the Refuge Prayer, a short reading in English written by the centre's founder.<sup>1</sup> Following the prayer, the teacher leads the students in guided meditation on one or more of the concentration techniques taught at this centre; some are based on Tibetan Buddhist practices, some on Theravāda meditation techniques. Some are newer practices adapted to the needs and preferences of western students.

Over the course of the ten week class, students learn several different meditation practices. They perform movement exercises based on *qi gong* and yoga. They listen to talks given by the teacher on topics ranging from stress reduction to developing loving-kindness and they discuss their experiences practicing meditation. Two guided meditation sessions take place each Wednesday evening, and students are strongly encouraged to keep up a daily meditation practice at home. Teachers hope that, by the end of the course, students will have experienced some benefits from meditation, developed a commitment to continue the practice on their own and, perhaps, taken out a long-term membership at the centre.<sup>2</sup>

Some distance farther west, on Crawford Street, not far from Bloor Street, one of Toronto's main thoroughfares, another introductory meditation class is offered, this one on Tuesday nights. This centre, also based in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, is situated in an old Protestant church and, until major renovations began in the summer of 2007, much of the feel of that church remained. Shrines adorned with several different statues and three sets of eight offering bowls occupy the former chancel. More than half of the pews have been removed at the front of the nave and replaced by one row of meditation mats and cushions and three long rows of chairs. From twenty to thirty people attend the Tuesday night class at this centre. Students are welcome to come as frequently or infrequently and for as long as they like.

On entering, students take off their shoes and take a seat in the meditation hall. Some will sit on cushions, but most sit in the chairs or pews. They await the arrival of the teacher, who assumes a seat on a mat and cushion resting on a platform before the shrines. The class begins with the chanting of a prayer in English honouring Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha. The teacher, often a monastic<sup>3</sup> wearing the red and yellow robes of the Tibetan tradition, then guides students in meditation focused on the breath. Following this meditation, he or she will give a talk, usually over an hour in length, on topics dealing with happiness, compassion, letting go of self cherishing and other related subjects drawn from Buddhist teachings. A second session of meditation follows, during which students reflect on the topic of the talk. Questions and discussion often follow the second meditation. After the class, some students gather in the basement for tea and cookies and some informal discussion. Teachers express the hope that those who attend the class find better, more positive ways of dealing with difficulties in their everyday lives, and begin to develop concentration and compassion through meditation and reflection on the lectures. Some

newcomers to this class will, over time, participate in numerous other events offered at the centre, and some may move on to its more intensive training programs.

These two centres, despite the differences in their settings and the organization of their classes, have several aspects in common. Both base their teachings in the broader tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, although the first also adds some meditative techniques from Theravāda Buddhism in addition to teaching movement techniques derived from yoga, t'ai chi and *qi gong*. Further, both centres draw on both Theravāda and Mahāyāna teachings and practices from time to time. Their classes are designed to appeal to people from non-Buddhist familial and cultural backgrounds—people referred to by just about everyone at these centres as “westerners.” At both centres, the teachers are also westerners from non-Buddhist backgrounds. The Crawford Street centre is associated with a large international organization founded by a Tibetan monk and based in England. The Yonge Street centre is founded by a woman who was born and raised in Canada and who studied in India with Tibetan teachers.

Both centres teach newcomers how to meditate as well as some basic ethical values rooted in Buddhist teachings. At both centres, there are numerous ways or means by which newcomers learn: lectures, question-and-answer sessions, group discussions, observation of others, reading books, informal questions of teachers and other members, and so forth.

Students also learn through the practices that they perform. Such practices include formal activities such as spoken or chanted prayers, prostrations, bowing, special hand postures called mudras and the chanting of mantras. Formal practices also include meditation, its postures and gestures and its concentration techniques.

This book examines these different ways that newcomers at the two centres learned about and through Buddhist practices and teachings. Over a period of several months, I attended meditation courses and other events at Friends of the Heart on Yonge Street and

Chandrakirti Centre on Crawford. I invited newcomers, experienced members and teachers to take part in interviews. What follows is the story of these two centres and the experiences of some of their practitioners. The story begins with the centres themselves; their histories, settings and teachings.

### **Friends of the Heart**

Friends of the Heart had its official beginning in October of 1980 when its founder and spiritual leader, Catherine Rathbun, began teaching in Toronto. Born in Canada, Catherine had lived and taught for a time in New Zealand, where she still has students who keep in touch via the internet. Catherine began her training in Tibetan Buddhism in 1969 with Canadian teacher Namgyal Rinpoche. Born Leslie George Dawson, Namgyal was recognized as a *tulku* (an incarnate lama) by the XVI Karmapa Lama, head of the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. Dawson was one of the first westerners to be recognized as such.

Catherine also studied in Sikkim with the XVI Karmapa Lama. Other teachers included Kalu Rinpoche, Karma Thinley Rinpoche, and John Coleman.<sup>4</sup> Karma Thinley is a teacher in the *Sakya* and *Kagyu* schools of Tibetan Buddhism who is based in Toronto. In 2002, he ordained Catherine as a lay teacher, and gave her the teaching name Lama Jetsun Yeshe. She is known by her students as Jetsun-ma. According to other teachers at Friends of the Heart, this lay designation is one that is present in traditional Tibetan Buddhism, and is much more practical than the full ordination, especially for a wife and mother, as Catherine is.<sup>5</sup>

The Toronto group originally met in Catherine's home. Some students had met her through a course she taught from 1989 to 1997 at York University, called Meditation and Movement.<sup>6</sup> In the early 1990s, several of the group's students rented a house and offered



its living-room area as a permanent shrine room and teaching space. Around that time the group was given an inactive charitable corporation for Namgyal House, which they re-registered under the new name, Friends of the Heart. According to its official registration, the group has an educational objective as part of its mission statement.<sup>7</sup> As a reflection of this mandate, all of its regular weekly meetings are structured as classes.

Friends of the Heart's membership had grown to more than fifty students by the late 1990s. In April 1998, the group moved into its current quarters on Yonge Street. Several of its earlier members trained under Catherine as teachers and started offering meditation classes at the centre. Joyce Allen and Richard Johnson, for example, are a married couple who became Catherine's students in 1990 and who were both senior members and teachers at Friends of the Heart.

Richard noted that Friends of the Heart, through most of its history, has been centred on Catherine. There were changes taking place beginning in the spring of 2007 as Richard and Joyce began to take on a greater leadership role and Catherine pulled back a little, but Catherine was still viewed as the centre's primary teacher and spiritual leader. In the fall of 2007, Joyce and another teacher, Meg Salter, resigned from teaching the introductory classes at Friends of the Heart. Senior member David Liang took over their classes.

The Friends of the Heart website provided the following description of the centre:

We offer meditation instruction and classes in Toronto. By emphasizing individual attention, discussion and dialogue in small classes, you will learn how to live in the world with a compassionate heart and a clear mind. Find peace, calm and joy in your life. Friends of the Heart is a group of lay people who actively pursue the deep philosophic and ethical teachings of East and West while maintaining an active, ordinary life within the community. From the Buddhist path, we take teachings and meditation practice from the Theravāda, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna streams.<sup>8</sup>

The description of the centre emphasized lay practice led by lay teachers and the significance of practicing in the world, traits that have become practically definitive of modern forms of Buddhism. While the model of the enlightened layperson appears in Mahāyāna scriptures, revered teachers, primarily monastic ones, are traditionally the heart of Vajrayāna, or Tibetan tantric Buddhism. In the West, the monastic lifestyle is not as revered and is perhaps less feasible than in traditional Buddhist countries.<sup>9</sup> Many Buddhist teachers in the West have therefore de-emphasized the monastic role, as Friends of the Heart has done. Note, too, that the centre's description highlights its eclecticism, another factor found frequently in western organizations. Eclecticism of this sort is, in part, a consequence of having all of the various Buddhist streams present in the same geographical regions, as they are in many western nations.

Located on Yonge Street north of Eglinton in Toronto's North York district, Friends of the Heart is in a third-floor suite consisting of a long, rectangular unit separated into three rooms. The first is a small area at the entrance, which serves as a lobby and office space. Passing between two tall wooden pillars and beneath rows of Tibetan prayer flags, we enter the main space, the meditation hall or shrine room. In the centre of the left-hand wall is a shrine with three golden *nīpas* or statues, each about a meter in height, draped with white silk scarves called *katas*. There are two smaller images, one of Shakyamuni Buddha, sitting below and to the left of the central, raised icon. The other is a small Tara, draped like the others in a white scarf. A small, framed photograph of the Dalai Lama sits near the Buddha figure. Two vases of flowers also adorn the shrine. Depending on the practices being performed, the three main *nīpas*, Tara, Chenrezig and Vajrasattva, will change positions.

In a row along the front edge of the shrine, seven small offering bowls are laid out in front of the icons. The bowls contain water, rice, flowers, and cookies or crackers. Incense is in one of the bowls, but it is not often lit. I was told that the smell of the incense was too strong for the small shrine room. At each end and in the middle of the line of offering bowls are glass candle-holders with lit white tapers or sometimes tea lights. Catherine taught students at the Tibetan Meditation class that the offerings in the bowls symbolize a step by step path in Buddhist practice. The two bowls on the left are filled with plain water, which represent water for washing and water for drinking, and these symbolize a desire to purify oneself externally and internally. The next bowl contains flowers, symbolizing the recognition of beauty in the world, or in the Buddhist path. The next bowl has the incense which, Catherine said, indicates a desire to dedicate oneself to spiritual purification. The incense bowl is followed by a candle, and its light represents enlightenment. Next is a bowl of scented water, signifying the deeper realization of spiritual cleansing. This bowl is followed by one containing food, usually cookies or crackers placed in a handful of uncooked rice. The food represents the nourishment of the path. The last bowl contains a seashell, which is a symbol of music, the divine sounds which are heard at the culmination of the path. These offerings are made in traditional Tibetan Buddhism. The two candles on either end of the row of offering bowls are an addition to the traditional format.

On the wall to the right of the shrine are two large bookcases containing the centre's lending library which contains numerous books on a wide variety of topics, mostly religion or spirituality. Several different traditions are represented, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam (and its Sufi variant) as well as all of the main streams of Buddhism. Pictures of the Dalai Lama, the Karmapa Lama (XVI and XVII) and of Catherine also

adorn the bookcases. There is a small frame containing a photo of a stained-glass depiction of Jesus.

The main hall has a large, Persian-style carpet in the centre placed over a layer of grey berber. There are windows along the right side of the room looking onto a brown brick wall across a narrow alley. A shelf or wide window sill that runs beneath the windows bears a large tape deck, flyers and brochures about the centre, a water jug and cups. Piled beneath this shelf are numerous zafus in forest green, along with other cushions in various sizes, shapes and colours. Yoga mats are rolled and stored in a corner nearby. The *zabuton*, or traditional meditation mat, is not used at Friends of the Heart. Around the walls are hung various thangkhas (Tibetan devotional paintings). At an open house, Meg Salter identified White Tara for me, in the thangkha hanging above and to the left of the shrine. Another framed picture is of an eleven-headed, thousand-armed statue of Chenrezig.<sup>10</sup> The shrine room is very clearly styled after Tibetan Buddhism, despite the centre's non-denominational, east-west syncretic approach.

The centre's third room is a general meeting room. A door set into a glass wall at the far end of the meditation hall opens in to this space. There are some comfortable chairs, a television and equipment for making tea or coffee. This room is used as a storage area as well as a meeting room. Baskets containing used and clean water cups are on a ledge in one corner. The low wooden tables used for Tibetan Meditation classes are stacked under the windows here. The windows along the far wall of this room look out over the public parking lot behind the building.

Nearby, there is a small theatre that was running a show called "Menopause Out Loud" when I first visited the centre in the winter of 2006-7. The show's music could be heard in the meditation centre after 8 pm each evening. Friends of the Heart teachers noted the music with some humour, acknowledging that it was an intrusion on meditation

practice. Some pointed out that the disturbance could help practitioners improve their concentration. In the winter months, the heating system contributes to the soundscape in the meditation hall: intermittent sounds of rushing air and high pitched squeaks and pops from the vents fill the room, loud enough that teachers must raise their voices.

When the centre operates its evening courses, the main door to the building at street level is locked. A clear plastic panel is mounted on the door using Velcro, and this panel holds a radio-operated doorbell, a sign for the centre and a slot for its brochures. People arriving just before the classes (or just after—there were often latecomers) ring the bell and a quiet squeak can be heard from the receiver in the centre's office area. Someone must then run down the stairs to the landing on the second floor and press a button to open the door.

From fall 2006 through to spring 2007, Wednesday nights were dedicated to the introductory meditation classes. Every ten weeks these classes switched back and forth between Calm and Clear taught by Meg Salter, and Introduction to Insight taught by Joyce Allen. Joyce also led the Healing Body, Healing Mind class on Thursday nights, which included an hour of yoga and an hour of meditation, and was open to practitioners of all levels. Most of those who participated in interviews for this project had attended the Wednesday introductory class, but one had enrolled in the Thursday evening. Other classes included Richard's Intermediate Meditation class every Tuesday night, preceded by an hour of hatha yoga. On Friday evenings Myra Willis led a class called Energy Training. Saturday mornings were dedicated to a T'ai Chi class, led by Gwen Robart. On Monday mornings from ten to noon, Catherine conducted the more advanced Tibetan Meditation course. When I attended this class from December 2006 to April 2007, its teachings were on Vajrasattva and Guru Yoga, two of the traditional Tibetan preliminary practices (Tibetan:

*ngöndrö*). Twice during fieldwork, this class offered initiation rituals, called “empowerments”; first into the deity and practice of Chenrezig and later into White Tara.

Every ten weeks or so throughout the year, Friends of the Heart holds a Saturday afternoon open house, where newcomers interested in the centre and its courses can visit in an informal atmosphere, ask questions, and participate in a guided meditation with one of the teachers. Friends of the Heart also holds several yearly retreats at Harmony Dawn retreat centre near Cobourg, Ontario, and teachers also offer various workshops or lectures throughout the year. They occasionally give lectures at Snow Lion, a Buddhist bookstore and meditation supply shop in Toronto’s Danforth Village.

Friends of the Heart has long had an eclectic approach to its teachings. Joyce said that initially, Catherine was teaching not only from the Tibetan and a more general Buddhist background, she had also been trained by Namgyal in a western mystery tradition, a version of Rosecrucianism, and she would teach that periodically. But, due primarily to time constraints, this kind of teaching was no longer offered.<sup>11</sup> Adding to its eclectic nature is the fact that some of the Friends of the Heart teachers trained in schools other than Tibetan Buddhism. Richard and Joyce, for example, have a background in Theravāda insight meditation (*vipaśyanā* or *vipassanā* in Pāli), and this is the style in which they tend to teach. The schedule of teachings and classes has changed somewhat over the years, primarily for practical reasons. For some time, Joyce had taught the Healing Body, Healing Mind class on Saturday mornings. She later decided that she needed to have her weekends free, and around this time, Gwen Robart joined the centre. Gwen had twenty years’ experience studying and teaching t’ai chi and she agreed to take over the Saturday morning time slot, thereby turning it into a t’ai chi class.

Some interview participants attended the Energy Training class taught by Myra Willis. Myra was also a student of Namgyal Rinpoche around the same time that Catherine

was. Because Namgyal was often away traveling, many of his earlier students came to Catherine after she had been given authority to teach. Myra's interests have been along the lines of healing and energy work such as reiki and *qi gong*. Her Energy Training class, which focused on developing healing energies in the body, was less of a meditation course and less Buddhist than other courses offered at Friends of the Heart. It was also an introductory level class, but was cancelled in spring of 2007 due to its small attendance.

In recent years, Catherine has reduced the number of public classes she personally offers in order to focus on one-on-one instruction with dedicated students. A survivor of breast cancer, she also needed to cut back some of her responsibilities in order to care for her health. At the start of fieldwork in November of 2006, she was offering the two hour Tibetan Meditation course which she taught up until May of 2007. At that time, she was also writing a book that would serve as a meditation and practice manual for Friends of the Heart members in her absence. In the summer of 2007, she conducted a Mahāmudrā meditation retreat at Harmony Dawn and she did a few guest teachings in the fall of 2007, but she took much of the fall off from teaching. In her absence, other members and teachers led her classes.

Friends of the Heart students generally begin with one of the two ten-week introductory meditation courses. Some may attend both. If they choose to stay on, they can then begin regularly attending the Intermediate Meditation class or the more advanced Tibetan Meditation class. That said, all of the classes are open to newcomers, and instruction is given where needed. Members interested in becoming more involved and in following a more traditional Buddhist path can undertake the Friends of the Heart foundation practice, which is based on the traditional Tibetan preliminary practices in which practitioners perform 100,000 prostrations, mantras, and chanted prayers. Finally, there is the IMP or Intensive Meditation Program, in which individual students enter into

mentoring relationships with teachers or senior members and receive more in-depth tantric teachings and practices. This is an advanced program whose content is restricted to committed and initiated practitioners, along the lines of traditional tantric esotericism.

In an interview, Catherine told me that her teaching goals at Friends of the Heart are to engage students' curiosity, show them the beauty of the dharma, and teach them ways to overcome negativity in their lives. In her view, such goals as completing foundation practice are only there "to help us humans have a sense of linear accomplishment." She said that the true objective of her teaching is to effect long-lasting changes wherein practitioners find practical applications of the dharma and meditation in their lives.

### **Chandrakirti Centre**

Chandrakirti is one of numerous centres around the world associated with the New Kadampa Tradition, also known as the International Kadampa Buddhist Union, which is headquartered at Manjushri Kadampa Meditation Centre in Ulverston, England. Kelsang Gyatso, its founder, is a Tibetan monk who fled his homeland in 1959. He trained for a time in India and then traveled to England in 1976 where he began to develop a following of western students. According to Chandrakirti members, his objective was to preserve in exile the lineage of the Kadam school (Kadam-pa), and to introduce it to westerners. He began training and eventually ordaining westerners in the practices of his lineage. In 1979 Kelsang Gyatso founded a Buddhist centre under his own spiritual direction, which was officially consolidated under the title New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) in 1991. Since that time, the organization has established numerous temples, dharma centres and smaller groups in western nations around the globe. Of primary importance to Chandrakirti Centre is its NKT education program, which consists of three levels, the General Program (GP), Foundation Program (FP) and Teacher Training Program (TTP). According to the NKT



website, it has 1,100 centres around the world,<sup>12</sup> although this number may include sites where classes take place in public libraries and other rented spaces.

Chandrakirti's parent organization has faced some controversy over the worship of Dorje Shugden, a spiritual being whose worship has been present in *Gélukpa* practice since the seventeenth century. Several Tibetan leaders have discouraged the practice, including the thirteenth Dalai Lama (d. 1933). The current Dalai Lama, who had spoken out against the practice since 1976, finally issued a formal ban against Shugden worship in 1996. The NKT, whose practices include Shugden worship, organized public protests against the Dalai Lama during his trip to England in 1996. The controversy over the general ban of Shugden worship escalated in 1997 when a senior monk who had spoken out against Shugden practice was murdered along with two other younger monks in Dharamsala, India. The controversy over Shugden practice continues to this day, with considerable vitriol from several of the parties involved. The NKT has officially taken an arms-length position, continuing to espouse Shugden practice<sup>13</sup> but making no reference to the Dalai Lama or to the controversy on its website.<sup>14</sup>

While it is necessary to locate Chandrakirti centre within the NKT and to contextualize the NKT within the broader context of Tibetan Buddhism, it is not the object of this study to enter into a detailed discussion of disputes arising within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. The focus here is on the participants at Chandrakirti Centre and the means by which they learned at Chandrakirti classes. In fact, many participants to whom I spoke were unaware of the controversy and, for the most part, unaware of the figure of Dorje Shugden or the worship of such a figure at Chandrakirti. General Program classes, which are the focus of this study, did not involve mention of the figure during my fieldwork, nor did they include devotional practices concerning any spiritual beings, with the exception, perhaps, of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Over time, NKT texts and practices have been adapted to a more western style. Prayers were originally performed in Tibetan, but are now translated into the native languages of the countries in which they are used. Practitioners now chant the prayers along with recordings produced at the organization's headquarters and distributed on CD to its numerous centres around the world. Gradually, the use of Tibetan terms is being replaced by local vernacular. For example, the *gompa* (Tibetan: *dgon pa*) is now more often called a shrine room or meditation hall.

Chandrakirti Centre started off in 1993 in a rented venue called Friends House, a Quaker facility in central Toronto. From the mid to late nineties, the centre occupied various small sites in different areas of the city. Over this time, its membership grew, and it eventually settled into a large Victorian house on Parkside Drive in the city's High Park district where it remained for several years. The shrine room was in the spacious main floor living room, and upstairs rooms were used as residential spaces and secondary meditation halls. By the turn of the new millennium, the membership had grown and the house on Parkside was no longer sufficient. An NKT temple established in nearby Mississauga had also begun attracting a fair sized membership, and the two centres often participated in shared events. Clearly more space was needed. In 2006, the organization bought an old brick church on Crawford Street, in the west end of the city, and began transforming it into a dharma centre. Some of the pews were removed and rows of chairs and meditation mats and cushions were installed. Three large shrines were set up in the chancel. The group now had a large shrine room and meditation hall and a basement common room in which to conduct its weekly services and classes along with retreats and numerous other special events. The move to Crawford Street was clearly a success.

In January 2007, a series of rapid changes began, changes that were still in progress at the time of writing. From January to August, four different monastics consecutively

served as head teacher at the centre. The long-time head teacher had left in January to start up a centre in Winnipeg, and two subsequent teachers took charge for approximately three months each. In August, Gen Thekchen (pronounced TEHchen), a monk who had been head teacher at the Kingston, Ontario NKT centre for nine years, was assigned to lead the Toronto centre. Thekchen is a Canadian from a non-Buddhist background who originally hails from Toronto. He developed an interest in Buddhism while traveling in India after graduating from university. He studied with Tibetan teachers in Dharamsala, India and in Nepal. On his return to Toronto, he discovered Chandrakirti Centre and enrolled in several of its courses. He later took NKT teacher training in England and ordained there in 1998. Half a year later he was assigned to the Kingston dharma centre as resident teacher and taught there for nine years until being assigned as resident teacher in Toronto in August, 2007.

Substantial structural changes began taking place at Chandrakirti as well. In May of 2007, officials from England visited the centre to announce that it was to become the main NKT temple for Canada. The temple in Mississauga was to be sold and renovations on the Crawford Street church to turn it into a proper temple would begin as early as June. Within two weeks of this announcement, the Crawford Street site was closed. Two houses were purchased nearby and renovations began to turn them into residential and teaching facilities. It was expected that the new Toronto temple, replete with three nine-foot tall Buddha statues, would open its doors in the spring of 2008. Since the Crawford Street site closed in the middle of fieldwork for this project, and remains closed at the time of writing, the following description of the centre is out of date. As is the case with all fieldwork studies, the following description is of a particular time and place. It is included in order to provide the reader with a sense of the ritual space, regardless of the changes that have since taken place at Chandrakirti.

On the front of the square brick church that houses Chandrakirti Centre there is a large, backlit sign. Below a photo of a pair of hands holding a string of prayer beads and a flower it advertises meditation classes on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 7-9 pm and Sundays 11-12 pm. Steep concrete steps lead up to the large, central doors of the church. These steps open into a small lobby. To the right, a staircase leads down to the basement common room, offices, washrooms and kitchen. To the left is a small room that was once used as the teacher's office. In late 2006 it was converted into a shop for the centre, selling various ritual objects and Kelsang Gyatso's numerous books in paperback.

The large shrine room is in the main hall of the church. Prior to Chandrakirti's purchase of the church, its central aisle, steps and chancel had been carpeted in a fine burgundy-coloured broadloom, a perfect colour for this Tibetan-based centre. Many of the original church pews remain, but a few rows were removed at the front where a row of dark red mats and cushions and three rows of pink upholstered chairs are set up. In the summer, air conditioners hum in the windows in the main hall. In the winter, the radiators of the old steam-powered heating system rattle and ping loudly. This cacophony frequently elicits comments and laughter from teachers and students alike. Some point out that the replacement of the old, noisy heating system will be a welcome part of the centre's renovation.

On the raised section of the former chancel stand three shrines in a long row, each set on a wide wooden cabinet. The small gold statues on each of the shrine cabinets are raised, sitting on long, narrow platforms that are covered in gold damask fabric. Below and before the statues on each shrine are seven large, blue glass offering bowls. The offerings are similar to those on the Friends of the Heart shrine, beginning on the left with water for drinking and water for washing, followed by a flower and then incense. Light, present in the form of a candle on the Friends of the Heart shrine is at Chandrakirti represented by a

bowl filled with coloured glass pebbles. The next two bowls contain scented water and a food offering, usually chocolate. There is no bowl symbolizing music on the Chandrakirti shrines; one member told me that music is present in the chanting of the prayers. As at Friends of the Heart, the incense here is rarely if ever lit, out of respect for people with allergies.

Each shrine bears three statues, averaging around forty centimeters tall. On the leftmost shrine the largest statue, in the centre, is of Je Tsongkhapa or Tsong Khapa, founder of the *Géluk* school of Tibetan Buddhism and the main spiritual guide of the NKT. Sitting on the same level on either side of this figure are two smaller similar figures, two of Je Tsongkhapa's disciples. All three statues are adorned in colourfully fringed robes and yellow pandit's hats. Beside them sits a collection of Kelsang Gyatso's texts, bound in red and gold. On this leftmost shrine, on the right end of the line of offering bowls, sits a mandala, a gold-coloured structure composed of several layers of rings, each smaller than the one below. The mandala is crowned with an ornament resembling a gold finial. The rings contain colourful beads, pebbles and rice. At some of the services performed at Chandrakirti, the assembly of the mandala is performed as an offering. All three shrines hold small, artfully arranged collections of bottles and packages of food offerings.

The central shrine has the largest and highest of all of the figures, that of Shakyamuni Buddha, draped in a golden yellow cloth. The Buddha sits on a square platform raised above the statues on either side of him. He is flanked by Green Tara, draped in a green silk cloth, and Avalokiteśvara, with a large, decorous crown. On the third shrine, the central figure is Mañjuśrī, bearing a flaming sword. The smaller, colourful image to his left is Dorje Shugden, depicted as a fierce looking figure riding a Tibetan snow lion. On the right stands a brass-coloured cylindrical icon resembling a stūpa. On a smaller ledge, below the statues but above the main offering bowls, sit five very small colourless

glass bowls below the image of Dorje Shugden. These bowls contain offerings of alcohol, tea, cookies, milk, and yogurt, offerings listed in some of the chanted prayers. Between the shrines are two large glass vases supported on black metal stands and bearing large silk flowers and leaves in red and brown tones.

Behind the shrines, closing off the remainder of the chancel, hangs a wide gold-coloured curtain, which provides a backdrop for the shrines. Just before the shrines, several carpeted steps lead down to the main level of the meditation hall. In the very middle of these steps, part of the original church architecture, is a raised square platform carpeted in the same burgundy colour as the steps and aisle. This platform is used as the teacher's seat. On it is a thick meditation mat upholstered in deep red and gold. A deep red zafu sits atop the mat. Beside the teacher's seat are several ritual objects, including a vase of flowers and a framed portrait of Kelsang Gyatso. There is also a small, cylindrical metal bell sitting on a wooden rest. When struck, it rings with a high, pure sound. Carol, a long-time Chandrakirti member, told me that some teachers ring this bell to start and end meditation. Other teachers dispense with this practice. The bowl-shaped brass bell often associated with Tibetan Buddhism is not present at Chandrakirti.

Since its reformation as the national centre for Canada, Chandrakirti has been renamed the Chandrakirti Kadampa Meditation Centre of Canada (CKMCC). In late 2007, the centre's website offered the following description:

Chandrakirti Kadampa Meditation Centre Canada's (CKMCC) purpose is to act as the principal, mother centre of Kadampa Buddhism within Canada and to function as an international spiritual community dedicated to achieving world peace through following the Kadampa Buddhist Path. Ongoing Buddhist meditation classes, study programs and meditation retreats taught by CKMCC offer us the opportunity to discover our innate capacities for happiness, wisdom and compassion. These classes are open to everyone regardless of background. Kadampa teachings offer us special advice that touches our hearts, so that we can learn to become happy and to lead meaningful lives that have the power to greatly benefit others. This

Centre has arisen from the pure intention and vision of Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, Spiritual Director of the New Kadampa Tradition – International Buddhist Union (NKT–IKBU), and is dedicated so that everyone may be happy and free from suffering.<sup>15</sup>

The focus on world peace sounds like social activism, but Chandrakirti is not an overtly socially or politically engaged organization. The intention is to teach individual students ways of finding peace in their own lives, through meditation practices and teachings on such topics as compassion and letting go of anger.

The website's description of the centre also highlights the international nature of the organization. The NKT is one among many Buddhist groups that operate as highly globalized organizations employing the very latest in modern communications technologies. As part of such an organization, Chandrakirti is subject to a top-down governance. Some decisions about the centre, such as the assignment of resident teachers and the structural changes that took place in 2007 and 2008, come from the leadership in England. The NKT has also developed a highly structured teaching system that is standard at its centres around the world, a system based on Kelsang Gyatso's teachings and written commentaries on traditional Buddhist texts. Class subjects and structures, as well as the timing and content of many NKT devotional services, are also standardized throughout the organization. I noticed during my fieldwork that different NKT teachers tended to give very similar teachings, right down to similar phrases and syntax. Individual teachers do have their own styles, however, and Chandrakirti's schedule has shifted from time to time according to the specific needs of its membership.

Up until its closure in June of 2007, Chandrakirti Centre offered regular introductory meditation classes on Tuesday evenings. The Wednesday and Sunday classes advertised on the sign on the front of the building were not regularly being offered in 2006 and 2007 due to small attendance and the availability of teachers. During the renovations

introductory classes continued at several libraries and coffee shops on different weekday evenings throughout the Toronto area. Such venues had been in use for additional classes around the city, even before the closure of the main centre. These are the General Program classes, and many of those attending are newcomers to Buddhist teachings and practices. More long-term Chandrakirti members often move on to the Foundation Program, which usually takes place on weekends, although its scheduling changed several times during fieldwork. Those who wish to take on a leadership role and teach NKT classes enroll in the Teacher Training Program, which usually meets early in the morning several times a week. A nun at Chandrakirti told me that some very dedicated practitioners will take on the traditional preliminary practices, as is the case at Friends of the Heart.

Chandrakirti Centre also holds regular devotional services or *pūjās*. These services involve chanted prayers, offerings and sometimes meditation. The main *pūjā* is Heart Jewel which is performed every weekday at five in the afternoon. The Offering to the Spiritual Guide is performed on the tenth and twenty-fifth of each month, as it is in all NKT centres around the world. Other regular *pūjās* include the Wishfulfilling Jewel and the four-hour Melodious Drum. In addition to these *pūjās*, the centre offers several retreats of various lengths throughout the year as well as numerous social events. Initiation rituals or empowerments take place from time to time, wherein participants received the blessings of the guru Je Tsongkhapa or a deity such as Green Tara or Medicine Buddha.

In an interview in late 2007, Thekchen expressed his objectives for teaching at Chandrakirti. He said he hoped the classes would provide a place where people can develop inner peace through meditation, and a place where they can question and discuss the teachings that they hear at the classes or, possibly, read in Kelsang Gyatso's books. I asked Thekchen if one of his goals was to encourage people to move on, from the General Program to the Foundation Program, for example, or to encourage them to become more



involved at the centre. He said that the numbers were not important. He admitted to going through periods when he assessed his teaching ability by the numbers of students who moved on to FP, but that this was not an appropriate measure. For him, teaching is a practice. “I love teaching, because I have to practice what I teach. It keeps reminding me of the path and it allows me to create enough merit to gain the actual realizations. So I think it is quite a brilliant process.” In this way, he feels he becomes an example: he is not teaching only through his words but through his own commitment to the practices and ethics of his tradition. “As long as I keep opening my heart, practicing patience, improving my study and keeping my vows and commitments, [I will be] proving year by year and creating the right causes.”

## **Outreach**

Many of the regular events at Chandrakirti Centre and almost all of them at Friends of the Heart are structured as classes. Newcomers are invited to come and participate for a time and learn something new. While some become regular members, others move on after attending a few classes. One of the key goals of these centres, then, is to continually attract new students to their classes. Most events are open to people from all levels of experience, from newcomers to trained meditation teachers. The introductory meditation classes at both centres act as their primary forms of outreach, introducing newcomers to meditation, to some Buddhist teachings and, ideally, to a new way of relating to themselves and their world.

The centres also use other forms of outreach. Both maintain websites that introduce their teachers and the centres’ objectives and describe their classes and other events. Friends of the Heart offers its open houses several times a year from September to April. Teachers at both centres give talks at public venues: GP classes take place at libraries

and coffee shops and Friends of the Heart teachers have held corporate workshops on meditation and talks at Snow Lion Bookstore. Both centres also publish regular community newsletters, distributing them to interested members and visitors via email. At Chandrakirti GP classes, pamphlets advertising upcoming events are set out, and there are always several of Kelsang Gyatso's books available for purchase. When I was participating at Friends of the Heart in January of 2007, printed postcards advertising the centre were introduced. Members were asked to post them in their neighbourhoods or workplaces in an effort to help expand the centre's membership. There are many means and opportunities to discover these or, indeed, numerous other meditation centres in Toronto.

Who responds to this outreach, and why? In answer to these questions, we shall hear from several of the people who were participating at Chandrakirti and Friends of the Heart in 2006 and 2007.

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<sup>1</sup> For the full text of the Friends of the Heart Refuge Prayer, see appendix B.

<sup>2</sup> At both of the centres discussed here, becoming a full member involved paying a monthly (Chandrakirti) or yearly (Friends of the Heart) membership fee. Members were allowed access to regularly-scheduled events and courses.

<sup>3</sup> I use the term "monastic" in its noun form as a gender-neutral term for both monks and nuns.

<sup>4</sup> Anonymous, "History Friends of the Heart," (2007), [http://www.friendsoftheheart.com/Toronto\\_meditation\\_centre/history.php](http://www.friendsoftheheart.com/Toronto_meditation_centre/history.php).

<sup>5</sup> Joyce Allen and Richard Johnson, personal communication, January 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Anonymous, "History Friends of the Heart."

<sup>7</sup> Joyce Allen and Richard Johnson, personal communication, January 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Anonymous, "Friends of the Heart Home Page," Friends of the Heart.

<sup>9</sup> See Patricia Q. Campbell, "Buddhist Values and Ordinary Life among Members of the Toronto Zen Buddhist Temple" (Wilfrid Laurier University, 2004), chapter four.

<sup>10</sup> Chenrezig is the Tibetan name for Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion.

<sup>11</sup> Joyce Allen, personal communication, January 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Kadampa Buddhism, Meditation Centres, <http://kadampa.org/en/centers>, visited September 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Anonymous, "The Dharma Protector," The New Kadampa Tradition, International Kadampa Buddhist Union, <http://kadampa.org/en/buddhism/the-dharma-protector/>.

<sup>14</sup> For more details on the Shugden issue, see: David Kay, "The New Kadampa Tradition and the Continuity of Tibetan Buddhism in Transition," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 12, no. 3 (1997); Stephen Batchelor, "Letting Daylight into Magic: The Life and Times of Dorje Shugden," *Tricycle Magazine* 1998; Donald S. Lopez, "Two Sides of the Same God," *Tricycle Magazine* 1998. and Anonymous, "Dorje Shugden Versus Pluralism and National Unity," in *The Worship of Shugden: Documents Related to a Tibetan Controversy* (Dharamsala: Department of Religion and Culture, Central Tibetan Administration, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Anonymous, "Chandrakirti Kadampa Meditation Centre Canada Ckmcc," <http://www.kadampa.ca/>.

## Chapter Two: Participants

From October 2006 through to November 2007, I had the opportunity to meet personally with several members and teachers at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti Centre. I asked newcomers and long-term members to tell me about their reasons for participating at Friends of the Heart or Chandrakirti and their interest in either Buddhism or meditation. Motivations among interview participants for attending meditation classes fell into different spheres of interest: intellectual curiosity; a search for meaning or change of perspective on life; a desire to improve concentration or achieve stress relief; and so on. Each of these interests relates to a different type of learning: acquiring new information, changing outlooks or ethical perspectives, or gaining new skills, for example. In fact, equivalent domains of learning have been identified in an influential learning model called Bloom's taxonomy. Further, what students took away from their experiences at the meditation classes—what they learned in the end—had much to do with their initial motivations for participating in the classes.

Early in the field work, while still deciding which Buddhist centres to include in the study, I attended an event at Chandrakirti called Stop the Week. It was held on a Friday evening in October 2006. With a donation, participants attended a brief lecture or dharma talk, titled "What does the Buddha see?" The talk was given by Gen Zopa, at that time Chandrakirti's resident teacher. What we see is not real, Zopa told his audience. We think that what we see and experience is what makes us happy and we get attached to things. This belief creates desire, desire for more, and desire for it not to end. Pleasure creates desire. But Buddhas, he said, can feel pleasure without desire or attachment. Buddhas know that what we think is reality is only a projection of the mind. On one hand, Zopa said we can never, ever realize the illusory nature of the world. On the other hand, he said that

when we become Buddhas (which, he said, might be this week, next spring), we will see what Buddhas see—pleasure without attachment. We need only be patient and content.

Following the teaching, participants were served a fine three-course vegetarian meal in the centre's basement common room. The meal was prepared by Chogyen, another monk and teacher at the centre. At the meal I met Gerald, a relative newcomer to Chandrakirti Centre and regular participant at its Tuesday evening GP classes. We talked about the meal, the teaching and participating at the centre. I told him about my project, and he agreed to participate in an interview. Gerald was the first interview participant,<sup>1</sup> and over the next year I interviewed twenty-four people involved at either Friends of the Heart or Chandrakirti Centre. Participants included newcomers attending introductory classes, a few more experienced members and some of the centres' teachers. Bulletins posted describing my project and inviting people to participate in interviews were ineffective: in the end, those who participated did so because I personally described the project to them and invited them to take part in an interview. The interviews were usually conducted in public places like coffee shops or restaurants. At times, ambient noise was a problem on the audio recordings, but these public locations were comfortable for my informants and for me. A few of the interviews were conducted in participants' workplaces or homes, and some outside of public hours in the centres themselves. Due to its sudden closure in June, 2007, there were fewer interviews with newcomers from Chandrakirti than Friends of the Heart. All the same, the number of interviewees exceeded the number originally proposed for the project.<sup>2</sup>

The following chart lists interview participants according to the centres they attended and their roles at the time they were interviewed. Names appearing in quotation marks are pseudonyms, chosen by those who opted for anonymity.



The distinction between newcomer and experienced respondents, in fact, was not as clear as this table would indicate. For example, Nicolette and Gwen had been participating at Friends of the Heart for less than a year, but both were involved in advanced rather than introductory level courses. Nicolette had had a history participating at other Buddhist centres, and Gwen had over twenty years of training and teaching t'ai chi. Gwen was also a teacher at Friends of the Heart, leading weekly t'ai chi classes. I list Nicolette and Gwen as newcomers due to the fact that they were new to Friends of the Heart. The responses they gave in their interviews had similarities to responses from other newcomers as well as experienced members. By contrast, Carol, a long-time member of Chandrakirti, had participated only at the introductory level classes. I initially interviewed her as an experienced member, but in the end listed her with newcomers because her reflections on the GP classes corresponded well with those of other newcomers.

While this book is, to some extent, a story about Buddhism, it is not necessarily about Buddhists. Many of the people involved at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti did not identify as Buddhists. In the study of western Buddhism in North America, in fact, there has been much debate over just how to identify who is and who is not a Buddhist. Determining identity through membership or attendance at a Buddhist centre fails as a criterion because it does not account for a large number of people who do not attend Buddhist centres or do not take out memberships, but do view the world in terms of Buddhist teachings or follow Buddhist practices.<sup>4</sup> Thomas Tweed argues that scholars have not paid sufficient attention to those whom he calls sympathizers, people who are interested in Buddhism but do not fully or formally embrace it. Tweed argues that their stories are a significant part of the story of Buddhism in North America, and that the experiences of sympathizers reveals a great deal about western culture.<sup>5</sup>

In order to identify who is a Buddhist, Tweed suggests something first proposed by Charles S. Prebish in 1979: a person should be considered a Buddhist if that is how they self-identify.<sup>6</sup> But self-identification still does not cast a wide enough net. In fact, many westerners who have been involved at Buddhist centres for some time, even some who have taken initiation or ordination, are sometimes uncomfortable identifying as Buddhists.<sup>7</sup> Reasons for this vary: some are affiliated with more than one religion and do not want to limit their identity. Others do not want to affiliate with any kind of religious organization. Still others are simply uncomfortable with labels and the expectations that tend to come with them.<sup>8</sup> As Tweed points out, religious identity is often hybrid, contested and complex.<sup>9</sup> There are many who do not fit traditional standards—involvement at a centre or taking the Buddhist precepts, for example—who claim Buddhist identity<sup>10</sup>, while some who meet such standards do not. The boundaries of Buddhist identity, therefore, are not clear.

One of the questions I put to my interview participants was: Do you consider yourself to be a Buddhist? Catherine H., whose family was Buddhist, said she had recently come to accept that this was the religious identity into which she had been born. Brenda, a newcomer at Chandrakirti, said that she did consider herself to be Buddhist because she believed in Buddhist teachings. All of the other respondents I identified as newcomers said they were not Buddhist at their first interviews. By the second round of interviews, only Gerald had changed his self-identification: claiming not to be a Buddhist at his first interview, he said that he was at his second. All four experienced members said that they were Buddhist, although Marconi said he was sometimes uncomfortable with the label.

I also asked participants to describe what they considered to be a “full,” “proper” or “real” Buddhist. Most of them had surprisingly high standards for what constitutes a Buddhist. Years of practice, involvement with a knowledgeable guide, celibacy, vegetarianism, faith in Buddhist teachings, acceptance of Buddhist ritual, taking vows or

precepts, even ordination: These were some of the criteria given by respondents when they were asked to define Buddhist identity. Despite the fact that they were engaged in Buddhist teachings and practices that had been explicitly adapted for westerners, most of them defined Buddhist identity in terms of more monastic, historical expressions of Buddhism than that with which they were themselves engaged.

The high standards that respondents used to define Buddhist identity may account for the fact that few of them personally identified as Buddhist. Another reason, however, was a discomfort with labels. When I asked Nicolette, for example, if she considered herself to be a Buddhist, she jokingly replied that perhaps if she was asked at gunpoint she would say yes. Then she said: "I really feel uncomfortable with people who cling even the slightest little bit to a particular philosophy, religion, whatever. It makes me uncomfortable, for example, to see people wearing crosses or even OM symbols or that kind of stuff." Similarly, when I asked Diane if she was a Buddhist, she said that she had an interest in the dharma and she would call herself a practitioner, but: "I wouldn't use the label... I don't label myself generally." Diane said she did not believe that the Buddha was a Buddhist. Tanit, Gerald and Marconi also indicated a similar discomfort with labeling themselves.

The issue of Buddhist identity is an important concern for the development of Buddhism in Canada. Newcomers at introductory classes did not regard themselves as being fully engaged with Buddhism; rather, they saw themselves as part of a less formal circle of involvement.<sup>11</sup> Most said that they identified more as students, practitioners, or that they had an interest in Buddhism. This kind of involvement, in respondents' views, was not to be mistaken for full affiliation such as becoming a full member at one of the centres or identifying as Buddhist. Respondents clearly identified another, more committed level of affiliation that they regarded as "properly" Buddhist.



Given my definitions of spirituality and religion, I am inclined to classify as Buddhist those participants who are long-term members of a Buddhist organization, or those who identify with Buddhist worldviews for the primary reason that they *are* Buddhist. That is, for the purpose of study, someone may be considered Buddhist who has a special affiliation either to a Buddhist centre or to Buddhist teachings and practices, whether they self-identify or not. Since this was not the case for most of the newcomers who participated in interviews, I use Tweed's suggested term: sympathizers. With Tweed, I believe that the stories of people who are even peripherally involved with Buddhist centres, its teachings and its practices, are important indicators of the ways in which Buddhism is developing in North America, whether these people regard themselves as Buddhist or not. What follows are respondents' stories of becoming involved at Friends of the Heart or Chandrakirti Centre. Rather than conversion stories, I regard them as stories of turning to Buddhist practices and teachings.

These stories are significant because most participants had had some contact with Buddhism or with other Asian traditions before arriving at the door of a Buddhist centre. Respondents' stories of turning to Buddhist practices or teachings thus describe some of their learning about Buddhism prior to their involvement at Friends of the Heart or Chandrakirti Centre. Most importantly, the motives that respondents had for seeking out introductory meditation classes indicate some of their early learning objectives. The reasons respondents gave for their initial interest in either meditation or Buddhist teachings were multi-layered: a variety of different needs, opportunities and expectations were involved in their initial encounters with Buddhist practices or teachings. Reasons for their interests were therefore as individual as the participants themselves.

Two weeks after our first meeting at the Stop the Week dinner, Gerald and I met for an interview at a coffee shop in Toronto's east end. Gerald was forty-six at the time and

an artist who was busy running his own house painting business. He said he had been raised as “quite a liberal Catholic” but had fallen away from the church. Prior to participating at Chandrakirti Centre, he had explored some Hindu-based teachings on the internet. He had also read a few books on Buddhism, and said he knew “something of its spirit,” but nothing of the doctrine. “And so I didn’t really know anything about Buddhism in particular,” he said. In Gerald’s view, it was at Chandrakirti Centre that the real learning had begun. When I asked him what had first piqued his interest in Buddhism, he replied:

It was available.<sup>12</sup> A friend of mine was going there [to Chandrakirti Centre] for about a year. He doesn’t go too much now. And he was telling me about it. And he was just reminding me about principles that I’m trying to put into practice without having any real education behind them. So, I thought it would be good to get out for the night, because I work and I have kids and I don’t do anything—I don’t drink or anything so I don’t go out. So I thought this was like a night course. It was something intellectually stimulating and I wanted to see if it was related to what I felt should be happening in my life. So I was really kind of thrilled to see that everything corresponded with what I thought happens in life and feels like in life. And, the principles of Buddhism, I feel quite comfortable with their approach and their beliefs. So that was the reason for going: a friend introduced me to it, to the fact that there is a centre and it was available....

Gerald had begun attending GP classes in July 2006, and said he had not missed a Tuesday night in the three months since he had started. He had not been to any other Buddhist centres before Chandrakirti, and when we first met he had not attended any events other than the Tuesday night classes and the Stop the Week dinner. When I asked why he attended the GP classes, Gerald responded with a list of increasingly important reasons.

From the bottom: one, it’s a social occasion, just to get away from my environment at home, which my wife encourages. I don’t have any place to go so it’s: one, to get out; two, intellectual stimulation; and then three, curiosity. And then it gets more profound, more profoundly stimulating intellectually, more profoundly stimulating emotionally and more comfortable socially, as you get to know more people there. And then, once you see the effects of practicing meditation—it took a little while to adhere to. They encourage you to practice; I think it’s four times a day or something like that. I don’t know how long. Once you try that, you can sense the

benefits, so that makes you even more profoundly interested in finding out more about it.

Gerald noted certain results from his experiences at the class which became, in turn, motivations for continuing and objectives for new learning. Later in the interview, Gerald said that his main reason for continuing to attend GP classes was out of intellectual curiosity: he wanted to learn more about Buddhist teachings on the mind. "I'm interested in how the mind works and how it doesn't. I've been interested in that for quite a while." Initially, the class was, like any other night course, a chance to get out, to socialize and to learn something new.

Gerald also said that he practiced meditation on his own outside the centre. He said that, with attendance at the classes, his personal practice had become more rigorous. He had been very reluctant to try meditation initially. "There was a lot of resistance at first. I felt like an idiot when you sit there. And it was hard." But he believed that attending the GP classes allowed him to become more comfortable and more familiar with the practice. Thus the class taught more than just the principles and practices of meditation: learning also included developing a new attitude toward the practice. It also included some physical and emotional changes. Gerald believed that meditation helped him release tension and develop and maintain concentration. Describing the guided meditation sessions, he said: "They'll try to get you to remember a feeling or a situation in your life which makes you feel compassion for something. They ask you to remember when someone was good to you to try to stimulate that feeling." The objective of some of the practices, therefore, was the development of positive or beneficial emotional responses.

Among his experiences at the classes, Gerald identified several different but overlapping spheres: experiences that were intellectual, emotional, social and physical. Each of these spheres was an important part of his motivation for coming to and continuing at

Chandrakirti Centre classes. Additionally, Gerald indicated a progression in his involvement: he described his experiences as becoming increasingly profound. This observation suggests that his experiences at Chandrakirti Centre touched him on a deeper, perhaps a spiritual level. Spirituality was not a word he used in his first interview, but he would later look back on those early experiences and describe them in spiritual terms. Initially, Gerald had spoken about applying principles that he had been testing out in his life, without having much education behind them. Clearly, one of his reasons for attending Chandrakirti Centre was to learn. On an intellectual level, he wanted to learn about Buddhist teachings on the mind. Reflecting back several months later, Gerald revealed that his relationships with his teenage children were among his initial motivations for coming to Chandrakirti Centre.

It was a chance to keep the boat away from the rocks, so to speak, because with children, especially teenagers, I was getting into a lot of conflicts at home. So, I was really searching for any sort of philosophy that might give me help with being a better parent. And I was always trying to be a better person, but specifically a better parent. So, the focus for me at first was just to find a life raft.

With this hindsight, Gerald noted that he had been looking for practical solutions to certain problems, but also for insights into being a better person and parent. It is possible that he had been less conscious of his spiritual motivations for attending GP classes when we first spoke, or perhaps longer-term exposure to the teachings, which frequently highlighted spirituality in Buddhist teachings, had influenced Gerald's later interpretation of his initial motivations. In any case, he had said at his first interview that he hoped Buddhist teachings on the mind would help him interpret his life situation.

