



eSkillful Means: Wake up!

Level I – The Spirit of Life

Topic one: Inner Freedom

Skillful Means takes a pivotal place in the traditional Buddha Dharma (or perennial Truth teachings). Called “upaya” in Sanskrit, ‘thabs’ in Tibetan, Skillful Means traditionally refers to compassion or appropriate action. With wisdom, Skillful Means forms the two wings of enlightenment – wisdom in action! Skillful Means is the heart of Dharma practice in daily life. The teachings of Skillful Means are based on the unique view that the human mind can know the nature of reality from the vantage of enlightenment or perfection. The Buddha articulated this more than 2500 years ago and thousands of men and women have followed this path since then.

Often, Buddhism begins by teaching about suffering (samsara) and how to end or even transform it (nirvana). And, although Skillful Means also revolves around the transformation of suffering, it does not begin with suffering and frustration, or karma and emotionality. Rather it starts by alerting its practitioners to the inner freedom (or great nirvana) already within them. Skillful Means is a path of action, exercising one’s inner freedom. It cultivates non-dual awareness and harmonizes the flow of life’s energies in the body and senses against the backdrop of time.

Troubling emotions indicate something needs attention, or that something is not working well. At these times, awareness operates at low levels and energy is bottled up. Something has contracted within you. With the Skillful Means teachings you regain higher levels of awareness and more harmonious flows of energy and thus regain your innate freedom. Increasingly, you act with more flexibility and learn behaviors that express your authenticity, your basic talents and goodness. These are all revolutionary insights and transformative goals which you will study and incorporate in the work place, a perfect arena for human development.

Tarthang Tulku Rinpoche writes: *“In letting go of our belief that suffering is a necessary part of human life, we can take a few steps forward.”* This view is based on the idea that human beings are whole and complete – nothing is lacking or missing. Ignorance of our inherent wholeness is like a disease and frustration its symptom. But your actions and attitudes change, your awareness and energy transform. You gain access to all kinds of new knowledge and the courage to follow your true nature.

Human potential

Skillful Means is not a practice intended to make you work harder, longer or smarter to attain your specific goals but rather a sensitive practice to refine your inner resources and *contact the experience of working well*. In this experience the practitioner will find the qualities all of us long for, such as joy, satisfaction, meaning, confidence, intimacy, presence, sustainability, caring and love. It will enable you to consider what works best for everyone around you and for the long-term benefit. You will put into action that which generates positive results. Time is of the essence in this approach. Skillful Means is not a set of strategies to add to your

arsenal but a way to change how you think, sense, speak, and act. The “do-er” is changing and it becomes apparent that nothing is irrevocably bad.

In traditional Dharma teachings, Skillful Means are manifest in the behaviors and insights called paramitas² that operate from the enlightened mind. By practicing the paramitas (often translated as ‘transcending functions’), you come closer and closer to awakening your potential because mind and energy will increasingly channel enlightenment-mind. Skillful Means is based in the view that human beings possess profound inner freedom. Therefore, practice is not so much a process of “developing” potential, but rather of ‘releasing’ it, through opening the channels that allow it to flow and refining it with the inner resources of awareness and energy.

The promise of life

Skillful Means relaxes divisiveness within perception and softens isolations as a result of contractions. It works with the raw materials of every day life, always from the point of appreciation and respect for life. Even amidst stress, difficulties, and change, you can always ask: what is the promise of this project, of this team, and of this situation? Envision what is needed and what is possible. Appreciate the promise of life and your alliance with this promise will begin to flourish within you. You do not need to battle yourself, as long as you are completely present in each situation and continually allow a fresh view of life's promise to mix with whatever dynamics are at play in your body and mind. Rather than dreading or struggling with each of life's problems anew, or suffering guilt, blame and fear, you can fabulously speculate on the vision of perfection, how the situation would be if your highest aspirations materialized. Increasingly you will find that your problems mostly result from bad habits and simple neglect, and are based on long-worn patterns established quite some time ago.

