

Community Sojong Ceremony

Recognition

Bring to mind your life in this past month.

Try to bring up something that you have said, something you have done, or a pattern of mind that fell short of your intent and aspiration for yourself.

Recall an event, or pattern involving just you alone, or you and someone else that was particularly difficult, or that went badly. Acknowledge the situation clearly and honestly. Note how you feel about what happened, about yourself, or the others involved.

Bring to mind how painful it is to be caught by such a pattern, or to have acted in the way that you did.

How does this pattern, or behavior color your attitude towards yourself?

How does this pattern affect your relationship with your significant other, your family, children, friends or acquaintances?

What does this 'cost you' in terms of your own well-being, peace, connection to others, and your ability to love, or be loved?

Regret

Arouse a sense of weariness, or regret regarding this particular incident, or pattern

- not shame, or self-blame, but a sincere desire to refrain from harming yourself and others, a desire to renew your commitment to wake up, and to reconnect with your fundamental goodness?

Remedial Action

Again, bring this pattern, or event clearly to mind. Recall what is done, or what is said when you're caught in this pattern.

Can you see that at the core of the situation was your desire, or the others person's desire to be happy, or free of some pain

Can you see that that is what motivates us all?

The essence of wanting to be happy is love.

The essence of wanting to be free of pain is compassion.

Aren't we all alike in wanting to be happy and ease? And aren't we all the same in going about it ways that usually bring yet more pain and confusion

Consider the situation with this in mind.

With this understanding can you forgive yourself for whatever part you played in the situation?

With this understanding can you forgive the other person, or people for whatever part they played in the situation?

Rest with this for a minute.

Resolve

Now bring to mind a clear and firm resolve to refrain from this pattern in the future. Arouse the desire and the courage to be kinder, clearer and more gentle with yourself and the world around you. Resolve to refrain from that which disturbs your wellbeing and the wellbeing of others. Recall and refresh your aspiration and commitment to bring your practice and your most noble intention to whatever arises in the next month.

Additional notes:

Sojong:

The Tibetan word *so* means “to repair” or “heal” and the word *jong* means to “give up” or “purify.” In the sojong ceremony, we are asked if we realize the faults we have committed and then we promise not to repeat the same mistakes in the future. This process helps us to observe our vows properly.

Pema’s comments from Yarne 2002

“So the main purpose of Sojong, which is sometimes translated as the confession ceremony, the main purpose of it is to dismantle habitual patterns and we should remember that. And what I mean here specifically by habitual patterns are habits of our mind, the conditioned habits of our mind that cause us enormous suffering. So I copied down a little quotation from Vasubandu, about Sojong: ‘to fully restore all that is positive and supportive and to clear away that which weakens us and causes harm. To replenish insight and courage and purify habitual, dismantle, patterns, the Tathagata has taught the practice of Sojong. Let me go over that again; so first of all, in the middle of it, he says, to replenish insight and courage, and that word is Sojong. ‘So’ means to replenish and jong means to purify, or I’m using the word dismantle because it’s a more contemporary word and it has the same meaning. So to replenish or strengthen insight and courage, this is the first part of the Sojong, that is the meaning of ‘So’ to replenish insight and courage. This is to say it’s an opportunity, every day of our lives, but specifically every two weeks, to reflect back on what has happened in the last two weeks, and replenish our insight, which is to say, to further awaken our insight into our habits, our habitual tendencies that cause us to suffer; sort of reflecting back on where we got stuck and where we got unstuck, where we got hooked and where we felt unhooked; where we felt ourselves closing and where we felt ourselves opening. Looking back each day and particularly, specifically with the ceremony, every two weeks, looking back, and it’s a chance to strengthen or replenish insight and also courage, because believe me, this work takes courage.”

From *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* by Patrul Rinpoche

The main obstacles that prevent all the extraordinary experiences and realizations of the profound path from arising are negative actions, obscurations and habitual tendencies. "Obscurations" means factors of negative emotions and conceptualizations that cover and obscure our Buddha nature.

Just as the surface of the mirror has to be cleansed to allow forms to be reflected in it, so too our obscurations have to be eliminated to allow realization to appear like a reflection in the mirror of the Ground of all.

Guru Padmasambhava said:

It fully restores all positivity,
And clears away all negativity without exception,
In order to replenish virtue and purify harmful deeds,
The [Tathagata](#) has taught the practice of Sojong.

Anam Thubtan has this to say about Sojong:

There is a particular observance day in the Buddhist tradition called Sojong, which literally means restoration and purification. During Sojong, one makes an extra effort to look deeply into oneself and observe that which is obstructing and holding them back. It is an opportunity to become conscious of karmic patterns and to see how much we have strayed from the true path. In such an honest and humbling recognition one is able to strengthen their sacred vows of awakening.

Sojong is also regarded as a means of confession in the Buddhist traditions. In this sense, confession is not about judging oneself or performing self-flagellation from a viewpoint of conventional morality. Instead, it is the simple act of bringing everything into awareness, which is the most powerful form of spiritual purification. In the Sutras, confession is described as “revealing” or “not hiding,” but if this idea is not clearly understood it can be seen as heavily moralistic. Here not hiding means to not stow anything away into the unconscious, instead bringing it all to one's acknowledgment. In this way we become a witness within the light of awareness. In monasteries, Dharma practitioners come together to recite words of confession to each other in a symbolic act of witnessing. This act has nothing to do with fear, retribution, or punishment. Instead, it is a loving and compassionate acknowledgment and acceptance of where one is on the path. When we know how to do that, healing and transformation happens in our heart.

From Pema Chödrön

“I was doing an interview with Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche recently, and I asked him the question: “Rinpoche, you have been living in the west for some time now, and you know western people well. What do you think is the most important advice you could give to a western dharma practitioner?”

And he said “I think the most important thing that western dharma practitioners need to understand is guiltlessness.”

I said “guiltlessness?”

He said “Yes. You have to understand that even though you make a lot of mistakes and you mess up in all kinds of ways, all of that is impermanent and shifting and changing and temporary. But fundamentally, your mind and heart are not guilty. They are innocent.”

Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche to Pema Chödrön