While some of Gerald's motives for participating at Chandrakirti Centre may have been spiritual, he was initially skeptical about the centre's rituals. At his first interview,

when speaking about the practice of bowing or prostrating to the teacher, for instance, he said

I was really wary. I don't prostrate unless I really feel the need, so I went in there being very wary of the whole thing, whether I sensed that it was false; false respect: just to smell that sense of falseness, and I didn't get it from anything. And the brief introduction I've had gives me a sense of respect for the teachings, so I'm more than willing to be respectful.

Observing prostration practice and bowing had thus introduced Gerald to a sense of respect for the centre and its teachings. Yet he said that he still found some of the centre's ritual symbols confusing. Referring to the numerous icons on the shrines, he said: "All those little statues—I have no idea what they're for." He also said he was curious about the lifestyle of the monastics, but did not want to ask or to research it on his own. After four months attending the GP class, Gerald was aware that there were many things yet to learn about the religious side of Chandrakirti Centre.

The different areas of interest that had motivated Gerald to attend GP classes—the intellectual, social, emotional, physical and spiritual—were present to varying degrees in other respondents' reasons for participating at Friends of the Heart or Chandrakirti Centre. There were, however, distinct overlaps between these spheres. Tanit, for example, was very interested in the practical and physical aspects of meditation practice, but her interest in meditation was primarily spiritual.

Tanit, at forty-eight, was an assistant professor at Ryerson University's theatre department and a theatre production designer. When we met, she was on sabbatical and taking some time to explore her interest in meditation. We met in November 2006 at Joyce's Healing Body, Healing Mind yoga and introductory meditation class at Friends of the Heart. Because I had also studied and worked in theatre, Tanit and I shared some

common ground. I told her about my research and she expressed an interest in participating in an interview. We met over lunch in December.

When I asked Tanit how she came to be participating at Friends of the Heart, she said that she had, for the past six years, been very interested in Daoism.

My father had bought a book, *The 365 Dao*, and I thought: this looks really intriguing. And I went out and bought it. It's basically meditations for each day of the year. And I started to read it, not in a very consistent way to begin with, but if I was feeling restless or unhappy or something I'd think, oh yes I should read the Dao. And then, within the last two years I have become much more regular with it, reading it virtually every day.... Certain meditations are absolutely intriguing. I became really intrigued with the fact that life is a dream and that many of the sages profess this, and that we aren't really awake. I kept thinking, so what does that mean if I'm not awake? And how come everybody comes to my class on time if we are all in a dream?

As Tanit began reading the book on Daoism more and more frequently, she began to apply its teachings and practices in her life. "One of the things that the Dao continually makes reference to is meditation," she said: "that this is really an essential part of reaching enlightenment. So, I got a book out on it [meditation]... and I found that there were many, many different types. And I thought, well, that's interesting." While Tanit's first introduction to meditation came from a book, she soon decided that reading about the practice was not enough. "When I was reading about meditation, it didn't have any primacy of the experience. It's words. So what you have to do is actually translate those words into movement and thinking."

On a trip to China in October of 2006 Tanit had visited several Buddhist temples. The trip inspired her. "When I came back, I thought okay: I want to learn how to meditate. It just reinforced the idea that there's a way to reach enlightenment, which is pretty exciting." At the Buddhist temples she visited, Tanit discovered that there were similarities between Buddhism and what she had learned about Daoism. "I don't think they always

make a really fine distinction between what is Buddhist and what is Dao [sic]. So, for me, in my mind, they are conflated as well.... They suggest very similar items, particularly meditation as being a very important part of it.”<sup>13</sup> Before ever seeking out a meditation class, then, Tanit had learned something about meditation and certain Daoist and Buddhist concepts such as the illusory nature of ordinary life. She had also developed a strong interest in the concept of enlightenment and the possibility that she might follow certain practices to achieve that goal.

On her return from China, Tanit searched the internet for Daoist meditation centres in Toronto, and found none. Widening her search to “meditation in Toronto,” she found the Friends of the Heart website. She attended the open house held in November, 2006. “I liked the approach of the open house: come see if it suits you.... I liked the openness. And I also really appreciate the fact that there’s a ten week period where you can try it, see whether it works in your life.” Due to a prior commitment, Tanit could not attend the introductory classes on Wednesday evenings, but someone from the centre advised her to try the Thursday evening Healing Body, Healing Mind course instead. The classes began with an hour of yoga exercises, followed by an hour of meditation. The second hour was dedicated to teaching and practicing meditation. Joyce made some adjustments to the usual Thursday night session, repeating the teaching from the Wednesday night so that Tanit and other newcomers had the opportunity to learn more about insight meditation practice.

Tanit spoke primarily about her participation in the class and the different practices and techniques she was learning. She was surprised that there was considerable flexibility in the meditation postures used, and that the general guideline for postures was to make oneself comfortable. “I think that was the thing that crossed my mind when we were beginning to do meditation was: am I going to be able to sit still for this long? Because I

don't sit still. I move around a lot." One of the first things that Tanit learned, therefore, was that she would be able to meditate: Joyce told the class that if anyone should become uncomfortable during meditation, it was all right to change posture.

For Tanit, the practicalities of posture and technique were important elements of meditation. But meditation itself was the practical means to a primarily spiritual goal. In her first interview she made several references to enlightenment. She was very intrigued by the belief that achieving enlightenment was possible, and spoke of meditation, Buddhist precepts, and the Friends of the Heart refuge prayer in direct relation to the goal of enlightenment. Tanit was one of few student respondents who mentioned enlightenment, the goal traditionally associated with Buddhist teachings and practices, as a personal goal. Respondents spoke more often about ethical, emotional or practical results of meditation: stress release, developing concentration or compassion, a different outlook on the world, or a means of understanding the mind and the self. For Tanit, at least at her first interview, meditation was significant primarily as part of the path to enlightenment. She had learned through her readings on Daoism that meditation was an "essential part of reaching enlightenment." The physical practices, the development of awareness; in Tanit's perspectives, all were geared to that goal. Enlightenment, as she described it, was the means of waking up, of emerging from the dream that is ordinary life.

Tanit was clearly interested in the spiritual side of Buddhism and Daoism. Like Gerald, however, she was not looking for what she regarded as religion. "There is something extremely accessible about the Buddhist thinking," she said. "And I like the idea also that, in the handbook that we have, they describe Buddhism as not a religion per se: it is actually about stilling the mind and becoming more aware but it doesn't necessarily have ties to a religious ideology."<sup>14</sup> Like the majority of respondents, Tanit preferred to regard Buddhism as a practice, a philosophy or a way of life rather than a religion. Western



Buddhist sympathizers often extend this worldly perspective to the ultimate goal of the tradition as well: Buddhist cosmologies linking enlightenment with the cessation of the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*), are less appealing to many western Buddhist sympathizers. Many are uncomfortable with concepts such as karma and rebirth, associated as they are with religious ideologies, to use Tanit's phrase.

Despite indications of discomfort with certain Buddhist religious concepts, there were certain references to religion—that is, forms of spirituality institutionalized within Buddhist tradition—among respondents' motives for coming to Friends of the Heart or Chandrakirti Centre. Speaking about her reasons for attending Friends of the Heart, for example, Gwen said:

I wasn't consciously searching for Buddhism or for spiritual practice per se.... And I met Catherine. And I felt a strong pull, like I felt a strong sort of emotional pull. I wouldn't say it was even spiritual, but I don't know sometimes the difference. And then I went to the open house where I met Richard and Joyce and then I just thought I really like this, I really like this place. And I'm drawn to Buddhism over any other religion.

Although she began by saying her motivations were not spiritual or religious, Gwen concluded by saying that the religion that interested her most was Buddhism. She did, therefore, associate the centre with Buddhism and Buddhism with religion.

Margaret said that the reason she went to Friends of the Heart was to learn how to meditate. "I think I was primarily looking for a method, a way to change the kind of frantic lifestyle and busyness in my head, to find some way of finding peace in the middle of chaos." She had a busy job and while she said she enjoyed the chaos, she wanted to find a way of balancing the stress that accompanied it. But she also said that she had not had a "religious-spiritual connection" in a long time, and: "I feel that's something I would like to have." Margaret was to retire in a few months, and she said that finding a religious or

spiritual connection was on her list of things she meant to do. Margaret thus regarded her motives for attending Friends of the Heart, at least in part, as religious or spiritual.

Bronwen, who had been introduced to Chandrakirti Centre by her father, said that she agreed to attend the classes because she wanted to find a way to improve her relationship with her stepmother.

[My father said] you can't change a person, you have to accept. He wanted me to see it from the Buddhist point of view, where you can be more compassionate to the person and still go on with what you want to do, don't stop seeing each other. But you want to try and feel for her pain....

Bronwen thus indicates that among her primary reasons for attending the GP classes was a desire to learn about specific Buddhist teachings. Thus, among other, more practical concerns, Gwen, Margaret and Bronwen referred to spirituality and religion as motivations for taking the meditation classes.

Another respondent who referenced the religious, among other spheres, was Marconi, one of the experienced members of Friends of the Heart. He traced his path to Buddhist practice and to Friends of the Heart through several personal crises, including two divorces. Searching for solutions to these crises, which he identified as emotional and spiritual, he became involved with several different spiritually-based groups that, for various reasons, did not work out. His partner then introduced him to Friends of the Heart and to what he called "the Tibetan stream, the Vajrayāna stream." Despite Friends of the Heart's self-description as an eclectic centre, Marconi clearly associated it with that specific Buddhist school. At the time of his interview, Marconi and his partner were attending the Monday morning Tibetan Meditation classes, the most strictly Tibetan Buddhist of the regular offerings at Friends of the Heart at that time. Marconi also emphasized the significance of the practices he followed, particularly meditation and yoga. Thus his path into Buddhist practice also involved the physical, spiritual, emotional and religious spheres.

Like Tanit, several respondents traced their interest in either Buddhism or meditation back to the discovery of a book or other materials on Asian religion or philosophy. Nearly half of all student respondents indicated that what they had read about Buddhism, meditation or other eastern religions or philosophies had been an important motivation for seeking out a meditation course. Their readings also constituted an important part of their overall learning. If they learned about Buddhism as a world tradition, about its history and its diverse schools, it was primarily through reading books or conducting internet research. Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti meditation classes, by design, did not provide much factual data about Buddhism. Chandrakirti classes included considerable detail on Buddhist teachings, but the emphasis was more on ethics and applying those ethics in contemporary Canadian life rather than factual, historical details about Buddhist tradition. Describing what she learned at GP classes, Carol said: “Initially I really felt it was Buddhist thought, but they really focus on practical applications of Buddhist thought.” Carol, in fact, was another participant who had initially become interested in Buddhism by reading various books.

Strictly speaking, Carol was not a newcomer to Chandrakirti Centre. She had been attending classes at the centre on and off for seven years. I wanted to interview her primarily because, after all of her years at the centre, she was still attending the introductory classes, choosing not to move on to any of the higher level programs. As a volunteer at the centre, she was knowledgeable about its operations and kind enough to answer many of my questions, in addition to participating in an interview.

Carol was fifty-six and had a background in nursing. She had been raised in a Baptist church when she was growing up. As a teenager, she took the baptismal classes required prior to making a full commitment to the tradition. When the classes concluded, however, she could not make that commitment. “I couldn’t do it. It didn’t sit right with

me.... Thinking back now, I think it was pretty amazing. Usually, I would have just complied. That's when I really pulled away from my religious upbringing." For several years after that, Carol said, "I just backed off from religion, that type of religion, altogether. It just wasn't an issue."

I asked Carol when she had first taken an interest in Buddhism. She replied:

I guess I was in my thirties. I had just started having a small family. And I just started reading. I was interested in Asian cultures; I had some kind of affinity to those kinds of things. But I didn't get in to that, except very superficially. That had pleasing aesthetics, pleasing ideas, et cetera. So, I just started reading, initially about cultural things and then that progressed. I can't remember the first Buddhist book.... Suzuki, the Japanese monk that came over first and started the San Francisco Zen Centre.... That might have been the first.

Carol then read several more books on Zen and developed a strong interest in the art and culture of Japan. She said she found the simplicity of the Zen aesthetic most appealing. She had not been involved with any kind of Buddhist practice at that time, however. "It was just really reading." Her readings did introduce her to Zen concepts, however, and she said that Zen spoke to her more than her previous religious education had. Eventually, she started looking for somewhere to practice.

I thought, well, I want to find out more about meditation. I went to the Zen Centre here, actually [in Toronto's west end]. It's not far from the old Chandrakirti Centre. And I had young kids at the time, and time constraints prevented me from doing something personally, for myself. Fitting all of that in was challenging. So, I really continued to read and do sporadic meditation.

In fact, years would pass before Carol once again decided to go to a Buddhist centre. She eventually came across a flyer for Chandrakirti and, she said, "I liked the idea of classes. At the Zen centre, the times I went anyways, it was more just meditation. I kind of wanted some direction: more direction and discussion and that kind of thing. So, that's why the Chandrakirti Centre worked out for me." Hence Carol's primary motive for going to

Chandrakirti was to learn, to take part in a class where she would gain some formal instruction in addition to practicing meditation. Carol's process of turning to and learning about Buddhist practices and teachings had several key turning points: from an intellectual curiosity and emotional attraction to Asian culture she became fascinated by the style and simplicity of Zen; from there, she developed an interest in Zen concepts and in meditation. Eventually she encountered Chandrakirti, where the particular focus on Buddhist teachings sparked her interest. She stressed that hearing the teaching at the GP classes was her main formal practice, although she also practiced meditation on her own.

After some time at the centre, many Chandrakirti members move on from the introductory classes to the higher-level education programs. Carol instead continued to attend the introductory class, primarily due to other commitments. She had some interest in the Foundation Program but for years it was offered on Sunday, the day Carol set aside for time with her family. While her primary involvement at the centre continued to be at the Tuesday evening GP classes, she did take part in some empowerments (ritual initiations) and retreats, in addition to working at the centre as a volunteer. Carol was not overly concerned that she had not moved on to higher-level classes. She believed that she continued to benefit from the GP class, even when the topics were repeated.

It's interesting, because, with Zopa, often he would do a series and then that series would get repeated to a certain extent. And I thought: Oh dear, same old, same old. But I realize now, and obviously he improved over time, because he talks about the first time he talked. But there was always something new, another discussion and other things. And just his presentation [was appealing]. And, I'm a slow learner; I needed it to be repeated over and over. To let it sink in.

Here Carol reveals something interesting about attending the GP course: each time the same topic came up new things arose; new discussions took place that became new learning experiences. Repetition also helped Carol learn the topics better as she heard them

over and over. Repetition of the class topics itself is comparable to a ritual. Ron G. Williams and James W. Boyd, in their study of a Zoroastrian fire ritual, argue that the very means of learning something new from a ritual is its repetition, the fact that it is performed without variance. They compare this process to appreciating a classic piece of artwork or music: with each new encounter with the same piece the viewer or listener discovers something new, something that, like a steady but far-off horizon, draws one ever onward to newer and deeper understandings.<sup>15</sup> GP classes are less rigidly structured and more variable than the kinds of rituals Williams and Boyd discuss, but combined with their insights Carol's description suggests an almost ritualistic element to the repetition of topics at the classes. Repetition, she suggested, improved her learning.

Alan, who also attended the Chandrakirti Centre GP classes, said something similar. He said he was still learning, even after attending the class for over a year and hearing many of the same topics discussed. "It's the same message, really. You evolve each time you're practicing these things. Suddenly I notice I've moved a little bit forward from what they said a year ago. I hear it again and think about it in a different way now."

At sixty-five, Alan was a menswear retailer who owned a shop in Toronto's Yorkville district. We first met at Chandrakirti's Tuesday evening GP class and chatted afterwards over tea and cookies in the basement common room. Alan often attended the classes with his daughter, Bronwen. Both father and daughter took part in interviews. Alan and I had our interview in a park not far from his shop in May of 2007.

Alan had grown up in England, in an environment in which he said religion did not play a large role. "Coming from a working-class background, church really didn't fit in to your life. It was there, but it was really more for other people than it would be for yourself. I was confused by that," he said. When I asked Alan what had brought him to Chandrakirti Centre, he replied: "Basically, I've always been interested in the idea that there's something

else other than just means and ends.” His interests, then, leaned towards the spiritual, that which goes beyond everyday concerns. Alan became interested in Buddhism after his wife had introduced him to *siddha* yoga. “A couple of times I took a meditation course. But I didn’t like the structure there. There’s still a god. I didn’t like the god thing.... That’s never sat well with me.” Like several other respondents, then, certain religious elements—in this case, theism—were of less interest to Alan.

About a year prior to our interview, Alan had seen a sign for a meditation class offered through Chandrakirti at a church in his neighbourhood. Intrigued, he began attending that class regularly. Eventually, the class was cancelled due to low attendance, so Alan sought out the main centre on Crawford Street. The course appealed to him, he said, because of its focus on happiness.

I’ve always been fascinated by the Buddhist idea. Typically you hear about Buddhists because things will pass over them, they’ll let things go.... [At the class] they seemed to talk about happiness. And I thought: you know, I don’t think I’m very happy. It hadn’t really occurred to me about not being happy.

The teachings on happiness made Alan realize that, for years, he had regarded his business as his only pursuit. “You’re tied to that. There’s a structure and it’s debt or profit.” The possibility of pursuing happiness apart from the success of his business had not occurred to him until he took the class. “The idea of being non-materialistic has always been counter to my thinking,” he said. Alan learned that the Buddhist perspective advocated “not hanging on but letting go of materialism.” The GP lectures introduced him to some new ideas. “You’re not going to be happy until you stop thinking about yourself and be unattached. I thought: well, that’s a switch. It means going in another direction.”

Alan spoke about his motivations for attending GP classes almost entirely in terms of the ideas and concepts he was learning. Learning meditation techniques was part of the

class, but Alan viewed meditation more as a means to achieve the transformations he sought. He said he had been meditating before he attended the GP classes, in the Siddha Yoga style, but Chandrakirti classes gave him a new outlook on the practice. He had thought meditation was about blocking out thoughts, but now regarded it as a means of working on oneself, of “moving forward,” as he put it. “It’s about working on merit, as they say. I like that idea.”

Merit (*punya* in Sanskrit) refers to “karmic fruitfulness,”<sup>16</sup> a kind of storehouse of positive energy that is believed to be generated through meditation, prostrations, prayers, offerings and adherence to Buddhist ethics. In the Tibetan system, it is common to dedicate the merit one gains through one’s practice to others. Alan’s appreciation for the concept of merit indicates that he regarded the outcome of his involvement as spiritual, something that went beyond “means and ends,” the day-to-day, materialistic concerns of his business life. From his earliest experiences at the GP class, he said, he had discovered a new ethical perspective: new ways of looking at the world and of transforming his life.

Like Alan, Diane was interested in finding ways to change her outlook and her way of life. At fifty-nine, Diane was a semi-retired former civil servant and another respondent who discovered Friends of the Heart via the internet. We met at Joyce’s Introduction to Insight course and at the Tibetan Meditation classes conducted by Catherine Rathbun in 2006 and 2007. Diane told me that she had been interested in Buddhism, but the “in,” as she put it, was meditation. From her interview, however, it seemed that Buddhist concepts had equally inspired her to become involved at Buddhist centres.

Diane had encountered the work of a woman called Byron Katie, who teaches a method for discovering one’s essential nature and a sense of no self. Diane said, “I got a copy of a book of hers and have gone to a couple of workshops that she has done.” But Diane did not understand some of Katie’s ideas. “She would write... about having no self



and the world being a projection and nothing having inherent reality. And I thought: What the hell is all of this? And then I was interested in meditation and I started hearing some of the same things.” Having determined that there was a connection between Byron Katie’s writings and certain Buddhist concepts, Diane decided to find out more about Buddhism.

Diane then attended some talks at Snow Lion, the Buddhist bookshop where several Friends of the Heart teachers had made public presentations. She said that the talks helped her understand some of the concepts she had found confusing. Following that, she enrolled in two adult education courses, one in world religions and the other in philosophy. “I knew what I was interested in had something to do with religions and philosophy, but I didn’t know what exactly. But it was more along the lines of: Who am I? What am I doing here? What is the meaning of life?” Throughout her interview, Diane often noted that she had an intellectual or cognitive interest in Buddhist concepts, but that she was also seeking answers to spiritual questions. She found that the academic courses did not offer the answers she sought. “I dropped those two courses,” she said, “and just started going to two different Buddhist centres. I go to Friends of the Heart and I go to another place called Atisha in the Beaches.” Diane first attended the November 2006 open house at Friends of the Heart and then enrolled in its Introduction to Insight course. At the same time, she began attending General Program classes at Atisha Centre. Atisha is another Toronto-area NKT centre and is considered to be Chandrakirti’s sister centre. Atisha’s class structure and content follow NKT guidelines and are similar to Chandrakirti’s. Shortly after those classes started, Diane learned about the Friends of the Heart Tibetan Meditation class on Monday mornings and began attending that as well. She said she did not want to divide her time between two different centres, but found she was interested in both the meditation instruction at Friends of the Heart, and the Buddhist teachings at Atisha. Although she was less engaged by the chanted prayers and empowerments

performed at the Friends of the Heart Tibetan Meditation course, she was impressed by teacher Catherine Rathbun and continued attending that class until Catherine left in May of 2007.

I asked Diane why she was interested in Buddhism, and she replied: “Buddhism is the closest philosophy that I feel I can identify with and [I] really want to live my life according to those kinds of principles.... It feels like there are more answers about meaning in Buddhism than I have had in any other place.” Diane had been raised Catholic, and, like Gerald and Carol, had fallen away from her family’s church. “I’m not into any kind of dogma,” she said. “I was raised Catholic and I was turned off to organized religion.” Despite this view, Diane said: “Buddhism really appealed to me.” Western participants at Buddhist centres, including some long-term members, often declare that they do not like organized religion: this despite being involved at a Buddhist centre, following structured teachings and practices, and participating in various rituals. This apparent contradiction is another indication that many westerners do not regard Buddhism as a religion. Diane plainly understood it instead as a philosophy or way of life.

Diane’s involvement at Buddhist centres began due to an interest in meditation, but by the time we spoke, she was most intrigued by the teachings she heard, particularly those at Atisha Centre. When I asked which teachings appealed to her, she replied:

Well, to start with, at the most basic level it’s the concept that everyone has a Buddha inside. It’s so different from the original sin concept.... It’s a very different approach. Your job, then, is to uncover the blockages and allow that Buddha to shine forth. I really, really like that. I like the teachings around the noble path: right thinking, right behaviours. And [at Buddhist centres] people seem to live that.

Throughout our conversation Diane made connections between her understanding of religion and what she learned and experienced at Friends of the Heart and Atisha.

Sometimes she contrasted the two, as she did when speaking about Buddhist teachings and

the concept of original sin. At the same time, she was intrigued by traditional Buddhist doctrines such as the eightfold noble path and the Buddhist precepts. Because such doctrines were new to her, however, she had no reason to identify them with religion per se. But there were times when she encountered elements she did associate with organized religion at Friends of the Heart and Atisha. When speaking about the possibility of becoming more involved at Atisha Centre, she said: “You know, there’s a part of me that wants to hold back, because of my experience in religion, being raised in a very authoritarian Catholic environment. I’m always kind of questioning. At the Atisha Centre, all of the books are written only by the one guy, Geshe-la. And I’m thinking: okay, they only have this one guy; it’s too god-like for me. But I have been looking at the books on the shelf and I might open some next time.” Where Diane did associate her experiences at the centres with religion, she was clearly uncomfortable. This discomfort extended to the more formal practices at the Friends of the Heart Tibetan Meditation class.

I’m a little concerned that it’s too ritualistic for me. You know, the beads and the chanting. It just evokes in me: Catholic Church, the rosary beads. You know, when I was a kid, it was all in Latin, and this seems to me just a different language. You know, it’s the same... feeling. I’m not sure. It may be that that’s a blockage that I have and that may open up. I certainly like Catherine and feel very warm and open towards her and that’s why I’m coming. I’m just not sure about some of the practices.

Because some of the practices seemed too close to Diane’s previous religious affiliation, she was less comfortable with them than she had been with the teachings, which were different enough that she did not associate them with religion.

Before coming to Friends of the Heart and Atisha, Diane had learned about Buddhist teachings and practices from a few different sources. There was the Byron Katie material, the courses on religion and philosophy and the talks at Snow Lion. Approximately ten years earlier Diane had also taken a meditation course based on the teachings of Jon

Kabat-Zinn, a western Zen teacher and author who created a secularized system of teaching meditation called Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction. While Diane was working, however, she was unable to keep up the practice she learned at that course.

When I was doing the course I did meditate, but I found my job was very, very stressful and I found that with the job I could be a mother, I could be a daughter (both my parents were ill) and I could have that job, but there was nothing else in my life. There was no room for meditation. It was just caring for my kids, caring for my parents and doing my job. And I felt my soul was dying. I didn't have time for meditation and so I just felt that my soul was dying in that job.... [Then] there came a point in my life where my kids had left home, off to university, and I was no longer happy in the job that I was doing. I decided to leave it. You know, these questions: Who am I? were coming up. And it just seems like it converged with this Byron Katie and then her observations about not attaching to the goal and being selfless. So, that's really what brought me into the Buddhist part of it. I was trying to understand, conceptually, any sort of a philosophical framework, too, for living.

Diane felt a strong desire to find a spiritual path for transforming her life. This desire, combined with an interest in meditation and a strong intellectual curiosity about Buddhist concepts. She was motivated to continue, especially at Atisha Centre, mainly out of an interest in learning more. Several times in her interview she said that she preferred the intellectual side of what she was learning. She sometimes conceded that her spiritual needs were not satisfied by strictly cognitive learning, but insisted that she was “a head person” and needed more cognitive understanding than what she called experiential learning in the meditation class. Even so, the intellectual, experiential, and spiritual were all factors in Diane's motives for attending introductory classes at Friends of the Heart and Atisha. Beginning with an interest in meditation and a need to find out who she was, she became more interested in gaining new knowledge.

Intellectual curiosity, a spiritual quest, emotional attractions to Buddhism or to Asian philosophy or culture: many respondents, like Diane, indicated an array of different reasons for attending introductory meditation classes. Some respondents, however, were

strictly interested in learning how to meditate. John was one. John was taking the same Introduction to Insight class as Diane and I at Friends of the Heart, beginning in November of 2006. When John and I met for an interview in February of 2007, the class was coming to an end. John introduced me to a downtown coffee shop where, he said, the poor quality of the coffee would ensure a quiet environment for our interview.

At age sixty, John was retired from his former careers as a teacher and a systems analyst. His interest in meditation began when he was in his twenties. At that time, and occasionally over the years since, he had read some books on meditation and relaxation. When he retired in his late fifties his interest rekindled. "This seemed like a good time to get back to it," he said. He first discovered a Toronto area group called Spring Rain Sangha that met weekly at a Presbyterian Church, but found that the group was rather advanced. There was little instruction and the meditation sessions were forty-five minutes long. John said he needed to find something at an introductory level. He heard about Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction course that was being offered at the Toronto General Hospital, but that course would not begin for a few months, so John decided to look for another group in the meantime. He found information online about Friends of the Heart and went to the open house in November 2006. He started attending the Introduction to Insight course immediately following that open house. By January 2007 he was also participating in the Kabat-Zinn program at the hospital.

John made it clear that his primary interest was meditation. When I asked if he had any interest in Buddhism, he said only that he was a little curious about the symbolic objects in the Friends of the Heart shrine room. "I suppose it would be interesting just to have someone who sort of knew all the details about the statuary and the symbols on a lot of things," he said. Despite this curiosity, John was much more concerned with learning meditation techniques and practices. He mentioned that he had once encountered another

group, one that he found to be “very, very Buddhist.” From his description, it may have been a GP class conducted through Chandrakirti or Atisha Centre. “There was very little of a sit involved and an awful lot more listening to real Buddhist theology, really. He [the teacher] talked a lot about reincarnation, things like that.” These teachings did not appeal to John. He went to Friends of the Heart looking for meditation practice rather than religion or spirituality. I asked John if he came from a religious background, and he replied: “No. Not particularly anti-religious. My parents were churchgoers, United churchgoers. I went to Sunday school as a kid.” Unlike others I spoke with, John had no particular discomfort with or objection to the religious elements he encountered at Friends of the Heart, but he was not particularly interested in them, either. “I would not be going to a Buddhist temple to become a Buddhist or to join a congregation,” he said.

When I asked John why he attended the Friends of the Heart meditation course, he said, “Well, certainly an anti-stress component, the relaxation component, that sort of thing.” John disclosed that he had an arthritic condition called *ankylosing spondylitis* which causes excess growth of bone in the spine.

So, your spine ends up pretty stiff. And the trick is to keep yourself stiff and upright.... So that, I suppose, has been a factor in whatever I do, in terms of physical movement.... This is like a “move it or lose it” type of arthritis, so I do a lot of stretching exercises. Any type of relaxation, anti-stress, is great for that type of arthritis; it really keeps your pain level under control.

The Friends of the Heart meditation class included some *qi gong* and yoga exercises, and John said that some exercises were helpful for his condition, but that some yoga postures were difficult. At that point, he mentioned that he had taken some t'ai chi classes for about a year. I asked him how meditation, apart from its stress reduction component, affected his condition. “It's sort of neutral physically, the actual meditation part,” he said. “I seem to be noticing more of a connection between meditation and mood, possibly, but not between

meditation and anything physical.” With reference to the erect posture used in meditation, John said: “It doesn’t hurt. That is a good posture, certainly, to be in. I should be trying to keep [that posture].”

Before going to Friends of the Heart, John’s primary sources of learning about Buddhist-related topics were books on meditation and relaxation he had read several years earlier, books he said were “not specifically Buddhist.” He had also encountered another Asian-based practice in the form of t’ai chi. At the time of our interview, he had been participating at different meditation groups for about six months. At retirement, he had jumped right in to the practice, learning to meditate at Spring Rain, Friends of the Heart and the Kabat-Zinn course. He said he had not explored much about Buddhism itself, its history or its doctrines. Nor was that kind of learning of interest to him, before or during the classes. His learning objectives for the Friends of the Heart class were geared toward developing a skill that promoted stress release and pain reduction. Despite some experience with Buddhist and other Asian practices, John had not developed an interest in eastern spirituality or religions.

Two other respondents from Friends of the Heart enrolled in its introductory classes strictly to learn how to meditate. Erin, a thirty-year-old sales representative for a clothing company was looking for ways to reduce the stress that came with her job. Like John, she was somewhat curious about Buddhism. She had done some research on the internet and had read two books by Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh, but her main goals at the course were to learn different meditation techniques and to develop the skills to maintain a meditation practice. Erin had initially been attracted to Friends of the Heart because its website did not emphasize the fact that it was a Buddhist centre. “For me, it was much more about the meditation than it was about Buddhism.” She said:

My main reason for wanting to go to meditation classes and learn how to meditate..., I would say the number one reason is stress. I just wanted to reduce my stress. My job is pretty demanding and I feel like I work a lot and I bring that upon myself as well. So, I just wanted to be able to have a way to get away from that.

Erin's learning objectives, therefore, were more practical than spiritual or intellectual. She wanted to gain skills that could help her manage her stress, but was not particularly interested in Buddhist values or ethics.

The other respondent interested solely in meditation was Dennis, a financial analyst who was thirty-three years old. He said "I play a lot of poker and a lot of poker players meditate to help their poker game. So that was the very first thing that piqued my interest. And I went through a little while where I had trouble sleeping at night, so I thought I would give it a try." A year prior to coming to Friends of the Heart, Dennis had taken a three-hour meditation class at a Toronto-area yoga centre, but was now looking for a more comprehensive course. Dennis said he knew nothing about Buddhism, nor was he particularly interested. For respondents like John, Erin and Dennis, then, there was a clear distinction between meditation practice and Buddhism.

Six of eleven Friends of the Heart students interviewed, and two of eight from Chandrakirti Centre said that learning how to meditate was their initial motivation for participating at the centres. From Friends of the Heart, Tanit, Diane, John, Margaret, Dennis and Erin claimed that meditation was the main reason they enrolled. Diane, Tanit and Margaret also expressed certain spiritual objectives among their learning goals. Although she had been originally interested in Asian cultures, Carol was one Chandrakirti respondent who said that she initially went to the centre primarily to learn meditation. Brenda was the other. Like John and Diane, Brenda had taken the Kabat-Zinn meditation course, but when she first came to Chandrakirti Centre it was to attend a prayer service. She quickly developed an interest in the teachings and the more spiritual practices taught at



the centre. At the time of our interview, she said she rarely practiced meditation. She said that her primary practice was to be patient and compassionate and to wish well-being to others, a practice called *metta* or loving-kindness. “One can turn one’s whole life into a meditation,” Brenda said. “It’s about being in the moment and being respectful and about seeing the beauty that lives in the world.” Other Chandrakirti Centre respondents, including Gerald, Carol and Alan said that meditation was part of their practice, but they gave a wider variety of reasons for coming to Chandrakirti Centre: curiosity about the applicability of Buddhist teachings to every day life, an interest in Buddhist teachings on the mind, an attraction to Asian culture, a desire to learn about Buddhist practice and principles, or a search for happiness and detachment. Those whose were primarily interested in meditation most often spoke about what they learned at the classes in terms of meditation postures and techniques. Those interested in Buddhism or in spirituality more often spoke about changes in their attitudes, values and behaviour as a result of the classes. There is an indication, therefore, that students’ initial motivations for attending corresponded to what they said they took away from the classes.

In fact, a noticeable trend emerged from interview participants’ stated reasons for attending the classes; a trend that distinguished Friends of the Heart participants from those at Chandrakirti Centre. Most respondents taking the Friends of the Heart meditation class indicated that their primary interest in coming to the centre was to learn and practice meditation. Fewer indicated that an interest in learning about Buddhism or its teachings was foremost among their motivations. While most respondents from Chandrakirti introductory class were interested in meditation, and many meditated at the centre and at home, most indicated an interest in Buddhist teachings as their primary motivation for attending GP classes. In fact, this trend reflected the different approaches of the two centres. At Friends of the Heart, introductory classes were structured to teach meditation

first and foremost. There were some teachings on Buddhist ethics, but direct references to Buddhism were minimal. Students spent much of the time meditating or discussing their meditation experiences. At Chandrakirti, introductory classes usually began and ended with meditation sessions, but much of the class time was dedicated to lectures and discussions on Buddhist ethics and worldviews. One might conclude from this trend that respondents found whatever it was that they were looking for; that their objectives and expectations for coming to Friends of the Heart or Chandrakirti Centre were fulfilled by the course content they encountered. Conversely, one might argue that respondents, who already had been participating at Friends of the Heart or Chandrakirti at the time they were interviewed, were likely to assess their initial motives and interests in terms of the kinds of learning they had already gained.

Both centres' introductory level classes were advertised as meditation classes, even at Chandrakirti with its lecture-style approach. The following description of the GP course appeared on Chandrakirti Centre's website:

Chandrakirti KMCC offers introductory meditation classes throughout the GTA. Each class includes a simple breathing meditation, a short talk on Buddhist thought and a concluding meditation. There is also time to ask questions and discuss.<sup>17</sup>

While this description of the GP class was accurate, in my experience the main event in the class in terms of time spent was the talk followed by questions and discussion. Meditation sessions were brief and less time was given to teaching, discussing or practicing meditation techniques than at Friends of the Heart. Because the classes were advertised primarily as meditation classes, it is possible that Chandrakirti Centre did, in fact, attract more people initially seeking meditation instruction than indicated in the interview material. Both Alan and Carol, it seemed, first came to Chandrakirti Centre after finding its advertisements for meditation classes, although they indicated other equally important motivations for

enrolling. Even so, both indicated that it was only after they participated at the classes that the teachings on Buddhist principles began to interest them more than meditation itself. Diane, who was taking courses at Friends of the Heart and at Chandrakirti's sister-centre, spoke about both meditation and Buddhist concepts among her interests, although she did say that meditation was her first interest. It is possible, then, that respondents expressed their most recent experiences when reflecting upon their pre-existing interests.

Nevertheless, participants at both centres probably would have remained only if they felt that the teachings matched their initial learning goals. Those who found that the introductory classes were unsuited to their initial interests and expectations would not have stayed around long enough to be interviewed. Newcomers were coming and going all the time, especially at Chandrakirti where students could attend weekly or just occasionally, rather than enrolling for several weeks up front. John, as an example, had encountered what might have been a GP class once, and because of its emphasis on Buddhist religious teachings—what he called theology—he did not go back. Diane became more interested in the teachings at Atisha and left Friends of the Heart at the end of her trial membership. Moreover, both centres offered different options for meditation versus teaching. For a time Chandrakirti offered a class called Stress Factor Zero, which focused on meditation practice, although it also included some teaching. During fieldwork for this study, however, that course was sporadic and had a very small attendance. None of the interview participants had enrolled in that class. At Friends of the Heart, the Monday morning Tibetan Meditation class offered much more on Buddhist teachings and included more formal ritual such as chanted prayers. Friends of the Heart respondents who did not indicate meditation among their initial motivations for participating at the centre—Anna, Nicolette, David and Marconi—attended that class. Gwen, who worked on Monday mornings, was the only respondent initially motivated by an interest in Buddhism and

spirituality who did not attend that class. While interview responses about their earlier motives may have been influenced to some extent by the courses they attended, Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti participants had enough choice that they were able to select centres and classes that appealed most to their needs and expectations.

From respondents' stories of turning to Buddhism or to meditation practice emerges a picture of several connected spheres of interest: intellectual, emotional, practical, physical, spiritual and religious. These elements are significant because many of the same descriptors correspond to the different means of teaching and learning at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti classes such as lectures, meditation, discussion groups and so on. That is, respondents' motivations for attending classes and their initial learning goals fell into categories that also corresponded to the different means and types of learning that took place at the two centres. The various means and types of learning are explored in chapters three and four, respectively.

It is noteworthy that a significant number of respondents had ambiguous or negative views about religion; what many termed organized religion. One of the very reasons that some people participate at western Buddhist centres is because they have moved away from a religious tradition in which they were raised and were seeking something else. Diane, for example, noted that she was somewhat uncomfortable because the chanted prayers and the idols on the shrines reminded her of her Catholic upbringing. Brenda had a colourful way of describing her involvement at Chandrakirti in contrast to her perspectives on Judeo-Christian doctrine.

You go to this amazing place, you listen to this ancient, two and a half thousand year old teacher who busted his you know what to figure this stuff out, didn't lay on you that it has all to do with some beastly bloody god who's going to judge you and if you're not a really good person you're going to burn in hell. You know, there's none of that. None of that nasty stuff. Mind you, I think that the wheel of life and multiple rebirths is a much a

scarier place than being sent into purgatory. I think it's much scarier. That you have to keep doing this?

Although she felt it was “scarier” than Christian conceptions of hell and purgatory, Brenda indicated a provisional acceptance of Buddhist rebirth cosmology. In that, she differed from most respondents. The interesting thing is that early Buddhist scripture actually does reference hell-realms and ghost-states into which beings with negative karmic conditions are believed to be born. Westerners, however, usually receive a selective version of such teachings. When they do learn about hell-realms and hungry ghosts, some westerners dismiss them as Asian cultural accretions that are not essential to the heart of Buddhism.

Previous experiences with religious traditions may even influence a person's overall conceptions of what constitutes spirituality. Tanit said, for example: “I had my experience with Catholicism, and it had not been of the most joyful order. So, I had not had a lot of interest in that kind of spiritual experience. And, you're right; I tend to attach it to: spiritual, Catholicism, not good, not interesting.”

Preconceptions about ritual and religion, therefore, have a strong influence on what western Buddhist sympathizers want out of Buddhism, what they are attracted to, and also what they find surprising or disconcerting when they begin to learn more about the tradition. The prevalence of such attitudes among western Buddhist sympathizers thus tells us something about what they expect to find when they go to a Buddhist centre. Many are looking for something different from their previous religious experience, something they can regard as non-religious and non-ritualistic. These attitudes also indicate the necessity for Buddhist centres' organizers to adapt to meet the needs and expectations of their anticipated audiences.

A key motivation for participating at the meditation centres is yet to be discussed: the desire to be part of a community. I asked respondents whether they thought it was

important to practice with a group, or to meditate in the company of others. Significantly, many of them replied using the same language, referring to the impact of participating with “like-minded individuals.” Gwen, for example, said, “I just like to come together with like-minded, like-hearted people who are close enough on the same path that I feel nourished by it.” Diane agreed: “I need a place to be where there are other like-minded people.” Brenda, Alan, Anna, and Margaret also used the exact phrase “like-minded people” when discussing reasons why they participated at the centres or why the community at the centres was important. Several other respondents, including Carol, Marconi and Gerald, expressed similar sentiments. The frequency with which such sentiments were expressed suggests that being involved with others who had the same interests was a strong motivation for respondents to seek out and continue participating at Friends of the Heart or Chandrakirti Centre.

Few respondents had much contact with Buddhist sympathizers, those like-minded individuals, before stepping through the centres’ doors. The fact that Gerald first attended a Buddhist centre with a friend makes him a bit of an outlier among western Buddhist sympathizers. By far the majority of such people find their way to Buddhist centres on their own: few have friends or family members involved with Buddhist teachings or practices. Several respondents had friends or acquaintances who had at one time introduced them to meditation or Buddhist teachings, but most came alone to Friends of the Heart or Chandrakirti Centre. It was also rare to see family members participating together. Respondents Margaret and Marconi attended Friends of the Heart classes with their respective partners and Alan had introduced his daughter Bronwen to Chandrakirti, and later, his wife. Friends of the Heart teachers interviewed included Joyce and Richard, a married couple. Friends of the Heart had been recommended to Gwen by another member, but Gwen first went to the centre on her own. Catherine H., the one respondent

whose family was Buddhist, sometimes participated at her family's Chinese Buddhist temple but she started attending Chandrakirti Centre on her own. She later introduced her friend Brenda, another interview participant, and they attended together for a time. Of twenty-four total interview participants, then, only nine had originally come to Friends of the Heart or Chandrakirti Centre in the company of a friend or family member.

Coming with someone else to a Buddhist centre or meditation group is, therefore, not crucial: being with others is. As Diane put it, "No one in my close circle is on the same path that I'm on," she said, "and so that's the other thing, I guess, is that I like being around people who are on the same kind of path. I can learn from them." Being involved with people who understood and shared their perspectives was clearly important for most respondents. Anna said, "I would say that I can find spiritual experiences anywhere. This just happens to be with like-minded people, that if I share what I visualize or experience in other ways, that they are open to it." Anna thus felt she could share her experiences with others who would understand at Friends of the Heart.

Shared understanding and experiences constitute one reason for the importance of a community. Another, as Gerald had pointed out, was the opportunity to socialize. It was, in fact, among his initial reasons for attending the GP class. He found Chandrakirti to be a warm and welcoming place. As a result, he continued even after the friend who introduced him to the centre stopped participating. One of the Chandrakirti volunteers had made a lasting impression on Gerald when he first arrived. "She was so welcoming that it made you feel good and it made you feel you want to be there. So that was a good starting point right at the door." As noted, much of the socializing at Chandrakirti took place following the classes in the basement common room. Gerald said:

After the meditation, you're encouraged and invited to go downstairs and have snacks, usually cookies—delicious cookies, actually. Sometimes I think

I go there for the cookies.... And you can sit around in a nice environment and usually about half or a third will sit down and the teachers will sit there too and you can ask them anything you want, whether it's about the lecture that night or anything in particular.

Alan said something similar. "There's something about being in the centre.... There's a little community afterwards, when you go downstairs. You can talk, or if you wanted to speak to the monk or the nun, you can do that." Socializing thus offers additional opportunities to learn, through informal discussions. For Bronwen, socializing offered the opportunity simply to meet and engage with others. "I love being with people because I live on my own," she said, "and it's a time to indulge a bit in the socializing after, just even the different age groups, just to meet people and explore other's lives and see what they're doing."

Being with like-minded people, however, did not necessarily mean seeking out a new social group. While nearly all participants indicated that it was important to practice with a group, some made it clear that they were not looking to socialize. Diane said that it was important to be in the company of others who were interested in the same subjects as she was. "But," she said, "I don't need to go to the centre for a group of friends, if you know what I mean. I don't see that as the centre of my social life.... The whole experience for me is the meditative one, so I haven't been particularly social [or] wanting to get to know people." John said that it was "nice to get out" when he practiced with a meditation group, but he still did not consider it to be a social occasion. When I asked if it was important to be part of a community, he replied:

Not particularly, I would say. I like going to a group and doing [meditation], but I—it's funny, one of the people at this Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction [course] said that he had looked around at different groups to learn meditation before, but he couldn't find one that didn't involve potluck suppers as well. He thought that this hospital one would be a good one because there were no potluck suppers. No, I'm not really looking for community.



No potluck suppers: John offered this story to describe his own sentiments about becoming involved with a community. He was interested in meditation practice, and wanted to practice with others, but did not wish to become socially involved with others in the group. Some respondents who said they were not interested in socializing at the centres explained that they had other social circles and were not looking for another when they enrolled in meditation classes.

Although Alan appreciated the opportunity to socialize and ask informal questions after the class, he was somewhat wary of what he called the business side of the centre. “I think there’s a danger, in any of these things, of becoming part of an organization,” he said. He spoke about a church he and his wife had attended which became structured too much like a business, in Alan’s view. “I think it’s likely to happen with all of these centres. They are a business as well. And [at Chandrakirti] you get a core: you see the people that show up all the time. I don’t mind helping, but I don’t want that becoming something I need to have: to go there as almost like a club.” Alan preferred to keep his involvement at an educational and spiritual level, remaining apart from the social community and the core of volunteers at the centre.

Several respondents noted another benefit of participating with a group. Practicing with others, they said, helped them develop and maintain their meditation practice. Nine student respondents emphasized the discipline and commitment involved in attending classes, qualities that were less easily cultivated on one’s own. Gwen, for example, said: “I may always need the sangha,<sup>18</sup> but right now I need it so that I can start to build, because I’m in the process of building that discipline.” Speaking of participating with a group, Dennis said:

It helps me stay disciplined. I know class is coming up, so I want to keep pace with the class. So I make sure I get my meditations in during the week.

Yeah, just the support it gives. I had a couple of bad weeks where it just wasn't working out and I missed a couple of days and then I was kind of frustrated. And then Meg came with her analogies and it helped that quite a bit.

Like Dennis, Margaret believed that the weekly reinforcement of attending the classes gave her the discipline to keep meditating. "I wouldn't maintain a home practice if I weren't doing something at least once a week that calls me in to a little more structure and encouragement and so on." Erin said: "I would imagine that once I stop this I'll probably find it harder to make the time and be regimented about it and actually do it. Practicing with other people is obviously the best way to do it." Marlon, Brenda, Anna and Carol also indicated that practicing with others reinforced the discipline and commitment necessary to keep up the practice.

At Friends of the Heart classes, students were expected to discuss and ask questions about their daily meditation practice, and were thereby encouraged to keep meditating at home. Chandrakirti question and answer sessions offered a similar opportunity to learn from other students and receive encouragement from teachers. John and Marlon noted that one could draw energy for meditation practice from the presence of others. Marlon said that the path to enlightenment takes a lot of energy.

And that's one of the purposes of practicing in the centre. People have said that when they practice here they feel more motivated or that they have more energy and I guess the other one is the fact that it's good to have a community. Some people, they practice alone. They don't feel that motivated.

Several respondents, therefore, believed that engaging and meditating with other meditators built commitment and motivation for keeping up with the practice.

The communities at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti, therefore, were important for some as a social group, for others as a support for their practice. As might be expected, the centres' memberships were not often characterized as religious communities.

While John was himself not interested in finding a religious group, he speculated that that might be one motive for joining a meditation class. “I can see that some people would come looking for community. Some people will come looking for almost a religious community—sort of a clean slate religious community that doesn’t have the baggage that their old religion carried with it for them.” This is an informative remark. John was aware that some Buddhist sympathizers might have negative views towards their previous religious affiliations. He speculated that some might expect a Buddhist group to become a substitute religious community, one free from the problems members might associate with other religions.

Whether respondents were seeking a new practice, a new outlook on life, a new way of living, or just a healthful hobby or exercise, the majority of them said they had a variety of different motivations for enrolling in meditation classes. It is significant that respondents’ stated motivations included a desire to gain new information or intellectual-level learning, an interest in exploring new attitudes, outlooks and ethical perspectives and the motivation to learn meditation skills and techniques. These particular interests correspond to different categories or domains of learning that meditation classes would, to one degree or another, provide. As respondents’ experiences at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti unfold in subsequent chapters, it will become evident that learning that took place through formal practices such as meditation involved all of these domains of learning. Before investigating the patterns of learning, however, it is first necessary to explore the meditation classes at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti Centre.

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<sup>1</sup> Three other respondents had also been interviewed by this time, but the Zen-based centre they attended was, in the end, not included in this study.

<sup>2</sup> Additional details on the interview selection process and research methods can be found in appendix A.

<sup>3</sup> See Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002), 187.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas A. Tweed, “Who Is a Buddhist? Night Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures,” in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 18.