Contraction, a tightening of energy and awareness within, is unnatural. But we learn this behavior at an early age for the purpose of ‘belonging’ to and surviving in our families and the cultures in which we grow up and live. Contraction causes blockages in the flow of energy, creates stress in body and mind, hinders perception and closes the heart. Skillful Means advocates generosity and full participation to relax this contraction. It demands that we begin now, that we do not act lazily and procrastinate. Skillful Means shows that we are part of nature and nature is basically generous. It holds nothing back, hoards nothing, saves nothing for later. The more you participate wholeheartedly in life, the more energy you will discover, the more you will learn and the more skillful your actions will be.

The Skillful Means insights do not come from moralistic or dogmatic principles, but from a verifiable truth of what works and what does not. When we are truly genuine and authentic, we will be generous (without ever thinking we are generous). It is normal to be ‘in’.³ You will pay a price for less than full participation!

Study

Skillful Means is not a technique but a body of knowledge that needs to be embodied. A skillful practitioner begins to ‘own’ it, and gradually can feel it in bones and blood; in tissues and cells. It becomes embedded in your tongue and eyes and stamped in the palms of your hands and feet. Skillful Means becomes a code-name for a true ally at work. Through Tarthang Tulku Rinpoche, we have access to a living tradition of wisdom in action. It is an enriching experience; not a goal or strategy, but a method to contact the experience of working and living well. As the experience of Skillful Means strengthens, you have the faith you can do almost anything.

The required readings and practices this program provides deserve nothing less than sincerity and respect. If you start skipping homework we advise you to go back to the point where you were still fully engaged or otherwise stop the classes. Accumulating the materials and putting them in a binder for later defeats the purpose. The weekly assignments will be small so you can really study, practice and start this inner work. Ideally, you hand-copy the chapter(s) assigned. Do not type but write as beautifully as you can in a note book.

Read

1 *Skillful Means – Patterns for Success* (SM) by Tarthang Tulku Rinpoche
Chapter one – Inner Freedom

Notice that all SM chapters are set up as follows: First, Rinpoche points to the natural state of perfect being, then how we fall away from this open, perfect and complete state. That is followed by how we can regain this way of being and finally, how it will be when we have recaptured what was lost or neglected.

2 *MasterWork – mastering the energy of time* (MW), by Arnaud Maitland
Chapter 5 for the background on Skillful Means and the paramitas

Practice

a) *Loss of integrity and dignity* - Go back in time, perhaps even into childhood, and observe in detail and reflect on situations in which you were cheerful, open and spontaneous and your acts of generosity or help were not acknowledged or reciprocated⁴ – do this at least three times. The purpose of this exercise is to discover that these positive qualities are still accessible, they are still ‘there’, and they can be recaptured. Nothing was lost; they are still yours and you can regain your hold on them! But, as with all practices, strive for direct experience, not for thoughts or concepts.

b) *Examples of masters* - When you are in a tight spot, a difficult situation, ask yourself what would a wise person or somebody that you respect do in this specific situation; then, begin to do just that.

The purpose of this practice is to expand the mind, to invite a positive, creative mind into your every day situations. You will notice you are freer to act in a different way than you thought. You are *not* who you think you are – you are freer. We do not have many examples of skillful masters, of men and women who were or are able to show what wisdom in action is like, how it acts, looks, feels, and tastes. People with these kinds of minds and energies are extremely rare, but if you begin to recognize in others some quality that you deem high, it will increasingly awaken in you too and the lineage of knowledge-holders will appear to not be far away.

Journal

Please start a journal and for now, make daily notes only on what you accomplished during the day. Quantifying what you do will bring clarity to mind. Do not give too many details, but in a few lines list, describe, and, quantify your specific accomplishments.

Example: Monday, March 8, 2010

Five clients, typed one page of notes on a meeting with colleagues, eight phone calls, twelve emails (four business, eight personal) or Eight meetings, one legal document, lunch with client (name), two sales totaling \$....., twenty three emails (all business).

Keeping a journal in this program is a must.

Good Luck – Ah!



Mind-Body Discipline

The insights of Skillful Means have both an energetic and a perceptive component. For example, inner freedom is not only something to be understood as sound and real, but also to be experienced as such.

