

Opening the Heart - retreat outline

On a daily basis we learn to protect ourselves and our status quo, seeking comfort and rejecting what hurts us; a never-ending cycle of trying, in vain, to stay just right. How we act is governed by what we've learned in our lifetime and what we inherit (karma). This on-going process of response and action is self-perpetuating and strengthens our delusion about the world, nurturing hate and greed, leading to more suffering for us and others.

However, we are not slaves to our patterns of behaviour; by acting as a bodhisattva (a being devoted to helping others who are suffering), we can sow new, wholesome seeds of karma. We can also purify and turn around old habits and karmic patterns.

Chenrezig is an icon or divine figure in Buddhist practice, symbolising ultimate compassion combined with wisdom of the 'no-thingness' and ephemeral nature of all things. He/she listens to the prayers of all sentient beings in times of challenge and difficulty. He/she is represented as a white Buddha form, that embodies the enlightened mind's infinite capacity for loving kindness and compassion.



By envisioning Chenrezig, and tuning-in to our innate wisdom and kindness, we can take practical steps to build positive future karma. We practice by imagining, then 'becoming' Chenrezig, using a mantra to strengthen the internalisation. Regular practice changes our intention and action, making us and others happier.

Whilst Chenrezig is part of the Buddhist tradition, it is mirrored in many other Eastern cultures, and the focus on compassion is at the root of Christian and most religious practice; so this retreat is universal in its reach. It works by waking up our innate, limitless capacity for loving kindness.

The retreat will begin with meditations and exercises that help open the heart to our intrinsic loving kindness and the experience of non-self. We will then explore the feeling that Chenrezig practice can bring, including a sadhana (formal practice based on ancient texts), and work with all the senses to deepen and integrate the practice into our being at the root.

This practice will be enhanced by the positive energy, peace and beauty of the retreat centre (Maitreya House), by good food, and by supporting each other in this joyful journey.