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- <sup>5</sup> Tweed, "Who Is a Buddhist? Night Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures," 28.
- <sup>6</sup> Prebish, *American Buddhism*, 188; and Tweed, "Who Is a Buddhist? Night Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures," 24.
- <sup>7</sup> See Angie Danyluk, "To Be or Not to Be: Buddhist Selves in Toronto," *Contemporary Buddhism* 4, no. 2 (2003).
- <sup>8</sup> Danyluk, "To Be or Not to Be: Buddhist Selves in Toronto," 129-30, 32-3.
- <sup>9</sup> Tweed, "Who Is a Buddhist? Night Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures," 18-20.
- <sup>10</sup> ———, "Who Is a Buddhist? Night Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures," 24.
- <sup>11</sup> James Coleman discusses various circles of involvement among western Buddhist sympathizers in the United States. See Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*, 186-91.
- <sup>12</sup> With his admission that Buddhist classes were "available," Gerald highlights an interesting fact about Buddhism in the West. Over the last several decades, opportunities for westerners to come into contact with Buddhists and Buddhist groups have grown. Since immigration policies changed in the mid-1960s to allow more people from Asian nations to settle in North America, there has been much more contact between Buddhists and non-Buddhists here. Transportation and communication technologies have developed to the point where westerners can easily come into contact with Buddhist institutions and practitioners around the globe. Media coverage of well-known Buddhists east and west has also penetrated local communities.
- <sup>13</sup> Daoism in fact had a strong influence on the development of Buddhism in China, particularly on the Ch'an (Zen) school.
- <sup>14</sup> The section Tanit was referring to from the Friends of the Heart handbook reads: "The Buddha taught not a religion or a philosophy, but rather how to meditate." Anonymous, *Friends of the Heart Student Handbook* (Toronto, ON: Friends of the Heart, 2005), 10.
- <sup>15</sup> Ron G. Williams and James W. Boyd, *Ritual Art and Knowledge: Aesthetic Theory and Zoroastrian Ritual* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 78-82.
- <sup>16</sup> Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 18.
- <sup>17</sup> International Kadampa Buddhist Union, "Chandrakirti Kadampa Meditation Centre Canada," International Kadampa Buddhist Union, <http://www.kadampa.ca/index.php?section=home>.
- <sup>18</sup> Sangha, a word traditionally reserved for the Buddhist monastic community, is commonly used in western Buddhist groups to refer to their full memberships; lay people, teachers and monastics included.

## Chapter Three: Classes

Beginning in September of 2006 through to June of 2007, I participated at a variety of different events at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti Centre. The introductory meditation classes offered to newcomers were my main interest, but I also had the opportunity to attend higher-level classes, some social events, prayer services and empowerments. At Friends of the Heart there were a number of different classes offered to newcomers, and the interview group included participants from each. At Chandrakirti, the General Program was the flagship offering for newcomers; in fact, all Chandrakirti interview participants, including the more experienced members, took part in GP classes during the time I was conducting my field work. While the courses at the two centres were quite different in style and content, each involved similar elements, including lectures, group discussions and formal practices.

In addition to the introductory courses themselves, the individual activities that took place in the classes bore certain ritual qualities, and can thus be explored as ritual or as ritualized behaviours. As noted in the introduction, ritual and ritualized behaviours are regarded here as existing on a sliding scale from less to more ritualized. Elements of the classes can be regarded as ritualized to one degree or another to the extent that they were repetitive, formal, stylized, embodied and performed, special or highly valued, and, for some participants, spiritual.

The elements of the classes discussed in detail here are: rituals of entry, opening prayers, meditation sessions, talks (Friends of the Heart) or lectures (Chandrakirti), discussion or question-and-answer sessions, and closing rituals.

### Introductory meditation class structure

<u>Friends of the Heart</u>	<u>Chandrakirti Centre</u>
Introduction to Insight and Calm and Clear	General Program
Entry, participants remove shoes	Entry, participants remove shoes
Meeting, greeting in the lobby (teacher present)	Meeting, greeting in the lobby (teacher not present)
Enter shrine room	Enter shrine room
Pull out cushions or chairs	Take seats in chairs or pews or on cushions
Teacher greets class	Teacher enters (some stand, perform prayer mudra), greets the class
Refuge prayer	Liberating Prayer
Teacher re-introduces last week's meditation technique	Teacher guides body scan and breathing meditation
Meditation, guided	Meditation, guided
Group discussion	
Movement: yoga, <i>qi gong</i> or walking meditation	
Teacher's talk	Teacher's lecture
Introduction to new meditation technique	Meditation, guided, often on lecture topic
Group discussion	Question and answer session, group discussion
Dedication of merit (always)	Dedication of merit (sometimes)
Parting: students and teacher informally exit	Parting: students stand, perform prayer mudra as teacher leaves, students follow
Individual questions with teacher, some students leave	Some students leave, some participate in social group in common room

Alan Rogers, who has written at length on adult learning, claims that there are two different means of learning: formalized, which usually takes place in educational environments like classrooms, and experiential or “acquisition” learning.<sup>1</sup> The latter most often takes place in the midst of everyday activities as learners perform tasks and observe what is going on around them.<sup>2</sup> Experiential learning is task-specific, highly contextualized and tacit, or that which we might not know we know: the type of knowledge required for riding a bicycle, for example.<sup>3</sup> Rogers describes formalized learning as learning-conscious-learning, in which students are aware of their activities as learning. Formalized learning most often involves receiving and remembering new knowledge or information. Overlaps occur when, for example, experiential learning takes place in formalized settings: a group of students is set a problem to work out. Further, formalized learning—memorized

multiplication tables, for example—can become tacit knowledge and may develop into tools to be used in task-conscious-learning.<sup>4</sup> As Rogers puts it, there are not two different sites of learning, but two different ways of learning which can take place in the same settings.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, there were overlaps between how and what students learned at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti classes. The range of postures, techniques and effects of meditation, for example, was learned through lectures or talks, formal instructions, personal experience, observing and following others, group discussions and personal insights. Lectures, formal instructions and question and answer sessions were more formalized means of learning, whereas practice, observing and following others and developing personal insights were experiential.

Within formalized and experiential means of learning there are three different types or domains of learning: the cognitive, involving the acquisition of knowledge or information; the affective which refers to changes in attitudes, feelings and values; and the psychomotor which entails movement and motor skills.<sup>6</sup> Formalized learning most often conveys information or develops cognitive abilities, but it can also be used to teach new attitudes and values as well as physical skills. Experiential learning is the means by which we most often gain new physical skills and attitudes. An example is Jennings's analogy about chopping wood: through one's arms, hands and shoulders one learns about the ax, the wood and, to an extent, about the world itself.<sup>7</sup> Yet cognitive learning can also be applied in experiential learning: Learning about and then practicing meditation postures and techniques is an example. Like formalized and experiential means of learning, there are overlaps between cognitive, affective and psychomotor learning as well. These domains will be explored in more detail in subsequent chapters. For now, it is important to distinguish between the various means of learning—the formalized structures in the classes and the ways students learned experientially—and the types of learning that students experienced:

changes in knowledge, attitudes and skills. All of the various elements of the meditation classes, described below, are formalized in the sense that they are parts of a formally structured class. Yet, they all involve experiential learning as students are personally engaged in the formal activities.

### **Rituals of entry**

What I am calling “rituals of entry” at the Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti introductory classes were a series of activities preceding the formal start of each class. At both centres, the first thing participants did on arrival was to take off their shoes. Each centre had shoe trays set out just inside the door where students could leave their footwear. If newcomers arrived who did not know about this requirement, teachers or other members would point it out. Removing one’s shoes, although less formal than the behaviours performed on entry into the shrine rooms, still bore certain ritual qualities. Being asked to remove their shoes, or discovering through observation that they were expected to do so, students became aware that they were entering a space that was somehow special, that it was different from other public spaces. Meg, who taught Friends of the Heart’s Calm and Clear introductory class, described removing the shoes as “crossing a threshold, creating a container, or creating a sacred space. Leave your worries behind you.” Gerald said that taking off his shoes “initiates a sense of respect for the place, which is good. But it seemed foreign at first and I felt quite weird.” Indeed, North Americans are not accustomed to removing their footwear when entering a public place. Anna noted that taking off the shoes denoted a similar decorum to not wearing shorts in certain places. She agreed that it signified respect. “I like to think of that as a sacred space. So, that’s what it does: it just reminds me to honour it. You know, when you’re in sacred spaces I think you treat yourself and others more respectfully.” The removal of the shoes,



then, was a practice that taught something: the centres are places where a certain decorum holds. In Diane's view, removing the shoes had practical reasons as well. She said: "I love it. I ask people to take their shoes off in my house. It's pure cleanliness." There are, therefore, several meanings implied in the gesture of removing one's shoes in a public space, meanings that identify the space being entered as special or even sacred.

More formal rituals of entry took place as participants entered the shrine rooms. At Friends of the Heart, the entrance to the shrine room was an archway bordered by two wooden pillars draped across the top with colourful Tibetan prayer flags. At Chandrakirti, participants stepped from the lobby through two wooden, glass-inset doors into a space that looked very much like a church. Participants who were familiar with the customary procedures placed their hands palms together in a posture I call prayer mudra<sup>8</sup> as they crossed the threshold into the shrine rooms. Newcomers observed as teachers and experienced members either performed one or more prostrations facing the shrine or bowed to the shrine, with hands in the prayer mudra position. Introductory students were not required or expected to perform such gestures, but some occasionally imitated others by performing the mudra and bow. I did not observe newcomers performing prostrations at either centre unless specifically asked to do so during empowerments or chanted prayers. On arrival at introductory classes, most newcomers simply entered the hall and took their seats. At Friends of the Heart, rituals of entry were fairly informal. Students filed in to the shrine area with the teacher, and would chat informally until the start of the class. A few minor rituals sometimes preceded the class: lighting candles on the altar, setting out water and cups, and so on.

At Chandrakirti, teachers spent time alone in preparation before the class and would therefore enter the shrine room after most students had arrived and taken their seats. Rituals of entry changed at the GP classes during field work. When Zopa was

teaching, he would enter, bow to the shrine and take his seat while most students remained seated. With the arrival of new head teacher Gen Delek in February of 2007, GP students would stand, perform the prayer mudra, and bow as the teacher passed. Observing experienced members, newcomers imitated this gesture of respect. The performance of this gesture continued for the remainder of my participation at the GP classes. Carol, one of my interview participants, told me that Zopa did not want people to stand when he arrived to teach the GP class. He wanted the class to be open to everyone, and felt that too much formality might be unwelcoming for newcomers unfamiliar with Buddhism. According to Carol, Delek was much more familiar and comfortable with ritual. The rituals of entry, therefore, changed with the styles of different teachers.

### **Opening prayer**

At the start of each class, teachers at both centres began by greeting students, and would sometimes introduce the topic for the evening. The greeting was followed by an opening prayer. The refuge prayer that was spoken at the beginning of all Friends of the Heart events was printed in the student handbook given to members when they enrolled.<sup>9</sup> Having taken their cushions or chairs, and with hands placed in the prayer mudra, students either listened or followed along as teachers spoke the refuge prayer in a measured, low, and somewhat reverent tone of voice. The prayer included the traditional refuges of Buddha, dharma and sangha along with certain resolutions to develop and perfect one's body, speech and mind. At Joyce Allen's Introduction to Insight course, students were encouraged to bring their handbooks and read the prayer aloud at the beginning of each class. Meg's approach in the Calm and Clear course was to recite the prayer and encourage students to say it if they knew it or to just listen and contemplate its meaning. All teachers and more experienced members appeared to know the prayer by heart. The meanings of

the prayer were expressed not only through the words spoken but also through the performance of the prayer itself. Like removing one's shoes, reciting the prayer served as a kind of threshold crossing: it was a signal that the class had begun.

The performance of a prayer at the beginning of GP classes at Chandrakirti also began when Delek started teaching in February 2007. Called the Liberating Prayer, it was an homage to Shakyamuni Buddha. The prayer, written by Kelsang Gyatso, was sung accompanied by a recording on compact disc. Printed copies of the prayer were handed out at each class so that students could sing along with the recording. The prayer was sung in a light, lyrical melody. The music was western in style, in contrast to the resonant, almost atonal chanting traditionally performed by Tibetan Buddhist monks. In addition to honouring the Buddha and requesting blessings, the prayer also created a clear moment of separation from ordinary activities and a shift to the special activities of the class. Before the use of the prayer, the class began less formally—in a less ritualized fashion—with the teacher's arrival, greeting and introduction to the lecture topic for the evening.

The notions of threshold crossing and the special or set-aside nature of rituals are explored in Arnold van Gennep's writings on rites of passage. He argued that rites of passage have three distinct phases: separation from the ordinary space and time of everyday living; the transition or liminal period during which the rite takes place; and incorporation, the act of re-entering ordinary space-time.<sup>10</sup> Van Gennep called them, respectively: preliminal rites, liminal (or threshold) rites and postliminal rites.<sup>11</sup> Turner built on van Gennep's work by exploring the transitional or liminal phase in more depth. He describes liminality as a state in which ordinary structures and identities are suspended, a quality that gives ritual its sense of being set aside or other than ordinary. Turner also documented a unique kind of bonding among participants in the liminal space-time of a rite, which he called *communitas*.<sup>12</sup>

Naturally, not all rituals are rites of passage or initiation rites, but many involve the three general phases of van Gennep's model. At meditation classes, there was threshold-crossing as participants arrived at the centres, removed their shoes and stepped into the meditation halls. The spaces could be considered liminal; they were set aside for a special purpose during which participants' normal roles and activities were suspended. Several respondents said that sharing their learning experiences with others was an important part of participating at the classes, possibly indicating a kind of *communitas* or bonding between participants.<sup>13</sup> At Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti classes, the rituals of entry described above were one form of separation, the prayers another. By the time the prayers were recited, participants had fully entered the liminal space and time of the class.

## **Meditation**

Prayers were almost always followed by meditation. Teachers and students usually referred to meditation sessions as "sittings" or sometimes just "sits." Most classes involved two sittings per class. Teachers at all three classes introduced a variety of different meditation practices or techniques, beginning with some instruction on meditation posture. While traditional meditation postures such as the lotus—legs crossed with one or both feet placed on the opposite thigh—were not taught, at both centres we were always advised to sit with a straight back. In order that we remain awake and alert in meditation, teachers often advised us to keep our eyes half-open rather than closed. Alan noted that he was trying to follow this technique: "One of the things I been trying is keeping my eyes half open. I've always closed my eyes, but I know when I close my eyes I end up dozing off."

At Friends of the Heart, most students sat or knelt on zafus on the floor. The primary objective for seated meditation postures was to achieve a stable, three-point foundation that would support the body during meditation. If, when seated cross-legged on

the floor, our knees were raised off the ground, Joyce or Meg instructed us on the use of extra support cushions under the legs. Some participants used several support cushions to achieve the stability required. Those who sat in chairs were advised to keep their feet apart and firmly planted on the floor. While a few specific postures were taught and most students followed them, we were not given any strict rules or requirements for how to sit and were, in fact, encouraged to experiment with different postures, including lying down. The overriding guideline on meditation posture was to find a position that was comfortable in which we could remain alert. The traditional lotus posture almost automatically provides a stable three-point foundation without support cushions because it levers the knees toward the floor. It was not taught at either centre, however, likely because it is a difficult posture for westerners who are not normally accustomed to sitting cross-legged for long periods of time.

John described how Joyce instructed students on meditation posture at her first

Introduction to Insight class:

She went through all the different varieties of cushions that they had. It was pretty much make yourself comfortable, really. She was showing all the different [postures], kneeling. At that time, she couldn't do it cross-legged, so she was kneeling on the floor with the pillow between her legs, taking the round pillow on its end. . . . And then saying: if you're more comfortable in a chair, just sit in a chair. Try and keep your back upright. I don't recall her saying anything particular about the hands. She just ran through a few places you could put them, cross them or put them on your legs.

I asked Meg if it was important to teach newcomers formal meditation postures.

She said, "I think they're very important. We are incarnate creatures. We are embodied."

She said that personally she was very intellectual, so understanding the significance of the body in meditation came as quite a revelation. She therefore made a point to emphasize the body in her teaching. Still, there was a balance to be maintained, particularly with westerners who might find traditional postures painful or difficult to maintain. "Having

said that, I'm wondering what we are actually teaching in terms of formal practices," Meg said. "Certainly, I try to take the middle road in terms of meditation posture. Anywhere from: at the end of the day, it's not that important to yes, it is important." Meditation posture, therefore, is one element of the practice for which teachers must attempt to find an appropriate balance between tradition and change when introducing Buddhist practice to western practitioners.

At both Friends of the Heart courses a few meditation hand postures, or mudras, were also demonstrated. Both Joyce and Meg demonstrated what is known as the "cosmic mudra": hands cupped together in the lap, palms up, with the thumb-tips touching. Although this and other mudras were demonstrated, students were free to use them or not. Again, although there was some formality in terms of the postures and practices that were taught, the general approach in the classes was one of openness and experimentation.

Of course, meditation involves more than just figuring out where to place the hands, buttocks and feet. After demonstrating various postures, teachers moved on to the concentration techniques. There was usually some formalized instruction given beforehand, but concentration techniques were primarily taught experientially through guided meditation. As students meditated, teachers gave slow, softly spoken instructions. For example: "Concentrate on your breathing; feel the sensation of your breath at the nostrils, the cool sensation as you breathe in and the warm sensation as you breathe out." In addition to instructions on posture and concentration techniques, teachers also offered general advice on how to sit or how to concentrate; little tricks that some students found helpful. John described one such piece of advice that Richard gave the night he taught Joyce's Insight class. "Richard said something about: don't seek the breath, let the breath come," John recalled. "Which I thought was really good. That felt much better when I tried to do that. Little things like that, I think, are going to be helpful as you go down the road."

Each of the introductory courses presented a variety of different meditation practices; concentration exercises or techniques for engaging or training the mind during meditation. As the name of her course implied, the main practice Joyce taught was insight meditation but she also introduced other practices as well. Over the ten weeks of the course, she added new practices and expanded earlier ones to include new techniques. The first meditation session at each of Joyce's Insight classes began with a body scan, as a prelude to other meditation practices. Beginning at the forehead and moving down through specific areas of the body (eyes, mouth, jaw, throat, arms, torso, hips, legs, and feet), we were asked to feel each area become relaxed, soften and broadened. The body scan concluded as we widened the focus to take in all of the body.

The insight meditation practices Joyce taught began with developing an awareness of sensations in the body. She asked us to move our awareness through our bodies and search for areas of activity—pain, pressure, tension and so on. Find one such area and label it as “touch,” Joyce said. Stay with that area and be with the experience for a while. Then move on: find another area of the body that is either “touch” or “rest.” Or we might choose to remain with the first sensation and refresh our awareness of it. Joyce asked us to concentrate on each of these areas for a time, noting what, if anything, the awareness did to alter the sensations. Later in the course, insight practice was expanded as we added the labels “feeling” and “peace” to “touch” and “rest.” We were asked to pay attention to areas in the body with which feelings or emotions were associated. Where there were none, we were to label the area “peace.” It was a difficult practice: many students, myself included, initially had trouble with the idea that emotions could be located in the body, and were unsure what to look for. Joyce advised that we could return to seeking out areas of “touch” and “rest” if the other practice was too difficult.

Joyce later taught an insight technique in which we paid attention to images behind our closed eyes or tried to determine the location of our thoughts. Labels used in these practices were “image active,” “image rest,” “thought active” and “thought rest.” Each insight practice involved the same process: find, label, experience, then move on or refresh. The emphasis was on using neutral labels so as not to become overly concerned with whether the presence of tension, emotion, thoughts or images was positive or negative.

Joyce also taught a basic breathing meditation. We were asked to count from one to ten on the out-breaths, returning to one again. Joyce suggested that this technique was good for students who had trouble sitting regularly or if other methods seem complicated or confusing. Finally, she taught metta or loving kindness meditation. She gave us a print-out with three four-line verses:

May I be happy  
May I be peaceful  
May I be well and free from suffering  
May I be filled with kindness and compassion

May you be happy... etc.

May all beings be happy... etc.

We began with the first verse, silently repeating it over and over again. Then Joyce guided us to the next verse: we were advised to think of an individual, someone we cared about. Again, after several silent repetitions, we moved on to the last verse, offering peace, happiness and so forth, to all beings. Occasionally, Joyce guided us in directing the second verse to people for whom we had neutral or negative feelings. We were encouraged to make metta part of our regular practice.

As the Introduction to Insight course progressed, meditation sessions became gradually longer. We began sitting for ten minutes and were up to twenty-five or thirty at



the end of ten weeks. Joyce thus guided us through a process intended to improve and increase our meditation skills and techniques as the course progressed.

In February 2007, the Introduction to Insight course came to an end and Meg Salter's Calm and Clear introductory class began. This course maintained much of the same structure as the first, but Meg introduced some different techniques. The first concentration technique she taught was a focus on good, relaxing feelings in the body. She asked us to allow the jaw to drop just a little bit and to feel how good that little bit of relaxation felt. We stayed with that for a moment, then she asked us to feel the good feelings moving out from there: what else in the head area feels relaxed? She slowly took our attention through other areas of the body, observing good, relaxed feelings in the neck and shoulders, down into the arms and hands, through the torso, hips, legs and feet.

Other techniques Meg taught included a body scan while silently repeating the mantra, as she called it, "letting go in the body." We were asked to imagine the awareness as a beam of light being shone throughout the body, melting areas of tension as if they were ice in a beam of sunlight. Meg also taught breathing meditation—counting from one to ten on the out-breaths and returning to one. A second kind of breathing meditation had us focusing our awareness first in the belly or chest and then at the nostrils. Meg's version of metta or loving kindness meditation had us recalling times when we had received kindness from others and then focusing on the feelings of happiness, gratitude and kindness that the memory created. Meg also taught the same metta verses that Joyce had introduced. The last technique Meg taught was a visualization meditation. We were guided through visualizing a beach and a calm lake, and a pebble tossed into the water. This was a simple introduction to visualization, a meditation practice often used in Tibetan tantric or Vajrayāna Buddhism. Once again, the meditation sessions were longer by the end of the course than at the beginning. Meg told students that the cycle of classes was designed to be

open and available to people to join whenever they were ready, but she did want to move on with each class so that students would improve their meditation skills as time went on.

At Chandrakirti Centre, introductory classes were not part of a one-time, short-term course. They were designed to be open to newcomers at all times. As it was always possible that people with no meditation experience were present, brief instructions on meditation techniques and postures were given at each class. Most participants sat in chairs or pews, and the sittings were relatively short; between five and fifteen minutes. Instructions on meditation posture at GP classes were brief, often limited to the advice that students should keep their spines straight. Gerald described meditation instructions he had heard:

You try to get a good posture, being a straight back. There's a position that you hold your hands in, and then you try to get as comfortable as you can wherever you are sitting. And then they try to get your focus on your breathing—breathing through the nose. If you're stuffed up—they always say this—if you're stuffed up, then through the mouth. Focus on the breath in and the breath out. And once they have that, they try to tell you to relax your body from top to bottom down to your toes, from the crown of your head down to your toes and back up again. Basically trying to relax and try to focus on your breath, keep everything simple, there's nothing mystical or magical about this. It's straightforward.

By far the majority of students at GP classes meditated in chairs or pews. I occasionally observed someone lying down in a pew during meditation. Mats and cushions were available, and a few students used them. I did not hear any instructions on meditation postures for cushions at the GP classes, but Carol told me that such instructions were occasionally given.

When I asked Thekchen if it was important to teach specific meditation postures, he replied:

Usually, in the General Program, we are sitting in chairs. I know that in some traditions it's on the cushion, and part of the practice is getting through the pain. Fair enough, but I think because I'm doing more

contemplative, analytical meditation, rather than just sitting, I think it's important to be in a comfortable position so that I can just focus on first my breath and then on what I need to accomplish.

Under all of the GP teachers I observed, meditation sessions generally followed the pattern Thekchen described: the first sitting normally began with a body scan for relaxation and then some kind of breathing meditation. The second sitting involved contemplative practices like metta or silently observing the mind, or an analytical meditation on the teaching that preceded it. Meditation techniques were easy to follow and many of the same techniques were used without much modification from class to class.

The first meditation session at GP classes almost always began with a body scan: we were guided in concentrating our attention at the head and moving down through various areas of the body (head, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, back, abdomen, legs and feet). Teachers asked us to take a little time to feel each area as relaxed and clear. At the end, we focused on the whole body, seeing it as relaxed and clear. The body scan was used as a prelude to other meditation practices. Another meditation practice taught at GP classes was called "silent observer," in which we watched the processes of our minds as thoughts arose and disappeared like bubbles from a lakebed. Teachers asked us to be aware of our thoughts and observe them without judgment or attachment and then let the thoughts go without becoming distracted or carried away by them.

There were two different breathing meditation techniques that I encountered at GP classes. The first was simple awareness of the breath, usually focusing on sensations at the nostrils, as described above. The second was sometimes called "black and white" meditation. Teachers asked us to imagine breathing out stress and negativity in the aspect of thick black smoke. We then breathed in goodness, light or healing energy. As Gerald described black and white meditation: "While you're breathing, they try to make you visualize what you're doing with your breath. You're breathing in light and getting rid of

tension with your exhalation.” When Thekchen guided this meditation at one class I attended, he asked students to imagine that the light or energy we were drawing in came from the hearts of enlightened beings. The meditation thus became a means of receiving blessings.

Metta or loving kindness meditation was practiced in different forms at different GP classes. Examples were: 1) make a wish for all beings to be liberated and to find permanent inner peace; 2) concentrate on health and happiness, first for yourself, then for someone you know, then for all beings; 3) think about the people in your life and wish them well; 4) imagine that all other beings are your kind mothers.

Finally, analytical meditation involved reflecting on the teaching of the evening. This particular practice was reserved for the second meditation session. Students listened to the teacher guiding the meditation and concentrated on their feelings as the teacher reviewed the concepts covered in the talk. Topics frequently included compassion, kindness, patience and gratitude, and how to develop these emotions or attitudes. Gerald described this kind of guided meditation as follows: “They’ll try to get you to remember a feeling or a situation in your life which makes you feel compassion for something. They ask you to remember when someone was good to you to try to stimulate that feeling.”

As part of meditation instruction, GP teachers sometimes described one or more traditional mudras—usually the cosmic mudra described above. Thekchen told me that this mudra symbolized wisdom in compassion: the right hand represents wisdom and is cupped in the left, which represents compassion. The thumbs, he said, symbolize *tuma*, or inner fire. Two respondents, Gerald from Chandrakirti and John from Friends of the Heart, mentioned a more practical purpose of the cosmic mudra that they had learned: the point where the thumbs touch is a measure of a meditator’s concentration and relaxation. If the pressure is too hard, the meditator is too tense, if the thumbs drift apart, the meditator is

too sleepy. Thus, in the same gesture, we have symbolic (more ritualized) and practical (less ritualized) meanings.

All of the meditation practices described above were guided; that is, teachers gave verbal instructions for following the selected practices throughout every sitting. Guided meditation sometimes involved periods of silence where students carried on the practice on their own, but no sittings at any of the introductory classes I attended were completely silent.

On occasion, novice meditation students expressed a belief that the object of meditation was to silence their thoughts completely. Some said they were frustrated when unable to do so. Teachers usually responded to such frustrations by informing students that it is impossible to completely suppress or eliminate thoughts. Even experienced meditators find that the mind tends to wander. The trick is not to silence the mind but to recognize the moment when it has wandered and “gently,” as teachers often put it, bring the attention back to the practice. Thus an important goal of all of the practices described here was to develop concentration, the ability to stay with or return to the meditative focus, whatever it might be.

There were several additional objectives of the meditation practices described, some explicitly stated by the teachers, others left to interpretation. At Friends of the Heart, sittings often served strictly as practice, helping students develop the capacity to maintain a meditation posture and concentrate on the meditative technique. Other possible purposes of meditation practice, in my understanding, were: relaxation, especially deriving from the body scan and breathing meditation; developing awareness of the body and the processes of the mind from insight meditation; generating gratitude and compassion from metta; developing detachment; and becoming less judgmental from insight, metta and others. Meditation sessions at Friends of the Heart, therefore, were aimed at helping students

develop new skills such as physical flexibility and the ability to concentrate, new attitudes such as gratefulness, equanimity or non-attachment, and, to some extent, an understanding of Buddhist values such as compassion.

The first sitting at GP classes was often intended to help students relax and concentrate in order to prepare them for the teaching to follow. When the second sitting was dedicated to reflecting on the teaching, it appeared that the goal was to help students internalize and more deeply understand its meanings. Once, Zopa said that the meditation would help us “develop the mind of a Buddha,” thereby hinting at enlightenment, a goal not often mentioned at introductory classes. Occasionally, the second sitting was given over to metta, a practice intended to develop gratitude and compassion for others, a frequent topic of the lectures. Because meditation practice was most often dedicated to preparing for or reflecting on the teaching, it seemed to be supplementary to the teaching, rather than a goal in and of itself. Chandrakirti meditation instruction, therefore, focused more on the development of new attitudes, values and perhaps insights into Buddhist truths than on the physical or practical techniques of meditation.

Instructions on meditation postures and concentration techniques are a formalized means of teaching physical skills and techniques. They were means by which students learned about postures and techniques on a cognitive level, by gaining new information. Such instructions represent the “how” of learning to meditate. By employing the techniques, students later learned experientially how to perform them. The “what” of meditation—that is, what students learned through doing it—came with time and experience. The specifics of what respondents said they learned in meditation are explored in chapter five.

Friends of the Heart classes always included some form of movement exercises following either the first sitting or the teacher’s talk. These exercises either involved a few

yoga postures, some flowing *qi gong* movements or walking meditation. The objective of the movement sessions was to stretch out the joints, get the blood flowing and, as most teachers stressed, to increase students' awareness of our bodies, thus indicating that meditation is also embodied rather than simply a mental exercise. Movement sessions were taught in a formalized manner as the teacher led the group and demonstrated the different postures and gestures, but students also learned experientially how to perform the exercises. For the most part, movement sessions primarily taught specific motor skills and techniques, but respondents indicated that their attitudes were also affected. All of the Friends of the Heart newcomers I spoke to said they appreciated the movement sessions because afterwards they felt more alert and physically and mentally prepared for subsequent meditation sessions.

### **Talks or lectures**

At Friends of the Heart, the teachers' talks preceded the second meditation session. Less like lectures, the talks were fairly short and somewhat casual. Teachers sat with students on cushions on the floor in a rough circle and students would interrupt to comment or ask questions. Talks usually had to do with meditation techniques and students' experiences meditating. Joyce dedicated several talks to concepts derived from a variety of Buddhist scriptures, although they were not always identified as such. In a talk on lasting happiness, for example, Joyce spoke about several qualities that corresponded closely to some of the six perfections (*parāmitās*) of the Bodhisattva path<sup>14</sup> in Mahāyāna Buddhism—generosity, virtue, patience, strenuousness, concentration and wisdom. Joyce did not mention the six perfections, however, or the source of the concepts she taught. Given the centre's eclectic, lay-oriented character, it is not surprising that the introductory teachings did not go heavily into Buddhist doctrine. Talks at Friends of the Heart also avoided references to

metaphysical concepts such as karmic rebirth. Some of the topics Joyce covered were: reducing stress, the nature of being versus doing, generosity and gratitude, developing equanimity, and happiness. From these talks, students gained some new factual or conceptual information, and had the opportunity to discuss, analyze and evaluate it. While talks were a formalized means of learning, they were not intended to impart a great deal of new information to be memorized. Rather, their objective was more along the lines of generating certain attitudes and feelings and learning ways to reinforce those attitudes and feelings through meditation. Most of the talks were given in direct relation to the meditation practice taught in the same evening.

Some talks introduced traditional Buddhist values. Joyce spoke about generating compassion and sympathetic joy, of letting go of attachments and desires, and of the impermanence of the self. In week ten, she introduced a path for applying the practice to the life of a householder. The path Joyce laid out involved the following steps: committing to meditation practice; building insight into impermanence and no-self; letting go of attachments; developing equanimity; and ripening wisdom, ethics and compassion. Although Joyce did not identify the specific sources of these traditional Theravāda and Mahāyāna teachings, she did indicate that they were Buddhist. The ritualized setting in which the talks were given and the association of their topics with traditional spiritual teachings imbued the teachings themselves with certain ritual qualities: several respondents regarded them as specially meaningful or elevated.

Meg's class introduced some of the same concepts, although her talks tended to focus more closely on meditation techniques and the processes of the mind involved in meditation. Instead of presenting a prepared talk every evening, Meg sometimes introduced a topic and gave us time to discuss it among ourselves before relating our reflections to the whole group. The talks she gave included the following: the myths about meditation; the



immediate effects of meditation (slowed breathing as an example); concentration; and meditation as a means of healing. Meg often used analogies for explaining the concepts she introduced. She referred to the mind as a wild horse running in an open field, for example: meditation helps us build a secure corral in which to contain the horse and keep it from wandering too far. Once she compared meditative concentration to a microscope: with practice we can refine its focus. These analogies gave students new and memorable ways of understanding the practice and the goals of meditation. Months after the class concluded Dennis, who had been a student in her class, remembered Meg's wild horse analogy. Student discussion groups were a means of exploring the topics Meg introduced through our personal experiences and reflections within a formalized learning structure. Again, the learning gained through Meg's teaching methods had more to do with changes in attitudes and values and gaining new skills than acquiring a lot of new cognitive data.

In their lectures, Chandrakirti teachers used many direct references not only to the Buddha and his teachings but also to the more religious or non-empirical concepts of traditional Buddhism such as karma and rebirth. They did not shy away from introducing these concepts, even when teaching newcomers. Teachers often insisted that a full understanding of the Buddha's teachings depended on an understanding of karmic rebirth. Kindness and compassion for all beings, for example, resulted from the understanding that every being has at one time been our mothers. At one of the Runnymede library classes a man in the audience asked if the rebirth cosmology was important. He said he was more interested in meditating in the here and now. The teacher, Chogyon, replied that one could use meditation to feel happy just in this life but, as he put it, "it's like using a Rolls Royce to haul manure." He said that without the rebirth cosmology, we cannot use meditation practice to its full potential. Chogyon urged us to put our doubts aside and keep our minds open to other possibilities.

As a result of this resolve to teach karmic rebirth even when it did not appeal to some newcomers, my impressions of the GP lecture topics were that they were more religious, metaphysical and philosophical than those I had experienced at other western Buddhist centres, including Friends of the Heart. Even so, Chandrakirti students frequently asserted that the lectures were presented in such a way as to be practical and applicable to their personal situations. Gerald said that “the examples that they offer, when they try to explain the teachings, it’s very practical. They try to root it in the world in everyday examples.” Despite this focus on practicality, Gerald admitted that the teachings “can be quite theoretical and metaphysical.” Carol said that the focus on “practical applications of Buddhist thought” was what appealed to her about the GP lectures. “They’ll address a particular topic, but usually the focus is on the practical terms.” In fact, practical applications of the teachings were sometimes assigned as homework: try being generous to people around you, Marlon suggested at a GP class he taught: let someone else have the best seat on the subway. Alan remembered and recounted this homework assignment in his interview.

GP lectures were usually about one hour in length, and Chandrakirti teachers spoke without notes, although they sometimes read from Kelsang Gyatso’s texts. The majority of people who teach in the NKT follow the Teacher Training Program, and it was clear after attending classes with several different teachers that they had been well instructed in NKT topics and teaching styles. Many of the same topics were covered by different teachers, sometimes using the same wording. All teachers also tended to use plural pronouns in conjunction with single nouns: our body, our mind, our self. This style is used by Kelsang Gyatso in his commentary texts.

GP classes were formally structured. Teachers sat alone at the front of the room and students were seated in rows facing the teacher but not one another. Teachers would

usually speak uninterrupted until formally concluding their talks. A few times, teachers asked questions of the class during the talk and students seemed reluctant to reply. Thekchen said he regretted students' reluctance to interrupt. He told me he would prefer it if students would ask questions and challenge him. It seemed to me, however, that the formal structure of the lectures was what discouraged students' comments and questions.

Each teacher had different techniques for making the concepts they introduced memorable. For example, Chogyon often referred to desires to have "a cottage by a lake and a yellow Hummer," lighthearted yet pertinent examples for illustrating attachment and impermanence. Gen Sanden had a humorous way of speaking in which he would parody a contrary position and then deconstruct it in his teaching. Another effective pedagogical technique used at the GP classes was simple repetition: teachers would often find ways of stating the same thing in a few different ways over the course of a lecture.

The long, detailed lectures at Chandrakirti GP classes do not lend themselves easily to a brief summary. Topics and key concepts that were frequently reiterated included the following: the need for spirituality to overcome material desires and suffering caused by impermanence; karmic rebirth cosmology and the idea that all beings have at one time been our mothers; the need to reduce anger, attachment, ignorance and self-cherishing; the need to be kind and generous to others; developing inner peace; and developing compassion for all beings as necessary for achieving enlightenment. The topics presented were always clearly identified as Buddhist teachings and principles. While there was a great deal of new information to be learned, and some students told me they wished they could remember more of it afterwards, my impression was that teachers were not concerned about how much detail students remembered. The lectures primarily referred to attitudes, emotions and values and were clearly intended to encourage students to find ways of changing their habitual perspectives and behaviours in accordance with Buddhist values. Once again, the

formalized structure of the lecture, the ritualized setting and traditional spiritual sources of the teachings, along with the monastic status of most of the teachers gave the teachings a sense of authority or sanctity.

### **Group discussion and socializing**

All of the introductory classes had time set aside for group discussions or question-and-answer sessions with the teacher. At Friends of the Heart, there was usually more than one discussion session in a class. Teachers led discussions about meditation practice following each sitting and there were discussions during the talks. Discussion groups at Friends of the Heart generally focused on students' meditation experiences and techniques. At Chandrakirti, there was typically one question-and-answer session near the end of each GP class following the lecture. The question-and-answer sessions were usually centred on philosophical questions about Buddhist ethics and principles, often regarding karma and rebirth. Rarely were questions asked or experiences shared about meditation practice in the GP classes I attended.

Several respondents indicated that learning through group discussions was an important part of their experiences at the meditation classes. John, for example, said:

Going to a group where other people come and talk about their experience: You learn that whatever difficulty you're having, other people are probably having it too and it's quite normal. Everyone's mind wanders. That will go on as long as you have a mind. That's definitely a good thing to learn.

Several other respondents also said that hearing that others shared the same difficulties or experiences was helpful and encouraging. Discussion groups allowed students to share their confusions and work some of them out together. Dennis, for example, said:

You get to hear how people are doing, how well they are doing or not. You just sort of learn from that. ... Most everyone in the class is at the same stage. Almost everyone is a beginner, so you get an idea of how they are

dealing with the same roadblocks and the same problems and the same successes here and there.

Carol said, “I found the questions were always quite amazing because people would ask things that you had thought about, but didn’t make an effort to ask, or questions that you hadn’t thought about. And you thought: yeah, what about that?” Group discussion sessions thus afforded the opportunity for students to learn what other students were curious about, and hear answers to questions that they may have had without being aware of them.

Brenda said that one of her most significant learning experiences resulted from someone asking “big, thoughtful questions” at the GP classes. “It’s Gerald who asks good questions,” she said. “He just asks the most amazing questions. And I started to learn. I’ve learned from him.”

While discussion groups generally involved students’ reflections on their experiences, they were not themselves experiential learning. They had a fairly formalized structure in which teachers led the discussions and students were given an amount of time to speak or respond. By means of the discussion and question and answer sessions, students gained new information about meditation, Buddhist teachings and also what other students were curious about or had learned through their meditation practices. For the most part, such sessions explored and reiterated, through students’ queries and shared experiences, the received attitudes and values learned in the classes.

### **Closing rituals**

Following the last discussion session of the evening, Friends of the Heart teachers concluded the class by reciting the dedication of merit, a short prayer which also appeared in the student handbook: “May any merit that has been raised here for the good and the wholesome be shared forth now to help all beings who are suffering.”<sup>15</sup> This prayer concluded with a mantra in Pāli, *idam te punnya-kammaṇa sva kiyava haṇ hotu* [sic], which

teachers and experienced members repeated three times. Although the mantra was printed in the handbook and transliterated for ease of pronunciation, few newcomers recited it as it was spoken very quickly. Joyce told me that the mantra meant the same in Pāli as the line in English that preceded it. It was the only use of the Pāli language in the Friends of the Heart introductory classes. Like the refuge prayer at the beginning, the dedication of merit was accompanied by the prayer mudra. On the last recitation of the mantra, teachers and experienced members opened up their hands, palms up in front of the body, in a gesture that symbolized distributing the merit to others. Following the dedication of merit, a few students sometimes stayed behind to ask questions of the teacher. Most filed out to the lobby, put on their shoes, and left.

In the GP classes, a dedication of merit was sometimes spoken as a separate prayer at the end of the class, but was more often included in one of the meditation sessions or as a separate, less formal statement made by the teacher at the end of the class. For example, Zopa concluded one GP class in January 2007 with a dedication of merit that was performed as part of the teaching. He asked us to reflect on any good energy that we had developed through our attention and our efforts that evening and to dedicate that energy to those in our lives—family or friends—who might be having difficulties.

At the conclusion of GP classes, teachers usually invited students downstairs for tea and cookies. Then the teacher would stand, bow to the shrines and exit down the main aisle of the meditation hall. The gestures performed on the entrance of the teacher were repeated. That is to say, before February 2007, there was little by way of formality on the exit of the teacher. Beginning in February 2007, students stood, performed the prayer mudra and bowed as the teacher passed on the way out of the hall.

The formal activities that ended the classes wrapped up the teaching and returned participants to ordinary time and space. A sense of respect, for the space, the teachings and

the teachers, is what students said they learned from the decorum of the entry and closing rituals. Traditional gestures like the prayer mudra, the use of the Tibetan language mantra at Friends of the Heart and the dedication of positive energies to others completed the framing of the classes as special, set aside and elevated.

### **Ritual and introductory meditation classes**

The classes offered at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti were regarded as learning environments rather than rituals, although students attended in order to learn, among other things, certain ritualized practices. It is clear that the overall structures of the classes did have a number of ritual qualities: they were enacted, embodied or performed; they were communal; they contained symbolic elements and sometimes referenced the transcendent—karma, rebirth, enlightenment and enlightened beings, for example. Some aspects were spontaneous, others were formalized and repetitious. Moreover, the classes took place in clearly ritualized settings: that is, in the presence of shrines adorned with offerings, Buddhist icons and other symbols.

The main spaces in the two centres were variously called shrine rooms, meditation halls, or sometimes Buddha halls. With their shrines, statues, offerings, devotional paintings, bells, candles and incense, there was no mistaking these rooms as anything but ritual spaces. The same spaces in which the introductory classes were held were also used for empowerments and chanted prayers. Events in these spaces, including some of the introductory classes, involved the use of *sādhana*s, a word used at both centres to describe prayer texts, and were sometimes conducted by ordained people wearing traditional monastic robes. As mentioned, Chandrakirti held some of its GP courses in other, more secular spaces such as libraries and coffee shops. I attended two classes at a library where the only ritual objects in the room were the teacher's robes. At another GP class, this one

in a spare room above a coffee shop, a temporary shrine was set up with a Buddha statue, a painting of Kelsang Gyatso, a painting of a *stūpa* (a Buddhist burial shrine) and a small vase of flowers. While GP classes that took place in these public spaces were less ritualized than those held in the shrine room at the main centre, they were ritualized nonetheless.

Some ritual theorists have investigated links between learning and ritual by examining education as a form of ritual. Peter McLaren, for example, studied the ritual elements of a Catholic high school in Toronto. He discovered that there were several different states, spaces and times that were more or less ritualized in the course of a school day. Schools, like ritual spaces, are “temporally insulated just as they are spatially insulated from the rest of society.”<sup>16</sup> Classrooms are places where students’ ordinary roles are suspended and they exist in a kind of liminal state. McLaren regards the overall structure of the school day as a macro-ritual, whereas the individual activities that take place are micro-rituals: the morning prayer, the lessons, the prayers before and after lunch, the act of contrition at the end of the day, and so on. His reflections on how ritual structures and symbols influence learning are useful for understanding what Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti students learned and how. Similar to my observation that the ritualized structures and spiritual sources of the teachings at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti served to legitimize and elevate them, McLaren finds that symbolic dimensions of Catholic school culture, along with its ritual structure, create ritual knowledge or “the deep codes that provide the blueprints for how students come to know and react to various situations.”<sup>17</sup>

Whereas McLaren explores education as ritual, I am examining ritualizing as a means of learning. Nonetheless, some of his insights are applicable to the Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti “classrooms,” providing further grounds for considering them as rituals. The repetition of lecture topics at Chandrakirti GP classes had something of a ritual



formality. So, too, did many of the class activities. Each time classes were held, similar elements were performed in a similar order. Hence class structure, like that of the school day in McLaren's study, is the macro-ritual. Nested within the larger ritual of the class itself were several smaller, micro-rituals: meditation, for example, sometimes began or ended with the ringing of a bell. It also included any or all of the following: the assumption of specified back, leg and hand postures, guided meditation instructions spoken slowly and softly by the teacher, and the performance of specific practices like scanning the body, repeating a mantra, controlling or concentrating on the breath, and so on. Hence, inclusive of all of these activities, meditation itself can be regarded as a ritual since many of its individual elements are ritualized to one degree or another. Thus within the micro-ritual, meditation, there are ritualized activities; activities we can classify as either ritualization or ritualizing.

### **Ritualization and ritualizing**

Ritualization, in its generic sense, refers to a process by which acts take on the qualities of ritual: they become ritualized. In a study of the Jain *pūjā*, for example, Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw present an analysis of ritualization and the qualities that define ritual actions. In their view, ritual is "a quality that action can come to have" and "ritualization is the process by which normal, everyday action is endowed with this quality and becomes ritual."<sup>18</sup> The bulk of their text is dedicated to an illustration of what it is that makes actions ritualized. There is, in their view, a subtle transformation of an actor's intention in acting which distinguishes ritualization from ordinary, everyday actions. They claim that in ritualization actors are aware of their actions, but these actions are also perceived as "objects" that are "encountered and perceived from the outside."

Instead of, as is normally the case in everyday life, a person's act being given meaning by his or her intention, with ritual action the act itself appears as already formed, almost like an object, something from which the actor might "receive." In this transformed situation, the intentions and thoughts of the actor make no difference to the identity of the act performed. You have still done it, whatever you were dreaming of.<sup>19</sup>

It may appear that the opposite is the case in meditation practice: following the breath, focusing on an object of meditation, or performing a visualization must certainly require that one not be daydreaming. But meditation does have some consistency with what Humphrey and Laidlaw have said. Teachers at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti often underscored the idea that sitting, making the attempt to meditate, *counts*. Experienced meditators know that their minds will wander. For some, the goal—at least the initial goal—of meditation is to develop the ability to recognize when the mind has wandered and then bring it back to the object of meditation. In this sense, then, it does not matter what one is daydreaming, as long as the ritualized act is performed: the act of returning one's attention to the object of meditation. If, however, one is daydreaming and does not bring the attention back to the meditative focus, then this is a much less ritualized act than would be a more focused meditation.

In any case, I am less interested here in Humphrey and Laidlaw's ideas about intention than I am their conception that ritual actions are not created by those who perform them, that such actions can be regarded as pre-formed objects. They claim that "the peculiar fascination of ritual lies in the fact that here, as in few other human activities, the actors both are and are not the authors of their acts."<sup>20</sup> Ritualists perform actions that they learn from other ritualists, that they and others have performed perhaps many times before. They may experiment with them, or change them over time, but the behaviours are first received from external sources. Rappaport reflects this idea in his definition of ritual: "The performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not

entirely encoded by the performers.”<sup>21</sup> Respondents involved in this study performed formal practices that were not entirely their own, practices that have a history, traditional purposes and symbolic complexes of meanings attached to them. This perspective on the qualities of ritual action is therefore significant for this study.

Humphrey and Laidlaw’s view of ritualization—as a process by which actions take on the quality of ritual—refers to ritualization in its generic sense, noted above. But this conception misses an important aspect of ritualized behaviour, one that Grimes points out in his text *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*. Grimes asserts that ritualization is “the stylized cultivation or suppression of biogenetic and psychosomatic rhythms and repetitions.”<sup>22</sup> In this view,

the grounds of ritualization as a human necessity are ecological, biogenetic, and psychosomatic. We cannot escape ritualization without escaping our own bodies and psyches and thus rhythms and structures that arise on their own.... Among the modes of ritual activity, ritualization leaves us the least choice. Whether we are involved in ritualization is not ours to decide. We can only choose whether to be attentive or repressive in the face of actions that compel and surround us.<sup>23</sup>

Ritualization, therefore, is unavoidable. It is dependent on our physiology, but it includes the symbols and meanings we attach to the movements we enact. Ritualization is performed whether we like it or not; it is the preconscious enactment of our bodily movements.

Ritualization is the first of six “modes of ritual sensibility” identified by Grimes. The others are decorum, ceremony, liturgy, magic and celebration.<sup>24</sup> While it is a category of its own, ritualization is not entirely separate from the other five, but is present in all of the other ritual modes.<sup>25</sup> It is found in the wide range of phenomena that generally fall under the term “ritual,” from day-to-day interactions to secular performances to high religious ceremonies.

Ritualizing, by contrast, is a more deliberate activity. Grimes notes that it is closely related to ritualization, but the two terms are distinguished by their degrees of consciousness and intention. “Ritualizing is an attempt to activate, and become aware of, preconscious ritualization processes.”<sup>26</sup> Ritualizing can also refer to the act of creating new ritual. Ritualizing, in my view, thus refers to behaviours that are cultivated and sometimes invented or experimental, that also bear a number of other ritual qualities. This perspective draws attention to the fact that ritual is not static; it can change and it can be reformative as well as conservative. Grimes’s list of the qualities of ritual asserts that rituals (not ritualizing) are not usually regarded as invented, spontaneous, improvised, and the like. But ritualizing, as emergent ritual, may eventually become more formal, repetitive, and stable. With time, it can become ritual.

Grimes notes that establishing a hard and fast definition of ritualizing would be to set distinct boundaries and perhaps fail to recognize connections to significant elements outside those boundaries. He accordingly offers the following “soft” definition of ritualizing, a behaviour that, in his view, is characterized by boundary-crossing: “Ritualizing transpires as animated persons enact formative gestures in the face of receptivity during crucial times in founded places.”<sup>27</sup>

The shrine rooms at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti Centre are founded places, as are the centres themselves. Tuesday or Wednesday evenings at 7 PM are not necessarily crucial times, but they are special, set-aside times when participants gather with like-minded others to learn meditation and Buddhist teachings. Students participating in order to learn something new may naturally be in a receptive frame of mind. But the teachings, practices and ethics they learn are also rooted in Buddhist cosmology, something that transcends the immediate and everyday. In the context of a study of meditative practices, terms such as “animated,” “enact” and “gestures” require a little conceptual

tinkering, which will ensue. For now, I wish only to note that the above description, and the notion of ritualizing as consciously cultivated ritualization, are the connotations with which the term is used here.