Within the teachings of Tarthang Tulku, the energy part is supported by for example, Kum Nye and meditation. Each e Skillful Means lesson will have a few Kum Nye suggestions and possibly a brief visualization. It will take too much time to explain why certain exercises are chosen with respect to the specific topic, but please feel free to contact us if you have any questions about the mind-body discipline suggestions.

Inner Freedom

Inner freedom will be experiences when life's energy flows though the body senses and mind unhindered. The current subtle energy body has blockages in the channels and knots in the chakras, which we experience as resistance, laziness, despair, low energy, and low levels of awareness and concentration. The eKum Nye offers an in-depth program to systematically cleanse and purify the inner architecture of the subtle body.

In the context of Inner Freedom, a most profitable exercise would be KN #87 Transmuting Negative Energies. You can choose some of the other Kum Nye exercises to loosen up the neck and shoulders and relaxing and stimulating the lower body energies are essential to restore our intrinsic inner freedom. Try to take **at least 20 minutes a day** for a systematic mind-body discipline.

- Kum Nye suggestions for lesson one:
- KN #29 Clear Light, followed by be KN #87
- KN #27 Touching Nurturing Feeling followed by be KN #87
- KN #21 Healing Body and Mind followed by be KN #87.

Visualization: Contacting Light

Visualization is based on the understanding and experience that the nature of reality is open. The practice of visualization is an exercise to awaken the nature of mind and the strengths within. (For more in depth information, please refer to our e Visualization program).

Each e Skillful means lesson will include a suggestion for visualization which you can practice formally or at any other appropriate time.

The first visualization practice is called Contacting Light (*# 32 Mastering Successful Work*).

At first, close your eyes. Imagine space without light, dark and silent. Gradually a diffused light becomes visible and spreads through the whole of space. This light has no source and can not be captured, but it illumines forms and shapes and can be seen and contacted by inner awareness let this awareness deepen, and absorb yourself in it. The contemplation expands into light, contacting the light with a feeling tone that is also light, in an almost physical sense.

Let the contemplation of light abide lightly, without psychological weight or property, charge or volume until light itself is illumined, becoming transparent. Without forced focusing, this contemplation can become the body of light, a fully open channel.

Without yogi practices such as these, the Skillful Means insights are very hard to embody. Please give it your dedicated discipline.

Notes

1 Knowledge of Freedom p 157

2 MasterWork pp 55 -64

3 You will find a very similar approach in Kum Nye, where the basic nature of our being is “flowing” and “continuity”. Kum Nye tries to restore these qualities of flowing and continuity because they are our natural states. Once our energies do flow, we almost instantly feel a sense of wholeness. This has been confirmed in many Kum Nye retreats where people may have had to struggle through some resistance. This is merely a reflection of energy restricted. When these same people feel truly happy and appreciative at the end of the retreat it is for one reason only: they have come back into the wholeness of their being. The word ‘Kum’ refers to our authenticity, so the more our energies flow in a continuous, harmonious way and massage our inner being and senses, the more authentic we will become.

4 How come we fall away from the natural state of being and lose our sense of integrity and dignity? Tarthang Tulku in various books describes the process which might be summarized as follows: in early childhood we started to figure out how we could belong to our families, to our parents and siblings and the traditions of our culture. By looking for acceptance and adjusting our behavior so we would have a sense of belonging (and safety), we sacrifice our integrity and dignity. Now we experience insecurity, anxiety, low self esteem and fear because we placed our anchor in self-images and in the opinions of others and influences of the environment. We do not have our true bearings in life itself or in the experience of working well. The voices of others speak loud and clear in us, instead of the inner voice connected to the principles of life. We look for a sense of security in transitory situations and in patterns of suffering, sometimes passed on through generations. We behave like others, who may suffer, in order to belong and feel the false sense of safety it seems to provide. We do everything to not be left alone.

A different way to explain the same dynamic is to say that we lost touch with ourselves because we started to look outside ourselves for fulfillment. This loss grew not only from attraction and grasping to one particular person, thing, or concept. It grew from the moment we began looking outside of ourselves for the things that would render us whole. In the process of acquisition of family, property, success and peak experiences, we began trying to fill a sense of emptiness. The wholeness we crave can only be found within or with the direct experience of working and living.

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