



Evolving Ground

Spectrum of Ecstasy Facilitator's Guide

Session 5: From Isolation to Compassion

Ch. 8

Orientation

Note: while prompts are laid out here in an approximately linear way that follows the text, they are resources, not a map. Review them, have them handy, and feel into which prompts to use, and when. They can be used to start or restart conversations. Oftentimes, discussions will take on their own energy, and no prompting is needed. Other times, a prompt can help guide a discussion that has veered to other subjects back to relevant matters. Use “shadow” prompts to help diversify the conversation in the group.

Sometimes people may want to ask questions about how to apply the material in the book to their life, how to engage the view in certain situations, or other personal matters. They might just want to be listened to, to explore the issue, gather ideas, or even be told what to do. Other participants may miss the nuance between these different desires and move quickly toward providing answers or solutions stemming from their own practice and framing. A basic orientation is to facilitate the questioner in exploring their experience by asking open-ended questions or reflecting back what the questioner is saying. If the questioner wants ideas, find out if they have any ideas to offer to themselves. Emphasize that any ideas expressed are just possibilities, and may or may not be a good fit.

Opening the Session

Take a few minutes to meet and greet. This is an opportunity to learn about everyone. Those who are shy will often feel more comfortable speaking up later if they've already spoken. Then formally get started.

Getting Oriented

- First impressions: some things you are liking in this chapter? What are some things you don't like?
- First impressions: anything surprising or unexpected in the material?

Relating Personally

- How do you manifest distorted energy in these ways?
 - Obsession
 - Seduction
 - Compulsion
 - Fantasizing
 - Manipulative generosity
- What are times when you...
 - Changed in such a way that a previous obsession became optional?
 - Related to someone you found attractive without trying to impress or seduce them?
 - Brought awareness to a compulsive habit or tic as it was happening?
 - Shifted from anticipating the next good thing to appreciating what you had?
 - Helped someone without caring whether they recognized it or were grateful?
- How did the above changes increase your intelligent response to your circumstances?

Exposing the Shadow

- Where do you get stuck or encounter resistance, or just think the book is completely wrong?
- Does anything not sit well in your feelings, even if you can't articulate it?
- Does anyone have a different point-of-view on this?
- How could this idea be taken in a problematic direction?
- What other teachings, schools, or points-of-view do you believe would disagree?

Exploring Key Concepts

Key concepts: *fire element, separate/inseparable, isolation, loneliness, aloneness, compassion, discriminating awareness.*

The entire phenomenal world could be poured into this sense of isolation; and it would simply vanish. There is no answer to this void we feel—this sense of being isolated and incomplete. There is no cure for this emptiness in terms of filling it. There is no cure apart from staring into desire with non-conceptual attention. This liberates the boundless energy of desire into the desireless-desire of compassion. (156)

- What is distorted fire energy trying to do?
- Why can't this approach work?
- What is the difference between *loneliness* and *aloneness*?
- What does *compassion* mean here, and what does it not mean?
- What is *discriminating awareness*?
- How does distorted fire energy differ from distorted earth energy?
- What do you think the authors mean when they say that liberating the fire element *establishes intrinsic seduction as the fabric of reality*?
- What connections do you see between discriminating awareness, compassion, and pure appropriateness, in the description of the liberated qualities of the fire element?
- What is the difference between *desireless-desire* and *desirelessness*?

Excerpts for Discussion

Desire needs to be experienced with a certain sense of spaciousness or the flames of desire can escalate into emotional napalm. It is worth cultivating the art of 'dream-like window shopping.' It is worth learning to admire and enjoy the passing display of phenomena, without feeling a need to grab at them and turn them into reference points. (153)

Total renunciation of the world is not required in terms of Tantra—merely in terms of referentiality: 'I enjoy, therefore I enjoy'—rather than 'I enjoy, therefore I am.' (2)

Once we have some recognition of intrinsic space, a great discovery can be made—loneliness is actually aloneness or uniqueness. There is a positive sense in which aloneness is an uninhibited, unattached frame of non-reference. (157)

There is a distinct difference between the real compassion of pure appropriateness and the 'idiot compassion' that helps people to vegetate in long-term self-indulgence. It is 'idiot compassion' to assist others in remaining incapable—purely because that is what they wish to do. (158)

The symbolism of the lotus [a symbol of fire energy] is that it grows up out of the murky mud and slime of polluted water into dazzling sunlight. When it opens, its petals are pristine and unaffected by the stagnant sludge. Its petals have been pure from beginninglessness. The lotus remains pure through the illusion of renunciation, of apparent obfuscation, and the transmutation of apparent obscuration into clear light. (159)

END OF EXERPT