To summarize: ritualization refers generally to the process by which behaviours take on ritual qualities. More specifically, it refers to the stylization of our preconscious or unexamined bodily movements, those programmed by our anatomy but also influenced by our social and cultural conditioning. It is the way we relate to the world as bodies in that world. It is taking place all the time and it may or may not develop into regular rituals. Ritualization becomes ritualizing when it is developed into a more conscious, intentional process, one in which we become aware of and experiment with ritualization. It is sometimes playful, often tentative or experimental. Assembled together, behaviours involved in ritualizing can produce new forms. Ritualizing becomes ritual when those forms are developed and sustained.<sup>28</sup>

According to this characterization, meditation postures and practices taught at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti meditation courses are examples of ritualizing. They are pre-formed, even traditional behaviours that are received by the students who perform them. Having learned them, they are encouraged to experiment with the behaviours to determine which ones work best. Postures and practices were thus adapted by students to fit their individual preferences or needs. Teachers indicated that it was important for students to find a comfortable, sustainable and personally relevant practice because the primary goal was to be able to meditate every day. Thus ritualizing—experimentation with ritualized behaviours—was intended to become ritual—daily meditation practice.

Several respondents indicated an appreciation for the adaptability and experimental nature of the practices taught. Erin and Diane noted that counting the breath was their preferred meditative focus because it allowed them to concentrate better than did other

techniques. Diane was relieved when she learned she could meditate sitting in a chair rather than having to sit on the floor. Tanit said that she had been worried about her inability to sit still for long. She was relieved but also surprised when Joyce advised students to move if they became uncomfortable. “It’s funny how you have this perception of: you will not move at all during meditation,” Tanit said. I asked why she believed that, and she replied: “I think it has a lot to do with how meditation is portrayed in films and that we see monks who are meditating and they are not moving. And meditation is associated with stillness. I think, somehow we make this connection.”

In fact, many interview participants made some associations between meditation and formality, along with a range of other ritual qualities, even though most, when asked, did not consider meditation to be a ritual. While meditation postures were not strictly standardized at any of the classes, most students did adopt some kind of special posture, such as the straight back or a traditional mudra. At Friends of the Heart, most participants, encouraged by the majority, made an effort to sit on the floor even when it was not comfortable to do so for long. When speaking about meditating at home, respondents always related some kind of formal practice that they would repeat each time. Alan, for example, made what he called a “ceremony” out of his home meditation practice. To begin he would light a couple of candles. Then, he said, “I have a sort of a shawl that I put on. And I sort of put that on in a way that I’m trying to make it more of a spiritual thing—or maybe not spiritual. It’s a structure.... I noticed that there is a ceremony—that’s the word I’m thinking of—you create a ceremony around it.” Despite the flexibility and encouragement to experiment with different postures and practices, students did associate meditation with formal structures, standardized or traditional practices, repetition and consistency. They implicitly, if not consciously, associated meditation with certain qualities of ritual.

## **Performance theory and restoration of behaviour**

Schechner describes the process of receiving, adjusting, adapting and experimenting with behaviour in order to create new forms as “restoration of behaviour.” As a performance theorist and theatre director, Schechner has written extensively on the intersections between ritual and theatre, along with other kinds of cultural performance. In Schechner’s view, performance entails all forms of activity that show or display, including the performative behaviours of humans and animals as well as the performing arts.<sup>29</sup>

Performances are behaviours that are embodied and enacted. Not limited to the fictive or make-believe, they include everything from the ordinary activities of daily life to sporting events, theatre and ritual. Performance theory, therefore, is a method for investigating ritual by exploring its correspondence to other performances.

One of Schechner’s influential contributions to performance theory is his description of restoration of behaviour. This is a process by which physical or verbal actions are deconstructed into small strips or “bits” of behaviour that can then be rearranged and assembled into new actions, like editing together strips of film.<sup>30</sup> It is behaviour that is “not-for-the-first time, [it is] prepared or rehearsed.”<sup>31</sup> Schechner regards restored behaviour as the root of all theatre and ritual, and claims that it is the same process in both.<sup>32</sup> His characterization of restored behaviour has significant parallels to both ritualization and ritualizing. Schechner writes:

These strips of behavior... are independent of the causal systems (social, psychological, technological) that brought them into existence. They have a life of their own. The original “truth” or “source” of the behavior may be lost, ignored, or contradicted—even while this truth or source is apparently being honored and observed. How the strip of behavior was made, found, or developed may be unknown or concealed; elaborated; distorted by myth and tradition. Originating as a process, used in the process of rehearsal to make a new process, a performance, the strips of behavior are not themselves process but things, items, “material.”<sup>33</sup>

Like Humphrey and Laidlaw's ritual actions, restored behaviours consist of actions that do and do not originate with the performer; they are actions that are received, independent objects or materials. In theatre workshops and meditation classes, performers are aware that they are experimenting with different behaviours and developing them into something new. In that sense, then, restoration of behaviour is similar to ritualizing as I have described it above: formative, experimental ritualized actions.

In theatre, restored behaviour takes place primarily in the workshop-rehearsal process. Workshops, Schechner claims, are the most ritualized elements of the theatrical process. A workshop is a liminal space where performers' normal roles are suspended and their usual behaviours are broken down and re-constructed. Performers enter a workshop as "fixed or finished beings."<sup>34</sup> In the liminal environment of the workshop, behaviour is broken down into bits, what Schechner calls "the smallest strips of repeatable action."<sup>35</sup> Then begins the work of rearranging and reconstructing the bits into something new.

Meditation classes, like performing arts workshops, were sites of experimentation. Students were given certain practices to perform. They repeated the behaviours to become familiar with them, but were also encouraged to try different forms. If sitting cross-legged on a cushion was not comfortable, they could try kneeling or sitting in a chair. If insight practice was too difficult, they could switch to watching or counting the breath. Any one of the different practices students learned could be dropped, combined with others or reconfigured as they tried to find the practice that worked best for them. Several students also added practices they had learned elsewhere. Like theatre workshops, the classes were intended only as a beginning: students were expected to take what they learned and develop from it a regular meditation practice.

Schechner makes a direct connection between performing artists and certain ritualists. He writes that "performing artists—and, I would say, meditators, shamans and



trancers too—work on themselves, trying to induce deep, psychophysical transformations either of a temporary or permanent kind.”<sup>36</sup> If we see ritualists as performers, then we may see the students at introductory meditation classes as performers in training. It should be understood that this is not merely an analogy: students at introductory meditation classes were learning to perform what they were taught.

## **Conclusion**

Meditation classes provided spaces for restoration of behaviours like meditation postures, gestures and concentration practices. They were also sites for discussing and assessing Buddhist teachings, ethics and worldviews. Each of the various elements of the class was an opportunity for gaining new knowledge, attitudes or skills through different means: either direct, formalized teaching or through experiential learning. Each of the elements of the classes was also, to one degree or another, formally structured, or standardized; they involved received practices and teachings originating in an historical spiritual tradition, many were symbolic, valued highly, and so on.<sup>37</sup> Ritualized learning, therefore, is learning whose settings, content or activities bear several of the qualities commonly associated with ritual.

With its formal structures and embodied patterns of action,<sup>38</sup> ritualizing in meditation classes has the unique quality of combining formalized and experiential forms of learning. It takes place in formalized educational settings, but it involves the learner experientially. By sitting cross-legged and concentrating my mind on an object of meditation, my body and mind teach me how best to sit and concentrate. In the context of a formalized meditation class, I am aware that what I am doing is learning the best ways to sit and concentrate. Thus, the practices and the means by which meditation students learned were ritualized. Moreover, the ritualized nature of what was being learned had

important influences on *how* students learned. As the discussion of respondents' learning experiences progresses, it will become clear that certain patterns of learning developed which included gaining new knowledge, new attitudes and values, new skills and new insights. Before explaining that pattern in more detail, however, it is first necessary to establish what each of these different types of learning entail.

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<sup>1</sup> See Alan Rogers, *What Is the Difference: A New Critique of Adult Learning and Teaching* (Leicester, UK: NIACE, 2003), 17-27.

<sup>2</sup> Schechner discusses formal and informal training among theatre performers and ritualists. See Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), 193-5; and Richard Schechner, "Magnitudes of Performance," in *By Means of Performance*, ed. Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Rogers, *What Is the Difference: A New Critique of Adult Learning and Teaching*, 16.

<sup>4</sup> ———, *What Is the Difference: A New Critique of Adult Learning and Teaching*, 38.

<sup>5</sup> ———, *What Is the Difference: A New Critique of Adult Learning and Teaching*, 28.

<sup>6</sup> B.S. Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: The Cognitive Domain* (New York: David McKay Co. Inc., 1956), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Jennings, "On Ritual Knowledge," 327.

<sup>8</sup> John Powers describes a variation of the prayer mudra, used in Tibetan Buddhism, called the "gem holding position" where only the base of the palms and the fingertips are touching. John Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, Revised Edition* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2007), 299.

<sup>9</sup> For the full texts of the Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti opening prayers, see appendix B.

<sup>10</sup> Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, ed. Monika B. Vezedom and Gabrielle Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 15-25.

<sup>11</sup> Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 21.

<sup>12</sup> Victor W. Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, ed. Ronald L. Grimes (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 513.

<sup>13</sup> Communitas is also indicated in respondents' discussions about shared experiences and the development of commitment through practicing with others. See chapter two.

<sup>14</sup> In the Mahāyāna branch of Buddhism, a Bodhisattva is a being who has vowed to become a Buddha or enlightened being for the sake of all others. There are numerous steps along the path to becoming a Bodhisattva, beginning with the six perfections.

<sup>15</sup> Anonymous, *Friends of the Heart Student Handbook*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Peter McLaren, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 197.

<sup>17</sup> McLaren, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*.

<sup>18</sup> Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 64.

<sup>19</sup> Humphrey and Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual*, 5.

<sup>20</sup> ———, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 43.

<sup>23</sup> ———, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 42.

<sup>24</sup> ———, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 41.

<sup>25</sup> ———, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 43.

<sup>26</sup> ———, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 61.

<sup>27</sup> ———, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 60.

<sup>28</sup> ———, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 62.

<sup>29</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 22.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Schechner, "Restoration of Behavior," in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, ed. Ronald L. Grimes (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996), 441.

<sup>31</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> ———, "Restoration of Behavior," 457.

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<sup>33</sup> ———, “Restoration of Behavior,” 441-2.

<sup>34</sup> ———, “Magnitudes of Performance,” 41.

<sup>35</sup> ———, “Magnitudes of Performance,” 41.

<sup>36</sup> ———, “Magnitudes of Performance,” 40.

<sup>37</sup> This list once again draws on Grimes’s chart of qualities of ritual in Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory*, 14.

<sup>38</sup> Jennings points out that “ritual is above all a pattern of action.” Jennings, “On Ritual Knowledge,” 325.

## Chapter Four: Learning

Interview participants offered many insights into how and what they learned at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti classes. Several interview questions were intended to encourage them to reflect on learning: What is the most important thing about the class? Why do you attend? How do you learn what to do, where to sit, what to sing? Do you gain any new knowledge or understanding through the lectures? Through group discussions? Through the practices? Can you teach me something you were taught? Naturally, when one enrolls in a class one does so with the expectation of learning something. So, what were interview participants learning and how?

Interviews with Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti students revealed not only that there were different means of learning—lectures, discussions, formal meditation practices and so on—that took place within the meditation classes, but there were different types of learning as well. I began by distinguishing these types using a range of descriptors such as: intellectual, attitudinal, emotional, ethical, physical, practical, and spiritual. As noted earlier, similar descriptors applied to respondents' motivations for attending the courses and thus their expected learning outcomes. Note that these descriptors are not intended as ideal categories: most interconnected and overlapped with others. These descriptors were, rather, early indicators that a learning model which accounted for different types of learning was needed in order to investigate respondents' learning experiences.

The following interview excerpts indicate the different types of learning described as respondents answered the question: Why do you attend meditation classes? Diane's response highlighted cognitive learning:

I attend because I want to know more. So in addition to practicing I get some very concrete teachings which I really like.... So, what I like about the Tuesday night [at Atisha Centre] is that there's a significant teaching. It appeals to the cognitive part of me that wants to understand. I'm a head person, I want to understand it in my head. I wish I were more of a heart person and I could just take in the stuff at a heart level, but my mind is like: What's that? Why are we doing this? How is this different from Jesus? So I have that bit of a barrier. So, the intellectual and the meditation, the combination of those two appeal to me.

In this speech, Diane makes an important distinction between "head level" and "heart level" learning. Although she was aware of the latter, what we might call experiential learning, she claimed that she was more interested in gaining new knowledge or an intellectual understanding of new material. Catherine H. said that she had gained the use of a new kind of language, one that aided her relationships with her hairdressing clients.

It's really giving me a language to communicate with my clients. As a hair stylist, we are so close to people, physically, mentally, in all different aspects of their lives: personal life, romantic life, family life. So everyone goes through a struggle, and I'm able to communicate how to become more compassionate for their struggle. And I found that people have actually been able to hear what I was trying to say. Whereas other times, I didn't have the language before.

Catherine had thus gained new communication skills based on an increased awareness of compassion, and was putting them to use in her professional life. Bronwen noted that meditation was significant, but she also spoke about the teachings.

The most important thing is the meditation practice, for me. Also, I like the lesson. I should say I always love it. I find I really liked just all the thoughts. I really like what they say. My father and I walk down from the centre to Bloor Station afterwards, and it's a long walk. And we talk and we talk, and I just feel fresh or just amazed about the thoughts that come out of people's minds, the things that I had never thought of before.

Bronwen was intrigued by the new perspectives she and her father were encountering and exploring in the GP classes. Margaret claimed that meditation gave her a kind of skill or technique for focusing on peacefulness and happiness, things that she otherwise overlooked in her daily life.

I guess why I'm drawn to the Wednesday night class and therefore subsequent activities is this search for some kind of groundedness and peace. The meditation that we do when we talk about: May I be happy, may I be peaceful; that embodies what I'm looking for. It's almost like a pause where you start to actually pay attention to those sorts of things that in my day-to-day life get ignored way too often.

Margaret thus highlighted changes in attitudes and emotions that she was learning through meditation practice. Finally, Gwen spoke about gaining a deeper understanding of herself through meditation, something that enabled her to be less self-focused and more compassionate. In her view, she was learning new ways of understanding herself and relating to those around her.

I believe that it makes me just a little more aware of the depth, the space inside of me and it gives me an opportunity I guess, in that meditation, to explore that, which in turn has all sorts of emotional and psychological benefits. It sort of de-personalizes me on some level. . . . I think it helps to make me more compassionate. Really and truly, I think it helps me particularly in my work to be as connected to my heart or my feelings as I am to my mind.

Gwen's response indicates emotional and psychological changes as well as a degree of spiritual insight. Others described gaining new knowledge, discovering new perspectives or outlooks, and developing skills or techniques for altering habitual emotional responses. Some emphasized learning how to meditate, the practicalities of posture and meditation technique, when speaking about what they learned. Respondents often distinguished intellectual or cognitive learning from that which took place in meditation. These responses indicated, therefore, that there were several qualitatively different types of learning that took place at the introductory classes.

Dennis's response is interesting because it refers to a number of different types of learning in a few short sentences. When asked why he attended the Friends of the Heart Calm and Clear class, Dennis said he attended the class

just to try to develop a good meditation practice, and to help me develop a good meditation practice and to learn how to develop a good meditation practice, because the ten weeks will be up soon. You sort of have to learn how to do things. You learn from going to class, but then the class teaches you how to learn, how to do things.

Dennis's response appears simply repetitive, as though he was trying to gather his thoughts. But it also suggests that he was aware of different aspects of learning meditation: his own trial and error, the support he gained from attending the class and the specific techniques he learned in the class. Dennis also noted that the class helped him learn how to learn. He was thus aware of learning on a macro level, or learning itself as a skill that is learned.

All of this evidence brings us to an important question: What do we mean by learning? In its most common interpretation, learning refers to acquiring new knowledge or information by way of studying. Learning may also involve gaining new skills for assessing, organizing and relating bits of information to each other; processes that are intellectual in nature. Some interview participants clearly referred to this kind of learning. It took place chiefly through listening to lectures, reading, discussion groups and asking questions. This perspective, however, refers to one specific type of learning: knowledge or cognition. When respondents spoke about discovering decorum in the shrine rooms, learning meditation postures and practices, developing concentration, finding out about themselves or uncovering new ways of being in the world, they were speaking about types of learning that are not strictly intellectual or cognitive. We therefore need a broader definition of learning if we are to understand all of the ways in which students at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti learned.

In its most basic terms, learning refers to change.<sup>1</sup> Rogers defines learning as "changes in knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes which lead to those more or less permanent changes and reinforcements brought about in one's patterns of acting, thinking

and/or feeling.”<sup>2</sup> This definition pays attention to processes as well as results of learning. Like the respondents quoted above, Rogers highlights the fact that there are different types of learning or different attributes that change during the learning process: specifically, knowledge, understanding, attitudes and skills. These changes, in turn, affect the way one acts, thinks or feels.

Three of the four terms Rogers uses in his definition of learning correspond to the three domains identified in Bloom’s taxonomy, a model of learning objectives which is helpful for exploring students’ learning experiences.<sup>3</sup> I will argue, in fact, that two of the domains, the psychomotor and the affective, entail learning processes that have similarities to restoration of behaviour and therefore to ritualizing.

### **Bloom’s taxonomy**

First published in 1956, Bloom’s taxonomy identifies three distinct learning domains: the cognitive, which involves mental or intellectual learning and is associated with gaining and employing new knowledge; the affective, which relates to attitudes, emotions and values and the ways in which they affect behaviour; and the psychomotor, which refers to physical abilities, movement and motor skills.<sup>4</sup> Under each domain is a list of related learning processes which is arranged hierarchically, illustrating the movement from simple learning tasks to those that are more complex. Benjamin S. Bloom and colleagues published handbooks on the cognitive and affective domains<sup>5</sup> but none on the psychomotor domain, citing a lack of secondary school or college-level teaching of physical skills.<sup>6</sup> Since the original taxonomy was published, revisions and additions have been proposed. Anita Harrow, for example, set out an expanded taxonomy for the psychomotor domain in 1972, and in 2001 a group of American educators led by Lorin W. Anderson constructed a revised taxonomy of Bloom’s cognitive domain. The purpose of the taxonomy was to help



college-level educators plan learning objectives, but it is useful here because it elaborates on different types of learning and their associated learning processes.

### **Cognitive learning**

The cognitive domain entails learning activities such as remembering or recalling and the skills or abilities related to working with that knowledge. Learning activities in the cognitive domain begin with gaining and remembering factual, conceptual or procedural knowledge.<sup>7</sup> More complex cognitive learning tasks include: interpreting, analyzing and evaluating information and using it to create something new.<sup>8</sup>

Among Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti respondents, cognitive learning involved gaining new information about meditation (its purposes, potential benefits, and its different postures and techniques) as well as knowledge of Buddhist terms, some of its teachings, but mostly its values and ethics. Respondents gained such knowledge through listening to lectures or meditation instructions, discussing concepts and experiences with others, asking informal questions of teachers and other students, and through reading books or internet sites on their own. Students' cognitive learning also involved analyzing, interpreting and evaluating the new knowledge they acquired. As noted earlier, however, remembering or analyzing new information was not the primary objective of the meditation courses at either centre.

In fact, interviews uncovered several indications that some respondents did not consider cognitive learning, in the sense of an intellectual understanding of new material, to be the primary goal when learning about Buddhism or meditation. When asked about what they were learning, six of the students interviewed said they would rather avoid what they considered to be too much information or analysis. Gerald, for example, said he was

willing to familiarize himself with basic principles, but did not want to read any interpretive information about Buddhism.

Personally, I prefer not to read. I have the most basic [book]—it's like the Dr Seuss of Buddhist books, *What the Buddha Taught*.<sup>9</sup> It doesn't go off anywhere except for basic principles. I try to stick with that only because I don't want to come in there with something I've picked up and think it's my question. I want to go in there, at least for the first year, for the first introduction, knowing that my questions are my own, that I haven't picked it up somewhere. And that's important.... I wanted to just have that initial reaction to it myself, uneducated.

Gerald thus felt that gaining too much knowledge in advance might impede his personal reactions to and interpretations of the teachings. Similarly, Priscilla said, "I think you can get confused if you read too many different commentaries on texts." Alan distinguished between learning in the sense of gaining information and discovering ways to improve himself, the latter being more important in his view. "I think at this stage of the game," he said, "because there's a lot of work I have to do myself, I don't need to get tons of information." John, notably, contrasted meditation to learning new concepts. "I'm sure you can go into Buddhism and find vast concepts to try and get your mind around, but you don't do that during meditation. At least, not any meditation that we've been taught. It's the very opposite." Finally, Brenda expressed a similar sentiment:

I've learned by not rushing to learn, which is how I would normally do things. I turn most things into research projects, so this one I thought: You can't do it. You just have to be with it. Just allow it to be as it is and don't analyze it. ... I need to treat this as an experience, not an intellectual exercise.

In fact, these comments reflect an interpretation of learning that is also found in Buddhist *sūtras* or canonical texts, where cognitive learning or intellectualizing is regarded as an obstacle to putatively higher levels of wisdom. Commenting on this perspective, Étienne Lamotte writes, "a person may become convinced that dedication of a purely intellectual order is sufficient, but this is far from the truth. The direct view constitutes true

wisdom [*la vraie sagesse*] and this is what is necessary for salvation.”<sup>10</sup> In this view, intellectualizing is merely a first step; it may, in fact, hinder deeper understanding. Although the majority of students to whom I spoke were not familiar with the scriptural sources for these ideas, several students from both centres expressed a preference for domains of learning other than the cognitive.

Another indication that cognitive learning was not of primary importance came, notably, from the one respondent who claimed to be most interested in cognitive learning. Diane said:

I really like the meditation classes that we did [at Friends of the Heart], the meditation part of it, but I would like a little more teaching about what it is that we were looking for. Maybe that's not good for me, because it's too much in my head, but [I prefer] a little bit more of a cognitive component to it.

Diane frequently described her learning preferences as cognitive or intellectual. “I live pretty much from the neck up,” she said. “It's at Atisha, really, where the most concrete learning has been. You know, like: What is the mind? What is concentration? I feel like a bit of a sponge. I'm doing a lot of reading and trying to understand.” Diane felt it was important to learn new concepts from knowledgeable teachers, and she was most interested in cognitively exploring those concepts. “It appeals to the cognitive part of me that wants to understand. I'm a head person, I want to understand it in my head.”

Despite her interest in the cognitive aspects of learning, Diane said she would rather be able to respond differently to what she was learning at Atisha and Friends of the Heart: “I want to understand conceptually but that's not my ultimate goal. My ultimate goal is to live my life a bit differently, with more meaning.” She said that intellectually understanding the concepts she was learning was appealing, but her main objective was to make some more substantive changes in her life. “Who am I?” she had been asking herself:

“And that brought me back to wanting to meditate and that’s why I was interested in insight meditation, because I wanted to find out more about who I am.” While she recognized that she was “a head person,” she also said, “I wish I were more of a heart person and I could just take in the stuff at a heart level.” In Diane’s view, her preferences or natural tendencies influenced the quality of learning she experienced. “So I have that bit of a barrier,” she said, an indication that her desire for intellectual learning was an obstacle for experiencing learning on the “heart level.” “So, the intellectual and the meditation,” Diane said, “the combination of those two appeal to me.”

Thekchen also indicated that a cognitive or intellectual understanding of the teachings was not sufficient. He said that sometimes students at the GP classes respond a little too easily to certain concepts. “I give a teaching on challenging your self-cherishing mind,” he said. “That [self-cherishing mind] is your entire basis of reality and of being. And for people to just sit there and go: Yeah, makes sense—I don’t think it got in. I just challenged every single belief system you have. Either you took it on an intellectual level and you’re not taking it in, which means you’re just going to keep on being self centred, or ... you want to soak it in a little bit before asking a question.” In Thekchen’s view, then, some of the concepts he taught required something other than cognitive comprehension. He was, in fact, referring to the need for an affective understanding of his teachings.

### **Affective learning**

The term “affective” refers to affections or emotions as well as changes that affect behaviour. Learning on an affective level begins with sensitivity and attentiveness to new emotions and attitudes. As affective learning progresses, the learner responds to the new emotions and attitudes, “valuing” or attaching value to them and then either rejecting or accepting and committing to them. Acceptance and commitment create a new value system

by which the learner begins to voluntarily adjust her behaviour. With time, the new value system may be internalized to the point at which it influences behaviour, at a less conscious level, in predictable ways. Bloom and colleagues referred to this last affective process as “characterizing values.”<sup>11</sup>

Nearly all of my respondents, teachers and students alike, indicated that affective change and reinforcement was the nexus of what was taught and learned at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti Centre. Most respondents indicated, in fact, that the primary purpose of cognitive and psychomotor learning was to support the affective changes that were taking place. Gwen, for example, spoke about changes she experienced through meditation, describing them in terms very similar to affective learning processes, especially changing emotions and accepting new values.

I can see the transitions as you progress through life.... It's not that I have rubbed away emotions. I'm probably better at sitting with them. I'm probably not as reactionary as I used to be. I have the ability to respond, I think, in a way that I didn't feel like I had to do. I feel like I settle in a different way, sitting. I also feel I'm connected to something really good in the world. Something that I believe is good.

Gwen noted that her emotional responses had changed over time, and that the new responses were being repeated and reinforced with her practice and participation at Friends of the Heart. She believed she had gained new values that she accepted and wanted to put into practice. Meditation was, in her view, the means by which she had made the affective changes she described. Her strongly positive description of her learning emphasizes the fact that she highly valued the teachings and practices that she had learned.

One of the questions I put to respondents was: can you teach me something you were taught? The question was intended to draw out the most significant or memorable elements of respondents' learning. In response to this question, experienced Friends of the Heart member David said:

What's coming to mind is not so much of a teaching, like a technique or something. It's more knowing that we have the potential, we have the ability to have peace, a great deal of happiness, acceptance. So that's something very deep I've learned from Friends of the Heart.

Note the distinction David made: When I asked him to teach me something, he declined to speak about a particular technique, he emphasized a change in perspective, the belief that it was possible to be happier and more peaceful.

Respondents used a range of similar or related terms to refer to what I am calling affective learning. Margaret, for example, believed that learning meditation at Friends of the Heart helped her become more grounded and at peace. Anna also spoke about feeling more peaceful. Catherine H. said that Chandrakirti lectures highlighted compassion, kindness and giving. Brenda spoke about compassion, patience, wishing others well, being in the moment and being respectful. She said that her practice was loving kindness, and that the GP classes helped reinforce and remind her of that practice. Tanit spoke about compassion, patience, spirituality and virtue:

I'm beginning to realize that, as I travel this journey, there's something else, that spiritual thing. And I don't even know how to define that. I understand that being compassionate, having patience, these relate to spirituality, but it's almost like they are symptoms of it, but not it. So, I don't think I can define it. I just have the sense to recognize that there is this spirituality, of being concerned about virtue, about your word being true.

Alan emphasized generosity and honesty. He said he used to think of generosity in terms of giving time or money, but now regarded being generous as being more caring or thoughtful. He also talked about giving things up, being happy with less, and letting go of attachments. Carol, who also participated at Chandrakirti, spoke of compassion and selfless love. Among Friends of the Heart students, Dennis spoke about equanimity and balance, and Diane believed that affective change meant learning non-attachment, selflessness and

aspects of Buddhism's eightfold path: right thinking and right behaviour were the examples she gave.

Attitudinal changes described included becoming more generous, selfless or less attached. Emotional responses included gratitude, love, sympathetic joy, equanimity, happiness and feeling calm, grounded or at peace. These particular attitudes and emotions may also be regarded as values, since they were generally highly esteemed or "valued." These values or emotional responses were presented as positive means of counteracting what were given as negative states, such as selfishness or self-cherishing, materialism, anger, impatience, attachment or stress. The values emphasized in the lectures, talks and meditation practices were generally those inspired by traditional Buddhist teachings: truthfulness (one of the Buddhist precepts), interconnectedness, and cherishing others were among them. Compassion, which is described in the Buddhist perspective as a virtue rather than an emotion,<sup>12</sup> was mentioned most often in classes and interviews.

The reason affective learning was important for most respondents had to do with their motivations for enrolling in meditation classes. Most of those to whom I spoke described learning goals that corresponded to affective changes. Alan, for example, enrolled in meditation classes because he wanted to be happier. Tanit, who had been intrigued by the idea of enlightenment, spoke often about learning meditation techniques, but most strongly emphasized the new outlooks and values she believed meditation practice had inspired in her.

By contrast, John was not expecting to change his attitudes or values in a significant way when he enrolled in meditation courses. He was interested primarily in learning meditation techniques, and he emphasized skills and, to a lesser extent, intellectual learning over attitudinal changes or changes in values. When I asked John if he thought he had developed any new attitudes from the practice he said no. He said that meditation affected

his mood, an affective change, but he primarily spoke about meditation techniques as the results rather than a means of learning. Dennis and Erin were the other two respondents whose primary interest was in learning how to meditate. When speaking about the results of the meditation course, Dennis said he thought he was better able to concentrate and to be more efficient at his job. Erin said she felt less stressed, and was better able to calm her mind. Significantly, both said they could not conclusively attribute these changes to the meditation classes, but believed there may have been a relationship. Dennis and Erin spoke about the techniques they were learning and the ways they cognitively understood the purposes of those techniques more than any attitudinal or emotional changes they experienced. Motivations for attending the classes, therefore, corresponded to, and may have influenced learning outcomes. Friends of the Heart students John, Dennis and Erin were exceptions overall: most respondents highlighted affective change as the most important aspect of their learning.

Furthermore, students' emphasis on affective learning may have been influenced by the objectives of the teachers, who also stressed affective outcomes. Catherine Rathbun expressed what she believed was the most important learning gained at Friends of the Heart: "What they take away, I hope, is courage, the ability to find their own strength, the ability to develop compassion and see how those things—their skills and their compassion, their courage and their convictions—can be used in the world to help others." Thekchen described the GP classes as "a place where people can come, develop an inner peace through meditation in a safe environment, question and talk about things and discuss and listen to other perspectives and different methods that come from a different source." As noted earlier, the talks and lectures at both centres highlighted attitudes and values based in Buddhist teachings. It was clear that the objectives of the teachings, together with the meditation practices, were to help students: moderate emotions by developing equanimity



and non-attachment; change attitudes by listening to teachings or meditating on generosity, sympathetic joy or cherishing others; and begin developing a new value system based on Buddhist principles of compassion, impermanence and no-self.

While engaging in formal practices such as meditation was one means of learning in meditation classes, the ritualized nature of the classes, their settings and teachings, also had an influence on the ways in which students learned. Chandrakirti was the stronger example: the setting, the role of the teacher—who was not only a teacher but often an ordained monastic—the traditional source of the teachings and their religious or spiritual content: all of these elements were strongly characterized by various ritual qualities: they were formal, special, set aside, elevated and so on. In his study of Catholic school instruction, McLaren argues that ritual structures and symbols sanctify the learning process, and tacitly shape the ways in which students learn.<sup>13</sup> Like Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti courses, the Catholic school classes McLaren studied had elements that were formal, repetitive, communal, elevated, spatially and temporally separated from ordinary activities, and so on. McLaren argues that these qualities served to instill ritual knowledge, which he describes as the “deep codes” that act as the foundations of learners’ understanding of the world and of their reactions in various situations.<sup>14</sup> His description of ritual knowledge brings to mind the last learning activity in Bloom’s affective domain, by which the learner develops characterizing values that predictably influence his or her behaviour.<sup>15</sup> McLaren’s findings demonstrate that ritual structures in learning environments influence the way attitudes are internalized, as well as the ways in which those attitudes affect behaviour. Ritualized structures invest teachers and teachings with heightened affective qualities; attitudes, emotions or values that are, in a sense, sanctified by their association with the ritualized structures and settings in which they are encountered. The ritualized qualities of the learning environment thus supported affective learning activities: the reception, acceptance

and reinforcement of new attitudes and values and the development of new behaviours based on those attitudes and values.

Describing the GP class, Carol said that it provided an opportunity for her to step out of her usual busy life and take time to reflect on the ways in which she normally thought and behaved. “It’s like a little oasis where I feel that I can actually focus on that area that’s still mysterious to me in a lot of ways.” Carol thus indicated that the GP class involved separation from everyday activities and receptivity on the part of its participants, aspects common to theatre workshops and to ritual activity. The class also provided an atmosphere in which Carol became aware of new perspectives; namely, the Buddhist teachings introduced in the lectures. Moreover, classes offered the opportunity for Carol to evaluate and experiment with the new ideas, to associate them with other behaviours, values and attitudes and, subsequently, to reconstruct what she had learned into something new: new ways of thinking, responding and behaving. When I asked Carol what was the most important thing about attending the GP class, she replied:

I think reinforcing the concepts it’s teaching me in terms of compassion and kindness. And then going beyond that to the reality and imputed reality and all those kinds of things. And then expanding my consideration of those things. Just reinforcing those things and taking it further.

While Carol gained new factual knowledge about Buddhist concepts, she was primarily engaged in testing, accepting and deciding whether or not to commit to those concepts. She indicated that deepening her understanding and commitment was the most important element of her learning at GP classes. Carol also said the classes helped her reflect on the mysterious aspects of herself—an indication that she may have been seeking a kind of Buddhist insight into the nature of the self and the Buddhist concept of emptiness.

I think that I re-visit and reconnect with the responsibility that I require in my life towards myself and the world around me. That is a key word, responsibility: to learn how to operate in the world and to be open and

caring about everybody.... There are a lot of deeper lessons to be learned. Emptiness, truth, and specific aspects of that. But generally how to be in the world—I'm resisting the word positive. Rather, honest in what I feel is important in regard to the teachings: compassion and selfless love.

While Carol pointed to the possibility of insights into Buddhist truths, she indicated that her most significant learning was of the affective type.

### **Psychomotor learning**

The third of Bloom's domains is the psychomotor, which has to do with developing and refining motor skills, physical activities and co-ordination. The learner begins by observing and then imitating new movements or physical abilities, developing the rudiments of the skills. Skills improve with practice and repetition, and finally the learner adapts and fine tunes the skills in order to perfect them.<sup>16</sup> In a later addition to Bloom's taxonomy, Harrow listed the kinds of skills that are learned and perfected in this domain. Her list begins with reflex movements which are not learned, but are the building blocks of other physical skills. In Harrow's account, psychomotor learning involves fundamental movements like walking and grasping, physical abilities like strength and stamina, and more complex abilities she calls skilled movements. It also includes non-discursive communication such as body language.<sup>17</sup>

While Bloom and colleagues did not elaborate on the psychomotor domain, Schechner actually offers a detailed vision of this type of learning with his description of restoration of behaviour. Restored behaviour refers to "organized sequences of events, scripted actions, known texts [and] scored movements" existing separately from those who perform them. As such, it can be "stored, transmitted, manipulated, transformed."<sup>18</sup> Like psychomotor learning, restoration of behaviour is a process wherein behaviours are observed (that is, received from the outside and transmitted), imitated, repeated and adapted. In theatre workshops, Schechner notes, performers break down behaviours into

the smallest repeatable “bits.”<sup>19</sup> Not likely as small as Harrow’s reflex movements, Schechner’s bits are more like fundamental movements. Bits are then experimented with, rearranged, and restored into new, longer strips of behaviour. Performers observe, imitate and repeat the movements, practicing and refining them. Workshops and rehearsals are sites in which performers practice skilled movements until they gain the stamina, strength, agility and familiarity required to perform the new actions expertly. Harrow, in fact, lists performing arts under skilled movements in her taxonomy. As Schechner writes: “What was rote movement, even painful body realignment, becomes second nature—full language capable of conveying detailed and subtle meanings and feelings.”<sup>20</sup> With repetition and refinement, physical skills become embodied to the point at which they act as a kind of tacit knowledge on which the performer can draw without explicitly thinking about it. This is just the kind of ritual knowledge or “embodied practical reason,” as Crossley calls it, that develops through ritual activity.<sup>21</sup>

Schechner notes that restoration of behaviour is a process that is virtually the same in ritual as it is in theatre; and it is in theatre workshops that ritualizing is most prominent.<sup>22</sup> In ritual and in theatre the performer is first separated from his or her ordinary state, becoming a *tabula rasa*. In this way, the performer becomes receptive to new learning. Receptivity means that there is always something being received by someone.<sup>23</sup> That someone is either the performer him or herself, a group of primary or secondary performers or an attendant audience, be it human or divine.<sup>24</sup> For the performer to become receptive he or she must first be separated from familiar surroundings: which is why restoration of behaviour and ritualizing often take place in special, liminal, or sacred spaces. It is in that liminal space and time that the creative work of restoration of behaviour or ritualizing can happen.<sup>25</sup> Something new is created. The last phase of the workshop process is reintegration, in which the restored behaviour is rehearsed until it becomes second

nature. The outcome of a theatre workshop is a new theatrical performance. A similar process takes place through ritualizing, which is the means of creating a new ritual or of updating an old one.

The behaviours that performers acquire and begin to adapt in workshop settings are received from a particular source, which may be a text or a previous performance or ritual.<sup>26</sup> Schechner argues that, while source material is often believed to be drawn from historical events or ancient tradition, much actually derives from earlier performances, what Schechner calls “non-events.”<sup>27</sup> Meditation postures, gestures and techniques are examples of behaviours that may be received, repeated and refined. The mythic origins of these behaviours—the Buddha seated under the bodhi tree, the saffron-robed monk or nun deep in meditative absorption performing these same postures, gestures and techniques—can influence attitudes or emotions concerning them and may connect them to a value system that is itself (believed to be) traditional and therefore special. Meg, for instance, spoke of the connection between her meditation classes and the traditional origins of Buddhist practice:

I guess my own personal goal in this is to give some robust, effective, time-tested (like 2000 years of time-tested) tools that they [students] can work with, which if they work with will yield benefit now, but will yield benefit deeper and deeper and deeper as they proceed with it. And if they choose to proceed, it's not up to me. It's up to the dharma. I'm just a servant. I'm just a tool of the dharma in that sense.

In fact, Meg's teachings were adapted each time she offered them, quite consciously so. She presented what worked best, in her experience, for her particular audience. Still, she maintained that there was an important link to Buddhist tradition, a link that, in her view, made the practices special.

Meditation classes I attended had phases similar to those Schechner describes in theatre and ritual. We students, performers-in-training, stepped out of our everyday

routines on entering a shrine room. Formal practices performed on entry helped us accept, if only for a time, the values expressed by the setting and the group. We then received instruction on meditation, its postures and particular meditation practices; or we listened to a talk on Buddhist ethical teachings and worldviews. Guided through meditation practice, we learned new ways of sitting or maintaining a particular posture, new ways of breathing, of directing and holding our awareness, or of reflecting on the meanings of a teaching—all very basic, fundamental behaviours performed in new ways. Classes were therefore comparable to workshops: we were introduced to different postures and techniques; receiving them from the teachers then repeating them in order to achieve familiarity and increased capacity to assume and maintain postures and concentration. We learned various postures and techniques and practiced them repeatedly, refining them so that we became more comfortable and familiar with them. We were encouraged, especially at Friends of the Heart, to combine, experiment with and adapt the postures and techniques we learned: try this gesture, that posture, teachers advised. Try it again. If it does not work, if there is too much pain or discomfort or you cannot concentrate, try something else: adjust the support cushions, kneel or sit in a chair. Students tried different postures and supports at home: Tanit tried sitting on a lower support such as a sofa cushion, for example. Using a short stool was never suggested at the classes, but this was Alan's choice for his home meditation practice. Joyce and Meg conducted lying down meditation: they had us lie on the floor with our knees up and hands on our abdomens. This posture was taught as an alternative: try it out if seated meditation is not working. At more than one of the Chandrakirti GP classes, I observed students lying down in the pews during some meditation sessions even though there were no instructions from teachers to do so.

Postures were just one set of behaviours we experimented with. There was, in fact, more encouragement to experiment with the meditative concentration exercises we were

taught. Try beginning with a body scan, teachers advised: relax the tongue, the muscles around the eyes. Look for other areas that are tense, if that works better. Turn the body scan into insight meditation, seeking out areas of touch or rest in the body. Add the search for images or thoughts; if this becomes too complicated, just go back to observing the breath. We were introduced to several different techniques, and encouraged to combine them or to set aside those that did not work. At one Insight class, for example, a young woman who had fidgeted through the meditation sessions said she liked the concentration techniques she was learning, but said she had a hard time sitting still. She preferred to perform the concentration exercises while walking. This was her way of “restoring” the meditation “behaviour.” There was, therefore, a wide range of adapted behaviours going on both within and outside the classes.

If classes were workshops, then rehearsals began with our daily meditation practice. We were encouraged to meditate each day—Friends of the Heart students were asked to meditate for longer periods each week—to find the best techniques and keep them up until we gained facility and familiarity with the practices. The final performance was the hoped-for outcome of meditation practice. Teachers and students expressed the expectation that, with time, meditation would result in emotional and attitudinal changes such as stress reduction, calmness, equanimity or increased capacity for kindness and compassion. Ideally, these attitudinal changes would lead to long-lasting behavioural changes, and students would begin performing ordinary activities in accordance with the new values and attitudes. Indications were, however, that such behavioural changes tended to drop off when students discontinued their involvement at the centres or their home meditation practice or both. Even so, engaging in meditation classes and personal meditation practice appeared to link the development of new skills with attitudinal change: thus connecting psychomotor and affective learning.

Restoration of behaviour, like affective learning, involves willingness, attention and awareness. There is an interesting reversal between Schechner's approach to restoration of behaviour and affective learning described by Bloom and colleagues. Learning tasks under the affective domain suggest that changes in attitudes, feelings, emotions or values lead to changes in behaviour. Behavioural changes are initially conscious and voluntary. With time, driven by the new value system, they become stable, predictable, and characteristic of the learner.<sup>28</sup> Such behavioural changes are not necessarily things learned, they are results of learning—Rogers makes a similar point in his definition of learning. Thus affective learning can lead to behavioural change. For Schechner, however, behaviour is an object or material that may first be experimented with, something that one takes apart and reconstructs, distancing oneself from one's behaviours in the process. This is not behaviour in the sense of the outcome of attitudinal change: it is closer to the motor skills and activities of the psychomotor domain. In Schechner's view, it is the manipulation of behaviour that changes attitudes, not the other way around.<sup>29</sup> Schechner's perspective thus links psychomotor learning to affective learning. Experimenting with, practicing and adapting behaviours may affect attitudinal change which, in turn, may lead to long-term, less conscious behavioural change. As Schechner notes, the work of performing artists along with ritualists like trancers, shamans and meditators is to effect permanent or temporary "psychophysical transformations."<sup>30</sup> These performers are therefore engaged in affective and psychomotor learning activities.

If learning activities consist of conscious experimentation with culturally and biologically conditioned behaviours, learning in the affective and psychomotor domains has similarities to ritualizing and restoration of behaviour. All of these activities lead to change: something new built from breaking down and reassembling something old. Like ritual activity, psychomotor learning processes are repetitive, enacted and embodied.



Psychomotor learning tasks that are more ritualized—that are also considered to be special, traditional, spiritual, and valued highly, for instance—may influence changes in attitudes, emotions and values. That is to say that the stronger the ritualized qualities of the learning, the more likely they will lead to affective change. This is because practices that are regarded as special, elevated and so on may influence students to value them more highly, commit to them, and begin to change their behaviours in accordance with the new learning. While it cannot be concluded from this that learning is equivalent to ritualizing, the premise that ritualizing bears similarities to recognized learning activities, especially of the affective and psychomotor types, is a significant point for investigating the ways in which ritualizing contributes to new learning.

#### **A fourth domain?**

Bloom's taxonomy is informative because it describes different types of learning that correspond to respondents' learning experiences. But it does not cover all types of learning, change or development respondents indicated in their interviews. A fourth category, which I label "insight," is also suggested. It is a type of change that is also indicated as a goal of Buddhist practice according to certain *sūtras*. To the extent that this category is drawn from these sources, it is specific to the groups studied here: namely participants involved in learning Buddhist-based practices and teachings.

Several Sanskrit and Pāli *sūtras* refer to something akin to different domains of learning, which the texts refer to as the development of wisdom.<sup>31</sup> The three wisdoms, as they are called, are "the wisdom gained by listening to expositions of the dharma, the wisdom gained by contemplating the truth, [and] the wisdom gained by the cultivation of meditation."<sup>32</sup> This is the usual order given in Sanskrit and secondary sources, but the three wisdoms appear in the Pāli Canon's *Dīgha Nikāya sūtra*,<sup>33</sup> or the Collection of Long

Discourses, as follows: “Three more kinds of wisdom: based on thought, on learning [hearing], on mental development [meditation].”<sup>34</sup> According to Buddhist scholar Brian Nichols, Sanskrit sources indicate that the three wisdoms form a hierarchical sequence: “One hears the dharma, one thinks about it, one meditates; each stage generates a higher level of wisdom.”<sup>35</sup> The development of wisdom is intended to change one’s perception of the self and the world, in the end eliminating delusion and suffering.<sup>36</sup> Developing wisdom is thus intended to change one’s patterns of acting, thinking and feeling; the kinds of changes that constitute learning in Rogers’s definition. Where Rogers specifies that these changes are the result of changes in knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes, Buddhist doctrine speaks of wisdom.

According to Powers, the first wisdom, which arises from hearing, refers to a surface understanding gained through someone else’s teaching.<sup>37</sup> In this sense, it corresponds to Bloom’s cognitive domain: receiving information, which is change on an intellectual level. Lamotte, however, suggests that the first wisdom also relies on faith: if one does not understand the teachings one hears, then one must take them on faith until understanding develops.<sup>38</sup> The second wisdom, which arises from thought or reflection means considering the significance of the teaching and coming to a deeper understanding of it.<sup>39</sup> The second wisdom may correspond to the affective domain, since it refers to developing new attitudes or values inspired by the dharma or Buddhist truths. Even so, the second wisdom is still analytical or cognitive to some degree. Lamotte suggests that wisdom arising from reflection refers to a personal reaction that is still intellectual, and is not true wisdom.<sup>40</sup> True wisdom is that which arises from meditation. In Lamotte’s view, the third wisdom is a direct, autonomous realization of the truth of Buddhist teachings.<sup>41</sup> Because the third wisdom arises from meditation, it would involve certain formal practices and techniques which may be developed through psychomotor learning processes. But the

third wisdom primarily refers to developing a type of understanding that transcends the ordinary. It is understood as a fully internalized conception of that which one has pondered, and is regarded as a type of realization that surpasses conceptual understanding.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, while Bloom's categories have some correspondences to the three wisdoms, the third wisdom points to a type of development beyond any of Bloom's domains. In order to draft a model with which to explore what meditation students were learning, I therefore propose adding a fourth category to Bloom's three domains. The four categories that encompass potential learning or change taking place through meditation classes are: cognitive, affective, psychomotor and insight. These categories are consistently found in respondents' reflections on what and how they learned at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti Centre.

While most newcomers spoke about learning in terms that matched Bloom's domains, several respondents, in fact, made references to types of learning similar to the three wisdoms. Learning through meditating on teachings was described most clearly by Marlon, an experienced member and occasional teacher at Chandrakirti. I had asked him how he learned about Buddhist practices, teachings and history, and he replied:

There are classes that teach us. Or you can read about it. And then the other thing is that you can meditate. I think in meditation, you learn about more and the teachings go in further.... Without the meditation, the practice wouldn't get far. You can read something and quickly forget about it.

Another experienced Chandrakirti member, Priscilla, said that the Foundation Program involved reading, thinking about and meditating on Kelsang Gyatso's texts. "When we do FP, we only do maybe six pages a week," she said. "We're supposed to read the six pages in advance and really contemplate and meditate on them and have questions ready for when we go into class." Experienced members involved in higher-level classes had therefore

learned something about the three wisdoms. But some Chandrakirti newcomers also spoke about different levels or types of understanding.

Reflecting on what he had learned in the GP classes, Gerald identified hearing, thinking and meditating as parts of his learning process. This was at his first interview, only four months after he began attending GP classes at Chandrakirti. Gerald said:

There is an emotional awareness that's stimulated by intellectual observing. There is observing your process of mind which in turn affects your emotion. So, that mechanism there, I'm deeply interested in and it seems a healthy approach Buddhism has to getting the gears of that mechanism moving, not to shut them down and just accept a given thing. I say I have faith, but faith in the mechanism, speculation, and observing.

Gerald speaks about the learning process as a mechanism that moves from one element—emotional, intellectual and meditative—to another. I asked him if what he meant by faith was faith in the practice. He replied, “Certainly, yeah. Faith in the practice of inquiry.”

Gerald said that he had learned certain principles from his readings, in particular the idea that self responsibility derives from the notion that you are what you think. Having learned this principle, he said he could then ponder it on his own, a process of inquiry that he regarded as a significant part of his practice.

So, from understanding more of the principles through a book, the idea of self responsibility being that you are what you think, you are who you think you are, and basically all of your actions are a result of your own choices and your own other actions. That seems so simple but it's really got an enormous depth to it. So the more I ponder some of the principles, the broader the space becomes between being able to meditate... Some of the principles are like a Mobius strip, I find. You can start and then go a long way and then come back to the simplicity of it. It's really intriguing. It's like a little adventure in your mind. You can see where this will go. And then once you start to observe yourself it's amazing to see how accurate they are.

Gerald said that observing the processes of his mind affected his emotions. Moreover, exploring the principles he learned intellectually and emotionally related to his meditation practice: The process of inquiry helped him observe himself, gave him what he called a

“broader space” in meditation for further exploring the principles he had been taught. Gerald believed that observing himself in meditation affirmed the accuracy of the teachings. He said he was able to develop what he regarded as a deeper understanding of the teachings by reflecting on them and, in a sense, testing them in meditation.

Are these the three wisdoms of the *Dīgha Nikāya*? There are some similarities. Intellectual awareness, Gerald said, stimulated emotional awareness. By emotional awareness, Gerald was referring to an understanding that was more intrinsic and less strictly cognitive. He also said that reflecting on such principles on his own increased his understanding and, perhaps, added to his meditation practice. Although unfamiliar with the concept of three wisdoms as described in Buddhist scripture, Gerald’s responses suggested two, and possibly all three.

Different levels of wisdom corresponding to the three wisdoms are also indicated in a meditation practice found in schools from the Theravāda, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna branches of Buddhism. This practice has two dimensions. The first is stabilizing meditation (*śamatha*), often called calm abiding, the objective of which is to generate mental tranquility. The meditator concentrates on a particular object of meditation such as the breath, the elements, various colours, loving kindness, compassion and so on in order to induce single-pointed concentration; the ability to remain focused on an object of concentration without interruption.<sup>43</sup> The other dimension is analytical meditation (*vipaśyanā*), which refers to developing insight.<sup>44</sup> It is intended to help the practitioner develop personal, intuitive insight into the nature of reality; specifically, Buddhist truths concerning impermanence, suffering and no self.<sup>45</sup> The meditator begins, for example, with a conceptual understanding of emptiness, the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena. He or she then analyzes emptiness from the state of calm abiding in meditation. Priscilla gave an example of analytical meditation taught at Chandrakirti FP classes: Practitioners reflect on the

emptiness or lack of inherent existence of various parts of the body and of the self: the emptiness of the eye, of the mind, of the body. The latter is considered as neither equivalent to nor independent of any one of its parts. Priscilla said that, through such analyses, the meditator may begin to experience the emptiness of the body.

Analytical meditation is not cognitive analysis, although it may begin at that level. The meditation is intended to result in a deeper sense of the absence of inherent existence. The meditator then concentrates on that sense of absence. Insights developed in this way are thus taken as subsequent objects of stabilizing concentration. Stabilizing and analytical meditation are first developed separately, but the goal is eventually to unify the experience of calm abiding and insight to the point at which the results of analytical meditation themselves generate calm abiding; an experience which leads to what is called “higher insight.” Higher insight means achieving a deeply felt—as opposed to intellectually grasped—realization that all phenomena are by nature inherently impermanent, empty and unsatisfactory.<sup>46</sup>

Calm abiding and insight meditation, respectively, were the core practices of the Calm and Clear and Introduction to Insight courses at Friends of the Heart. Describing the alternating course schedule, Meg said:

I think of it as two wheels: one is *śamatha* practice, calm abiding... only it is put in more secular terms. And then, once you have a stable base—once you have a clearer lens, you can look. If the lens is shaking you can't see anything. So, which comes first? I think that they are two sides of a coin. They are both needed. The question becomes: what is a suitable entry point? The thought has always been that people need calm first. In our society, people need calm first. Which is why the Wednesday night has been more *śamatha* oriented practice. Because if people get nothing else, there are going to get stress reduction.

Hence introductory students at Friends of the Heart did learn stabilizing and analytical meditation practices, albeit at a preliminary level. Several Friends of the Heart students to

whom I spoke reported increased calm and concentration as well as insights into their reactions to sensations in their bodies. Insights at this preliminary level, however, are more akin to affective change than the deep intuitive realization Powers describes as “higher insight.”

Chandrakirti students also learned about stabilizing and analytical meditation practices, which Kelsang Gyatso translates as “placement” and “analyzing” meditation. In his description of them, the practices correspond to the three wisdoms of the *Dīgha Nikāya*. Placement meditation, he writes, depends upon analytical meditation and analytical meditation depends upon listening to or reading spiritual instructions.”<sup>47</sup> Chandrakirti teacher Thekchen offered what I found to be the best description connecting the three wisdoms to stabilizing and analytical meditation.

You listen, or you read. That’s the wisdom arising from listening or reading. And then, in meditation you do contemplation. So, that is where you integrate more from your own experience or other examples, and you’re applying it and contemplating using the reasoning, until you arrive at a new understanding. . . . And that meditation, that wisdom arising from that meditation, is coming because your mind is becoming more familiar, more embodied with the truth, with that understanding. I think, technically, wisdom arising from meditation occurs at a very advanced level. Once you have developed what is called tranquil abiding, perfect concentration, you can focus on the object for days, months without any distractions. . . . You are able to concentrate, mountain-like concentration, and analyze at the same time. . . . It’s called superior seeing, and once you get to that level, your mind and the image of the truth, let’s say emptiness, you are analyzing and concentrating at the same time. And that’s what leads to direct realization, a non-conceptual realization. I think wisdom arisen from meditation occurs when you can analyze and concentrate at the same time.

Thekchen described highly advanced stages of the practice, where placement and stabilizing meditation are no longer separate, but which refer to the third wisdom alone. It is believed that novice meditators can experience insights through which they begin to understand emptiness, but most initial realizations are still of a conceptual—what Bloom and colleagues would call a cognitive—sort.

Even so, a few respondents reported having experiences that corresponded to Buddhist descriptions of insight. Some respondents described such experiences as little “aha” moments or what might be explained as brief mystical experiences. Teachers indicated that such experiences were encouraging signs of development in students’ practice. Marlon, for example, said:

Now, the deepest learning is what is called realization, when there is something that goes on in the mind which allows us to directly access what Buddha talked about. That is called realization. That is something that is, well for myself, hasn’t happened a whole lot yet. It takes time. Often I wish those would happen more. But those are things that are quite rare. I guess in other religions or other traditions, we would call it inspiration or something like that. Often I hope those would happen more often.

Marlon’s description of what he calls realization corresponds well to the description of the third wisdom, above. He describes it as a direct experience of the Buddha’s teachings. As he points out, however, such experiences are rare.

Given that insight experiences are usually understood as being beyond words, it is not surprising that respondents’ descriptions of such experiences were often vague. Tanit attempted to describe one such moment. She had been experimenting with different meditative concentration techniques, including the insight meditation Joyce had taught, a relaxation body scan and another technique from her book on Daoism.

And I got this incredible, I don’t even know how to describe it, it almost felt like there’s this wave of something. I don’t even know what to describe it as. And I [thought] what was that? And then I kept trying to do it again, and I think it was almost like I was too conscious.... And then it would only happen almost if I did it obliquely. I don’t know how to describe it.

Tanit felt that this experience pointed to the possibility of more frequent and deeper experiences of the same kind, and that it was the sort of thing she should try to develop through meditation practice. As she pointed out, however, conscious efforts to initiate such experiences almost always fail.



Gwen said: “When I have an awareness of what it means to be empty—not what it means, experience of emptiness or experience of this precious moment, this one right here. How do I sustain that? And I think, yeah, practice.” With this statement, Gwen indicated that she had had more than one such experience in meditation. Her clarification is significant: she believed that she had achieved not an understanding of the meaning of emptiness, but a direct experience of emptiness itself, an immersion in the present moment.

Carol also touched on insight when she spoke about “going beyond imputed reality,” by which she was referring to Buddhist teachings on what is real and what is illusion. Insight into such principles, many Buddhists believe, requires more than attitudinal or behavioural change: It is defined as an experiential realization that Buddhist teachings are true. Respondents who described insight experiences said that they *resulted* in affective changes: changes in attitudes, emotions and values. But insight experiences themselves were not identical to affective change.

While it is difficult to describe internal experiences, never mind analyze them, I believe that the possibility of such insights, and certainly the emphasis placed on their role within the Buddhist tradition, should be acknowledged. I include these examples here because respondents considered insights to be possible, important, and even necessary experiences involved in meditation. I follow my respondents in acknowledging the possibility of a type of change that is neither cognitive, affective nor psychomotor. As indicated by the three wisdoms doctrine and stabilizing and analytical meditation, achieving insight includes development in all three of the other domains.

### **“Practice” as changing behaviour**

Teachers at both centres indicated that “practice,” the repetition of new behaviours and reinforcement of new attitudes, was the best way to learn. There were, however, different perspectives on what constituted practice. At Friends of the Heart, where the focus was on learning how to meditate, students generally referred to meditation as their practice.

Teachers at both centres often encouraged students to turn everyday situations into opportunities to enact the ethical perspectives introduced in the classes, but it was at Chandrakirti that doing so was considered the main “practice.”<sup>48</sup> Rarely did Chandrakirti respondents speak about meditation as their sole practice. Meditation was, rather, a device for understanding and reinforcing ethical teachings. Many GP students thus regarded their practice as the everyday activities that they conducted with mindful awareness of values such as compassion, kindness, selflessness and so on.

For two Chandrakirti members, Catherine H. and Brenda, sitting in meditation was not a regular practice. But each had her own formal practice and her own ways of experimenting with Buddhist teachings. Each had made certain behavioural changes in her everyday life. Catherine, as mentioned, had changed the way she related to her clients. Brenda said she was trying to turn her whole life into a meditation. “It’s about being in the moment and being respectful and about seeing the beauty that lives in the world,” she said. One of the manifestations of this attitude was the way she swept up seed pods that fell from a tree in her yard. “I used to do that job and rail against it and end up with a sore back and I would be whinging away. And then, when I turned it into a meditation, the job is done and none of my bits hurt.” In this way, Brenda had ritualized the act of sweeping up seed-pods. Rather than an ordinary chore, she began to regard it as a practice, attaching value to it and regarding it with spiritual significance. Through this kind of practice—a

deliberately cultivated meditative activity—Brenda believed she was learning to change her habitual attitudes and reactions.

When I asked Alan to describe what he had learned at the GP classes, he spoke of a new value or ethic he had learned and immediately began describing ways he considered changing his behaviour in response.

I learn that the only path is to give up thinking about yourself. Which is so hard to do, when you spend so much time generally thinking about yourself. I could say: well, I'm only going to open [the store] three days a week and... go and work for charity. But, for me, I have to find the balance: what do you need to support yourself, what are your needs? You could sell the house. There's lots of things you could do. It seems to me there's a balance with the attachment that you have to things, that it wouldn't be wise to be too radical. You have to really be able to change your mind rather than quickly change your circumstances. I'd like to be happier with less. That's my goal.

The idea of being less self-centred appealed to Alan. He had assessed and valued it, and had begun to look for ways to change his behaviour accordingly. He considered the possibility of making sweeping changes to his lifestyle, but recognized that it was more important to change his mind—that is, his attitudes—than to change his life radically. He decided to make his goal finding ways to live with less. I asked if he thought he was learning ways to that goal. He said:

Yes, first of all there's the giving and sharing, which I've never been good at. It's never been my lifestyle. I've always figured it's important to be self-sufficient... I won't ask you for anything and you won't ask me for anything and we'll get along fine. But, I realize that it doesn't work like that... I wasn't happy living that type of life. So, you try and change it.

The new values Alan encountered in the GP classes suggested that he should re-think his position on being charitable. When I asked Alan how he learned these new values he indicated an immediate connection between changing his values and changing how he behaved.

Practice, I would say. I now make a point of giving, say, to my wife. Not in what I would normally think of as giving, [for example], money or time. But every week now I buy flowers so when she comes home they're there. And I realize she gets so much pleasure out of that. I end up getting it back in the pleasure she receives from it. Just being more thoughtful with the children. And I've even been taking my daughter Bronwen, introducing her to something that at a young age she might recognize will give her happiness.

Alan had an interesting perspective on what practice entailed. It primarily consisted of his conscious efforts to enact the new values he had learned; to be more generous and giving in his everyday life. In fact, what he regarded as the more profound changes in attitude followed from his behavioural changes. He had learned and accepted the idea that selflessness led to happiness, he then enacted new behaviours in accordance with that idea and the behaviours, he believed, then began to affect his emotions and attitudes. Speaking of practicing generosity, Alan said:

I think, what it does for me, is it makes me look at things differently. Whereas before I might have looked at it one way, and thought: oh, I'm very logical about that, I've done the right thing and I'm doing the right thing. And then suddenly, it's like an "aha." You've had a shift, because there's a different way of looking at it. Giving, for example, when I see people sitting on the streets... I [used to] automatically say: you know what, all I'm going to do is give you money and you're going to go off and buy a drink. Going to the lessons has changed that. I shouldn't be attached to what they're going to do with the money. The idea is just to give.

When interviewed again several months later, Alan said he was better at examining his instinctive reactions in order to refrain from being as judgmental as he had been previously. He said he was operating based on his "insights" rather than "automatic drive." "I give money to panhandlers without attachment. I make sure I have loose change." Alan had begun this shift by setting aside his initial instincts and deliberately giving spare change to panhandlers, an activity he regarded as part of the "practice" he had learned through Chandrakirti. Like Brenda, Alan was transforming something ordinary into something special. He had ritualized the act of being generous to strangers. With time, he believed, the

behaviour had changed his attitudes towards giving and towards those to whom he gave. He also experimented with different ways of being generous, including being more attentive to people he met in the street or in his store, giving flowers to his wife and so on.

Practice, like rehearsal, involves a conscious awareness of the behaviours being repeated and refined. Alan was trying out new behaviours, becoming increasingly familiar with them and with their results. It was through the practice, through a deliberately reconstructed behaviour, that Alan learned something about himself and about a different way of being in the world. "It makes you feel better," he said. "It's a good feeling to give rather than always think about what you can get." As a result, Alan's experiments with new behaviours and attitudes in his day-to-day life led to more affective changes. His learning process had some similarities Schechner's restoration of behaviour, in that his consciously reconstructed behaviours led to attitudinal changes which in turn reinforced the new behaviours. Alan thus described a kind of cyclical link between affective and psychomotor learning. Alan was deliberately enacting new behaviours that were, in his view, spiritual, special and elevated. He was consciously enacting and repeating the behaviours while adapting his usual activities to accommodate the new ones. The fact that he, like other respondents, spoke about his experiences in such positive terms is another indication that he had experienced affective learning. He had highly valued the lessons he received at Chandrakirti, choosing to commit to them and to adapt his behaviours accordingly.

For Chandrakirti students, changes in everyday behaviours like those Alan described were the primary tool for implementing affective changes. Meditation, another formal practice and psychomotor means of learning, was regarded as a means of reinforcing the changes initiated by the formalized lectures and experiential learning in daily life. Alan, who said he meditated twice every day, regarded meditation as a reminder, a

means of refreshing the learning, and a means of making him, in his words, “sharper” at what he believed was the real practice, the changes in his everyday activities.

### **Respondents’ reflections on learning**

Respondents reflected in several ways on what and how they learned in the meditation classes. One approach I took for exploring what respondents had learned was to ask them what they had not learned. Were there any questions they still had? Was there anything they found confusing? Such questions illuminated the content and purposes of the meditation classes. They also highlighted the limits of learning through ritualizing.

When I asked John what he had not learned, he said he was curious about some of the symbolic elements at Friends of the Heart:

I suppose it would be interesting just to have someone who knew all the details about the statuary and the symbols on a lot of things. I think there are probably a great many more symbols on different tapestries that are on the walls that Buddhists would look at and say: oh, yes, that’s such and such. That represents this, that and the other. I’m seeing them and not knowing what they are.

While this statement indicates mere curiosity on John’s part—he made it clear he was not interested in Buddhism as a religion—it is an indication of something that was not explained at the Insight meditation class. Students engaged in ritualized practices, but were not always informed about the ritual objects or symbols present in the meditation halls.

Other respondents suggested there were some gaps in learning about particular meditation practices, the correct ways to do them and what their benefits were. Nicolette said:

There’s stuff I haven’t learned, probably mostly because... I haven’t been a good enough student.... And I’ve made up a nice little list of the goals and a list of all the practices that might help, but I am unclear as to... You know, people talk about: this is a grounding meditation and this is a calming meditation. And I want to learn: what does that mean? I kind of want a magic bullet approach. Today, I need calming, so what do I do? Or: today I

need to improve my emotional health by engendering compassion, but I've got five minutes: what do I do? I would like to learn something very practical like that.

Nicolette evidently had learned something about the two kinds of meditation discussed above, but felt that she still needed to learn more about how to perform them. Dennis felt that the teaching at the Friends of the Heart class had been very thorough, but, like Nicolette, he sometimes wondered if he had learned enough about meditation.

I don't think anything has come up that I haven't been able to ask or get answered. The resources are there if you have questions. What I'm sort of wondering is if there is ever a point where it all sort of clicks. I guess I sometimes you wonder if you're doing things right and if you're getting the full benefit. That might be a bad way to put it, but at the end result, when you've got a lot of experience and you've been doing it for a while, what does that feel like? So I'm wondering, will something sort of click where you know you've [got it]. So, that's sort of a wondering going forward, I guess.

With this response, Dennis indicated an understanding that a certain amount of practice is required in order to know the "right way" to meditate and to experience its benefits. He had learned that the goal was to keep practicing and evaluating his practice until it began to feel right. Dennis had questions about how to get to that point, but he also believed that such questions could not be answered by someone else. The answers would come through experience. Dennis, therefore, was aware of the value of experiential, psychomotor learning: practicing, adjusting, and perfecting his skills and abilities. Similar to workshops, Friends of the Heart classes were not meant to be the end of the learning process. Commitment to a regular personal meditation practice was seen as the next step.

Several students expressed a kind of equanimity about what they did not know or understand, indicating that it was just fine if there were questions they still had or things they had not yet learned. There was a noticeable trend among both Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti students that learning would take its own time. Alan said: "The questions I have, I will find the answers to." Brenda said she wanted to experience rather than

intellectualize, and that she learned by “not rushing to learn.” Carol said she was missing out on some of the teachings because she had not attended FP, where students explored Kelsang Gyatso’s commentary texts line by line. Even so, Carol was content with her current level of participation: “I’m not getting as deep as I could and maybe my little brain is happy to be there at the moment. This is where I am along that path.” Gwen said that she thought she should have questions, but she did not. “And that’s like how I approach t’ai chi. I do it, and we shall see what comes.” Tanit said that she did not understand the practice of finding feeling or emotion located in the body. But, she said: “that’s okay. I think that’s probably what I’m enjoying about it [the class] so much. It sounds a bit trite, but everything is right. ... Everything you don’t understand, this is fine.” Tanit was confident that the answers would come in their own time. “I think there’s a lot that’s unanswered, but I am really comfortable with that. ... I feel that I’m on a journey, and I’m enjoying the journey.” In an interesting reflection of Schechner’s description of theatre workshop performers, Margaret said she was a “pretty blank slate.”

It would appear that some of the students’ learning experiences had also affected their attitudes towards learning itself: many were at peace with what they had not learned. Such equanimity thus attests to respondents’ receptivity in the context of learning meditation and Buddhist teachings. It is similar to the attitude expressed by those who said they chose to avoid too much learning. Allowing answers to come in their own time and avoiding seeking out too much cognitive knowledge may indicate a preference for affective learning tasks: valuing, absorbing, gaining a deeper appreciation over time for new outlooks and orientations. But unconcern over things yet unlearned also suggests that some things can only be learned with time and experience; that learning through the practice was more important than asking questions and gaining knowledge. Practice, repetition, gaining familiarity and eventually expertise: these are psychomotor tasks.



Another question I asked Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti students was:

Does learning at the meditation classes differ from learning subjects at school or job skills?

This question was intended to encourage respondents to reflect on the types of learning that took place at meditation classes. In most cases, students contrasted learning meditation or Buddhist teachings to learning on a technical or cognitive level.

When I spoke with Tanit, much of her conversation concerned various skills and techniques involved in learning meditation: its postures and how to sit comfortably; its meditative practices and how to concentrate; and so on. Even so, when asked to compare learning at Friends of the Heart to learning school subjects or job skills, she distinguished learning technical skills from learning meditation.

It interesting because I'm learning about Buddhism right now and I just got into a series of classes on CAD, which is a computer program. Somehow, there's a difference about learning a skill. CAD is out here [Tanit gestured in front of her]. I'm on my mouse and I'm controlling a screen and I'm drawing something. And meditating is inside. It's more profound in some way than learning CAD. And I enjoyed learning CAD, too. But I'm not thinking about how it connects me to my world, how I see.... It's a different consciousness. Because, interestingly enough, I draw and paint and that is more connected to the Buddhist practice of meditation because I'm thinking about what I'm doing and I'm laying down a piece of paper or a colour and then I'm thinking, okay is that where it should be? And it's completely personal.... So, there's this internal questioning—is this right? Does it need to be here?—which I find in the meditation. You know, is this right for me? It doesn't matter about the autoCAD standards, it's not applicable. So I find the meditation has more to do with creating than learning technical skills.

In this response, Tanit was referring to the overall processes and effects of learning meditation, rather than learning its individual skills or methods. She was drawing a distinction between the objectives of learning autoCAD and those of meditation: learning the computer program had specific external results, while meditation's effects were internal, and “more profound.” Despite the fact that autoCAD is a computer drawing program, Tanit distinguished it from other forms of drawing and painting, which she said

were more creative and personal—qualities that she associated with meditation. The distinction she drew thus highlighted the affective elements of learning meditation—values and attitudes—rather than physical abilities or motor skills.

Marlon referred to the intellectual activity of the mind as a skill, and contrasted it to learning through meditation, which he saw as a way of gaining an understanding of how the mind works.

The other types of learning that I have encountered, say in a job or even in the regular education that I had in school, they often asked us to use our mind to achieve something. You know, if you're in a job, you work out a certain skill; you use your mind to do that. Here, the learning is inward. The other type of learning that I had was that we use our mind to achieve something, like a skill, or construct certain things. Here ... we learn about ourselves, in particular our mind, and how our mind works and how to produce positive minds and how to get rid of negative minds.

Marlon thus indicated that understanding the processes of the mind and the ability to achieve different states of mind—the things he learned through meditation and participation at Chandrakirti—were distinct from using the mind to certain ends—the things he learned to do at school or on a job. While Tanit contrasted meditation to technical skills and Marlon contrasted meditation to cognitive abilities, both regarded learning at the meditation classes as more inward—more about the self than the external world—than learning at school or on the job.

Like Marlon, Gwen indicated that learning about meditation or Buddhism was distinct from the intellectual kind of learning that takes place when learning subjects at school. She said that learning about Buddhism was discovering “a way of being in the world,” and compared it to philosophy, through which one explores the processes of the mind rather than adding to its content. Gwen also compared learning Buddhist practices to practicing t'ai chi. Gwen said:

I think learning Buddhism is a bit like a learning how to think, like in philosophy. So, if you think: I'm studying a way of being in the world. You can do that through philosophy right? This is my philosophy of life. Or you could do it through t'ai chi for a while. I did it through t'ai chi: What does it mean to recreate balance and harmony over and over again? Buddhists [ask]: What does it mean to be a compassionate human being? And continuing to develop in that way is bigger than understanding Math 101 or geography. Because I think it gives you a framework in which to view things. So everything that you're viewing, you view through a particular heart-mind sort of connection. So I think it's different, I think it is bigger than one little subject.

Like Tanit and Marlon, Gwen indicated that learning Buddhist meditation had a more holistic effect on the learner than gaining particular knowledge or skills related to a particular subject. Gwen spoke of creating balance and harmony and learning to be compassionate—affective processes of internalizing and enacting new attitudes and values.

Gwen was not the only respondent to distinguish the heart from the mind or brain. As noted earlier, Diane distinguished between head level and heart level learning. Anna associated learning with the mind or intellect while describing her experiences at Friends of the Heart as heart-felt. She said “I think because the practices there that I have seen, they sit with my heart so readily that I don't really think of it as learning.” Anna thus affirmed the common association of learning with what goes on in the mind.

In Alan's view, learning about Buddhism also had wider effects and applications than learning school subjects or job skills.

I think there's a huge difference. I think with the Buddhism, it's really changing yourself. For example, if you try to get a new skill or a new trade, it would be all about you, the idea of gain or whatever. The Buddhism, to me, actually is giving up. It is giving up what you might have thought. It's like changing a lot of what I would have thought.

Alan regarded learning as gaining something: a new skill, for example. That, he said, was all about the person learning, whereas Chandrakirti classes were showing him ways to shift his focus away from himself, and to let things go. In a sense, he was speaking about gaining

new attitudes and behaviours, but he phrased it in terms of losing old ones. Similarly, Margaret regarded learning as gaining something, whereas her involvement at Friends of the Heart meant letting things go. Learning meditation, in Margaret's view, meant letting go of brain content rather than gaining something new.

I guess much of the formal learning that I have done has been book learning. You know, applying your mind, trying to fill your mind with information. Meditation for me, initially anyways, is about emptying my mind and there's also the kind of mind/body connection. That's quite different from my formal education experiences. It's also more about me as a person rather than me as a worker or task kind of person.... It's very apparent to me that that is a place that's values-driven and has a spiritual component to it. And, to a large extent, it is a place for personal, inner kind of work as opposed to a club or a library or whatever, where it's either very social, not about looking inward but interacting with people, or acquiring book knowledge.

In this response, Margaret, like Marlon, Tanit and Gwen, associated other kinds of learning with the intellect and meditation with inward processes affecting larger aspects of the self. Margaret identified learning meditation with values and spirituality—elements of the third and fourth domains of learning developed above. Responses comparing meditation or Buddhism to affective-type learning, in fact, were given by most interview participants.

Even so, two participants highlighted not attitudes and values but the physical aspects of meditation. John was one. Significantly, he compared even the concentration techniques to physical activities. When asked to compare learning meditation to learning school subjects or job skills, he said:

Oh, well it's very different than that. It's much more like a physical activity. Oddly enough, for being as mental, for sitting still, it has much more in common with physical activities, in terms of practicing and doing it over and over and not being very good at the beginning and getting better as you do it.

John thus regarded meditation primarily as a psychomotor activity: Even given its stillness and the emphasis on what takes place in the mind, he believed that meditation was more

comparable to a physical than a cognitive activity. Similarly, Dennis regarded learning meditation as developing a skill. He compared learning to meditate to other types of learning as follows:

There are more similarities than differences.... I'll give you an example. I joined a running club with a friend of mine. Again, you meet every Monday and then you have to get your runs in every week, and if you don't do that you sort of fall behind. So, jogging, I guess is the same thing as meditation in that you have to do it at regular times throughout the week instead of on one day, do a run for an hour or something. So, from a discipline aspect I would say the two are similar. Yeah, with other things, too, it's a skill. I look at it as a skill you have to learn and develop over the time.

Dennis also pointed out that there were similarities in the way a learner takes in information, mulls it over and perhaps discusses it with others. This was another reference to learning as a skill rather than acquiring cognitive knowledge. Following the above remarks, I asked him about learning from an intellectual perspective: Was learning meditation like mathematics classes at school? He replied:

Well, I wouldn't say so. I mean, in the sense of the learning process where you read something for the first time, think about it and then maybe read it again and then maybe discuss it with somebody, it's the same thing that we're doing in meditation class. You might read about something, try it out, and discuss it. So, I guess that process in learning might be similar. And I guess, also, if you don't do something for a long time the skills get rusty, so if you don't meditate for a long time you get rusty. At the same time, if you're out of practice at doing math and problem-solving, you can get rusty with that as well. So, I guess there are some similarities.

It is informative that Dennis referred to learning meditation as a kind of discipline. He understood it as training, learning and perfecting a skill through practice, repetition and vetting ideas with others; procedures similar to the restoration of behaviour or learning on the level of the psychomotor domain. While Dennis highlighted similarities between meditation and training at a running club or learning in a mathematics class, his references were not to intellectual or cognitive types of learning.

The terms respondents used to describe learning meditation or Buddhist teachings included the following: profound, positive, inward, personal, letting go rather than acquiring, discipline, physical. Several respondents felt there was a transformative quality to learning meditation, namely learning life-changing views and practices. Overall, respondents identified learning at meditation classes more often with learning on the affective level—in terms of a value system that changes attitudes and behaviours—and the psychomotor—in terms of the physical techniques or concentration practices. While few of them explicitly referred their learning as ritualized, several of the responses included descriptions corresponding to ritual qualities: learning about meditation or Buddhism was somehow special, it was valued highly, and it had aspects of spirituality because it related to the experience of the whole person.

While the majority of students and teachers regarded cognitive-level learning as distinct from the main goals of the meditation classes, students did gain some new factual and conceptual information, particularly of Buddhist terms and symbols. At first round interviews, for example, several newcomers had already learned some common Buddhist terms such as dharma and sangha. By second-round interviews, a few had learned some less familiar terms like *bodhicitta*.<sup>49</sup> Gerald, at his second interview, described placement and analytical meditation, demonstrating that he had learned these terms and their meanings in the GP classes. Other factual knowledge students learned included: the names of different practices like insight (known to most respondents by the Pāli, *vipassanā*) or black-and-white meditation, metta or loving kindness meditation, and the names of certain mudras along with their functions or meanings. A few had learned the names of various Tibetan deities and of certain ritual objects, as well as their uses, symbols and meanings, although, as noted, this information was not given in introductory classes.

Neither was it the objective of introductory classes to provide students with factual data about Buddhist tradition, its history, schools, texts and so on. Even the talks or lectures did not cover much information of this kind. What respondents did learn about Buddhism as either a philosophical tradition or world religion came mostly from reading, their own self-directed research, and sometimes from informal questions of teachers and other members. When asked if they had learned about Buddhist history, philosophy or doctrine at the Friends of the Heart class both John and Dennis said not much. Erin said, “No, not really. Really basic knowledge.... Nothing that I could even speak of.” But then she said, “maybe I have, but... haven’t really known it as such.” Erin thus suspected that some of Meg’s talks were based on Buddhist teachings, but were not identified as such. Describing her introductory class teachings, Meg affirmed that she took an eclectic approach:

In this class, I will certainly utilize concepts of ethical precepts. But we don’t learn the noble path...<sup>50</sup> we don’t learn any of that.... So, they don’t learn Buddhist stuff. I might use analogies, stories from the Buddhist tradition. But then I might use stories from other traditions as well, but they are from the sacred traditions.

Because Friends of the Heart teachers drew on Buddhist and other sources without identifying them, students were, in fact, learning more about Buddhism than they were aware. Even so, the teachings were centred on ethics and practices rather than any factual detail about history, philosophy or doctrine.

Diane said that Atisha Centre was where she encountered the most “real teachings,” those that appealed to her desire for cognitive learning.

Sort of like Buddhism 101. Where do we go to get that? That’s why I like the woman who’s teaching at Atisha, because at least I’m getting some of that. It’s not at an academic level, which is not what I really want either, I don’t want to get a degree.... Certainly, the Wednesday meditation class [at Friends of the Heart] is not a place where you learn about those things, because the purpose of those classes was insight meditation.

I asked Diane if it was important to know about the history of Buddhism, its philosophy or teachings, and she replied:

To a certain extent. I'd like to understand the framework.... I don't really want to delve into all of the history, but just generally to understand what it means to be a Tibetan Buddhist or Vajrayāna Buddhist.... And I don't know why there needs to be so many Buddhists out there. I guess I don't know enough about the differences that you need to have so many different kinds of them around the city.

Like many newcomer respondents, Diane was unaware that varied cultural influences over extensive geographical regions had resulted in the development of many diverse Buddhist schools.

The interviews revealed some specific information about Buddhism that respondents had learned. When speaking about his meditation practice, for example, Alan said: "I can always go home and drink a glass of wine. But I can't do that now, I've got to meditate first." Alan had learned that drinking wine before meditation is, as he put it, "a no-no." He said that this was "their idea," indicating that he had heard about the restriction on alcohol from GP teachers. The fifth of the five Buddhist precepts, which are traditional guidelines for laypersons, advocates against the consumption of fermented drinks.<sup>51</sup> When I asked Alan if he had heard of the five precepts, he said he was not sure. "Are they things to give up?" he asked. I described them to him, and he said that the teachers at Chandrakirti had mentioned them from time to time. "Observance of them increases your merit for a good rebirth," Alan said, "a better life the next time around. They hold them up as good things to do, but they don't tell people they should do them." Hence some of the factual information Alan had learned included one of the precepts' restrictions, but no specific knowledge of the precepts themselves nor of their traditional origins.

I have argued that the ritualized nature of meditation class settings, content and learning activities facilitated the reception, acceptance and valuing of what was taught at the



meditation courses. Even so, many respondents, especially newcomers, did not readily accept certain Buddhist teachings, particularly those related to karma and rebirth. Introductory courses at both centres were intended to be inclusive and widely available to all, whether participants were interested in Buddhism or not. The level of interest in Buddhism was higher among Chandrakirti respondents than those attending Friends of the Heart classes. Unlike Friends of the Heart and several other western Buddhist centres I have encountered, Chandrakirti lectures did not shy away from Buddhist religious concepts. The factual information that GP students learned included details about karmic rebirth, including the different realms of rebirth (heavenly, human, animal and hell-realms), and the belief that our actions have lingering consequences that, if unfulfilled at the time of death, cause us to be reborn.

Despite the fact that many westerners interested in Buddhist practices are not willing to wholly accept the idea of karma and rebirth, Chandrakirti teachers were rarely apologetic about presenting the karmic rebirth cosmology. Even so, several Chandrakirti participants I spoke to were uneasy with the concepts surrounding karmic rebirth. Alan, for example, said he had read an article in which Kelsang Gyatso wrote about discovering his mother reborn in the child of friends living in England. Alan said he had intellectual difficulties with such beliefs, and could not bring himself to accept, logically, that reincarnation occurs as Gyatso described. But Alan also said that such beliefs were not an obstacle to his participation in Buddhist-based practices or at Chandrakirti.

At Friends of the Heart, Meg noted that westerners were often doubtful about karmic rebirth.

We never taught reincarnation. Never. Personally, because I'm a little bit wavering myself on that concept. And secondly, because it just puts people off, and it's just plain not relevant at this stage.... I'm a little cautious about that, because I think it has been treated in a new-agey way that is

inappropriate.... We won't necessarily talk about karma. We will talk about action and reaction. Sure. We get that. As westerners, we really get that.

Few Friends of the Heart respondents expressed concerns over karmic rebirth, for the simple reason that it was not taught at the classes. Diane, who had attended Friends of the Heart introductory and Tibetan Meditation classes, had learned about karma at Atisha Centre's GP classes, and said: "I have to say I was a bit disturbed about karma." Gwen, who had twenty years' experience learning and teaching t'ai chi and had encountered many eastern religious concepts including karmic rebirth, said that she was still working out her feelings on the subject.

Do I really believe in reincarnation? I don't know that it matters yet. Certain questions don't matter yet. The truth of the practice and the fact that it's good for myself and the rest of the universe, and I believe that, is what matters. Whether I come back again, I don't know.

Meditation students at both centres learned westernized forms of Buddhist teachings and practices that were adapted for their audiences. The sources of the teachings were at times obscured, and occasionally traditional teachings were slightly watered down in order to make them more appealing to westerners. Meg, for example, taught action and reaction rather than traditional views on karma. This type of approach made classes approachable for introductory students who were usually less interested in learning about Buddhist doctrine. Adapting teachings to suit a particular audience is, in fact, a very old Buddhist practice called *upāya* or skilful means. Still, as Chandrakirti respondents pointed out, the emphasis on karmic rebirth may have caused concern, but it was not a barrier to their participation. Naturally, newcomers to Chandrakirti for whom such teachings were a barrier would not have been around long enough to participate in interviews, so it is not possible to say how many people may have been discouraged from participating.

## Conclusion

Cognitive learning only went so far in the meditation classes. Some respondents were uncomfortable with some of the information they encountered, others were unconcerned and still others felt that too much cognitive knowledge could be a hindrance to other goals that they believed were more important. Respondents' reflections on learning, drawn out through the specific interview questions discussed above, provided the initial evidence in my research that there were distinct types of learning gained in meditation courses.

Bloom's taxonomy is a useful model for understanding what and how respondents learned, primarily because it recognizes distinct types of learning and because it describes learning processes that have notable similarities to ritualizing and restoration of behaviour. In order to determine the ways in which ritualizing contributes to learning, it is necessary to recognize that learning takes place in realms other than the cognitive. Learned ritualized behaviours—that is, behaviours that are received as an object or material from a source other than the performer and then experimented with—fall under the psychomotor domain. Moreover, psychomotor learning—whether it is consciously altered behaviour in daily life or meditation postures, gestures and concentration techniques—initiates affective changes. As psychomotor learning in meditation is explored in the next chapter, a better picture of the pattern linking learning domains will develop.

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon A. Walter and Stephen E. Marks, *Experiential Learning and Change* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1981), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Rogers, *What Is the Difference: A New Critique of Adult Learning and Teaching*, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Rogers's fourth term, "understanding," was substituted for "comprehension" under the cognitive domain by the team who revised Bloom's taxonomy in 2001. David R. Krathwohl, "A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An Overview," *Theory into practice* 41, no. 4 (2002): 215.

<sup>4</sup> Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: The Cognitive Domain*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> ———, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: The Cognitive Domain*; and D. R. Krathwohl, B. S. Bloom, and B. B. Masia, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook II: Affective Domain*. (New York: David McKay, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: The Cognitive Domain*, 7-8.

<sup>7</sup> Krathwohl, "A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An Overview," 214.

<sup>8</sup> ———, "A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An Overview," 215.

<sup>9</sup> Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove Press, 1974).

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- <sup>10</sup> Étienne Lamotte, *Histoire Du Bouddhisme Indien* (Louvain: Institut Orientaliste Bibliothèque de l'Université, Place Mgr Ladeuze, 1958), 48, my translation.
- <sup>11</sup> Krathwohl, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook Ii: Affective Domain*, cited in Teaching and Learning with Technology, "Bloom's Taxonomy," Pennsylvania State University, [http://tlt.psu.edu/suggestions/research/Blooms\\_Taxonomy.shtml](http://tlt.psu.edu/suggestions/research/Blooms_Taxonomy.shtml).
- <sup>12</sup> See, for example, Chris Frakes, "Do the Compassionate Flourish? Overcoming Anguish and the Impulse Towards Violence," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 14 (2007).
- <sup>13</sup> McLaren, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*, 6.
- <sup>14</sup> ———, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*, 202. McLaren takes a negative view of the hegemony of the instructional rituals at the school he studied. He is influenced by the relative powerlessness of a particular ethnically-defined group of students compared to that of the teacher. His concerns are that students internalize (perhaps unwittingly) worldviews and codes of behaviour that inculcate them into a particular social class and culture.
- <sup>15</sup> Krathwohl, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook Ii: Affective Domain*, cited in Technology, "Bloom's Taxonomy."
- <sup>16</sup> Technology, "Bloom's Taxonomy."
- <sup>17</sup> Anita Harrow, *A Taxonomy of Psychomotor Domain: A Guide for Developing Behaviour Objectives* (New York: David McKay, 1972).
- <sup>18</sup> Schechner, "Restoration of Behavior," 442.
- <sup>19</sup> ———, "Restoration of Behavior," 441.
- <sup>20</sup> ———, "Magnitudes of Performance," 36.
- <sup>21</sup> Crossley, "Ritual, Body Technique and (Inter)Subjectivity," 31.
- <sup>22</sup> Schechner, "Restoration of Behavior," 457.
- <sup>23</sup> Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 69.
- <sup>24</sup> ———, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 69.
- <sup>25</sup> Jennings, "On Ritual Knowledge," 326.
- <sup>26</sup> Schechner, "Restoration of Behavior," 443-5.
- <sup>27</sup> ———, "Restoration of Behavior," 443-5.
- <sup>28</sup> Krathwohl, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook Ii: Affective Domain*, cited in Technology, "Bloom's Taxonomy."
- <sup>29</sup> See, for example, Schechner's discussion of Ekman's experiment in which muscle-by-muscle construction of certain facial expressions resulted in subjects experiencing the associated emotions. Schechner, "Magnitudes of Performance," 30.
- <sup>30</sup> ———, "Magnitudes of Performance," 40.
- <sup>31</sup> In addition to the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the three wisdoms can be found in the *Vibhaṅga* of the *Abhidhamma* of the Pāli Canon, in Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, and in Sanskrit sources such as Vasubandhu's *Abidharmakośa-bhāṣyam* and in *Bhāvanākrama* I and III of Kāmalasila. H-Buddhism network email communication, Brian Nichols, January 2008.
- <sup>32</sup> "Three Wisdoms", in *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, ed. Charles Muller (2007).
- <sup>33</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* III:219
- <sup>34</sup> Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 486. The passage is preceded by another three wisdoms: "of the learner, the non-learner and one who is neither," which are also listed as the three kinds of persons. H-Buddhism network email communication, Brian Nichols, January 2008.
- <sup>35</sup> H-Buddhism network email communication, Brian Nichols, January 2008.
- <sup>36</sup> Early Buddhist doctrine, particularly the Four Noble Truths, teaches that the root of all suffering is delusion or the desires that arise from delusion. In this perspective, the ordinary mind does not realize the true nature of the world, which is that everything, including the self or ego, is impermanent and nothing has inherent existence outside of its causes and conditions.
- <sup>37</sup> Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, Revised Edition*, 75.
- <sup>38</sup> Lamotte, *Histoire Du Bouddhisme Indien*, 49.
- <sup>39</sup> Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, Revised Edition*, 75.
- <sup>40</sup> Lamotte, *Histoire Du Bouddhisme Indien*, 49.
- <sup>41</sup> ———, *Histoire Du Bouddhisme Indien*, 49.
- <sup>42</sup> Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, Revised Edition*, 75.
- <sup>43</sup> ———, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, Revised Edition*, 86.

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<sup>44</sup> The Tibetan terms for *śamatha* and *vipassanā*, which Powers gives as *zhi gnas* and *lhag mthong* respectively, are not generally known or used by western practitioners. ———, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, Revised Edition*, 86.

<sup>45</sup> “Vipassanā,” in *The Oxford dictionary of world religions*, ed. John Bowker (Oxford and New York: 1997), 1025.

<sup>46</sup> Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, Revised Edition*, 86.

<sup>47</sup> Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *The New Meditation Handbook* (Ulverston, UK: Tharpa Publications, 2004), 8.

<sup>48</sup> Several Friends of the Heart respondents also noted that everyday activities could be performed as though they were meditations, meaning that the concentration and mindfulness generated in meditation might be carried into other activities.

<sup>49</sup> Bodhicitta refers to the commitment to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

<sup>50</sup> In Buddhist doctrine, the Eightfold Path is the fourth of the Four Noble Truths, which are among the earliest teachings and are common to most Buddhist schools. The Eightfold path advises practitioners to practice right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. Specific traditional teachings such as these were not included in Friends of the Heart meditation classes. While such teachings were sometimes mentioned in GP lectures I attended, rarely were traditional identifiers such as “Four Noble Truths” used. What might be regarded as technical terms were kept to a minimum so as not to confuse or alienate newcomers.

<sup>51</sup> The first four lay precepts advise practitioners against killing or causing harm, stealing, sexual misconduct, and speaking untruths. For a detailed discussion of Buddhist precepts and ethics, see Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*.

## Chapter Five: Ritualizing

This chapter explores how and what students learned through embodiment and enactment; that is, through the physical aspects of ritualizing. With its silence and stillness, meditation is not as explicitly performative as other forms ritual activities. All the same, it is a ritualized practice. Later in the chapter I explore meditation postures, gestures and concentration techniques as forms of ritualizing through which respondents gained new knowledge, attitudes or skills. But there were other formal practices performed at the meditation classes that also served as learning opportunities. I begin, therefore, with a look at bows, prostrations, mudras and chanting.

Few newcomers among the interview respondents spoke about such practices of their own accord, a fact that indicated that they were less interested in formal practices other than meditation. I made a point, however, of asking respondents whether they thought prostrations, chanting and the like contributed to learning. Some respondents did not think that they did. John, for example, said: “No, I wouldn’t say so. I don’t think they do. You learn that they exist, that people are saying this and are doing this.” John’s primary interest was in meditation, and he was not interested in the other practices he encountered at Friends of the Heart. With respect to other formal practices, he gained a bit of new information—knowledge of the existence of such practices—but no more.

Tanit spoke about what she learned about the prayers recited at Friends of the Heart.

I’m trying to learn them right now, and I realize actually that’s the part that I’m not aware of. I’m thinking: oh, I don’t know it, and will I ever have to learn that? Have to. Oh, the language choices are so interesting. So, I’ve allowed myself, at the sessions, to simply listen to it.... So that is not something I’m specifically aware of yet. And I realize, when I meditate at home, it doesn’t even cross my mind. I don’t do that part of it.... So, yeah,

that's not integrated for me at this point. But it makes sense... that you are consciously making a decision to think about enlightenment, truth, changing, using awareness. And that you are truly capable of enlightenment. That's pretty phenomenal.

While Tanit had some reluctance to learning the prayers and was more concerned with getting her meditation posture and techniques right, she did indicate that, with repetition, she would not only learn the prayers, but would begin to understand their meanings.

By repeating the refuge each time, you have a different response to it each time. For me, right now, it's kind of a bunch of words and I don't know them. But I recognize that that will change, that it's a kind of a formalization: I'm about to meditate, I'm about to think about things, I'm approaching a sacred space, all of those things. And it's very helpful.

Tanit said that what she understood of the Friends of the Heart refuge prayer "made sense," particularly its references to a commitment to follow the path to enlightenment. She said that one of the meanings she attributed to the prayer was the idea that the goal of enlightenment was possible. At this early stage, however, the prayer served a different purpose: it set up her meditation practice, she said. She associated the prayer with the start of meditation and reciting it or listening to it gave her a sense of the sacred space she was entering. With this statement, Tanit was referring either to the shrine room or to the internal "space" she would generate in meditation.

In fact, many respondents claimed that practices such as prostrations, bows, mudras and chanting primarily gave them a sense of the setting, the practices, the teachers and the teachings as something special or worthy of respect. For instance, when I asked Nicolette if postures, gestures or chants helped her learn anything, she responded: "Learn about what? Well, they certainly help me learn how to do postures, gestures and chants." But then she said:

Beyond that, if I'm in the right mood they can teach me things like: how to be a good student, which is actually a useful thing; and all the things that are around that like how to be patient, how to be a good listener, those kind of

practices; and then beyond that, if you're doing prostrations, which is the weirdest one for me, once you learn physically how to do it without keeling over, then the visualizations that you're supposed to be doing can teach you about who your teachers are, how you feel towards them, what they've given you; hopefully it can teach you how to engender feelings of gratitude and generosity. So, that's the kind of thing you can learn.

Nicolette's response touches on several key aspects of learning: how to be a good student which is effectively learning about learning, learning patience, which is an affective type of learning; and learning skills like how to perform prostrations or visualization techniques. Nicolette also suggested that practices like prostrations generated a sense of respect and gratitude for one's teachers.

When asked if formal practices helped him learn in any way, Alan said:

I don't think they would really, but I think what it would teach me is to respect the teacher, the teacher has the knowledge. The teacher's earned the right or the status.... So taking the shoes off is part of that and the bowing and prostrating, whatever they call it. I probably wouldn't do that but that depends on the level that you probably put this person up on. Because by going down as low as you can, you are obviously raising... you should always keep them higher than you. But I think it's probably just showing respect. They don't seem to be bothered, it seems to me, the monks and nuns, one way or the other. I think it's more of the student showing respect. That's how I sense it.

Both Alan and Nicolette initially said that no, the formal practices do not lead to learning, then revised their statements by indicating that certain practices might teach students to respect their teachers. Their responses indicate that developing a sense of respect is not something they readily connected with learning. Even so, several other respondents agreed on the point Nicolette and Alan raised; that prostrations, bows, mudras and chants primarily conveyed a sense of decorum.

### **Ritualizing and decorum**

Decorum is one of Grimes's six modes of ritual sensibility.<sup>1</sup> It takes place when the cultural patterns and repetitions that constitute ritualization become part of a "system of



expectations” to which we, as members of that culture, feel we ought to conform.<sup>2</sup> At meditation classes, respondents observed or practiced the bows, prostrations, mudras or chants; through these observations or practices, they gained an understanding that the space, the teachers, or the teachings were considered to be special, elevated or even sacred; this sense raised certain expectations of behaviour that should or should not be exhibited in the space. The bows, prostrations and mudras are formal practices that expressed a sense of decorum. Grimes points out that decorum is often invisible to its performers,<sup>3</sup> but we become acutely aware of it when it is breached. Decorum, the expected appropriate behaviours in the shrine rooms at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti, hinged on what students learned about those spaces while there.

Carol said that newcomers sometimes observed teachers and experienced members bowing, performing the prayer mudra or even performing prostrations at the GP classes.

By example they [newcomers] see how things are. And it’s almost like a given, that you just behave.... It was like everybody understood. It comes with an innate understanding of how you conduct yourself there and the respect that was generated.

Carol made an important point: people (and this would be especially true of adults) do not learn the expected decorum on entering a space like the Chandrakirti shrine room. The ritual setting and formal practices performed within it tell us what kind of a space it is; with that knowledge, most of us have an understanding, likely derived from experiences in other, similar settings, of the expected behaviours in the new space. For instance, Diane said:

No one has ever said this to me, maybe I read it somewhere. The space where the altar is is somewhat sacred and you behave in a way that is in keeping with being in somewhat of a sacred space. So you don’t yell or boisterously laugh or call out to each other.

Without being told, Diane knew the kinds of behaviours that would be inappropriate in a Buddhist shrine room. Similarly, Gerald made his own assessment of decorum in the Chandrakirti shrine room when he complained that another student wore a hat in the class. As Gwen put it, “The energy of the space, with the altar, it begs for a certain kind of respect and humility when you enter into it.” Once a sacred space is created and recognized via its ritual objects and ritualized activities, our cultural expectations inform us of the appropriate decorum.

Another way of learning about expected decorum is through various prohibitions. For example, Chandrakirti members Carol, Marlon and Priscilla mentioned that the prayer booklets should not be placed on the floor, nor should Kelsang Gyatso’s books. Catherine Rathbun noted the same prohibition at the Tibetan meditation classes: even though the prayer texts that we used were photocopies held together by paper clips, they were reproductions of ancient and revered texts, she said, and the protocol was to keep them off of the floor. Another rule of decorum was to avoid pointing one’s feet in the direction of the teacher or any of the icons. Gwen had learned this rule on a Friends of the Heart retreat when she lay with her feet pointing towards Catherine, who then corrected her. At Chandrakirti, Marlon also mentioned the rule about the direction of the feet. Most newcomer respondents were unaware of this prohibition, indicating that it was not a concern at introductory classes.

Performing prostrations, bows, removing shoes and keeping texts off of the floor initiated an affective learning process. These practices suggested that the space and the teachers and teachings associated with it were worthy of respect. Students then assessed that sense of respect and interpreted it through their culturally existing knowledge of decorum and adjusted their behaviour accordingly.

## Prostrations

At introductory classes, prostrations were rarely performed, but many newcomers had learned about the practice or observed others performing them. Some had attended more formal rituals at the centres, such as empowerments, where all participants were encouraged to either bow or prostrate to the shrines or the teachers. Diane had encountered prostration practice at the Chenrezig and Tara empowerments at Friends of the Heart and the Heart Jewel prayer service at Atisha Centre. I asked her if she thought it was possible to learn about prostrations simply through performing them. She replied:

I have certainly read that people do learn through performing them. Prostrations in particular. Because it is very difficult for western people to do that. So, in stuff that I have read, I have read other people who, through that process, have come to learn something. But I'm not interested—it doesn't mean that I won't in some—I have a fairly prescribed interest right now. I don't know where that will take me, but right now it's in meditation, it's not in any of the—I don't even know what I would call them—rituals.<sup>4</sup>

While Diane's motivations for coming to Buddhist practices were in part spiritual, she was not willing to engage in the rituals she encountered. Consequently, she had had no personal experience with prostrations. "Personally," she said, "I have an aversion. It means bowing down to a god or to something. That's the other thing about Buddhism. There is no god in a sense. We can all be a Buddha, and we are." Although she hinted that her interests might change, for the time being Diane regarded Buddhism as non-theistic and strictly meditative, and felt that prostrations were extraneous.

Many western Buddhist sympathizers are emphatically unsympathetic to prostration practice. They give several reasons for this view, from the physical to the ideological. Prostrations are a repetitive weight-bearing activity that can involve considerable physical exertion. To perform a full body prostration, the practitioner begins in a standing position, usually with the hands in the prayer mudra, and then kneels to the

floor. Placing the palms down on the floor, the practitioner then stretches full out face down on the ground, stretching the arms above the head. Sliding the hands back along the ground, the practitioner then kneels and returns to the standing position, replacing the hands in the prayer mudra. Together, these movements constitute one full body prostration. The process is almost always repeated at least three times, but some practitioners perform hundreds of prostrations at a time. It can be quite a workout, and some people find it very hard on the knees, hips, back or lower legs.

While some practitioners claim that the physical aspect is the reason they do not perform prostrations, westerners more often have ideological difficulties with the practice. Reasons for this may stem from Judeo-Christian prohibitions against worshipping or bowing before idols. Like Diane, many westerners assume that prostration practice signifies the worship of a deity. Tanit, in fact, expressed the same view. She said she did not perform bows or prostrations.

For me, somehow that is not important. I think what attracts me so much to Buddhism is that it isn't about a god. That is not the central aspect, and that is exactly what attracts me. Now, I understand the concept of working with devotion. For example, I was reading recently that maturity is behaving as if there were gods, knowing that there are not. And I think there's something really interesting [to that]. You know that there is no god figure up there saying: you need to be a good human being, but you behave that way because you believe that that is valid and important.

I then asked Tanit if bowing necessarily had to do with a deity, and she paused for a moment. "Okay, yes," she said. "In my mind it does. Interesting. But, for me, absolutely it does. So, that's something to consider." Tanit was not unwilling to perform other devotional practices like reciting the refuge and merit prayers, but the prostrations, in her mind, signified worship of a deity, a practice that did not appeal to what she regarded as a mature spiritual ethic.

Gwen also said she had not incorporated prostrations into her regular practice. “That comes from Catherine saying to me once: you don’t have to say or do anything that you don’t understand. Ever. If it doesn’t make sense to you, or you don’t understand it, just leave it alone. So, I feel really good about that.” As Gwen’s comments indicate, part of the problem with prostrations is that westerners are not familiar with the practice. Powers notes that in Tibetan culture, prostration practice is very popular with monastics and laypeople alike. People are often seen in large numbers prostrating before religious sites or important religious figures. Many practitioners circumambulate religious sites by performing full body prostrations. Some have even gone on long pilgrimages by performing prostrations, beginning each new prostration at the point where the fingertips rested with the last.<sup>5</sup> Prostration practice is believed to be valuable, as a vigorous physical activity, for overcoming negative karma.<sup>6</sup> It is also intended to counteract false pride, since the practitioner completely lowers him or herself to the ground. Prostration is also a means of requesting the aid of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Hence, in traditional expressions of Tibetan Buddhism, prostration practice is both devotional and theistic.

For western students to accept prostration practice, however, teachers often find it necessary to find new interpretations of the practice. Buddhist teachers in the West often assure their students that prostrations do not involve bowing down before an idol or a deity. Some teachers, for example, advocate it as a means of grounding oneself,<sup>7</sup> or as a repetitive physical activity that can produce meditative mind states. Catherine Rathbun said that full-body prostrations “de-armour the body” and open up its energy centres or *chakras*. “That’s something that I found doing them,” she said. “It’s not part of the traditional teaching. That’s my own experience.” This is an interpretation of prostration practice by a western teacher for her western students that does not involve devotional practice or deity worship.

Some of the experienced members I interviewed had a positive outlook on prostrations. Marlon felt that they were a very important part of his overall practice and had no problem with them. Although Priscilla said she had problems with her knees and feet and could not physically perform prostrations, she defended their use as a gesture of respect for the teachings. Marconi did prostrations every day and said that they felt “pretty cool.” He described a guru yoga<sup>8</sup> visualization that he incorporated into his prostration practice, “and I go through that visualization before I start my prostrations and I’m now able to have a deeper and a clearer and a far more interesting connection.” Marconi thus discovered that combining the visualization with the physical activity of the prostrations gave him a sense of mental clarity and a deeper, more personal response to the practice. Prostrations also helped Marconi develop an increased awareness of his body. While he said that the practice was sometimes painful, he regarded the pain as a learning experience. “Where does it hurt?” he asked himself, “and what are you holding there?” Pain, Marconi believed, resulted from tensions or negative emotions being held in the body, and prostration practice helped him recognize such areas and reflect on what was going on in his body.

David was the only experienced member of the four interviewed who said he disliked prostrations. Laughing, he said:

I can’t stand prostrations. It’s interesting talking to people, because some people are totally fine with prostrations. And then, it’s like, I can’t stand it. . . . It’s just weird. I think definitely there’s something physical and there’s something mentally uncomfortable about it too, that somehow I find very oppressive. So I don’t like it.

David was working through the Tibetan foundation practice under Catherine Rathbun’s guidance. Foundation practice, which consists of the Tibetan preliminary practices, includes the performance of one hundred thousand full body prostrations, and David was

working his way towards that goal. Even though he said he could not stand doing prostrations, he still performed them, hundreds of them in fact, every day. “You know,” he said, “I think the prostrations are working on me because I’m having some sort of really strong effect, something that I’m trying to step back from. So, let’s step toward it and see what happens.” In effect, David treated his own mental resistance to the practice as a learning experience. His response reflects a conviction that Catherine had expressed. “We learn the best,” she said, “when things go wrong or when things are difficult.”

Aware of the aversion that westerners often have to prostrations, most teachers at Chandrakirti gave students the option to perform prostrations or not. They were never required at GP classes, but the chanted prayer services usually began with three prostrations facing the shrine. At one Heart Jewel service I attended, an experienced member, recognizing me as a newcomer, told me: “we do prostrations; you don’t have to if you don’t want to.” Like experienced members at Friends of the Heart, however, some Chandrakirti members chose to undertake foundation practice and worked towards completing the requisite one hundred thousand full-body prostrations.<sup>9</sup>

At Friends of the Heart, I asked Catherine Rathbun about the importance of persisting with prostration practice in the West. She replied:

It’s up to the teachers to teach them. If you expect people to do something without explanation, you deserve the resistance you’re going to get. So, you will hear me sometimes say at the beginning of class: we will now do prostrations. If you are following this discipline, and are instructed in this, you should do three prostrations now. If you’re not, don’t worry, simply be aware or imagine that you’re coming into the presence of your teachers, and then sit down. So, in other words, bringing [students] back to the idea of what it is that being taught, rather than having people look around and trying to do something they don’t know what they’re doing.

Catherine thus suggested that students need to be taught something about prostrations, their symbolism or meanings first. Then, through the action, through the practice, they may learn other meanings.

Catherine was clearly aware that prostration practice did not appeal to many of her students. At a Tibetan Meditation class I attended, she mentioned the need to find an alternative practice for westerners. She said that a Tibetan might brag about having a great uncle who performed hundreds of thousands of prostrations until his knees bled. But, she said, her western students were going to their doctors and telling them what they were doing, and the doctors would say: “You’re doing *what?* Stop it!” Prostrations, Catherine said, ruin westerners’ knees. Because of this, she had developed an adapted form of prostration practice which she said was specifically for westerners. Rather than kneeling down to the floor, practitioners remained standing, bowing at the waist and placing their hands palms down on the knees. Then, turning the hands palms upwards, practitioners bowed more deeply before returning to the standing position, placing their hands in prayer mudra.

Diane told me that she more readily accepted the adapted prostrations Catherine taught than the to-the-floor prostrations she saw performed at Atisha centre.

Somehow it didn’t seem so bad to do because I guess what we were doing with Catherine the other day was the same thing, only in a different posture. ... But the concept should be the same. I didn’t have a problem with it standing up and bending over. ...

Diane was aware that the full prostration and Catherine’s bowing prostration were similar symbolic actions: she was not certain why she had an aversion to one and not the other. Her discomfort with prostration practice derived from a perceived connection to theism and religious devotion, and the adapted prostration should have carried the same meaning. For Diane, however, it did not. Perhaps because it was physically less difficult, as Catherine



indicated, but Diane's aversion was more likely due to a sense that going all the way down to the floor seemed a more strongly devotional act.

Catherine was aware of traditional teachers' insistence on preserving ritual forms. She discovered, however, that it was necessary to adapt certain practices, particularly prostrations, in order to make them accessible to her students. There was a precedent for adaptation, Catherine believed, in Buddhist tradition itself: in the principle that everything changes. Catherine found that adapting the form of the prostrations helped overcome her students' physical barriers to the practice, while adapting its meanings, particularly by downplaying its devotional associations, overcame ideological barriers. Adaptation of traditional ritual—in essence, transforming stable practices into a form of ritualizing or experimental behaviour—thus made certain practices more accessible to new learners.

### **Learning, Experimentation and Invariance**

Respondents indicated that creativity, adaptability and experimentation supported discovery and new learning for other reasons as well. Tanit, for instance, spoke about the ways she had experimented with her home meditation practice. At Friends of the Heart, she said, she followed the specific practices that Joyce was teaching. But at home, Tanit added a visualization practice that she had learned from a book by Lama Surya Das, a western Tibetan teacher in the U.S. The practice involved, as Tanit described it, listing and putting down all of the things one does not need. Describing how she adapted this practice, Tanit said:

I'm not sure how it developed, but my image of myself is sitting on a little island and there's water all around me and I'm going through letting go of all of my things. And it's everything: my clothes, and I imagine my clothes lying on the water and floating away. But it is not only things. It's stuff like anger too, and actually trying to define the anger, what it is specifically and what it is triggered from and then: okay, acknowledge it, that's good. And now: put it on the water.

In this response, Tanit describes a unique visualization practice that she learned and then developed in her own way. The activity through which this new learning occurred was an example of ritualizing or restoration of behaviour: Tanit combined and reconstructed techniques she received from various sources. In essence, she was constructing her own ritual. Having the freedom to experiment in the early stages of learning meditation thus enabled her to create a practice that was personally relevant and meaningful.

Jennings argues that a ritual's openness to novelty is necessary for new ritual knowledge to develop.<sup>10</sup> There is evidence, despite what participants think, that rituals change considerably over time and across cultures. Jennings interprets the fact of change as an indication that rituals are a search for meaning or understanding of how to be in the world. In his view, without experimentation, variability and novelty, ritual would not be a source of new knowledge, it would simply repeat and transmit what is already known. Tanit, in fact, affirmed this view. Speaking about the yoga postures Joyce taught at Friends of the Heart, Tanit said:

Some of the poses are a little bit different than I have been taught in other places. So, that is actually helpful because it makes me more aware of what I'm doing, physically, because if it's exactly what you know, you just do it by rote. And this is helping me not do that.

Tanit claimed that the variability of the practices helped her learn them better because it demanded greater awareness and attention than rote repetition. For the same reason, Catherine Rathbun sometimes changed the sequence and some of the words of the prayers she led at Friends of the Heart. Small changes such as these can help maintain a ritual's vitality by refreshing participants' attention and awareness. In this view, too much habituation can render a ritual meaningless.<sup>11</sup>

Williams and Boyd argue against Jennings's position, asserting that repetition and invariance in a ritual are necessary for the development of new knowledge. They argue that

repetition, formality and invariance invest ritual with an “aura of necessity” and a sense that rituals should not be changed.<sup>12</sup> In this view, experimentation, adaptation and novelty are not what lead to the acquisition of new meanings: quite the opposite. Long-term and stable repetition of a ritual creates a steady horizon by which participants orient themselves and which draws them onward to new understandings and behaviours.<sup>13</sup> Of course, like Jennings, Williams and Boyd recognize that rituals do change over time. But in their view it is the appearance of stability, and participants’ belief that the ritual should not change that creates new meanings for the participant, thus inspiring change in the participant rather than in the ritual itself.

Although Tanit and other respondents suggested that experimentation and adaptation helped them learn, some also indicated that repetition and practice were necessary as well. Training necessarily involves an amount of repetition: through it, the body is familiarized with movements, skills and techniques, thereby creating a foundation of tacit knowledge that supports practitioners as they continue to perform and transform their rituals. Additionally, the fact that the practices are viewed as traditional, time-tested techniques influenced participants’ willingness to engage in and commit to the practices. Several respondents said that meditation connected them to traditional Buddhist wisdom. They thereby gained the benefits of stability as well as change.

The counterargument to both Jennings and Williams and Boyd, of course, is the possibility that ritual does not lead to new learning or knowledge; that it is not a means of inquiry or discovery. Ritual may become so stultified that there is no possibility for something new to come out of it. Underlying westerners’ customary suspicion of ritual is, perhaps, a concern that it may merely affirm the status quo, or even act as a kind of exploitation or oppression. Living rituals are those with which practitioners connect and make sense of their worlds. As Tom F. Driver puts it, “pompous repetitiveness” leads to

“ritual boredom.”<sup>14</sup> When rituals become redundant as a result of true (as opposed to perceived) invariance, they fail to connect meaningfully with participants, resulting in meaninglessness and rote, mechanical behaviour.

This is a description of ritual, however, that is void of the creativity of ritualizing. Neither Jennings nor Williams and Boyd imagine that it is a condition of all or, indeed, most rituals. Stagnant ritual is not likely to befall Friends of the Heart or Chandrakirti meditation students. They tended, rather, to err on the side of too much experimentation and adaptation, to the point at which some participants did not develop a stable, ongoing meditation practice. If adaptation and experimentation are too strongly emphasized over invariance and repetition, stable ritual may not emerge, and the behaviour may never develop into that touchstone that Williams and Boyd describe: a model by which participants measure and change themselves. Even Jennings argues that ritual imparts knowledge of “the right” way of doing things, of being in the world. But as Tanit described learning at Friends of the Heart, the experimental quality of ritualizing suggests that there are innumerable “right” ways, that each participant has a “right way” of doing things. Tanit had read a book about meditation that described standard meditation postures. But at Friends of the Heart, she saw that Joyce was kneeling rather than sitting cross-legged, and others assumed a variety of different postures. Tanit said: “You don’t get that from a book. You don’t get that everybody is sitting differently. They are working out what they need to do. Being in a group situation and seeing that, it opens up that idea that there isn’t *the* correct way.” The meditation classes, therefore, taught participants to work out the correct way *for them*. Emphasis on ongoing experimentation thus led to a personalized, individualized practice that may or may not become stable ritual.

Still, ritualizing is an important first step. It allows for the creation of an appealing, relevant, more viable practice to which practitioners may consequently commit. Tanit’s

island visualization, for example, might work so well that she may continue to practice it regularly, without variance. It may become her own ritual. Yet it might be limited in what it can tell her about her world. As a personal, individualized practice not performed among others it is not likely to connect her to a community or to phenomena beyond her personal experience of the world. For this reason Tanit, and most other participants, noted that it was important to practice with a community where the practices were formalized and repetitive: in short, where familiar practices were shared. Ritualizing as creative and generative is an important part of ritual, but so, too are stable and repetitive ritual forms.

As Driver puts it:

Without its ritualizing (new-making) component, ritual would be entirely repetitious, and static. Without aiming at the condition of ritual, ritualizing would lack purpose and avoid form; it would fall back into that realm of informal, noncommunicative behaviour from which it arose.<sup>15</sup>

### **Cognitive learning and ritualizing**

Experimentation and adaptation were not enough to make all formal practices accessible to all students. Few newcomers who participated in this study were interested in learning to perform ritualized practices other than meditation. Many said they were wary or skeptical about any degree of ritual they encountered at the centres. Most newcomers followed along with the prayers, mudras and bows performed at the introductory courses, but it is indicative of a general lack of interest in them that very few mentioned them when asked to describe the classes. Meg told me that she had seen some people, on arriving for a first meditation class, walk into the meditation room and walk out again because of its strongly ritualized décor. “It’s the shrine that does it,” Meg said.

Diane stated several times that Buddhist rituals, particularly devotional rituals involving gurus or deities, did not appeal to her. She indicated that she was willing to

follow along with some of the ritualized practices at Friends of the Heart and Atisha Centre but, she said, “if I’m going to be doing it, I’m not going to be doing it as a sheep. I want to know what it is that I’m doing and why I’m doing it, to make sure that this is something that I want to be doing.”

Several other respondents said that they wanted intellectually to understand why formal practices such as prayers, bows and offerings were done and to know meanings or purposes of such practices. The need for cognitive understanding with respect to ritual was particularly interesting since many respondents also said they wanted to avoid intellectualizing their practice, by which they were usually referring to either meditation or enacting Buddhist-inspired ethics. When it came to other forms of ritual activity, however, many of them wanted an explicitly intellectual-level understanding of the practices before they felt comfortable participating in them. Respondents more readily accepted meditation, a practice they could regard as non-ritualized, without needing much explanation or analysis from the teachers. Respondents like Diane, Gerald and Carol said they were uncomfortable with practices they clearly associated with ritual if they did not first understand them. Practices such as bows, prostrations, mudras, prayers and making offerings, were more easily recognized as ritual activities and were often approached with wariness or skepticism.

Carol said that when she first began participating at Chandrakirti, she had been concerned about the rituals at the centre. Her initial attraction to Buddhism had been inspired by the Zen aesthetic, which is stark and simple. Then she started participating at Chandrakirti where, Carol said, “the simplicity was becoming not so simple any more. The statues, and the offerings and all those kinds of things.” In spite of this concern—in fact, because of it—Carol decided to learn about all of the symbols and ritual activities she encountered at the centre. “So, just to educate myself, I started participating in the rituals.

And I became more and more involved. I still evaluate it every time I do it. . . . I'm still evaluating that." Carol felt she needed to know why the rituals were done, what they meant, and she needed to re-evaluate their meanings with each performance.

Some respondents indicated that they wanted to understand and evaluate the prayers, prostrations, bows and offerings before participating in them. From their responses, it appeared that they were trying to gauge whether or not such activities were too devotional, theistic, magical or superstitious for their comfort. At Chandrakirti, teachers were not reluctant to present students with the non-empirical elements of Tibetan Buddhism, and there was some tolerance of the religious and theistic aspects of the centre among newcomers at GP classes. Still, Thekchen told me, westerners do have certain preconceptions about ritual. He said that members who were learning how to change the water offerings on the shrines appreciated knowing about the symbols, intentions and meditative practices that accompanied them. Although deities and devotion to those deities were involved in making the water offerings, Thekchen pointed out that having the symbolism of the water offering explained made performing it more acceptable to western practitioners. "That's what I really appreciate and I think that's what people in the West really appreciate," Thekchen said, "is explained ritual. . . . I think people from other religious backgrounds love the fact that every aspect of the ritual is explained. There is no part of ritual that is: just shut up and do it." It would appear, therefore, that gaining a cognitive understanding of the rituals made them accessible to some respondents in the face of their reluctance or skepticism: without first learning about the purposes or meanings of the offerings and the symbols involved, they might not participate at all. Some cognitive learning, therefore, may be a necessary first step for westerners; a means of overcoming their initial wariness or skepticism.

Catherine Rathbun said: “many westerners actually have a reaction against ritual because they come from one of the Christian churches that use a great deal of ritual without explanation.” At one of the Tibetan Meditation classes she gave a brief talk on ritual. She said that mysticism can disappear under the weight of formal ritual, like ancient sacred sites underneath churches. Ritual, she said, is calming if you understand it. In the *Géluk* school of Tibetan Buddhism there is a great deal of ritual and teachings that surround it. Catherine noted, as an example, the formal practices performed enacted before the shrine, the precise movements that are performed. “This is outer training,” Catherine said, “it teaches you to be calm, it teaches respect, it teaches presence. But for westerners, it becomes something that keeps us away from its intent.” Excessive ritual, she believed, is a barrier for westerners.

When Gerald first attended Chandrakirti, he was a little wary of the formal practices like bowing before the teacher and the offerings and statues on the shrines. He was reassured by one monastic that the offerings and the statues did not signify the belief that deities were actually present (despite the fact that most experienced members and teachers to whom I spoke said that receiving blessings from deities was a key element of the practice at Chandrakirti). Gerald was reassured to learn that making offerings and bowing to the shrines were simply regarded as a mindful gestures and did not constitute deity worship.

By the time of his second interview in May of 2007, Gerald had become very involved at Chandrakirti Centre. He had been asked to come in once a week and change the water offerings on the shrines. He said that being given that responsibility gave him a sense of connection with the centre. “Since they asked me to do the water offerings,” he said, “I consider myself a member. I think being asked to do that really brought me into it. Otherwise I would have felt I was still along the outside looking in.”



Gerald described what he did when he performed the water offerings, beginning with pouring the water in the offering bowls into a special bucket. “Well, not special,” he said; “it’s just plastic, but it’s only used for emptying the water [from the shrines].” He then cleaned each bowl, setting them upside down on the shrine until turning them right side up again, one at a time, to refill them. “With each process, you’re supposed to try to think with a certain amount, as much as you can, of pure thoughts, which made me nervous at first. Oh, man, where am I going to get these?” Gerald said, laughing.

But I lightened up somewhat since doing it. Just doing that, I try to be as honest as I can. For me, coming from a Catholic background, I use it as a confessional. Not that I stand there and tell them my sins, but I just try to be as honest as I can. It’s like a one-on-one kind of thing, just for the half-hour or however long it takes. So, it’s sort of an intimate, tactile introduction to the rituals there.

Gerald was initially given some instruction on how to perform the water offering but not much detail on the symbols involved or their meanings. By simply performing the offerings, he developed an appreciation for the tactile nature of the activity, and felt it was a unique way of coming to know about the centre and some of its practices. “It’s just a tactile approach, rather than having the ideas all abstract. It’s just a tactile, hands on. It’s the ritual.” The experience of changing the offerings, he felt, was an intimate introduction to Chandrakirti rituals. Before being asked to change the water offerings, Gerald had only attended the GP classes at Chandrakirti and was unaware of most of the rituals regularly performed at the centre. “They are heavy on the rituals, and I wasn’t aware of that at first.” He said that he initially felt uncomfortable when he realized how “ritual heavy” the centre was.

I thought, at some point, I would break with it once it strayed from the philosophical, the intellectual ideas. I thought that if it got into rituals, I probably wouldn’t embrace it, but the more the ideas meant something to me emotionally, the more I was willing to embrace the rituals.

Being asked to perform the water offerings created an affective connection to the centre, drawing Gerald more strongly into the community at Chandrakirti. Making the offerings also made the centre and its rituals more accessible to him. "It's a daily, practical function that I think symbolizes or represents the community in maintaining the connection within the community. It's an important maintenance. It's important, and it's simple, and it just feels kind of nice."

Gerald clearly regarded the water offerings as a learning experience.

It's a chance to learn about the deities, about the symbolism involved in Buddhism and have a hands-on practical application of all the beliefs, to see how it feels. And also, I did it because mainly I work from the intellect, so I'm pretty suspicious of symbols and things like chants and rituals. And there's no reason for that, other than that's the way I see myself. So I wanted to break that down, and see how I felt. And it still feels kind of funny, but it's a good funny. It's like pushing outwards what you think you are. So, doing the water offerings, I get the chance to just feel myself a little, doing something I'm not that comfortable with. So, it's good. And I know it means something, it has a special function within the Buddhist ritual system.

Gerald's experiences are a significant example of learning through ritual. First, performing the water offerings increased his awareness and understanding of the deities symbolized on the shrine, about which he had initially experienced some wariness. The learning process he described was experiential; learning about the ritual through performing it, and through pushing himself beyond his initial skepticism by choosing to accept the ritual. Gerald also noted the fact that performing the water offering broke down his tendency to intellectualize and gave him an opportunity to reflect on that tendency. In so doing, he also learned about himself.

Gerald did not seek an intellectual understanding of the symbols or meanings of the water offerings before he began. Instead, he decided to step in and experience the ritual through what he described as a hands-on, tactile approach. That experience altered his emotional responses to the ritual itself, to the symbols involved, and to the Chandrakirti

community. Performing the water offerings also taught him the potential importance of ritual itself. I asked Gerald if he regarded the rituals as important. He said: “Now I do, only because the ideas have become more emotional-based.” Gerald’s experience of the water offering, therefore, is another example of psychomotor learning—observing, imitating and refining physical activities such as emptying and refilling offering bowls—that led to affective changes—in this case, Gerald’s awareness of emotional changes in himself.

Gerald also described the ways in which his attitudes had changed, in a speech that illustrates an intriguing process of body learning.

By getting your hands involved... it’s easier to, say, have focus on meditation, because you are more willing to do it. More of your experience of yourself is involved. It’s not just part of your brain, now it’s the experience of actually doing it with your hands. It’s like a consensus within yourself, that’s agreeing with everything. And there’s less doubt and less criticism directed to it. And when the criticism does come, it’s more balanced; judging about whether this works or not works. Because there is still criticism of the ideas.... [The offerings are] mind-based, but they have some feeling attached to them because you start putting these ideas into daily practice in ordinary life and you realize: 1) they’re beneficial and 2) they’re difficult. So, you learn to serve the ideas rather than have the ideas serve you. You realize that they have the power to help you, but in order to do that, you have to give them a power because they’re hard. They’re difficult to do. It’s easy to think about, as if they’re science-fiction ideas and say: ooh, yeah, it’s kind of cool, rebirth. But to really try to be in the present, it’s quite humbling. And not to conceptualize, but just to put it into practice. Maybe if I do embrace them more, and you want to embrace them more, maybe I will have more of the strength because they go out from your head into your hands.

Note that performing the water offering, in Gerald’s view, involved letting go of control: he saw himself as “serving the ideas” rather than using them to serve him. Through the practice, the “science-fiction” ideas such as rebirth became part of his personal experience, not some distant abstract idea that he may have had trouble accepting on an intellectual level. Gerald thus indicated that acceptance and deeper levels of understanding came through participation in the ritual. He felt he had gained an emotional understanding

through the tactile experience: embracing the ritual moved his understanding of the teachings, as he put it, from his head into his hands. Gerald was describing a kind of knowing that is situated in muscle and bone rather than that which is stored in the mind or brain. Theorists like Jennings and Schilbrack describe this kind of knowing as “ritual knowledge.”<sup>16</sup>

While performing the water offerings, Gerald was testing out the ideas involved, “to see how it feels.” During the ritual, he entered a state of receptivity, in which he provisionally accepted and explored concepts such as the presence of deities and of karmic rebirth. Afterwards, he was free to reflect on the ideas, analyze them and make his own rational conclusions about them. Some of what he understood about the offerings did develop with later reflection, but much of what he learned about and through the ritual took place simultaneously with its performance. While he was free to reject any of the meanings he perceived, repeated performances of the offerings evidently did increase his acceptance over time.<sup>17</sup> Gerald’s experiences with the water offerings indicated that learning through ritualizing has the advantage of being tactile, personal, and intimate; it engages the body as well as the mind in the learning experience.

By contrast, Carol, who had participated in some of the empowerments at Chandrakirti, said that she was still uncomfortable with “serious rituals.”

Some of the empowerments and those things... because they are using the *vajra* bells and all those kinds of things and they have different meanings. I don’t understand all of those things.... And I appreciate that they have significance, but I don’t feel compelled to be a participant in those things. It’s probably just a comfort level, because I haven’t grown up with that or something. I haven’t been exposed to it enough. And there’s still the question of: how much ritual does one require?

Carol indicated that her discomfort with the highly ritualized activities stemmed from a lack of understanding of their meanings. She made an important observation: she had not

grown up with the rituals and symbols of Tibetan Buddhism, and believed that this was why she was uncomfortable with them. Richard Hayes, Buddhist scholar and practitioner, expresses the same thought. Hayes notes that the rituals and symbols of an “exotic” religious tradition one adopts in later life will always feel foreign, and that one’s feelings for the new rituals and symbols remain only superficial.<sup>18</sup> Hayes suggests that it requires the imagination and fantasies of childhood to fully internalize and become emotionally invested in religious rituals and symbols. To some extent, I agree. Many respondents in this study repeatedly expressed difficulties understanding and accepting Buddhist rituals and symbols. But repeated exposure and increased familiarity, while it did not work for everyone, did help some respondents gain greater acceptance and emotional connection to the new rituals they encountered at the centres.

Ritualizing involves learning in all three of Bloom’s domains. Physical skills are received, repeated, refined and adapted. Because the activities are regarded as elevated, special, set aside, transcendent, and so on, their performance can result in affective changes; that is, new attitudes, emotional responses and new values. The addition of some conceptual and factual data about the rituals on the cognitive end also assists the reception-acceptance-application flow of affective learning. This learning process can be illustrated as repeated loops of a pattern of learning, moving from one domain to the next and returning. The process may begin with any one of the domains, but Gerald’s experience suggests that beginning with the psychomotor (observing, imitating and refining the performance of the ritual) made the learning more intimate and personal. Those who started at the cognitive end, questioning the meanings before becoming involved, were those who less readily accepted the centres’ rituals. Gerald had experienced increased emotional involvement when he unquestioningly took on the water offerings. Although Carol also performed the water offerings at Chandrakirti, she was still questioning their

meanings and purposes, and did not indicate the same kind of emotional connection to them. At the other end of the spectrum from Gerald was Diane, who wanted to know all about the rituals before performing them, and had yet to feel motivated to participate.

Too much cognition in advance may, in fact, be an obstacle to the kind of experiential learning Gerald described. As Catherine Rathbun said, there is something to be said for the “just do it” approach.

There’s a certain point where that’s exactly what I’ll say to a student. And, partway through Vajrasattva,<sup>19</sup> it comes from every single student: I can’t stand this practice, why do I have to do it? Why do I have to keep doing it? And I’ll say: you know what? Just do it. Sorry, you’ve made this intention, you’ve made this determination to do your foundation practice and this is very good and it’s very good that you’re having such trouble. It’s very good that nothing is happening and you’re not getting anything resolved and it’s hard. Just do it. Because, on the other side comes the illumination.

Catherine suggests that enacting the practice first and thinking about it later may result in more profound responses to the formal practices. Hence, gaining information about the rituals and evaluating or analyzing their meanings in advance may have the effect of preempting the experiential and intimate means of learning through and with the body that comes with ritualizing.<sup>20</sup>

Bloom and colleagues and several other commentators on Bloom’s taxonomy<sup>21</sup> point out that cognitive and affective learning do overlap. Hence, the need for cognitive learning in order to participate in ritual activity does not necessarily preclude affective learning processes like receiving and accepting new attitudes and values. For some practitioners, it is clear that gaining and analyzing information about a ritual is a necessary starting point. Cognitive learning can, therefore, open the door to other domains of learning about and through ritual. But, as many respondents indicated, intellectual understanding is merely the first step. Many felt that the full experience of ritualized

learning involves receiving and accepting new attitudes and values and embodying new activities and skills.

### **Ritualizing and meditation**

This chapter has been exploring the question: In what ways do we learn through the ritualized movements of our bodies? Most Friends of the Heart respondents believed that meditation was the primary means by which they gained new knowledge, attitudes and skills. Meditation as a whole certainly involves formal gestures and postures, such as stylized breathing or the prescribed postures of the legs, spine, head, hands, and so on. But meditative concentration exercises—the practices that take place in or with the mind of the meditator—also constitute ritualizing. Like postures and gestures, meditative concentration techniques are deliberately cultivated behaviours whose sources are—or are believed to be—traditional. They can be rearranged, experimented with, and can develop into regular practices or rituals.

Practices referred to here as meditative concentration exercises include but are not limited to those taught at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti: concentrating on or counting the breaths; silent repetition of a short phrase such as a mantra or prayer; metta or loving kindness meditation; paying attention to physical sensations in the body; paying attention to images or emotions; reflecting on a teaching; or complex visualizations of deities such as Buddhas or Bodhisattvas. The last is a practice not usually performed by introductory students, but by participants in higher-level courses, empowerments or *pūjās*.

In fact, Grimes has discussed meditative breathing, in the context of the Zen tradition, as ritualizing.<sup>22</sup> Normally, breathing falls under ritualization: it is, for the most part, a preconscious activity. But the way we breathe is influenced—Grimes calls it

stylized—by culture and society. Once we begin to focus on the breath, to take it as an object of awareness or concentration, breathing becomes ritualizing.

Strictly speaking, breath attended to is ritualizing rather than ritualization. To consider breathing a ritualization process is not to deny its obvious biological function but to recognize that any action, no matter how practical or survival-oriented, can become symbolic once it becomes the focus of attention and bearer of meaning. ... Until one begins breath-following, the stylization of our breathing is likely preconscious. We were not aware of it, though with effort we could have been. Respiration feels so simple—in and out, that is all. Yet the rhythm, depth, and rate are culturally and personally distinctive, sometimes intentionally so, particularly in traditions that maintain strong meditative traditions. In *zazen* one becomes aware of the stylization of the breath but refrains from stylizing it any further. Zen breathing does not occur under a “breathe naturally” dictum. Trying to breathe naturally is self-contradictory.<sup>23</sup>

Now, one could argue that breathing entails movement, and is therefore gestural. But what qualifies breathing as ritualizing is the concentration or attentiveness that takes place in Zen meditation (*zazen*): the awareness of the stylization of the breath. This focus of the attention is a non-gestural, entirely mental “doing” or mind event. This and other concentration techniques performed in meditation are not normal thought processes. Quite the contrary: they are designed to interrupt ordinary thought processes. It is more like a physical gesture of the mind than a thought. Dennis described an example of such a ritualized mental technique when I asked if he could teach me something he learned at Meg’s Calm and Clear class.

Well, the things I found most useful, anyway, were when Meg was talking about the idea of bringing your mind back. When you focus on something and your mind wanders, recognizing first of all that your mind is wandering, and then just acknowledging it, and then bringing it back to your focus. And also the idea of, instead of trying to block everything out—block out distractions—acknowledge distractions. In the early going, I would hear cars going outside and I wouldn’t quite know how to handle it, so you calmly acknowledge the distractions and then come back to what you’re trying to focus on.



The technique Dennis described involves consciously enacted behaviour rather than the normal preconscious activities of the mind. It is a way of using the mind that is not cognitive or analytical: it is much more like an activity or a skill—a gesture of the mind. Recognizing and calmly acknowledging distractions and bringing the mind back to the object of concentration is an activity that is also a received, traditional practice that is repetitive, formal, and stylized.

John claimed that meditative concentration exercises were more like physical activities than ordinary thought processes. “It’s like an activity. It might be mental, but it’s definitely a mental activity, not like: memorize this list of ten words type thing.” Learning meditation, in John’s point of view, was akin to developing physical techniques for the mind, a kind of training.

I guess the theory is that you’re going to build up your skills, much as you would build up your physical fitness. So, when you need it, it’s there. In times of calm, you’re going to build up these concentration and focus skills and in times of stress, you will be able to do this.

The mental skills that practitioners are meant to develop through meditation are concentration, awareness, and patience: the ability to stay with the practice and not become frustrated by distractions. In her Clam and Clear class, Meg also made several references to training the mind, often referring to “building the awareness muscles.” Several respondents, therefore, expressed the idea that concentration techniques were more like physical skills than cognitive thought processes.

What we do with the mind, therefore, can also be ritualized. Meditative concentration techniques engage the mind in ways that ritualizing usually engages the body: they are directed, repeated practices that are formal, deliberate and often pre-determined. Moreover, they are embodied just as postures and gestures are. They are, in fact, postures (concentration) and gestures (directing the attention) of the mind. It is worth noting that, in

Buddhist perspectives, the mind is not separate from body. In the following discussion, therefore, I refer to meditation as a ritual activity with respect to all of its elements: lighting candles or incense, for instance, or ringing a bell, performing meditation postures and mudras, as well as any of the various concentration techniques. All are embodied postures or gestures. In essence, this approach treats the mind as another limb, one with uniquely cognitive characteristics, to be sure, but it is another part of our bodies that can be directed and experimented with; in short, the mind can be made to act in ritualized ways. This is an approach that is intended to overcome dualistic conceptions of mind and body.

### **Meditation: learning through the body**

Learning through meditation, like learning through all ritual activity, is learning through experience. It is not merely hearing or reading about new information, attitudes, skills or insights; it is a means of experientially developing them. Alan Rogers writes:

Just as we all breathe but much of the time we are not conscious of it, so we all learn, even though at times we are not conscious of doing so. Learning, then, is the way we relate to our experiences—the way such experiences change us and the way we try to change our experiences and make sense of them.<sup>24</sup>

If Rogers is right, then ritualizing, as experience—as embodied enactment—cannot but be a means of learning. Rather than inquiring whether ritualizing is a means of learning it is more constructive to ask: In what ways do we learn through ritualizing?

If ritualizing serves a noetic function,<sup>25</sup> if it creates new knowledge about ourselves and our ways of being in the world, much of the knowledge it imparts is gained by and located in the body, in the muscles and bones rather than solely in the brain. As Jennings puts it, “my hand ‘discovers’ the fitting gesture (or my feet the fitting step) which I may then ‘cerebrally’ *re*-cognize as appropriate or right.”<sup>26</sup> In meditation, respondents have told me, the mind may discover the “fitting” ways of focusing, concentrating, directing the

attention, and so on. Later, meditators can “cerebrally” understand which of these techniques are most appropriate.

There was a strong emphasis on body awareness at all of the Friends of the Heart classes. Friends of the Heart teachers often claimed that one of their objectives was to overcome students’ tendencies to separate mind and body and to overlook the significance of the latter. Meg said that the focus on exercise and movement in the centres’ classes helped her realize, as she put it, “how physical meditation experiences were.” Tanit said she appreciated the way Joyce gave instructions, particularly with reference to the body, its postures and gestures. “I liked the way she describes things, too, [such as] letting your body settle into the pose.... I’m enjoying that aspect and I’m becoming a lot more aware of where my spine is in relationship to where I’m standing.” The time and attention Joyce put into her instructions on posture and movement helped students become more aware of their bodies. In Catherine Rathbun’s view, “traditional Buddhism, at least the way it’s come down to us, has often left the body out of the equation. And in the West that’s created what I call ‘neck up’ Buddhists.... If you leave out the body, you leave out one of your greatest teachers.”

Several interview questions encouraged respondents to reflect on how and what they learned through meditation, particularly with respect to the body. What did they learn through meditation postures? Was there any new learning, knowledge or understanding gained through meditation? I also asked a few respondents: What does the body know? In response to the latter question, Tanit said:

I’m finding, once my eyes are closed, and I’m trying to find points inside my body, it’s not so easy.... So, I’m beginning to think that my body knows a lot, based on what I have seen. And, of course, I’m a designer so I’m inclined visually, but so much of the information that I’m getting about my body is through what I see. Once my eyes are closed, it’s a very different experience. So, I’m not sure what my body knows and I don’t think I listen

to my body. And I'm starting to try to listen to it, to try to understand it without my visual understanding locating everything for me.... I think what I'm trying to do is learn to hear my body. I just assumed so many things about it, or I've just not even thought about it. But yeah, the body is there. You are in your body.

Through meditation, Tanit learned new ways of experiencing her body. She began to change her habit of sensing her body only visually, a habit that had effectively distanced her sense of self from her body. Meditation involved closing the eyes and being *in* the body, sensing it in ways other than the visual. Tanit experienced what it was like to be embodied and learned how to listen to her body in ways she had not previously done.

Tanit spoke quite a bit about the meditation techniques she learned at Friends of the Heart, as well as the new understandings that she gained through them. She described, for example, what she had learned through one of the insight practices that Joyce had taught.

I liked the way she describes it, too, in terms of active areas being associated with touch and [other] areas at rest. Those two areas. And it was interesting because I know when we were first meditating, I was associating active as bad and rest as good. And you just begin to recognize that you have this language set up. And then I realized that she was deliberately not referencing it that way. It was being specifically referenced as "touch" which isn't necessarily a negative or positive thing.

The new perspectives Tanit gained as a result of meditation extended beyond the practice itself. The technique of applying neutral labels to sensations in the body made Tanit aware that she normally judged most of her experiences as either positive or negative. Developing neutral responses to body sensations thus taught her that she might be less judgmental at other times as well. Joyce did not explain this idea directly: she never said "do not regard tension in the body as bad and a lack of tension as good." Neither did she say that the objective was to change our usual ways of judging other experiences. But through the

meditation practice of assigning neutral labels to sensations in the body, Tanit learned both of these things. She said

I'm finding I have this structure set up as: this is good, this is bad....  
Preconceptions, essentially. And Joyce, just by the nature of who she is and how the meditation goes, is starting to alert me to some of those preconceived ideas that I am carrying.... To be relaxed and at peace is good but the awareness isn't about that, it's about just being aware. And that's fascinating, it really is, that awareness. It's quite amazing.

Here, Tanit describes a technique that, through practice, developed into a skill that, in turn, led to changes in her attitudes. In time, this new perspective may also result in consistent changes to her behaviour in other areas of her life. Tanit thus experienced an affective type of learning, since the practice had influenced her values, attitudes and emotional responses. She believed she was inquiring into and discovering new ways of being and behaving.

Schilbrack argues that ritual knowledge, the peculiar type of knowledge gained through ritual, is uniquely metaphysical. Schilbrack defines metaphysics, not as the world beyond human experience, but as “the character of experienced things in general.”<sup>27</sup> In this view, metaphysical thinking arises through ritual when participants either experience the aspects of a ritual as aspects of the human condition or the ritual itself as a microcosm for human experience in general. For example: meditating in the cremation grounds teaches the meditator that his or her body is impermanent and so, too, is everything else.<sup>28</sup> Through ritual, we develop a kind of understanding that connects our bodily activities to the world around us.<sup>29</sup> Rituals, therefore, are “embodied ways of knowing.”<sup>30</sup> Schilbrack thus offers a way of understanding ritual as an experience through which we learn not only the right ritual gestures, but also how authentically to be in the world.<sup>31</sup> Ritual knowledge is, therefore, an embodied or psychomotor learning that is also affective, since it entails changes in values and attitudes.

Several respondents indicated that there was a strong connection between the physical aspects of learning meditation and certain affective changes that they experienced. “Adults act their way into a new way of thinking,” Meg told me, “they don’t think their way into a new way of acting.” In Meg’s view, the best approach to teaching meditation was to begin with the body. She said she sought moments in which she could use students’ experiences of change in their bodies as teaching opportunities. Physiological changes were what Meg called a “feedback loop” for understanding the whole of the meditative experience.

You will just notice yourself feeling differently, physically. And that is your first clue. You can’t put words to it yet. Words are the back end of the learning curve. If you are able to articulate it, it means you are way down the exploration path. But one of the first things that comes is some kind of a physical feeling. . . . Who knows where [the changes] start. But they become initially visible in the body.

Thus the changes that occur in meditation, Meg believed, are first noticed in the body. Moreover, students are more readily able to articulate their physical experiences. Meg described a progression of change, from “a lack of tension, a feeling of flow, a feeling of spaciousness, [to] a feeling of joy,” thus indicating that physical changes assist the development of particular emotional responses. She also noted that learning through meditation necessitated developing effective habits, as she put it, “physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.”

[It is] about the discipline required to build new patterns. It is an active intention to make things concrete. There was a lovely sentiment I came across, I don’t know where, about ritual being an enactment of an experience which is made concrete. So, if something you want to experience is spiritual unfoldment, you enact it in this ritual form.

The process Meg describes is a way of “thinking through and with the body.”<sup>32</sup> As Meg had put it: one acts oneself into a new way of thinking, not the other way around. In this view,

one begins with psychomotor learning processes, which may then result in affective change.

Rituals shape behaviour by training the body and developing physical habits or skills which may, in turn, affect our emotions, attitudes and values.<sup>33</sup> When asked what the body knows, Dennis replied:

The body definitely adapts, there's no question about that. Again, through repetition it can train itself.... I guess that's what working out and people who do exercises, they're really adapting to greater amounts of exertion. That's one way you might want to define exercise. But the way I would look at it is that your mind thinks through your body. So your mind might think of ways to adapt through the body.

The mind "thinks through the body," Dennis said, expressing the idea that the body also engages in inquiry and interprets experience.<sup>34</sup> Gwen expressed this perspective as well: "I learn to take concepts and see how they sit in my body," she said. I asked if her meditation practice influenced her beliefs, and she replied:

I would like to answer that question in a physical way, because I think that one can have beliefs that are of a cerebral nature, right? ... What I know seems more physical, seems more holistic than just knowing it in the brain. There is something about experience that is connected to Buddhism, to me, very, very deeply. So, there isn't that sense of separation like my mind knows this, but my body doesn't.... What is it to be one being? What is it to be whole? What is it to have heart-mind? ... So the practice helps to unify that.

Gwen's observations indicate a strong sense of the body and mind as one. She believed that meditation practice created that sense of unity of body and mind. She distinguished between knowledge of a cerebral type and knowing through the body, as I have done by positing different domains of learning. But in Gwen's view and in mine, there are distinct types of learning experienced by the body-mind: one is intellectual, that which we regard as involving processes in the brain. The other is physical: it is the way in which muscles and bones are trained to experience and to "know" about the world. Gwen is suggesting what I

have alluded to: that the mind, as part of the body, also develops the second type of knowing.

Because of its physical nature, learning through ritualizing often involves a changing awareness of the body. But when I asked Diane if we learn through the body in meditation, she said that she did not experience a strong sense of her body when she meditated. “Sometimes I just feel my heart beating, that’s all. So, yes I’m embodied, but I don’t have a sense of: I’m sitting here and my feet are on the floor. That’s gone. I like that.” Because she meditated seated in a chair, Diane experienced little discomfort while meditating. She said that, unless she had a pain, she often felt disconnected from her body and felt few areas of “touch” sought in the insight practice Joyce had taught. “I haven’t even tried to sit on the floor,” Diane said. “In some places I have read that you should force yourself to try to do it, because the pain is part of it.” Meditators often assume cross-legged postures that are accompanied by varying levels of tension, discomfort or even pain in the legs. But without pain or discomfort, Diane lost her sense of her body. The sense of the body disappearing may have appealed to what Diane often described as her intellectual nature or her tendency to live from the “neck up.” All the same, Diane said that she would like to become more aware of her body.

I’m just so disconnected from my body, so for me a part of wanting to do the insight *vipassanā* practice is to try and get that kind of connection.... I need to develop that relationship, that’s part of the way I meditate, that’s part of making some connection.... Am I learning it? I feel like it is possible. But when, for example, we try and see body sensations, I don’t have any. So it’s like: okay, there’s nothing there, go back up to the head.

Diane’s experience highlights an important point: If ritual activity is to teach us something about or through the body, it is perhaps necessary to have an awareness of the body during the practice. Catherine and Joyce both pointed out that the insight techniques taught at Friends of the Heart were intended to get practitioners out of their heads and into the rest



of their bodies. But concentration techniques alone may not be sufficient. The connection between posture, discomfort and body awareness may explain why some meditation teachers insist on traditional meditation postures, even when practitioners find them difficult or painful.

I asked Carol if she thought the body was important in the practices: Does the body learn, too? She said that assuming the same posture each time, “making the body a ritual and being aware of that, encompassing it in the meditation,” was important. Like Diane, she had read that it was important to maintain a particular meditation posture and to “go through the experience of being uncomfortable.” Carol said, “I try to be ritualistic about it but it is not always comfortable, and sometimes I cheat.” She did not feel badly about her so-called “cheating,” however. If there is too much discomfort, she said, it becomes a barrier to practice. Even so, Carol expressed an understanding that standard or traditional meditation postures were important.

In an article exploring meditative experience, Janet Gyatso points to the significance that Tibetan Buddhist teachings place on physical experience for the development of spiritual realization.

Produced by and in the body, experience is cultivated in meditation... so as to make the practitioner more aware of the body, to render the body subject, as it were, to the realizations of Buddhist doctrine, indeed to expand the domain of the subject not only to the body as such but to all the activities in which it engages.<sup>35</sup>

Skilled meditators are said to experience the truths of impermanence, suffering and no self first in the body and then as conditions inherent in all other phenomena. Higher insight, Gyatso notes, requires a unified experience of the body and mind.<sup>36</sup> The indication is, therefore, that higher insights into Buddhist principles require more than a cognitive understanding; they must also be felt in the body. Gyatso notes that, particularly in the

Mahāmudrā stream of Tibetan Buddhism,<sup>37</sup> spiritual realization necessitates freedom from body-mind dualism. The meditator becomes one with his or her body and with the object of concentration. Having a sense of the body during meditative practice, in this view, is necessary for spiritual realization to take place. Traditional postures may be a means of ensuring the necessary body awareness.

The significance of posture as a ritualized means of learning, however, is not limited to producing body awareness through body sensation. There is something about the ritualized nature of meditation posture that is significant as well, even postures assumed when seated in a chair; especially if a posture is specifically reserved for meditation. When I asked respondents to reflect on how or what they might learn through meditation posture, several of them said they had noticed strong associations between physical postures and gestures and what was going on in their minds. That is to say, formal, repetitive physical postures and gestures were associated with, and had an influence on, the mind-states that usually accompanied them.

The most common association of this sort was between the straight, upright meditation posture and alertness or concentration. Diane, for example, said:

Well, the sitting up for me means concentration. It means finding a place where my body is centred. I also see, if my spine is upright, that there is a better connection between brain and the body. So it means something physical about the transmission of energy.

Diane described a direct association between body-state and mind-state. “If I were like this,” Diane said, assuming a slouched posture leaning on her elbow, “I don’t even think of meditating like that. It’s a really alert thing for me, so I automatically sit in a way that feels right to me now.” Diane had discovered a connection between her body posture and her ability to maintain alertness and concentration. I asked her if she made similar associations

with the mudra she used in meditation, and she said the hand posture was not significant.

Even so, she did have a sense of which mudra “felt right.”

In terms of the hand movement, you know holding your hands; I don't think it has a particular significance. It just becomes part of the posture, the way of sitting. Although, I did switch [from hands on the knees to the cosmic mudra], because after I tried it a couple of times, it felt right to me. It felt like it was part of sitting upright. So, it is more of a posture, a body thing, to help me stay alert. That's it: the alertness.

Thus on reflection, Diane indicated that the “right” mudra was part of the habitual posture that she associated with meditation and thus with concentration.

Gerald made a similar association between posture and meditation.

Meditation, I think, is physical training on a certain level. You are asked to sit as still as you can and breathe quite calmly. Mentally, it's training too. But... if you want your mind to be still your body has to be.

Nicolette, who also said that the physical aspects of meditation helped her focus, asserted that this was the case because “the mind and body are one.” In fact, it becomes very easy, when arguing for associations between body and mind states, to slip once again into body-mind dualism. If body and mind are one, then the premise that the body influences the mind is mere tautology. But these associations between posture and concentration are not mechanical: if we still the body, we do not necessarily or automatically calm the mind.

On some level, meditative body states act as metaphors or symbols of the concentrated mind-state. Diane made habitual associations between posture and concentration, but she also regarded the straight, unmoving posture as a symbol of an alert, concentrated mind. “I view it as a way of staying alert and being able to concentrate. And if I get slumped over, mind follows body, right? If I'm all slumped over I feel that my mind is slumped over.” As another example, Margaret had learned a technique that made a

metaphorical connection between the body and the mind in meditation. When I asked her if she could teach me something that she had learned, she said:

Well, this is a tiny piece, but a piece I find very helpful when my mind is busy talking to me. And that is the trick Joyce taught us about letting our tongue relax. When I'm really busy, I realize my tongue is fairly firmly implanted on the roof of my mouth and by relaxing it, even if the rest of my body has taken on the right posture, I am amazed at how that... It's hard to have that mind-chatter going on if your tongue isn't engaged.

By practicing the technique Joyce had taught, Margaret understood that there were direct associations between the tongue and speech, and learned that she made figurative connections between physical and mental "chatter." Having made these connections, Margaret learned that relaxing the tongue helped her "relax" the mind. For these respondents, a relaxed tongue or upright posture, therefore, were symbols of concentration and alertness.

Habit formation is also an effective means of linking meditation posture and concentration techniques. Repeatedly assuming the posture while simultaneously concentrating the mind, meditators forge habitual associations between the two activities. Dennis said: "Your body is in the position, and maybe it gets familiar with it, so maybe subconsciously it will know it's time to settle down." With time and familiarity, then, meditation posture facilitates meditative concentration. Speaking about meditation postures and gestures, Carol said, "it can be helpful to have something that you're familiar with to put you in a place that you identify with calmness or focusing on a certain thing." I guess it's... kind of a comfort level with those things [i.e. the meditation postures and gestures]." Repetition and habit formation thus forged a direct connection between body posture and mind states.

Schechner also explores connections between mind and body states. To demonstrate how physical postures and gestures can affect mood or emotion, Schechner

describes two experiments conducted by psychologist Paul Ekman, working with professional actors.<sup>38</sup> In the first Ekman asked his subjects to generate six different target emotions (surprise, disgust, sadness, anger, fear and happiness) by reliving past experiences. In the second experiment, another group of actors was instructed, step by step, to contract specific facial muscles to produce prototypical facial expressions of the same six emotions. The instructions directed subjects on how to produce the expressions muscle by muscle but did not reveal to the subjects which emotions were associated with the expressions. For Schechner, the surprising outcome of Ekman's experiments was that the second group experienced changes in the autonomic nervous system (ANS), such as heart rate and skin temperature, that were of a larger magnitude and more recognizable than those of the first group. In other words, ANS responses indicated that the subjects were more profoundly affected by the mechanical production of specific facial expressions than by producing the same emotions by reliving memories.<sup>39</sup>

Schechner is interested in Ekman's experiments because of their implications for theatrical performers. Most western actors follow a technique called "the method," in which they relive experiences in order to produce desired emotions in performance. Mechanical reproduction of prototypical expressions, Schechner notes, is despised by most western actors. In light of Ekman's findings, however, Schechner concludes that mechanical methods may be more effective at producing intensity of emotion. For purposes of this argument, Ekman's findings provide evidence of strong physiological responses to body posture and gesture, which may, in part, account for respondents' experiences of associating the physical and mental aspects of meditation.

When John spoke about how and what the body learns, he initially speculated on the physiological responses that might occur in meditation. "I could see if meditation perhaps lowered your heart rate or through a general sort of calming, lowered your blood

pressure or things like that. The body might associate that with sitting down to meditate.” But John also raised another possibility. “Even at the sight of something, if there is some sort of visual thing or incense, or anything like that, the body might sort of instantly begin calming down.” John suggested, therefore, that the sight or smell of objects such as a shrine or incense may initiate some of the physiological states associated with practices normally performed in the presence of such objects. Sensing such objects, therefore, helps prepare the participant for the practice. John describes this process as a kind of reflexive conditioning. Such a response, however, is not necessarily a result of learning. As Harrow points out, reflexes are not learned. Learning is change: it is not merely change in patterns of acting (as conditioning is), it is change in patterns of acting that result from changes in knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes.<sup>40</sup> Where John describes a physiological process of conditioning taking place, most other respondents noted that meditation postures and gestures supported concentration skills, led to a sense of decorum or commitment to practice and so on. These response are more conscious and more affective than simple reflex.

Diane, for example, suggested that an opening prayer acts to establish a ground for her meditation practice. Before meditating at home, she often spoke a refuge prayer she had learned from her readings on Buddhism. Saying the prayer, she said, “feels like it’s delineating this time to do this. So, I wonder if this [the prayer] is me setting myself up: this is what I’m doing now. And doing that refuge reminds me that that is what I am doing now: mindfulness, what I am paying attention to.” Alan also suggested that certain things helped “set up” meditation. For a time, he lit candles before meditating at home. He said that doing so “sets up the idea that this is what you’re going to do. I think it gets your mind focused to say: okay, I’m ready to get into this position.” These reflections by John, Diane and Alan refer to ritual’s function as a framing device.

If I might be permitted an example from personal experience: When I sit down to meditate, I don't "just sit," despite the idiom of the Zen tradition in which I was originally taught. First, I go to a special place, either a Buddhist centre or a corner set aside in the spare bedroom of my home. These are special places because they are designated for meditation. If I am meditating at home, I often light a candle and a stick of incense. Sometimes I will perform three prostrations before I sit. At the very least, I will place my hands together in prayer mudra and bow. Then I sit on my mat and cushion, in a posture usually called half-lotus; legs crossed with one foot on the opposite leg, the other foot on its side on the mat. I regard this posture as special, since it is only used for meditation. It also has practical functions: it automatically keeps my spine straight and is slightly painful, thereby keeping me alert. After settling into the posture I ring a bell three times and place my hands first in prayer mudra and then the cosmic mudra in my lap. After all of these things are done, I begin meditation practice proper, concentrating on my breath and a chosen concentration technique.

The preparations are an important part of my formal meditation practice. They have various meanings. Some of the meanings, at the time I perform them, are unexamined, even vague. But the purpose they serve is clear: They express, if only to myself, that this is a special time, a time out of my regular routine, a time that I will dedicate specifically to meditation. In other words, they create the frame, temporally and spatially, in which I will meditate. If, after having performed the framing rituals, the phone rings or I feel hungry or the dog barks, I will not interrupt my sitting. Such things might disrupt me if I had simply taken a seat without such preparations. The ritualized activities tell me, when I finally do sit on the cushion, that I am not *just* sitting. I am not relaxing, taking a break, or ruminating about the things I have to do next. If I have, for example, ten minutes before I need to leave the house, and I decide to meditate in a chair without my

usual preparations, I find it very difficult to concentrate on my practice. In such circumstances, it is difficult to regard myself as performing meditation, and I am much more likely to become distracted and stop meditating all together.

I make deliberate references to performance here: I am both the performer and the observer of the ritual. The framing activities set up the enactment as surely as a stage or a curtain. The lighting of incense and candle, the bow or prostration, the mudras, the cross-legged posture and the concentration practice—all of these indicate to body and mind together that I am now meditating, doing something special or set-aside from my ordinary activities. These elements, each a part of the whole ritual of meditation itself, motivate me to undertake and maintain meditation practice for a certain period of time without interruption.

Framing, in fact, is one of the key functions of ritual. Framing creates a centre and periphery relative to a ritual, and is “meta-communicative”: it enables and encourages participants to interpret the events and activities that take place within the frame.<sup>41</sup> Framing rituals thus delineate a time and space in which ritual activity can not only be performed but also explored and interpreted. Repeated each time a ritual is performed, framing activities become habitual performances; what Crossley terms body techniques.<sup>42</sup> They are enactments of biological and culturally influenced ways of being and knowing. But they are not simply rote, unconscious repetition. Crossley argues that habituation arising from ritual is not merely mechanical; a simple linking of stimulus and response.<sup>43</sup> Ideally, it is a learning experience. A specific kind of understanding, felt in the body, develops as habits are cultivated and new meanings absorbed.<sup>44</sup> Through such performances, we learn about ourselves and the various uses we make of our bodies.<sup>45</sup> Hence the body is not merely an object through which we experience our world. It is the body that receives new knowledge or understanding. In this view, ritual involves habitual body techniques that lead to a



particular type of knowledge, one that is uniquely physical, in that it is located in our limbs, muscles and bones. It consists of the body's familiarity with its own activities, it is the body's knowledge of how to move and behave. While it develops through habit formation, it is not habituation in the sense of redundancy wherein meaning may be lost. While this type of knowing is significant for our understanding of ourselves and our experiences of the world, it is usually inarticulate and inaccessible to our discursive minds.<sup>46</sup> It is tacit. We use this kind of knowledge without thinking about it.

Janet Gyatso, discussing the cultivation of physical techniques as prerequisite to ultimate realization in Tibetan Buddhism, employs the same example Rogers does when discussing tacit, experiential learning; namely learning to ride a bicycle. Comparing that example to the way meditative training leads to "ultimate nondualistic realization," she writes: "An awkward set of techniques are [sic] practiced with difficulty until certain breakthroughs occur and the skills are mastered, leading finally to a feeling that riding a bike comes naturally."<sup>47</sup> Several respondents in this study made similar observations about learning meditation. In an exemplary response, Nicolette described Tibetan visualization practice as follows:

It's like learning any skill like riding a bike or making an omelet or throwing a baseball. You do it enough times that, once you get to the point where you have a body memory of it, or in this case, a memory of the images and the words and everything just sinks into your pores, once you get to the stage where you've got that deep memory, then you can get the full benefit of that skill that you have built up. So, if it's riding a bike, know you don't have to think about trying to balance, and you can go places.

Nicolette was speaking of body memory and training the body. To clarify, I asked if the same thing happens with visualizations, and she replied: "Yeah, or any kind of meditation." She thus connected visualization and other meditation practices, which are mental processes, with body memory, a physical one. Thus the habituation of concentration

practices may also serve to cultivate what Crossley calls “embodied practical reason,”<sup>48</sup> a familiarity with the technique that becomes an embodied, tacit understanding that may, in turn, inform one’s understanding of oneself and the world.

Gyatso argues that, through the formation of physical habits, initial theoretical conceptions are transformed into full realization according to Mahāmudrā meditation practices. “Cultivating a bodily habit,” Gyatso writes, “is in fact eminently appropriate, as the body seems to have a lot to do not only with the dawning of meditative experience in Mahāmudrā but also its conception of realization.” The practitioner begins with an intellectual conception that the practice will lead, as Gyatso puts it, to “an unfolding of felt experience” and, in the end, to higher insight.<sup>49</sup> The significance of the body in Buddhist realization is further indicated by the fact that Tibetan literature often describes meditative realization using somatic metaphors. Realization is full and complete, for example, when it is “brought in to the ‘belly of the mind.’”<sup>50</sup>

Nicolette’s comments about visualizations suggest that learning meditation concentration techniques is similar to gaining tacit physical knowledge. Concentration techniques are practices through which meditators develop new understandings and inquire about themselves and their worlds. Moreover, the ways in which they contribute to learning are similar to the ways that body postures and other ritualized body techniques do: through repetition, training, refinement and so on. That is to say, meditative ritualizing is not wholly an affective process of gaining new understanding. The concentration techniques are not themselves attitudes, emotions or values; although respondents said that such practices influenced all of these dispositions.

Nevertheless, Diane did propose that the special or elevated quality of certain meditation techniques influenced their results. At Friends of the Heart and Atisha Centre, she had learned practices in which she concentrated on what she called “virtuous” objects

like metta or images of the Buddha. “I just like that concept of holding on, holding my attention on this virtuous object. . . . You can then begin to meditate on virtuous concepts like compassion, like loving kindness, like patience. . . .” The techniques Diane described included certain positively valued concepts that she believed produced related affective changes. “There’s a certain point at which meditation can become transformational. And that’s really what I’m interested in. I can get to a level of feeling peaceful.” Concentrating on virtuous objects, she believed, increased her ability to be compassionate, kind, patient and peaceful. There is a suggestion here that affective changes—changes in emotions, attitudes and values—result from the special or elevated characteristic of the practice. Powers notes that objects that have soteriological value are often the focus of *śamatha* meditation.<sup>51</sup> But Buddhists also meditate on neutral and even negative objects as well—cremation ground meditation is an example—and these techniques are also believed to produce positive affective changes or desired insights into Buddhist truths.

Some respondents indicated that positively valued meditation techniques also affected physical changes. Tanit, for example, said that she had become strongly aware of changes in her body on one occasion during metta meditation.

I realized that my whole body had changed during this metta. I had totally stilled, I know my heart beat had dropped, my breathing had deepened. . . . Now, it’s happened on other occasions, but I’ve never been conscious that way. I find that partly it’s time that goes into that stilling. This happened rapidly. There were probably two or three minutes and my body had completely changed in a meditation that had been very restless and erratic. So, that was really interesting, and a real acknowledgement that there are triggers that you can learn about yourself that you can use.

Tanit attributed the physical changes she experienced to the positive quality of the particular concentration technique. Similarly, Nicolette said that a meditation in which she visualized herself being cleansed with light translated into positive body sensations, and helped release tension in her body. “Your actual body clues into that sensation of being

cleansed and letting all the detritus go that is clenched up inside it.” Like Diane, then, Tanit and Nicolette believed that the positive or virtuous quality of the practices led to the particular changes they experienced. Alan also claimed that concentrating on virtues such as compassion or selflessness led to positive results. “If you dwell on and actually think about: cherish others, not yourself... , your mind, as you walk away from the meditation, it’s been wired to believe that.”

John, however, did not feel that meditating on compassion and kindness helped him attain particularly virtuous mind states.

I don’t know, from the beginning I [thought] that meditation was focusing on your breath and not letting your mind intrude. When it got to be meditating on kindness or things like that, it was just not as successful. To me, it seemed artificial somehow. I didn’t seem like the activity I should be doing.

For John, then, metta meditation was an intellectual intrusion on meditative concentration because it involved thinking about words, phrases and concepts. Thus the positively-valued nature of the practice did not lead to affective changes in John’s experience. John regarded what he learned as meditation training, a way of developing new skills. He reflected on how those skills might develop over time, comparing meditation to learning how to type:

I don’t know if you have plateaus in it or not. The classical learning curve for things like that is a plateau. Like, your typing speed. I remember they would say it was always the classic example of plateau learning, where you go along and you might type at this speed and all of a sudden, for some reason, after *n* weeks, you’ll leap up to this speed. And I don’t know if it [meditation] works that way or not. It may well work that way.

While he consistently made comparisons between meditation techniques and developing new physical skills, John did not regard meditative training as strictly physical. “It’s sort of neutral physically, the actual meditation part,” he said. “I seem to be noticing more of a connection between meditation and mood, possibly, but not between meditation and anything physical.” In John’s view, the concentration exercises, though not physical, were

skills learned in the same way that physical skills are learned, namely through repetition and refinement. The affective changes John experienced were emotional: he said he felt more calm or mellow. He said he did not notice any changes in beliefs or values as a result of the practice. Neither did he connect positively valued practices like metta with positive moods. The outcomes John experienced were commensurate with his expectations: he did not regard meditation as a spiritual practice, but as a means of achieving practical benefits such as stress relief.

By contrast, Chandrakirti students described several different kinds of affective changes that resulted from meditation, primarily from meditating on the subjects of the lectures. Carol said that the meditation helped her develop compassion and kindness and a sense of personal responsibility, all of which were principles and values repeatedly emphasized in GP talks. Gerald said that the guided meditation in the classes helped him quiet his mind and experience feelings of compassion and gratitude. Bronwen believed that she was beginning to reduce her attachment to things like personal possessions as a result of meditation practice. Priscilla, a student in Chandrakirti's Foundation Program, described how meditation on a teaching such as emptiness might lead to a deeper, embodied understanding of the concept:

Something happens in meditation. I can't describe it really. It's just somehow it seems to settle in and click. Not all of the time, but sometimes you just go "oh," and then it makes sense, whereas before it was kind of out there, it was words on paper. But then it becomes incorporated into you. When you're meditating, you're allowing the winds to flow through the central channel and part of what you're thinking about goes into that. And so it incorporates into your actual being.

Priscilla's description of winds and the central channel are references to tantric concepts.

Tantric teachings hold that certain energy streams move through the body, centred on focal points or chakras positioned along the spine and head, and these energy flows can be

harnessed and used in meditation to affect physical and psychological changes in the meditator. Priscilla had incorporated this teaching into her meditation practice, and employed it as a method for internalizing and embodying the teachings she read in FP classes.

Alan had indicated that his primary practice was enacting teachings on compassion, selflessness and generosity in his daily life, but he also said that he meditated on such principles. He noted that this kind of meditation produced changes in his attitudes and behaviours by refreshing the GP class teachings. I asked him if meditating on a teaching produced a different kind of understanding of the teaching, and he said that yes, it did. He said that, when he dwelt on and repeated the idea of cherishing others, for example, the practice trained his mind and changed his responses and values. He believed that it was necessary to initiate the changes in meditation because it was not easy to do so in the midst of ordinary activities: "When you're working and doing things, you can't think like that." Alan, like other respondents, associated a psychomotor activity with a mental process. In the same way the muscles are trained through repetitive physical activities so the mind is changed through repetitive mental acts. And, as Alan noted, changing the mind changed his behaviour. Once again, this was an affective outcome, but it involved a psychomotor type of process. Alan described the practice as follows:

You think about cherishing or whatever the lesson might be: compassion. Bringing the mind back to that is the process. Unconsciously the idea is that contemplation on that helps it seep in, rather than consciously planning to be more patient. Meditating unconsciously gets into your psyche.... The more you do this the clearer the path will be for you. You do get too busy in the outside world. You don't spend enough time reflecting.

Alan thus described meditation as discipline that develops unconscious or subliminal understanding: a description similar to what Crossley and Gyatso describe as the tacit nature of knowledge generated through ritualizing.

Although meditative concentration exercises are not physical actions, most respondents believed the techniques required the development of certain skills such as the ability to concentrate, to refine one's awareness of thoughts and body sensations, or to objectively observe oneself and the practice without becoming attached or judgmental. The development of such skills involves psychomotor processes, particularly repetition, refinement and adjustment. But many respondents indicated that there were further changes that took place as a result of developing meditative concentration skills; changes corresponding to affective learning processes. Thus learning through meditation takes place in both domains. Bridging these two types of learning was the fact that learning took place through ritualized activities: that is, practices involving receptivity and reflexivity that were formalized, repetitive, elevated, formative and so on. The ritual qualities of meditation—its postures, framing activities and concentration techniques—thus initiated affective change through psychomotor techniques.

Buddhist teachings and practices, however, hold that there is another type of change intended to develop through meditation, which I have proposed as a fourth domain of learning, namely, insights. The *Dīgha Nikāya sūtra* and other Buddhist texts claim that meditation produces a deeper insight or a higher quality of wisdom than just hearing teachings or thinking about them. The deeply felt, non-discursive realization of impermanence, suffering and no-self, believed to result from the combination of stabilizing and analytical meditation, is an exceptionally high level of achievement, something that may take years or, some believe, even lifetimes to achieve. As noted earlier, a few respondents in this study hinted at meditative experiences that could be described as Buddhist-style insights. Newcomers at meditation classes were not overtly taught traditional practices intended to develop insights into impermanence, suffering or no-self. The techniques

taught were intended tangentially to open up the possibility of such insights. Experienced members, those who had taken higher-level classes and had learned more about the Tibetan and, especially, the tantric stream of Buddhist practice, were aware of such insights as goals of meditation. But a few newcomers indicated a belief that they had experienced certain realizations beyond psychomotor, affective or cognitive types of learning. Others indicated that such insights were a hoped-for outcome of meditation.

Describing the kinds of insights meant to arise in meditation, Marlon said:

Meditation actually deepens the understanding. It actually helps our minds to realize the subtle things. Most of Buddha's teaching, what he talks about is subtle. He talks about the nature of our mind, and often we don't really understand what the nature and the function is or the various types of minds. But through meditation we can actually come to observe that for ourselves, so that we can identify the types of minds there are and the type of situation that arises, and when it arises how we can actually change our mind. Through meditation we learn all that. So, I would say meditation is the core of our practice.

Marlon's comments bring to mind a debate over the significance in traditional Buddhism of unmediated meditative experience. Robert Sharf has argued that the oft-touted centrality of meditative experience in Buddhism is a modern western construction, propagated primarily by popular writers like D.T. Suzuki, and is not to be found in older, more traditional expressions of Buddhism in Asia.<sup>52</sup> In her study of Tibetan meditative systems, however, Janet Gyatso casts doubt on Sharf's position. She points out that the Tibetan terms usually translated as "experience" refer to different degrees of perception, from the mundane all the way up to the direct perception of Buddhist truths. In other words, what Tibetan teachings refer to as experience is akin to different and ever-deepening degrees of insight. While Gyatso notes that Tibetan authors display considerable ambivalence with respect to experience, meditative experience does play an important role in achieving the kind of self-reflexive consciousness that is believed to accompany higher insight.<sup>53</sup> Gyatso



also points out that meditation is a practice that not only involves both the body and the mind, it is intended to result in a fully integrated, non-dualistic experience of body and mind.<sup>54</sup> As such, psychomotor learning—which, in meditation, includes physical and mental processes—is vital for developing Buddhist insights.

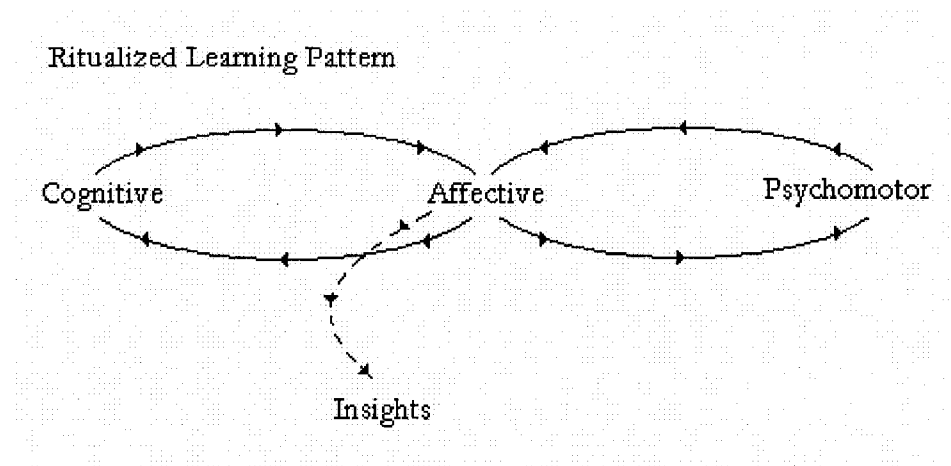
The path begins with cognitive learning, an intellectual understanding of the teachings. Along the way, the meditator develops an increasing acceptance of Buddhist values and worldviews, while cultivating the necessary meditation skills. Ideally, the meditator achieves higher insights as a result of this path. Meditative ritualizing, therefore, repetitively cycles through the three main learning domains, with the goal of arriving at the fourth.

## **Conclusion**

The path to achieving insight, as described in Buddhist traditions and doctrines, is idealized. But it does have certain similarities to the learning experiences that some respondents described. Learning meditation begins with the how: first the cognitive and then experiential knowledge of how to sit and how to concentrate. Factual and conceptual (that is, cognitive) knowledge about the reasons for and benefits of meditation may make the practice more attractive or accessible to newcomers. Next, the student's attitudes about what meditation is and whether or not they can perform it and whether or not it will be beneficial begin to shift. Finally, students learn the physical and mental techniques on a psychomotor level: receiving, imitating, developing, practicing and adapting the practices. Many respondents indicated that, with the cultivation of meditation skills there developed additional affective changes. At this point, respondents indicated that the changes were not just attitudes, feelings or values *about* meditation, but changes that happen *through* meditation. Examples given were: letting go of stress or attachments, feeling peaceful,

being better able to concentrate, or developing feelings of equanimity, gratitude or compassion for others.

Finally, many respondents indicated that they then interpreted and analyzed the new attitudes developed in meditation, thereby engaging in further cognitive learning. New cognitive understandings affected the way respondents valued meditation practice and its effects, so many of them continued practicing and refining the skill. Moreover, because meditation is formalized, repetitive, structured, held in enough esteem to be repeated and to elicit a degree of commitment from most respondents, the cycle was repeated. The pattern of learning thus moved from cognitive to affective through the psychomotor and back again. Some respondents indicated that they had either experienced a kind of insight, or that they believed that insights were the ultimate goal of the practice. At some point, therefore, the process is meant to break out, either once and for all or every now and again into the fourth domain. The pattern of learning, therefore, might be depicted as follows:



For some respondents, affective change was only incidental. Some more strongly stressed the psychomotor end of the cycle, others the cognitive. Based on the emphasis most respondents placed on affective learning, however, I place the affective domain at the nexus of the pattern. The changes through which practitioners began to accept new attitudes and values, for many, inspired a commitment to the practice. Through the

practice, students were also inspired to institute voluntary behavioural changes. Examples were: continued meditation practice (sometimes increased), changes in behaviour towards others in accordance with feelings of equanimity or compassion, efforts to change habitual responses in the face of anger or irritation, and so on. Some respondents suggested that such behavioural changes were internalized over time, becoming increasingly instinctive.

At his first interview Gerald used a metaphor for how he was learning that reflects the pattern demonstrated here.

The more I ponder some of the principles, the broader the space becomes between being able to meditate... Some of the principles are like a Mobius strip, I find. You can start and then go a long way and then come back to the simplicity of it. It's really intriguing. It's like a little adventure in your mind.

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<sup>1</sup> Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 40-56.

<sup>2</sup> ———, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 46.

<sup>3</sup> ———, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 46.

<sup>4</sup> I find Diane's references to different means of learning intriguing, here: She said she had learned that experiential learning through prostration practice was possible, but she had learned about that possibility through a book!

<sup>5</sup> Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, Revised Edition*, 300.

<sup>6</sup> ———, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, Revised Edition*, 299.

<sup>7</sup> Vietnamese Monk and founder of the international Order of Interbeing, Thich Nhat Hanh, for example, teaches a special prostration practice which he calls "touching the earth," a practice intended to overcome westerners' reluctance to performing prostrations. The practice, as Nhat Hanh teaches it, is a means of connecting with one's family and spiritual teachers and has no association with deities. Patricia Hunt-Perry and Lyn Fine, "All Buddhism Is Engaged: Thich Nhat Hanh and the Order of Interbeing," in *Engaged Buddhism in the West*, ed. Christopher S. Queen (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 52.

<sup>8</sup> Guru yoga involves visualizing one's teacher as a fully enlightened being, capable of helping one achieve full buddhahood. Guru yoga visualizations like the one Marconi described involve imagining a vast tree in which sit one's teacher and all the teachers of one's lineage. The visualization is intended to bestow the practitioner with a sense of a close connection to the teacher and all of the other gurus in the lineage. For a description of guru yoga, see Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, Revised Edition*, 310-11.

<sup>9</sup> For a full description of Tibetan foundation practice, see ———, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, Revised Edition*, 294-311.

<sup>10</sup> Jennings, "On Ritual Knowledge," 326.

<sup>11</sup> Grimes, concerned that ritual is too often associated with habituated behaviour, argues that habituation is, in fact, the bane of ritualization. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 43.

<sup>12</sup> Williams, *Ritual Art and Knowledge: Aesthetic Theory and Zoroastrian Ritual*, 72.

<sup>13</sup> ———, *Ritual Art and Knowledge: Aesthetic Theory and Zoroastrian Ritual*, 78.

<sup>14</sup> Tom F. Driver, *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Driver, *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual*, 30.

<sup>16</sup> Jennings, "On Ritual Knowledge"; Kevin Schilbrack, "Ritual Metaphysics," in *Thinking through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kevin Schilbrack (New York and London: Routledge, 2004). See also Crossley, "Ritual, Body Technique and (Inter)Subjectivity"; and McLaren, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*, 201-04.

- <sup>17</sup> Michael Raposa notes that repetition and redundancy in ritual is a means of confirming religious beliefs by embodying them in practice. Ritual is thus a means of induction or strengthening “belief-habits” or of inculcating them in practitioners who are marginal, such as newcomers or the “spiritually lukewarm.” Raposa, “Ritual Inquiry: The Pragmatic Logic of Religious Practice,” 115-6.
- <sup>18</sup> Richard Hayes, *A Buddhist's Reflections on Religious Conversion* (Montréal, Québec: Elijah School Lectures for the fourth summer program, 2000), 44-5.
- <sup>19</sup> By Vajrasattva, Catherine was referring to the foundation practice of reciting the hundred-syllable mantra of the deity Vajrasattva and performing one-hundred thousand prostrations. David, in fact, had confessed to being one such student.
- <sup>20</sup> Grimes points out that that ritualizing is non-discursive, that intellectual analysis, particularly during emergent rituals, can impede the development of those rituals. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 66.
- <sup>21</sup> L.W. Anderson and D.R. Krathwohl, et. Al., ed., *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (New York: Longman, 2001), 259-86.
- <sup>22</sup> Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 107-9.
- <sup>23</sup> ———, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 108.
- <sup>24</sup> Rogers, *What Is the Difference: A New Critique of Adult Learning and Teaching*, 10.
- <sup>25</sup> Jennings, “On Ritual Knowledge.”
- <sup>26</sup> ———, “On Ritual Knowledge,” 327, emphasis in original.
- <sup>27</sup> Schilbrack, “Ritual Metaphysics,” 137-9.
- <sup>28</sup> ———, “Ritual Metaphysics,” 138.
- <sup>29</sup> ———, “Ritual Metaphysics,” 139.
- <sup>30</sup> ———, “Ritual Metaphysics,” 136.
- <sup>31</sup> ———, “Ritual Metaphysics,” 139.
- <sup>32</sup> Raposa, “Ritual Inquiry: The Pragmatic Logic of Religious Practice,” 115.
- <sup>33</sup> Raposa explores body habits and their influence on beliefs in some detail. ———, “Ritual Inquiry: The Pragmatic Logic of Religious Practice,” 113-6.
- <sup>34</sup> ———, “Ritual Inquiry: The Pragmatic Logic of Religious Practice,” 124.
- <sup>35</sup> Janet Gyatso, “Healing Burns with Fire: The Facilitations of Experience in Tibetan Buddhism,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67, no. 1 (1999): 140.
- <sup>36</sup> Gyatso, “Healing Burns with Fire: The Facilitations of Experience in Tibetan Buddhism,” 129.
- <sup>37</sup> Mahāmudrā is a philosophy and teaching found primarily in the *Kagyū* but also in the *Géluk* schools of Tibetan Buddhism. It combines *sūtra* study for the comprehension of the truth of ultimate reality, which is believed to be bliss and emptiness, and tantra, in which the practitioner works towards realizing that truth through spiritual practice. “Mahāmudrā,” in *The Oxford dictionary of world religions*, ed. John Bowker (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 600.
- <sup>38</sup> Schechner, “Magnitudes of Performance,” 30-1.
- <sup>39</sup> ———, “Magnitudes of Performance,” 31.
- <sup>40</sup> Rogers, *What Is the Difference: A New Critique of Adult Learning and Teaching*, 9.
- <sup>41</sup> McLaren, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*, 46.
- <sup>42</sup> Crossley, “Ritual, Body Technique and (Inter)Subjectivity,” 35.
- <sup>43</sup> ———, “Ritual, Body Technique and (Inter)Subjectivity,” 35.
- <sup>44</sup> ———, “Ritual, Body Technique and (Inter)Subjectivity,” 36.
- <sup>45</sup> ———, “Ritual, Body Technique and (Inter)Subjectivity,” 35.
- <sup>46</sup> ———, “Ritual, Body Technique and (Inter)Subjectivity,” 37.
- <sup>47</sup> Gyatso, “Healing Burns with Fire: The Facilitations of Experience in Tibetan Buddhism,” 128-9.
- <sup>48</sup> Crossley, “Ritual, Body Technique and (Inter)Subjectivity,” 31.
- <sup>49</sup> Gyatso, “Healing Burns with Fire: The Facilitations of Experience in Tibetan Buddhism,” 129.
- <sup>50</sup> ———, “Healing Burns with Fire: The Facilitations of Experience in Tibetan Buddhism,” 129.
- <sup>51</sup> Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, Revised Edition*, 87.
- <sup>52</sup> See, for example, Robert H. Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995).
- <sup>53</sup> Gyatso, “Healing Burns with Fire: The Facilitations of Experience in Tibetan Buddhism,” 128-30.
- <sup>54</sup> ———, “Healing Burns with Fire: The Facilitations of Experience in Tibetan Buddhism,” 129.

## Chapter Six: Change

If learning refers to change, then we might measure Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti students' learning through the changes that take place over time as they participate at the centres. One way of measuring change would be to compare the reflections of long-term members with those of newcomers, since experienced members were where some newcomers might be a few months or years down the road.

Attitudes towards ritual comprised the most notable difference between these two groups. While many newcomers at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti were wary of or not interested in some of the rituals or more obviously ritualized practices, members who had more experience with the centres and were involved in higher level classes had not only accepted the rituals, they found them to be valuable learning experiences. For instance, both Marconi and David, who were experienced members at Friends of the Heart, found prostration practice to be an effective means of learning about themselves. They also regularly performed chanted prayers, to either Vajrasattva or White Tara.

David was thirty-four and a doctor of Chinese medicine. At the time of his interview, he had been a member of Friends of the Heart for about four years. He said that he “jumped right in” to the more advanced practices at Friends of the Heart after attending a workshop on the Chenrezig mantra with Catherine Rathbun. He had not attended any of the Friends of the Heart introductory classes. It was clear that David had more readily accepted formal Buddhist practices from the start than had many Friends of the Heart newcomers who participated in this study. At the time we spoke in March 2007, David was working his way through foundation practice. He described his daily practice as follows:

Six days a week, in the morning... I usually do an hour of practice.... I'm doing the Vajrasattva, trying to get through that, so I'll be working through that *sādhana*. And I usually do it for about an hour. And then I get ready for my day and then usually throughout the day, what I've been doing is Chenrezig mantra. And then in the afternoon, it kind of varies, but maybe around three to five, I'll do my two hundred prostrations.

Working through the Vajrasattva *sādhana* means performing the preparatory practices for purifying and clearing the mind, then chanting a series of prayers and mantras to the deity Vajrasattva and performing meditative visualizations of that deity, a detailed ritual that David performed nearly every day. David was thus committed to several traditional, highly ritualized practices. In addition to performing the Vajrasattva prayers and practices, and chanting the Chenrezig (*om mani padme hung*) mantra each day, he performed two hundred full-body prostrations, despite the fact that he found them physically difficult and “mentally oppressive.” I asked if he had considered Catherine’s adapted prostrations, and he said he thought they were the easy way out. He felt there must be a reason for the full-body prostrations, and believed that they were having a “strong effect” that he wanted to work through. He said that he was developing the stamina to perform prostrations—initially he had only been able to do twenty at a time but was now up to two hundred each day. I asked if prostrations were getting any better mentally, and he replied:

Yeah. The aversion is less. It still pops up, usually in the beginning. But it's kind of like: just go through it, just do it. Often times it's like my mind is thinking: okay, I've done two. I have one hundred and ninety-eight to go. So, sometimes it's just a matter of being present and going one step at a time. Stop thinking ahead into the future, just do the one, do the one. That makes it easier.

Here David describes something he learned through practice: first, that being in the moment and doing one prostration at a time was a good way to get through the arduous practice. Second, the practice helped him train his mind to maintain the necessary focus on the present moment. The “present moment” mindset is believed to be a goal of meditation

as well as other Buddhist practices. When I asked David if he had achieved a meditative mindset during prostrations, however, he said: “I’m not there yet. I’ve heard, I’ve read that it’s good. You do enter some state. But I’m not there yet.” Rather, he regarded prostration practice as a means of purification.

Marconi, a management consultant who was forty-eight, and also an experienced member at Friends of the Heart, attended Catherine’s Tibetan Meditation and Richard’s Intermediate Meditation courses every week. Like David, he had accepted many of the formal practices like *pūjās* and was performing them as part of his home practice.

I do White Tara two or three times a week on my own. I meditate at least once a day, I spend about an hour in the mornings with my own practice. That feels right.

Marconi also said that he was reading books on guru yoga and the Tibetan deity Tara. He said his studies and his practices were providing him with a sense of “awareness and presence.” Marconi had recently gone through some difficult times in his life, and he believed that the White Tara practice helped him face such difficulties. “I follow White Tara as a *sādhana*. And that is an important tool for me in terms of settling because I have gone through a massive amount of change.” Even so, Marconi admitted that his practices and what he was learning through them were not always easy.

There’s stuff that I struggle with. I absolutely hate it. And I just go: this is just horrific. But I’m in it, and I just go: okay, so here I am, it’s gross and it’s awful and I hate it, but I’m in it and often that particular experience will last for four or five minutes or half an hour. So, where is my breathing, where am I, what’s this? And then, okay.... Afterwards, I went, Oh, that feels so good... to let go of that.

The difficult practices Marconi spoke of were experiences and encounters that arose in his life, not necessarily the formal practices he performed. He spoke in particular about strained relations with certain family members. The practice he described, the practice he found most difficult, was relating to such people with respect and equanimity while at the

same time not giving in to habitual patterns that perpetuated the painful relationships. He felt that an important means of supporting that practice was performing the prayers to White Tara. Marconi thus felt that performing the formal practices gave him the resources for coping with difficult circumstances in his life.

The two experienced members from Chandrakirti also indicated that they more readily accepted some of the more religious and ritualistic elements that they had become familiar with at Foundation Program classes and Chandrakirti's chanted prayers. But acceptance was not always there from the start. Priscilla, who had been taking Foundation Program classes for three years at the time of her interview, said: "My bugaboo is I always want to understand everything because I figure I don't get anything out of it [otherwise]. But I keep being told by different people: it doesn't matter. Doing it is going to be changing you anyway."

Priscilla, at fifty-eight, had retired from her career as a teacher. I spoke to her primarily about her participation in the Foundation Program. She had been a member at Chandrakirti for four years. She had taken GP classes for one summer, then decided to try the Foundation Program. At her first FP class, however, she discovered that it included the performance of a *pūjā*, and she said she could not wait to leave.

*Pūjās* seemed too weird to me. What is all this weird chanting and stuff? I don't think I got into *pūjās* until I was in FP, and even then I still had trouble. It took me several months before I understood what all of the preparatory prayers were. Not that I understand them completely, but I felt it just was a waste of time.

Despite her unease, Priscilla persisted with the class and gradually became more familiar with the chanted prayers. "I slowly started to get more comfortable with them and started to like them. And now, I can't imagine not having them at the beginning of the meditation. We do them with meditation at home too." At the time she was interviewed, Priscilla was



regularly attending FP classes, had completed some of the commentary texts and written examinations on them. She described what she saw as the significance of the prayers for meditation practice and for studying the commentary texts in FP class:

If you look at the prayer, the stages of the path, I think you're asking for blessings twelve or thirteen times. ... You need the blessings so that you can really take in what's going on in the teaching. You have to set your mind, you have to set the stage, you have to get everything in order and you have to ask for blessings so that you understand the teaching better. ... Usually, we will do some of the prayers before we start the exam, too.

Priscilla had therefore not only accepted the chanted prayers, she had also internalized some of the religious meanings behind them, such as the necessity of blessings from gurus or deities in order to gain insights into the teachings.

Marlon, a writer and teacher who was forty-seven years of age, began taking GP classes in 1993, when Chandrakirti Centre was just starting up. Eventually, Marlon began to take the Foundation Program classes as well. Like Priscilla, he noted that FP classes involved more ritual: there were the chanted prayers following the prayer books as well as an oral transmission, from teacher to students, of Kelsang Gyatso's commentary texts.<sup>1</sup>

Marlon frequently participated in the Heart Jewel *pūjā* at the centre, and performed it on his own as part of his personal practice. Describing the purposes of Heart Jewel,

Marlon said:

There are actually three things that help us to meditate: first of all, we need to get the blessings from the buddhas. So this [Heart Jewel] helps us to achieve that. And also, in order to meditate, we need to clear our mind which is called purification. You know, like if our mind is cluttered up or it is distracted, we can't really concentrate, so this practice actually helps us to clear our mind. And the other thing that it helps us do is to generate what is called merit. That's something like a positive energy, it helps us to gather some positive energy so that we can actually focus. So, these are the three main functions of this practice.

When I asked Marlon how his involvement with Buddhist practices or teachings would be different if he did not attend Heart Jewel at Chandrakirti, he replied:

If I don't practice that, my involvement with Buddhism wouldn't be as deep, it would be more superficial and it would be more like just reading about it and forgetting about it. It wouldn't be a practice, it would be more like mere reading, intellectual thinking. But with this practice it actually goes deeper. It actually has a more subtle effect on our mind. I'm slowly learning about that, actually. I guess the purpose of our practice is to develop the inner potential of our mind.

In Marlon's view, learning through practice—in this case, performing chanted prayers asking for blessings from buddhas—was experienced differently to learning through reading or intellectualizing. Marlon had thus accepted many of the formal Tibetan practices and faith-based teachings.

Long-term members who were more involved than newcomers in the advanced courses and *pūjās* at the centres clearly indicated a greater acceptance of the centres' rituals and their religious meanings. It would appear, therefore, that greater acceptance of ritual may develop with exposure and increasing familiarity over time.

### **Newcomers: learning and change**

"What meditation is really demonstrating to me," Tanit told me at her second interview in May of 2007, "is that you can change. Not that it's easy, and not that it happens like: 'I have meditated. There, it's all done.' But it is an ongoing process and you can change anything about who you are." To bring to a close the stories of the six principal interview respondents, this section explores the changes that took place between their first and second round interviews. What role did learning through ritualizing have to do with those changes and to what degree did their motivations for joining the meditation classes affect the outcomes?

Tanit's journey to Friends of the Heart began with an interest in Daoism. She was particularly intrigued by Daoist teachings that life is an illusion and that there was a practice, namely meditation, for seeing past that illusion to achieve enlightenment. Unable

to find Daoist meditation classes in Toronto, she decided to go to a Buddhist centre. Her main motivation for participating at Friends of the Heart, therefore, was a desire to learn how to meditate as a means to a spiritual goal.

When we first met in December 2006, Tanit spoke a great deal about the practicalities of meditation postures, gestures and concentration techniques. She mentioned the techniques she was learning and how she adjusted them in order to develop an effective and personally relevant practice. She regarded meditation as a long-term journey: she had read in her book on Daoism that it took twelve years or more to achieve enlightenment, and she was keen to work towards that goal. By May of 2007, however, Tanit's reflections on the goal had changed. "Well, I'm now beginning to think that, in fact, enlightenment is the goal, but it's actually not important. It's the journey, it's what's happening to you as you travel towards this state."

This change in perspective came about as Tanit began to experience certain results from meditation. One result she attributed to the practice was an increased awareness of her body in the midst of her ordinary activities. She found she was holding a lot of tension in her body when sitting at the computer, riding her bicycle, and so on. With this awareness, she found she could release the tension. Tanit also believed that meditation had helped her learn not just about her physical habits, but something about her psychology and spirituality as well. For example, she had begun to explore fear in meditation, asking herself what she was afraid of. "And I finally accepted that I'm afraid of dying alone. And, yeah, that's pretty obvious, but it isn't until you really face it [that] you have acknowledged this. Why are you afraid of that? What is this fear based on?" The questions Tanit was exploring related to aspects of her self and her life that were psychological, but also spiritual: of ultimate concern to herself as a person. Tanit felt that meditation had led to some profound new understandings.

Did the changes Tanit described come about because the means of learning, meditation, was ritualized? Repetition certainly aids learning, but there were other influential qualities: the fact that Tanit regarded the practice as something special, elevated, and associated with spirituality and tradition—these factors shaped the nature of her learning. Her motivation—to find a practice that would help her develop spiritually—was a clear influence on the outcome, her belief that she had made spiritual progress.

Another significant change that Tanit noted was inspired not by meditation but through reading. After her first interview, she had begun reading several books on Buddhism by and for westerners: She mentioned Jack Kornfield, Pema Chodron and Sharon Salzberg. From these readings, Tanit began to gain a new perspective.

The thing that I'm beginning to understand is the whole idea of being able to help other people: it is a privilege, which hadn't been something I had understood that way. It's something I'm going through right now with my mom, who has broken her hip. She doesn't like the food at the hospital. So, I said: I have the time, I'm in a unique situation right now, so I will make stuff for you and bring stuff in.... And I dropped her lunch off just before I came here, and it's a fantastic day, and I thought: yeah, it's a privilege. It's an honour to have the opportunity to do this. That is definitely coming out of the reading that I'm doing, [and] being involved with the centre, understanding sharing with people is great. It's an amazing thing about being a human being and being able to do those kinds of things.

Tanit felt that her readings were also a means of gaining new spiritual perspectives. The changes she described, therefore, were not only attributed to meditation practice or to her involvement at the centre, although she believed that all of these elements had contributed to what she regarded as her spiritual progress. In the months since our first interview, she believed that her self-awareness had increased through self-reflection, a type of learning she described as intellectual.

I do keep a diary, and it's really interesting looking back, even just a few months, seeing how you are progressing and changing.... I realize that it has changed dramatically from when I saw you in December to now. The

intellectual aspect wasn't part of my practice at that time at all. The self reflection and examination wasn't part of it.

Tanit had begun to practice a kind of analytical or insight meditation, an analysis into her own nature. While she described it as intellectual, the results she described were changes in attitudes, outlooks and values; changes that were more affective than cognitive. The new information she had gained from her readings had also led to more affective changes, primarily because she regarded what she was reading as spiritual teachings rather than technical or academic.

After the ten-week introductory course with Joyce ended, Tanit took out a full membership at Friends of the Heart rather than enrolling in a second ten-week temporary membership. I asked Tanit what she thought her future involvement at Friends of the Heart might be. She said that she wanted to become more involved, perhaps by volunteering to help with the centre's administration. But she was very busy. She knew that when her sabbatical ended the following September it would be more difficult to continue the level of practice that she had developed to that point. But she did intend to continue at the weekly classes at Friends of the Heart, perhaps even joining the individual mentoring program later on. As a teacher, she had also considered the possibility of teaching meditation down the road.

Tanit felt she had learned the meditation techniques, postures and practices she had hoped to learn. She had made some discoveries about herself and her relationship with others that she regarded as steps along a long spiritual path to enlightenment. She had also become a longer term member of Friends of the Heart, with plans, at that time, to continue.

Like Tanit, Diane regarded meditation as a means of exploring spirituality. Reflecting on her motives for taking a meditation class, Diane said, "I knew what I was

interested in had something to do with religions and philosophy, but I didn't know what exactly. But it was more along the lines of: Who am I? What am I doing here? What is the meaning of life?" Having discovered that academic courses did not provide the kinds of answers she was looking for, Diane began exploring Buddhist practices and teachings. "It feels like there are more answers about meaning in Buddhism than I have had in any other place," she said. Diane enrolled at Friends of the Heart in order to receive some instruction on how to meditate, but she also said she wanted "a serious teaching," which she felt she received at the General Program classes at Atisha Centre.

Diane's first interview was in February 2007. By September, she was no longer attending Friends of the Heart, having left at the end of her second ten-week membership, around the time that Catherine Rathbun went into semi-retirement. Diane had continued at Atisha Centre, but she said she was still reluctant to become involved in an organized religion. While she insisted that she did not regard Buddhism as a religion, she had encountered what she believed were religious elements at both centres, elements with which she was uncomfortable. Even so, she decided to continue with the Atisha Centre GP classes because she liked the teacher and the teachings. At the time of her second interview, in September of 2007, Atisha had been closed over the summer, and Diane had not attended a Buddhist centre for a few months.

Even so, Diane continued her personal meditation practice. "I'm still practicing almost every day at home." She had gradually increased the length of her sittings and had reached fifty-five minutes. Describing the results of nearly an hour of meditation, Diane said: "Mostly, I feel energy.... I feel awake and alert, and I like it. But it's carrying out over into the day, trying to just pay attention. I'm just trying to be mindful during the day." But with more intensive practice, Diane also began to have some negative experiences.

I started to be very disturbed in my meditation practice. I had originally thought meditation was about peace.... Well, I was not feeling very peaceful. I was beginning to feel a lot of fears and being disturbed in my meditation practice.

Looking for solutions to this problem, Diane began reading books on meditation by western writers like Jack Kornfield, Pema Chodron and Ayya Kema. She learned from these books that meditation can give rise to negative emotions; an experience that, paradoxically, is said to happen among more experienced meditators. Diane was comforted to learn that what she had experienced was not unusual. She began to integrate what she had learned from her readings with the meditation practices taught at Friends of the Heart.

I would focus on “active” and it would be a turning in my stomach, so I’m sitting there centred on that churning, and it gets fear and anxiety. Then I would try to go some place to “rest,” but mostly I didn’t go to rest. I would stay with that churning and see what would happen to it. And sometimes I would stay churned up, and that’s the part I didn’t like. But I decided after reading, I’m just going to stay with it. So, I’m churned up, and just accept the fact that I’m churned up and see what happens.

Diane believed that sitting through the negative experiences made her more aware of her responses to such situations. “That led me to see that I’m a negative person!” she said with a laugh. “I just see so much of that: how judgmental and how many of my thoughts go right to judgment. I find that interesting.” Diane’s discoveries about herself derived from a meditation practice she had learned at Friends of the Heart, but she might not have kept up the practice were it not for the encouragement she gained from her readings.

Diane’s readings also introduced her to another way of envisioning Buddhism, and of applying it in her life: “It’s almost like Buddhism as psychology as opposed to Buddhism as a religion.... Because I never really thought about Buddhism as a kind of theory, a psychological theory. But it is.” Diane had thus accepted a common perspective by which Buddhism has often been presented in the West: as compatible, not only with modern science, but also as form of psychology or psychotherapy. There are numerous books

currently available on the topic of the intersection between Buddhist practices and western psychology.<sup>2</sup> While some commentators believe that applying Buddhist-style practices in psychotherapy can be fruitful, others have argued that this is a reductive appropriation of Buddhist teachings and practices.

Speaking about insight meditation, Diane said:

I'm seeing it more from a theory of development, a theory of the development of the mind. And I'm fascinated by that, which is more comfortable for me, maybe, because it's in my head and I can wrap myself around that.

Several months on, Diane's preference for intellectual learning about Buddhist teachings and practices remained. Her investigations into Buddhism and psychology introduced an analytical approach that she could apply through insight or analytical meditation. This approach appealed to Diane's interest in cognitive learning.

There were forces of push and pull in Diane's experience at Friends of the Heart and Atisha: she had an attraction to Buddhist teachings and practices, but continued to be uncomfortable with religious symbols and rituals and was unwilling to participate in devotional practices. Her reluctance to become involved in ritual may have precluded the kind of intimate, experiential learning about religious symbols and practices that Gerald claimed to have had, for example. Still, she believed she had made significant changes in her attitudes and outlooks as a result of the practices and teachings she learned at Friends of the Heart and Atisha. For instance, her daughter had recently moved home for the summer, and the situation was difficult for both of them. But Diane believed that she was able to be patient and considerate as a result of her practice and the Buddhist principles she had learned.

Diane did not rule out the possibility of learning about the more religious aspects of Buddhism. Speaking of her discomfort with the doctrine of karmic rebirth, she said:



“Maybe if I continue with meditation and at some point have an insight that reaches into subtler levels of consciousness in a way that I get insight into some of those concepts; but with my current mind in its current state of development, I cannot grasp it.”

With respect to her future involvement, Diane said she intended to return to Atisha’s GP classes when they resumed. But she was looking for more as well. “I would like to meditate longer in a group, but also to have access to an individual teacher.” She said she was not fond of the guided meditation at Friends of the Heart and Atisha, and wanted to find a group with which to meditate in silence. She was also planning on an intensive week-long retreat with another organization in southern Ontario. Although Diane had left Friends of the Heart, she was keeping up a meditation practice, and still interested in participating at Buddhist centres.

When John enrolled in the Friends of the Heart meditation class, he was purely interested in learning about meditation techniques and how to develop the skills involved. While he acknowledged that there might be a spiritual side to meditation, he was not seeking spiritual practice nor a religious or spiritual community. In February of 2007, when John and I first met for an interview, it was near the end of the Joyce’s Introduction to Insight class. I asked John if he still had any questions about meditation, and he said: “No. It’s just time on the cushion now.” John felt that all he needed was time and commitment to refine and practice his meditation techniques. In many ways, John regarded meditation as a psychomotor type of learning. Although it was not entirely physical, he regarded it as a skill to be developed through practice like other physical skills. While he said it altered his mood, making him feel more calm or mellow, he did not think that any other kinds of affective changes took place as a result of the practice. He said he did not associate such changes in mood with any change in belief, outlook, attitude, values or behaviours.

John believed that meditating with others was helpful. Without the group, he believed, it would be much easier to fall out of the habit. His prediction turned out to be true. When we met for a second interview in June of 2007, John had left Friends of the Heart and the Toronto General Hospital meditation group and had not meditated for a few months. After the two courses he had been taking had ended, he had suffered a period of depression during which he found it impossible to meditate. Describing the effects of depression, John said:

The simplest things become insurmountable, and the insidious thing about it is that everything you want to do is exactly the opposite of what you should be doing. You should be going out, exercising and socializing and that's the last thing you want to do.

The depression had not only interrupted John's home practice, it had made him unwilling to continue attending meditation sessions with others. By the time of our second interview, however, he was ready to start looking for a group with which to meditate again. He said that he might return to the Toronto General Hospital to participate in a continuing meditation program offered there. His intention not to go back to Friends of the Heart was partly due to its Buddhist orientation, but there was a more practical reason, as well; the course at the hospital was closer to home.

John said he did not think he learned anything in particular through other formal practices like prayers, bows or mudras. But he did believe that meditation had taught him something about himself and about how his mind worked as he observed its processes. Even so, he described what he learned in terms of the factual information he had gained rather than referring to changes in his attitudes or insights. "Everyone's mind wanders," he said. "That will go on as long as you have a mind. That's definitely a good thing to learn." He said that he had not gone as far with meditation practice as he would have liked, and felt that there was more that he could gain should he return to it.

Like most other participants, the outcome of John's learning at the meditation classes he took corresponded to, and was perhaps influenced by, his initial motivations for taking the courses. He had not been looking for answers to deeply spiritual questions, nor insights into Buddhist principles. He learned how to meditate, and that was what he had enrolled in the classes to do.

Reflecting on his reasons for attending the Chandrakirti GP classes, Alan said he had been looking for ways of being happier in his life. He said:

I'm sixty-five, so I figure I've got  $x$  amount of years left, and I'd like to change that to being in a better place, mind-wise, than where I've been: attached to the business where, if you have a bad day, you take it home with you. Now, if I have a bad day it's a different point of view.

The GP classes introduced Alan to the idea that being happy meant changing some fundamental assumptions and beliefs by which he had lived his life. Inspired by the values and ethics taught at the class, he decided to make changes in his outlook and behaviour. At his first interview in May of 2007, he said that his practice had improved his relationships with others, especially his family. He also believed he had become more thoughtful, caring, patient and generous. "The basic thing that I keep thinking about is not to think about yourself," Alan said. "And that seems to be the hardest lesson.... So that, to me, is important." An important element of his learning, therefore, was not a practice but a personal ethic.

Through his learning process, Alan assessed and began to accept new attitudes and values, which he then consciously applied. Alan's "practice" was a kind of informal training, a means of acquiring skills over time by noting and reacting to what is going on.<sup>3</sup> For Alan, it meant learning new ways of behaving with his family, his social groups, and his clients. It was a kind of play: experimenting with behaviours he had not tried before—an example he gave was consciously welcoming people who came in to his store to socialize

rather than to shop—and seeing how he reacted to his new behaviours, and what changes they made in his attitudes. Successful informal training results in inherent changes in behaviour, as learners begin to practice on their own.<sup>4</sup> Alan believed that, with time and with the help of his meditation practice, the new behaviours and attitudes would become innate rather than something he needed to think about.

Alan also believed that meditation was an important part of the practice. He said it helped him “refresh” or “sharpen” the changes he was trying to make in his life. At his first interview, Alan said he had been meditating once or twice every day for fifteen to twenty minutes each time. He regarded Buddhist meditation as a means of change.

It works for me if I can contemplate on changing things. And you do that, as I understand it with this meditation, the Buddhist. It's work, it isn't just sitting there and just trying to block out all thought. It seems to be more about working on moving forward, or merit as they call it. I like that idea.

Initially, then, Alan spoke of meditation as a means of becoming more naturally familiar with the values he wanted to enact: generosity, compassion and selflessness, for example. He believed that this familiarity was achieved by training the mind in seated meditation, and by the merit the practice generated. By the time of his second interview in October 2007, Alan's perspectives on his daily practice and on meditation had changed: they had merged, in a sense. Alan said, “you can meditate anywhere. I do it now with my eyes open, and I'm not so self conscious about it.” He said he sometimes meditated on the subway, or in the line-up at the grocery store. When he went for a walk in the morning, he would perform a metta recitation for building merit: wishing suffering to end for all living beings. He said that the energy he put into that particular practice felt more positive than “just thinking about cherishing other people.” He thus discovered that a ritualized repetition of a loving-kindness mantra felt like a more effective practice than simply resolving to be compassionate or selfless. In the five months since we had first spoken, then, Alan had

begun incorporating more of the ritualized practices taught at Chandrakirti into his daily activities.

I asked Alan about taking the same class over again: Was it still fresh? He said that he was still learning. “It’s the same message, really. You evolve each time you’re practicing these things. Suddenly I notice I’ve moved a little bit forward from what they said a year ago. I hear it again and think about a different way now.” He said that initially he heard the teachings in an academic way, but he was now able to enact what he had learned. The practice, he said, was “cherishing, getting the information from them [the GP teachers]. You will never get it if you cherish yourself, the point is to forget yourself.” He said he had noticed a difference in himself. He believed he was able to be less judgmental and was now operating on “insights rather than automatic drive.”

Alan had learned something that both experienced members from Chandrakirti, Marlon and Priscilla, had also expressed: that meditation is not the only form of practice, and that GP teachings were also intended to encourage students to change their outlooks and their lives. Alan came to Chandrakirti looking for ways of being happier. He believed he had found what he came for. He had also become a long-term, regular participant at the centre, finding it to be what teacher Thekchen had hoped: a safe, welcoming environment where people can explore and discuss the ideas coming out of Buddhist doctrine. After Chandrakirti closed, Alan and his daughter Bronwen continued to attend the classes at a public library. By October of 2007, Alan’s wife was attending the classes, too. What was next for Alan? He had not yet heard about the higher level classes at Chandrakirti, but he intended to keep going to GP classes. “It just becomes part of your life,” he said, “something you do.”

Originally, Carol began participating at Chandrakirti out of an interest in meditation and a desire to receive some detailed instruction on the practice. What she encountered at

the GP classes were talks on Buddhist teachings and principles that appealed to her. But she was unsure about the strongly ritualized elements at the centre. Although she had been attending GP classes and volunteering at the centre for seven years, she said she continued to evaluate the rituals and her responses to them.

As a long-term member, Carol's participation at Chandrakirti had leveled off before she and I first spoke in April of 2007. She had been participating at its introductory class and, by the time of her second interview in October of 2007, had not yet participated in Foundation Program classes. She was content to remain at the GP classes, and said that she was always learning something new as the same topics were repeated. She was, she said, a slow learner, and was content to take her time with what she was learning. When we spoke a second time, Carol reiterated some of what she had told me at her first interview.

I think that I re-visit and reconnect with the responsibility that I require in my life towards myself and the world around me. That is a key word, responsibility: to learn how to operate in the world and to be open and caring about everybody. That gets revisited in the class as opposed to sitting on my own. There are a lot of deeper lessons to be learned. Emptiness, truth, specific aspects. But generally how to be in the world—I'm resisting the word positive—rather, honest in what I feel is important in regard to the teachings: compassion and selfless love.

Like Alan, Carol believed that the GP lectures served to refresh and deepen her understanding of the teachings. She primarily spoke about her learning in terms of an increased understanding of Buddhist values surrounding compassion and selflessness. She said she participated at the centre for her own benefit, but also so that she might pass on some of those benefits through her relationships with others.

Also at our second interview, Carol said that she continued to re-evaluate the ritual elements, even after all of her time at the centre. Like Gerald, she had been changing the water offerings on the centre's shrines once a week. While she was willing to participate in the ritual, she still wanted to keep an open mind about it.

I don't want to be stuck in a routine. Rituals are accessories, like jewelry—sometimes it is nice to be pretty. I'm not attached to that at all. Rituals are a helping gesture, they have a nice, reflective quality that helps you stop things in your life for a while.

When I asked experienced members Priscilla and Marlon about the offerings on the shrines, they spoke about their symbols and meanings. Priscilla described almost exactly the same meanings of the offerings as had Catherine Rathbun at Friends of the Heart: water for washing, drinking, light representing enlightenment, and so on. Marlon spoke about the purposes of making offerings: They are made to the buddhas in order to gain their blessings, which are needed on the Buddhist path. Carol, however, did not speak about the water offerings' meanings or purposes, preferring to discuss her responses to the ritual. While I am certain that Carol *could* have told me about the offerings' symbols and meanings, it is significant that she did not. Because she was still evaluating them, I believe she had not wholly accepted the received meanings and symbols of the ritual as had fellow members who had, incidentally, participated in the advanced classes.

Carol more readily accepted ritual that had to do with her meditation practice. At her second interview, she said she was finding ways of refreshing her earliest experiences with meditation, especially the simplicity of the Zen approach. She also said she was trying to be ritualistic about her meditation posture, but not so much that discomfort became a barrier. Books she had read by a Zen writer, Brad Warner, emphasized the importance of posture and staying with the discomfort (*Sit Down and Shut Up* and *Hardcore Zen* were the books she mentioned). But, she said, she sometimes “cheated,” and that that was all right if discomfort was enough to get in the way of meditating at all. Carol was, in a sense, returning to the beginning. Her earlier experiences with Zen meditation, her earliest motivations for finding a Buddhist centre at which to study, were coming to the fore again. After seven years participating at Chandrakirti, she had accepted the rituals to some degree,

but not fully. She felt she had gotten away from her original intentions and was, in small ways, consciously returning to them.

Attending GP classes was still an important part of what Carol considered her practice, however. Following the closure of Chandrakirti in June, Carol was volunteering weekly at GP classes at a local library. She said that helping out at the classes gave her the opportunity to receive a teaching and to have a role in the centre's operations. She intended to continue her involvement at the centre and at the GP classes. Whether she had accepted the rituals or not, she was a fully involved member of the Chandrakirti community.

Gerald began attending classes at Chandrakirti primarily to do something positive with his time and engage in an activity that was intellectually, emotionally and socially stimulating. At his first interview in October of 2006, he did not indicate that there were any particularly spiritual reasons for attending, although he did say he was assessing the teachings to decide whether or not they corresponded with his perspectives on life in general. He believed that they did: "My initial feeling about the centre is that I have verified for myself that it's for real, and the teachings are for real, and it's worth continuing." In May of 2007, reflecting back on his early experiences at Chandrakirti, Gerald said:

When I joined I had a sense of spirituality at the beginning. I didn't have it within the element of Christianity. So, I was very protective of [i.e. against] any belief system that didn't correspond to that emotional, spiritual feeling or connection. And it has. It is very spiritual. It's a drip at a time. Spirituality, for me, has always been a drought. So, if you get a drip of something, it's very good.

What made the greatest change for Gerald was his participation in the water offerings at Chandrakirti Centre. He said that performing the water offering gave him a greater understanding of the centre as a whole, including its ritual and religious elements. Although he had been skeptical about the ritualistic side of the centre, Gerald said that he



learned a great deal about himself and the centre once he agreed to perform the water offerings. His experience suggests that learning that takes place as a result of performing the water offering is qualitatively different than that which he gained in meditation or through attending the classes and enacting their lessons. He told me that changing the water offerings offered a learning experience that was direct, intimate, tactile and in some ways deeper and more personal than the learning he gained through other forms of participation at the centre. Performing the water offerings also had the effect of drawing Gerald more fully into the community at Chandrakirti. It was when he started doing the water offerings that he began to feel more like a full member at Chandrakirti.

Of all of the principal participants, Gerald experienced the most significant changes between his two interviews. As well as increasing his level of participation at the centre, Gerald said that performing the water offerings made him more willing to dedicate time to meditation. His knowledge about different meditation practices and their goals had also grown. At his second interview, Gerald spoke about analytical and placement meditation, and described how they were taught in the GP class.

You would try to analyze a certain feeling that you feel when people have helped you, and you try to remember it as much as you can and then try to hold that feeling single pointedly, and then feel it out. And I think later, in daily life, if you can remember that feeling, you will generate a feeling of bodhicitta.

Gerald's knowledge of certain Buddhist practices and the terms used to describe them had clearly grown in the time since we first met. While several common Buddhist terms such as Theravāda were new to him at the time of his first interview, by the second he was comfortably using specialized Buddhist terms such as bodhicitta. Moreover, he felt he had gained some capacity to generate bodhicitta through his meditation practice.

Another significant change for Gerald had to do with his sense of Buddhist identity. At our first interview, when I asked Gerald if he would say that he was a Buddhist, he said:

No, no I wouldn't. Only because I don't want to have that label yet. I could easily say that I'm a Buddhist and believe it. I could say that I'm a Christian and believe it too. At the moment, though, if someone said: are you studying Buddhism? I would say yeah I was. Do you find a lot of benefits from it? I would say certainly. But I've almost said it a few times or thought it anyway, that I'm a Buddhist, and I don't like it.

At that time, Gerald regarded himself as a student rather than a member of Chandrakirti.

He said he was "more of a tourist," primarily because he was still assessing the centre, trying to decide how well its teachings applied to his personal circumstances and whether or not he felt they were, as he put it, "accurate." In May when I asked again if he was a Buddhist, he replied "Yeah, I was waiting for that question. Yeah I do." I asked Gerald what had changed over the months since we had first spoken, and he said:

Seeing the similarities between what I believed in before, seeing no contradiction towards my concept of God, appreciating and grafting onto the Buddha from all of my other beliefs and seeing whether it fits. And his teachings complemented and embellished those beliefs, so it's a chance to grow more.

For Gerald, then, identifying as a Buddhist meant accepting and reconciling the teachings with his pre-existing beliefs. Even so, Gerald equivocated about what it meant to be a Buddhist.

I guess I would consider myself a Buddhist. I had trouble with that question. I thought maybe I'm not still. But, in a good sense: I don't feel like Buddha is a god. It doesn't feel wrong to think about him as a friendly person, which is quite neat. He's a good teacher and a decent person. There isn't much more you could ask for. It's pretty nurturing.

It is interesting that the caveat Gerald put upon his Buddhist identity was the fact that he did not regard the Buddha as a god, although he did believe that regarding the Buddha as a good teacher and a friend was a more positive perspective than regarding him as a god.

Gerald thus suggested that the term “Buddhist” more accurately applied to someone with a more theistic conception of Buddhism.

From these and other respondents’ reflections, it is evident that motivations for joining meditation classes corresponded to what respondents identified as the most important outcomes. Furthermore, the ways in which they regarded meditation practice also shaped how and what they learned through it. Most interview respondents indicated that the most significant stimuli for change consisted of affective learning tasks: receiving, accepting, valuing and internalizing new attitudes and values. There was more emphasis placed on learning, practicing and refining meditation skills among Friends of the Heart participants, who more often identified meditation as their main practice. For Chandrakirti students Brenda and Catherine H. as well as Alan and Carol, affective change came from receiving teachings on Buddhist ethics in the classes, then experimenting with behaviours inspired by those ethics in their lives. But for those who came strictly to learn how to meditate—which was the case for Erin and Dennis as well as John—the learning processes focused on the psychomotor, with the addition of some cognitive information. Those who were seeking spiritual changes—that is, changes that affect the person on the level of their whole experience—tended to emphasize affective learning. Carol was perhaps the one principal participant who noted that her goals had changed after beginning to take GP classes. She originally went to Chandrakirti seeking meditation instruction, but the class also involved detailed teachings on Buddhist ethics. While she was returning to her earlier style of meditation practice by the time of her second interview, she still regarded her attendance at GP classes and the Buddhist teachings she received therein as her main practice.

## Teacher's objectives

While the introductory meditation classes were, to some extent, a form of outreach through which the centres attracted new members, none of the teachers to whom I spoke indicated that increasing membership numbers or inspiring conversion to Buddhism were significant goals of the classes they taught. Richard noted, in fact, that the retention rate among Friends of the Heart introductory students was fairly low. The closed structure of the Friends of the Heart courses may have contributed to this low retention rate. Joyce noted that many students felt they had what they came for after the ten week course and decided to move on.

We recognize that there are students that come and they learn some of the basics of meditation. Certainly a fair percentage of those simply say: okay, I've learned about meditation. And off they go. Whether they practice going into the future, it's hard to say. Certainly at least it's a seed. They may turn up at some other centre five years from now or ten years from now and say: I originally learned to meditate way back at Friends of the Heart. And then some of the students who come will really decide to take up the path and continue to practice with us.

Of the Friends of the Heart participants I interviewed, John, Diane and Dennis indicated that they would be interested in continuing with a meditation group, although all three had left Friends of the Heart by the time of their second-round interviews. Still, it would seem that, for these participants, a "seed," as Joyce had put it, had been planted.

Retention rates for the GP classes were difficult to determine for the very reason that the course had a drop-in structure and there were no enrollment records. I can speculate from my research that the percentage of students who continued at Chandrakirti in the long term was higher than at Friends of the Heart. Of the nine Friends of the Heart introductory students I interviewed, two were still participating at Friends of the Heart at the time of their second interview, an average of five months later. A third, whom I was unable to contact, may have continued as member. Of the six newcomers from

Chandrakirti, four were still participating at GP classes by the time of their second interview; this despite the fact that the centre had closed by that time and classes were being offered in other spaces. The potentially higher retention rate at Chandrakirti may have been due to the open-ended nature of its General Program: there was no official ending to the course, and students could continue to come as long as they liked without having to officially become members or change their level of participation.

I also queried whether an objective of the introductory courses was to encourage students move on to higher level programs. Friends of the Heart offered the Intermediate and Tibetan Meditation classes, but it also offered a mentoring program and a foundation practice similar to traditional Tibetan foundation practice in which dedicated practitioners performed hundreds of thousands of mantras, prayers and prostrations. When I asked Catherine Rathbun if one of her goals was to see students complete the foundation program, she laughed and said, “Oh, well they’d better!” But then she said:

Those are the small, human agendas. If you do this so many times, it you will have this and this and this.... Small goals are there to help us humans have a sense of linear accomplishment. The true changes are deep and long-lasting. Those are more important to me than the continuation of a centre or the fealty of a student or anything else.

When I asked Thekchen if he hoped students would move on from the General Program to the Foundation Program, he also said that the numbers were not important. He said that he had gone through periods where he assessed himself as a good or bad teacher based on “external things” like how many people go to Foundation Program, but that was not his overall goal. He said, rather, that his objective was to provide a welcoming place for learning about meditation and listen to and discuss “new perspectives.” Thekchen also spoke about teaching objectives in terms of establishing Buddhist tradition in the West. It was an interesting experiment, he said, to train western teachers who can then

teach other westerners. The difficulty was trying to find a way to adapt a traditionally monastic system to make it relevant for householders. In his view, the NKT was still working on this goal. With tongue in cheek, he said: “A lot of people are just sitting back and watching to see if people like me [i.e. western monastic dharma teachers] explode or go on some weird rampage or are happy.”

For the most part, the teachers I interviewed regarded the introductory classes as an opportunity to open a door for interested westerners and to introduce them to something new. What students did with what they learned was entirely up to them. Joyce and Meg likened the introductory classes to planting or scattering seeds. Thekchen said: “What seems to work is just letting people relax and take it at whatever level they want.” Most of the teachers indicated a hope that students would be inspired to continue some involvement with the teachings or practices they learned. Although each worded it differently, it is interesting to note that all of the teachers identified their main goal as disseminating the dharma or the teachings of Buddhism. Joyce said that in the ten week class students would begin to experience benefits of meditation and of “bringing the dharma to life.” Richard reiterated this goal. Meg spoke about specific benefits of meditation: the ability to change one’s perceptions and awareness. But these were the effects of teaching, not the main objective. Meg saw herself as using a time-tested tool, the dharma, to teach students certain beneficial techniques. Some benefits, Meg said, may be experienced immediately, but with time the techniques will yield deeper and deeper results.

Catherine Rathbun also spoke about deep and long-lasting changes that were, in her view, the more significant goal. I asked: What kind of changes? and she responded with a story.

I met with an old student a couple of days ago. She brought me news of some other old students that I haven’t seen in a number of years. And one

of them described having her baby and how meditation played a huge part in her delivery, and what part it had played. She also said she had now started the job that I had suggested to her when she was here studying early on. And she was saying: “you know, I wish I’d listened to Catherine however many years ago.” Her life is blooming. I haven’t seen her for a long time. It doesn’t matter. When I first met her, she was suicidal and in a terrible state with her education, with her family, with her life. That’s what it’s about: the dharma.

Catherine believed that her overall objective was to help students realize certain effects of the dharma and the practice in their lives. She regarded deep, long-lasting changes as the ones that are lived, that come out in the life experiences of the person who has been changed. When I asked Catherine what constituted success in her teachings, she simply said: “The lady who had her baby.” I then asked her what she considered to be failure. She replied:

Ego formation. People who learn a little and think they have learned a lot. Those who use the teaching to reinforce the ego instead of letting it go. I have been surprised on occasion when it first started arising, because it was with the more intensive program that I see ego formation. I was surprised at first, because I don’t teach on that basis. It really took me aback. I wasn’t prepared for it. But, the fact of the matter is, you can use knowledge and you can use some levels of attainment ... for building the ego. And when you do that ... it destroys the work in ways that the person doesn’t realize.

Here again is an indication that, ideally, the objectives of the meditation classes were to inspire profound and long-lasting changes in the ways students regarded themselves and their world, in the values they held and in the way they lived their lives. Such changes did not happen for all students, and sometimes the outcomes were not the positive ideals at which teachers aimed. It is clear from most of the interview responses that the majority of respondents reflected on their learning in very positive terms. In fact, no one I spoke with had much that was negative to say about their experiences at any of the classes at Friends of the Heart or Chandrakirti Centre. Complaints were limited to responses to ritual in general and to prostrations in particular. I believe that much of this

had to do with their status as newcomers: they were very interested in and intrigued by what they were learning. They indicated that the worldviews expressed in the classes corresponded to their own, and to some degree, they were justifying their choices. Respondents' positive outlooks may also be a testament to the teachers and their ability to pass on their enthusiasm for teaching meditation to western sympathizers. Teachers always put a positive spin on what they were teaching, highlighting the benefits of meditation and of following Buddhist ethical principles.

The positive outlooks on the outcomes of their learning, more significantly, indicate something else: respondents were elevating and positively valuing their experiences at the classes as well as the teachings and practices that they learned. This is an indication that what they learned and the ways that they learned it have affective outcomes: they are valuing their learning, often highly, positively, assessing and making a commitment to that learning. They claim to have seen positive changes in their lives, an indication that affective learning has gone beyond just a change of mood: they indicated that they had also experienced some changes in attitudes, values and behaviours. Students and teachers alike expressed the hope that what is learned through introductory classes will make lasting change in students' attitudes and emotional responses; changes inspired by Buddhist values and reinforced through Buddhist practice.

The outcomes that respondents spoke about were not final outcomes, of course, but only descriptions of where they were at the time of their interviews. Experienced members may eventually leave, moving on to other centres or giving up involvement with Buddhist practice altogether. Newcomers may become experienced members, or may choose not to continue. Western Buddhist centres tend to have a high attrition rate: those who arrive at their doors are, by definition, seekers. Some will continue to seek.



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<sup>1</sup> According to the NKT website, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso's commentaries on traditional Buddhist texts that are studied in the organizations' Foundation Program are: *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*, *Universal Compassion*, *Eight Steps To Happiness*, *Heart of Wisdom*, *Meaningful to Behold* and *Understanding the Mind*. The New Kadampa Tradition - International Kadampa Buddhist Union, "Books on Buddhism and Meditation," <http://kadampa.org/en/books/>.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Harvey B. Aronson, *Buddhist Practice on Western Ground: Reconciling Eastern Ideals and Western Psychology* (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2004); and Franz Aubrey Metcalf, "The Encounter of Buddhism and Psychology," in *Westward Dharma*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). Both Aronson and Metcalf point out significant differences between Buddhist doctrine and western psychology. Aronson's approach is to suggest ways of mediating those differences.

<sup>3</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*.

<sup>4</sup> ———, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 194.

## Conclusion

Learning, in essence, means change. The changes that took place as a result of ritualizing in meditation classes developed at the level of physical skills, including concentration skills, and at the level of attitudinal, emotional and behavioural change. Intellectual or factual knowledge was also acquired in ritualized ethos of meditation classes, but cognitive learning had less to do with ritualized activities.

The pattern of learning I have proposed suggests that learning through ritualizing links and cycles through the three (and possibly four) learning domains established in chapter four. The pattern goes something like this: Gaining knowledge about Buddhism or meditation before ever visiting a Buddhist centre—through reading, especially—constituted respondents' first cognitive learning. They gained information about meditation claiming that it is good for stress relief, concentration, and so on. They may have heard that Buddhism was an open, non-theistic philosophy and way of life rather than a religion, views that appealed to many respondents in this study. Some respondents had learned about a few Buddhist concepts and were curious about them. All of this learning refers to cognitive, factual or intellectual data. Having learned a little about Buddhism and its practices, respondents decided to seek out a Buddhist centre and enroll in meditation classes. The ritualized settings and activities they encountered there instigated certain affective changes, initiated by observing the decorum in the shrine rooms, which, for some participants, prompted a sense of respect for the teachers and for what was being taught.

At the classes, students then began engaging in ritual by undertaking the practices. These were primarily meditation techniques, but they also included other formal practices as well as conscious behavioural changes in students' everyday lives. Ritualizing involves learning activities in the psychomotor domain, including receiving or observing pre-

established behaviours or activities, imitating them, repeating and practicing them, and adapting them to create new forms. But the ritualized qualities of what is learned and how it is learned—the fact that it takes place in special settings, is set aside or elevated, formalized, regarded as traditional and possibly spiritual—connects the physical aspects of learning to the attitudes, emotions and values of the learner. Ritualized learning, therefore, links psychomotor and affective learning processes.

The development of psychomotor skills, for many respondents, thus led to new affective changes as they began to learn about new attitudes, experience new emotional responses and to positively value the practices and outlooks they were taught. Students could then reflect on and analyze those experiences, adding more cognitive learning over time. Intellectual reflection on the practices and values they learned encouraged some respondents to continue participating in the practice. Thus, although it was downplayed somewhat, cognitive learning also fed into the pattern of learning through ritualizing. The pattern cycled from affective through psychomotor and back again to cognitive learning. With continued practice, the cycle repeated. At some point, according to Buddhist belief, practitioners may break out of the cognitive-affective-psychomotor cycle to a qualitatively different experience of spiritual insight, described in Buddhist teachings as direct, experiential awareness of emptiness, impermanence or no-self.

Of course, it is possible that respondents' learning had more to do with traditional educational goals. Learning may have occurred because the activities I observed were educational, not because they constituted ritualizing. Respondents were, after all, participating in events structured as classes that were not considered to be Buddhist services or meditation rituals. Is it not the case that all learning involves repetition, much of it formalized? Do we not highly value other things that we learn?

In his discussion of ritual knowledge, Jennings makes a distinction between “mere” pedagogical repetition and the knowledge-generating function of ritual. In his view, strict repetition merely reproduces what is known: it teaches us how to perform the ritual and no more. Ritual becomes a means of discovery, Jennings argues, because it proposes a pattern of action that evokes imitation or response not only in the ritual but in all of our activities. Ritual knowledge is gained not through detached imitation but through engagement, which necessarily changes our understandings. While these are important observations, engagement, imitation and response still apply to other educational forms. What makes ritual knowledge distinct from other learning outcomes is the depth and breadth to which that learning is applied. As Jennings puts it, we recite the “Our Father,” and thus learn to act as God’s children.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, McLaren calls ritual knowledge the “deep codes” that become the blueprint for all of our reactions.<sup>2</sup> It develops through the legitimation and sanctification of the settings in which we learn and the ritualized nature of what we learn. Schilbrack claims that ritual knowledge is deeply metaphysical: what we learn in the ritual is a microcosm for the whole of human experience.<sup>3</sup>

The depth and breadth to which new learning is applied depends to a large extent on how we regard what we are learning. For instance, of the two examples cited earlier from Jennings—chopping wood and taking the chalice—one is typically regarded as more ritualized than the other. But, as my description of the range of ritual qualities suggests, any act can be regarded as more or less ritualized. Brenda turned sweeping seed pods into a ritual. Alan regarded giving change to panhandlers as a special, elevated activity inspired by Buddhist values and ethics. As the discussion about learning meditation versus subjects at school showed, the majority of respondents regarded what they were learning at meditation classes as different from more conventional types of learning.

Whether or not affective change took place had much to do with students' initial motivations for enrolling in the meditation classes. If they were seeking a means of changing their outlooks and ways of living at the outset, they tended to see in their experiences at Friends of the Heart or Chandrakirti the potential for that kind of change. Those who came seeking a spiritual practice or answers to ultimate concerns tended to speak about finding such things. This suggests that when they regarded what they were learning as more ritualized, there was a greater connection to the things they valued, were willing to commit to, the things that gave them a felt connection to their whole experience and to others and the world around them. For those who did not see what they were learning as qualitatively different from more typical kinds of training or education, the outcomes of their learning were more immediate, practical, and had less to do with generating the ultimate outcome of Bloom's affective domain, "characterizing values." For John, Erin, and Dennis, learning meditation was a formal, repetitive, embodied activity, but it was not particularly elevated or spiritual. For some respondents, then, learning meditation was strictly educational and not especially ritualized.

One of my initial objectives for this study was to uncover what newcomers at Buddhist meditation classes learned about Buddhism. If this question refers to the history, doctrine, and various cultural manifestations of the tradition around the world—that is, detailed information about Buddhism as an historical world religion—then the answer is that newcomers learned very little. Nor was that the objective of the introductory courses. The classes were not, as one respondent put it, intended as "Buddhism 101." Hence, although the courses were structured as formalized learning environments, their goals were not typically cognitive learning objectives. What was unique about them, and I believe unique about the learning processes as a result, was the fact that they were strongly

ritualized settings intended to teach or transmit practices that were formal, traditional, transformative, and, for some, highly valued or spiritual.

How well have this study's theories and methods served the investigation of ritualizing and learning? Beginning with Grimes's approach to describing ritual, I develop a perspective that opens up its definitional boundaries and sets out a set of common but non-definitive qualities of ritual, which have been useful for investigating ritualizing and learning. Where ritual is performed, embodied, repetitive, and formalized, it involves psychomotor processes. Where it is special, set aside, elevated, transcendent, spiritual, it relates to emotional and attitudinal responses as well as values and ethics.

Performance theory as a means of investigating ritual allows for the possibility of change rather than limiting ritual to formality and rote repetition. Ritual is, in this view, potentially adaptive, flowing, innovative. Each time ritual activities are re-performed, each time they are passed on to a new set of practitioners, they are re-assessed, and their complexes of meaning re-evaluated. Something new is learned. This process was happening among meditation students as they learned meditation postures, gestures and concentration techniques and experimented with them, shaping them into new practices. Moreover, with its focus on the performance of physical postures and gestures, performance theory helped underscore the fact that much of what students learned involved embodied techniques and either was, or was akin to, physical types of learning.

The emphasis on embodiment, on learning through and with the body, however, fails to account for the myths or narratives surrounding ritual activity. Indeed, this study does not explore links between myth and ritual in any depth. I believe that the study of ritual has rightly moved on from its early search for ritual's origins in texts or myths (or vice versa). The interview and field data from this study, however, do suggest that some myths or narratives were present in the meditation classes. Diane, for example, said that

she appreciate Catherine Rathbun's explanation of the meanings of the water offerings on the shrines. Learning the story behind the offerings, as noted, consisted of cognitive learning that helped Diane overcome some of her discomfort with the centres' rituals. The fact that meditation students sought out, learned and transmitted such meanings shows that some myths and narratives do surround the ritual activities at Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti. Grounding my study in performance theory may, in fact, account for its reduced focus on cognitive learning. I do believe, however, that there was sufficient indication, from students and from my observations at the classes, that cognitive learning was actively downplayed by teachers and students. The reduced emphasis on cognitive learning, therefore, was not solely a result of the performative approach applied here.

Although performance theory focuses on embodiment, it took the philosophical theories of Schilbrack, Crossley and Raposa to fully elucidate embodied types of learning, and the peculiar type of knowledge gained by and through the body. Schilbrack's claim that knowledge is not limited to thinking and that it is "necessarily embodied," along with Crossley's and Raposa's reflections on the ways in which we learn through the body helped underscore respondents' experiences of their bodies as knowing, learning entities.

And yet, the theoretical path I traced needed to take one further step. I needed to find a way to include techniques that take place in the mind of the practitioner, behaviours I regard as embodied ritualized enactments. The notion of the moving mind comes from my respondents, who suggested that learning through meditative concentration practices was akin to physical types of learning. This is the point at which Bloom's taxonomy applies, with its distinct domains of learning objectives and the tasks involved in each. Identifying a process of learning that is not cognitive, that involves reception, imitation, refinement and adaptation of physical movements and skills indicates a connection to ritualizing in some of its key characteristics: received behaviours, repetition, formality, and

embodiment. Where Bloom and colleagues do not connect psychomotor and affective domains, however, I find that ritualized learning does.

The paradox of this kind of study is that it attempts to analyze personal, non-cognitive experience, but must necessarily do so through second-hand, cognitive methods. Listening to what people have to say about learning and ritualizing, then writing about for others to read and evaluate, places readers several steps away from the original, immediate experience I attempt to record. Internal, subjective states are notoriously complicated phenomena to study. Nevertheless, the best way to obtain information of this sort is to consult the people who know about it. In my interviews, I asked some of the same types of questions in several different ways in order to draw out detailed information about students' learning and to have them reflect on their learning in new ways.

Participant observation ethnography is a recognized, tested method of scientific enquiry. It relies on a few key informants who have knowledge and experience of a particular culture, and who can provide reliable data about that culture.<sup>4</sup> This approach results in findings that are significant, even if they cannot be applied wholesale to a broader population. It is my conviction that, if we are to discover what people are learning at meditation courses at westernized Buddhist centres, we must ask them. This is a view in which individuals' experiences are important. A small group of informants allowed me to explore their experiences in more depth and detail than a statistical survey would have.

While the results of this study may not be applied too readily to a broader population, its findings with regard to ritualizing and its links to psychomotor and affective learning outcomes may well be applicable to other studies of ritual or to other disciplines as well. This project has taken an expanded view of ritualizing by including internal formal practices which produce psychomotor learning outcomes, thus demonstrating that the mind performs in ways other than the cognitive. This perspective is applicable to a wide



range of internal practices, such as silent prayer and practices deriving from other meditative traditions. To what extent are such practices cognitive? Do they, in fact, involve psychomotor types of change? Do they link to affective change by virtue of the fact that they possess various qualities of ritual? This study, therefore, suggests some intriguing avenues for investigating other types of formal practice.

This research may also apply to explorations of the ways in which ritualization, as preconscious, culturally stylized behaviours, may shift when a tradition founded in one culture is adopted by members of another. We learn to enact our world through our bodies, through the culturally and biologically conditioned activities we perform. How, for example, do the movements of a traditional Tibetan Buddhist ritual change, in their performance and their meanings, when adopted by Canadians taking on Tibetan Buddhist practices? Such a study would require a depth of knowledge about Tibetan and Canadian kinemes and somatized cultural competencies that is well beyond the reach of this study. I hope that others will regard this study as a starting-point for further investigations into the ways in which we learn through and with our bodies.

All living religions have the capacity for change. Change is necessary for a religious tradition to survive and to be relevant for subsequent generations. And, as Catherine Rathbun pointed out, change is at the heart of Buddhist teachings; the declaration that all things are impermanent. Even so, a tradition's followers must find ways to balance adaptation with the stable, tried and true forms of the past. This is the question that Buddhist teachers throughout the history of the tradition have faced: what is the essence of Buddhist tradition? What adaptations are necessary to transmit Buddhist teachings and practices to new geographical and cultural locales, and what needs to be maintained in order to preserve the tradition? Among participants learning about a new tradition, ritualizing is an important means of discovering what changes may be necessary, how those

changes are to be made, and how to make traditional rituals resonate with new generations of practitioners.

This research is thus applicable to the study of Buddhism in North America because it demonstrates that ritualizing, as a formative, experimental behaviour that contributes to learning, is an important means by which adaptations to new practitioners may be made, while at the same emphasizing the significance of long-standing and valued formal practices. With its experimentation, play, adaptation and reconstruction of behaviours ritualizing is a “way in” to new rituals and ritualized practices. Ritualizing, however, is not the end. It will not be sustained if it does not transform into ritual. Without the goal of becoming ritual, ritualizing lacks form and purpose.<sup>5</sup> For some respondents, this was the case: they tried meditation for a while, but when their classes ended, so did their practice. Several respondents indicated that participating with others was beneficial for maintaining a commitment to their practice. Hence, one factor that may assist the formation of stable ritual is ongoing involvement with a community of like-minded practitioners.

This book explores ritualizing as conscious experimentation with received behaviours which may become stable ritual over time. I argue that ritualizing in meditation engages the mind in the same way that ritualizing usually engages the body. Meditative concentration exercises are formal, deliberate and repetitive practices that are received from others and regarded as traditional. Since the mind is itself embodied, ritualizing that takes place in a meditator’s mind is as embodied as the postures or gestures we perform with our hands, feet and spines. Further, as the imagined centre of our consciousness, the mind can literally move: in meditation, a common practice is to take the focus of the mind into different areas of the body, or even outside the body. The mind is, therefore, another part of the body with which we can ritualize. And finally, the embodied mind, through

ritualizing, comes to know in much the same way a muscle “knows”; through repetition, familiarity, training, the development of skills and of skills into a pattern of behaviour. With this view of ritualizing comes the understanding that not everything we do is with our muscles, and not everything we know is in our heads. Ritualizing can generate a kind of knowledge that is located in blood, bone and muscle, and in an embodied, gestural entity that we call the mind.

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<sup>1</sup> Jennings, “On Ritual Knowledge,” 329.

<sup>2</sup> McLaren, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*, 202.

<sup>3</sup> Schilbrack, “Ritual Metaphysics,” 138.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology*, 187.

<sup>5</sup> Driver, *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual*, 30.

## Appendix A: Research Methods

Fieldwork, like anything else, is a process, and plans necessarily change as the work progresses. At the start of this project, I planned to interview between ten and twenty newcomers to Buddhist centres. I attended introductory meditation courses at several different centres and finally settled on Friends of the Heart and Chandrakirti Centre. I printed up bulletins introducing myself and my project, asking to speak with people with two years or less experience. No one came forward. I discovered that at Chandrakirti, after approving the bulletin, the teachers did not post it. One teacher later told me that he was concerned about the bulletin, particularly its invitation to practitioners of two years or less. He said that people who turn to Buddhism often do so because of a crisis and are often quite vulnerable. One little thing could stop them coming. Perhaps someone might promise to participate in an interview and then later regret that promise and stop coming. He asked that I instead get to know the people and personally invite them to participate in interviews. His suggestion proved to be the best course. In the meantime, I had gotten to know some more experienced members, and they were interested in the project. In order to allow them to become more familiar with me and what I was doing, I invited a few long-time members to participate in interviews. They were able to give me some perspective on how courses and other events at the centres had changed over time. Moreover, their responses provided a longer-term view of the learning process: experienced members were where some newcomers might be a few months or years down the road.

In the fall of 2006, after interviewing a few Chandrakirti members, I discovered Friends of the Heart and learned that a new cycle of classes was beginning very soon. I decided to take the opportunity to begin at the beginning with this centre, as most newcomers would, and attended the November 2006 Open House. That week, I took out a

ten-week membership and began attending introductory classes. The first person I encountered at Friends of the Heart was Gwen, whom I interviewed as a newcomer because she had started attending the centre less than a year before. But Gwen was also a Friends of the Heart teacher, leading the T'ai Chi classes on Saturday mornings.

By January 2007 I was participating at the Friends of the Heart Wednesday evening introductory classes and the Monday morning Tibetan Meditation sessions. At this time I learned that Zopa, the head teacher at Chandrakirti, who had approved my project, would be leaving at the end of January. I doubled up the fieldwork at that point in order to participate at Zopa's last few GP classes and to meet the next head teacher, Delek. When the second introductory class at Friends of the Heart began in February 2007, I realized I was overstretched and decided to step away from Chandrakirti until the end of the second Friends of the Heart class. This plan, I thought, would give me from May 2007 to the end of the summer to finish up at Chandrakirti.

Because few people from the first Friends of the Heart class had volunteered for interviews, I took a different approach in the second class. I asked Meg to introduce me to the class in the first few weeks. I then had more opportunities to speak with participants about my project and invite them to interviews. The response was much better, and in the end I interviewed more Friends of the Heart newcomers than originally intended. Along the way, I spoke to all of the main Friends of the Heart teachers and two of its more experienced members. Three newcomers interviewed had not attended the main introductory courses, but their experiences of learning at the centre, and learning through practice or ritualizing, were still informative.

I returned to Chandrakirti in late April, at the end of the second Friends of the Heart class. I hoped at that time to interview Delek. But at the first class I attended on my return, she announced she was leaving. Within two weeks, Sanden arrived. Then, in mid-

May, the bombshell: the centre was closing at the beginning of June. Knowing that the library and coffee shop classes afforded no opportunities to make contacts with newcomers, I extended invitations to as many newcomers as I could before the centre closed. Four volunteered. I approached Sanden for an interview, but he was committed to participate in NKT summer festivals, so we scheduled our meeting for late August. That meeting never happened: Sanden was replaced in the end of July. While I had achieved the number of interview participants I had originally intended, the numbers were a bit skewed in favour of Friends of the Heart, and I had no Chandrakirti teacher interview. Finally, in November 2007, I contacted the new Chandrakirti teacher, Thekchen, and he agreed to be interviewed.

Interview participants, therefore, were invited based on their participation and presence at the centres at the time I was attending classes and conducting field work. Those who participated were those with whom I was able to make some kind of personal connection. This fact may account for the larger number of women than men on the list, although at Friends of the Heart, the source of more than half of the interview participants, there were noticeably more women than men attending and teaching the classes. At the time of my research, there were six Friends of the Heart teachers all told, only one of whom was male. Classes averaged out at eighty percent women and twenty percent men. During the fieldwork, four teachers taught at Chandrakirti, three men and one woman. At the GP classes I attended, approximately forty-two percent of participants were men.

At the end of each first-round interview, I asked participants who were newcomers if they would be willing to do a follow-up interview some months later. Without exception, all agreed. Second-round interviews began in May of 2007. The objective was to find out what respondents were doing after some time had passed; whether they were still involved at Friends of the Heart or Chandrakirti, whether they were still practicing and how much

they remembered about what they had learned. In the end, I was able to meet with eight of the fifteen newcomers for a second interview and contacted another three by telephone. Of the four others, two did not respond to invitations for second-round interviews. Another had changed contact information and could not be contacted through the centre because of a request for anonymity. The fourth was facing a very busy time at work and declined to participate in a second interview. The total number of interviews was thirty-four: nineteen first-round interviews with newcomers, four with experienced members, four with teachers (Richard and Joyce were interviewed together), and eleven second-round interviews with newcomers.

## Appendix B: Opening Prayers

### Friends of the Heart

#### In All These I Take Refuge

The Mind of Light is called Enlightenment

In this we\* take Refuge

The Body of Truth is called the Dharma

In this we find solace

The Teachers of Truth are called the Sangha

In them we find comfort and courage

Our minds are not separate from the Mind of Enlightenment

Let us vow to sweep away their cobwebs

Our knowledge can grow to be an exhibition of Truth

Let us vow to burnish our awareness

Our bodies are storehouses for learning and development

We vow to treat them with honour and kindness.

The energy of breath rising is the energy of growth

The energy of breath falling is the energy of return

The midpoint of balance is the place of union

Where Body, Speech and Mind join together

And the jump to Transcendent Wisdom becomes possible.

In all these, we take Refuge.

Anonymous. *Student Handbook* (Friends of the Heart, copyright 2005), 12.

\* The text of the refuge prayer appeared in the Handbook written in the singular, but was always spoken in the plural at FOH classes and events. The version reproduced here is the form in which it was recited.

### Chandrakirti Centre

#### Liberating Prayer: Praise to Shakyamuni Buddha

O Blessed One, Shakyamuni Buddha,

Precious treasury of compassion,

Bestower of supreme inner peace,

You, who love all beings without exception,

Are the source of happiness and goodness;

And you guide us to the liberating path.

Your body is a wishfulfilling jewel,

Your speech is supreme, purifying nectar,



And your mind is refuge for all living beings.

With folded hands I turn to you,  
Supreme unchanging friend,  
I request from the depths of my heart:

Please give me the light of your wisdom  
To dispel the darkness of my mind  
And to heal my mental continuum.

Please nourish me with your goodness,  
That I in turn may nourish all beings  
With an unceasing banquet of delight.

Through your compassionate intention,  
Your blessings and virtuous deeds,  
And my strong wish to rely upon you,

May all suffering quickly cease  
And all happiness and joy be fulfilled;  
And may holy Dharma flourish for evermore.

Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Prayers for Meditation* (Ulverston, UK: Tharpa Publications, 2004), 2.

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