

Guiding Principles and Resources for Establishing and Conducting a Dharma Ocean Practice Group

"The idea is not that because there are a million people doing the same thing as you, you feel secure because you're not the odd man out. The idea is more that you are the odd man out in any case, and there are lots of odd men out together."

— Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, *The Path Is The Goal*

"Indra's Net" is a metaphor taken from Mahayana Buddhist teachings describing a net that reaches infinitely in all directions, holding a multifaceted jewel at every tie point. Each jewel is unique. But reflected in any one jewel's multifaceted surfaces are all the other jewels in the net. Reggie has used this metaphor frequently, saying that we are each like a jewel in the net - unique, containing within us the totality, and intimately interconnected with all others.

Dharma Ocean is a community of meditators and groups around the world, following the path of embodied spirituality. Dharma Ocean is a non-monastic, non-organized religion, a householder-based lineage - a community of householder yogis and yoginis, who prioritize the practice of somatic meditation in their lives. We are a large and diffuse community without any definite boundaries, but one linked by a common love of life and the somatic practices that open us to it. As a "practicing lineage," coming together in practice with others is one of the ways that we can support our own individual practice and nourish our lives.

Each practice group is a jewel in Indra's Net - each unique, containing the totality, and interconnected with all other practice groups in the larger Dharma Ocean community.

A small number of inspired community members may decide to come together with others in their community to practice and explore Dharma Ocean's path of somatic meditation. You might consider starting a practice group if there are no existing groups in your area. Members of the practice group are co-creating a space where they can hold their own and each other's experiences with openness and respect.

Each Dharma Ocean practice group, no matter where it is in the world, is unique and has its own ever-unfolding journey. Thus all Dharma Ocean sanghas and practice groups are formed and run administratively and financially independent (...).

To start and to hold a practice group is a very direct and transformative way to bring the practice into our immediate life situation. It requires discipline, trust, and constant opening. It is also one of the most rewarding ways to experience the teachings and the lineage. This document aims to give you a broad road map for forming a Dharma Ocean practice group and to offer resources to support you in your journey.

Shared Mission and Core Values

First and foremost, all of Dharma Ocean's activities and groups are guided by the mission of the former Dharma Ocean Foundation, which is to embody, unfold, and widely offer the unique path to awakening and human fulfillment taught by Trungpa Rinpoche, Reggie Ray, Caroline Pfohl, and other Dharma Ocean Teachers, creating a living continuity of the practicing lineage in our time.

Dharma Ocean activities are centered around the essence of this lineage described below, and can be further understood through working with the Three Commitments (below):

- The fundamental goodness of the human person - our own and others' inborn enlightenment and inherent perfection
- The sacredness of all of life and experience - that everything that arises is an expression of ultimate wisdom and a potential gate to immediate awakening
- The everyday practice to "never turn away" - to develop an attitude of complete acceptance and openness toward all experience, finding in it the transformation, fulfillment, and ultimate realization that so many of us seek today.

There are some essential values that we uphold to protect, nourish, and guide the growth of ourselves and the community. These values outline the commitments that a practice coordinator needs to make before starting, and while holding, a Dharma Ocean practice group:

Practice

As the **practicing lineage**, practice is always the primary motivation to form and attend a practice group. We are committed to somatic meditation practices, which emphasize direct, non-conceptual experience through the body as the gateway to the dharma. The practices invite us to be fully present inside the body and to realize our full humanity on the cushion and in day-to-day life. We cultivate the practices that support our understanding of the three kayas as outlined by the Three Commitments (below).

Dharma Ocean teachers and meditation instructors maintain their own personal practice as a way of being present when working with others one-on-one or in groups. We also ask that coordinators maintain a close relationship to their own practice and make a relationship with a meditation instructor or Indra's Net mentor in order to help their service to the community come from an embodied place. (See Resources Below)

Personal integrity

Protecting, nurturing, and furthering the journey of other practitioners is one of the primary responsibilities of anyone in a service role in Dharma Ocean. Together, Dharma Ocean's teachers, meditation instructors (MIs), staff, and volunteers vow to create a safe, trusting and open environment for others. We ask all practice group coordinators to hold the same level of integrity, to be mindful of not using the role to fulfill their own social, emotional, or sexual needs by taking advantage of others' vulnerability or longing for the teachings. It is essential that practice group members recognize that a practice group coordinator is expected to maintain this personal integrity. (...)

A very important part of this integrity for a practice group coordinator who is not an authorized Dharma Ocean teacher or MI is that they not set themselves up as teachers, MIs, or mentors for the group. This means that practice group coordinators should not be guiding practices or answering practice questions in group discussions. Their role is to coordinate the group's practice sessions (playing audio, timing the session, etc.) and to facilitate personal and experiential peer-led discussion, sharing from their own experience and refraining from giving advice. Honoring the boundaries of the coordinator role protects the integrity of the teachings as well as the personal journey of the coordinator and the group

members.

Additional practice and training is required to serve as teachers or MIs in which the teachings are being transmitted from embodied experience of the depth of this lineage.

Inclusivity and Right Speech

Our aim is to provide a safe container to practice respecting others in the group and their unique meditation and life experiences, and relating to others with compassion and dignity. We want to create an affirming space for all who wish to walk the path of somatic awakening without bias, favor or harm based on race, gender, class, orientation, age or ability among other factors. We appreciate diversity in the group, as we practice relating to all emotions, situations, and people, openly and directly. However, this openness is not an excuse to indulge problematic behavior, impose our own ego-driven views and beliefs or political or social agendas or to allow physical, emotional or mental harm to others in the group.

We ask all Dharma Ocean practitioners to practice Right Speech by being mindful of implicit biases, judgments, learned stereotypes and assumptions of other people. We respect each person as a unique individual with unique life experiences, and not as a prototypical member of a representative group, even if self-identified. We ask you to show up as who you are, sharing and communicating genuinely, clearly and skillfully and interacting directly with others as they are, not based on your assumptions or their self-identified category. This view of right speech should not be confused with “political correctness.”

If you find your speech has insulted someone, the best way to repair this is with a straightforward apology absent of excuses. If conflict arises among members in the group, you should honestly, authentically, and respectfully address and mediate the conflict. If you have a concern or confusion regarding right speech, we encourage you to seek out your meditation instructor first, then the Inclusivity Protector for information, support, or remedies to situations.

How to Begin

If you've checked the Dharma Ocean practice community page, and you didn't find a group in your area, you are encouraged to start a group. From our experience, starting a group with a small group of inspired practitioners, who are committed to sharing the workload and responsibilities is a more sustainable way to manage a group than starting one by yourself. If you'd like to identify or notify others who may reside within your area, we recommend that you post your group on Dharma Ocean's Community

Considerations:

1. Locating a practice space or setting up a personal Zoom account.

- a. Size: How many people could lie down comfortably in the space?
- b. Surroundings: Consider noise and safety. For instance, if the venue is a community center, find out if other groups are meeting in the building or if events are regularly scheduled during your group's practice session that could affect the experience of your practice.
- c. Cushions and chairs: Are there venues in your area with cushions you could borrow, such as local zen or yoga centers? Or will you ask your participants to bring their own cushions? Are there chairs available for those who need them?
- d. Cost: Are group members willing to share the cost of the space or Zoom subscription? By donation? Discuss with group members who will be keeping the accounts.

2. Determining the frequency of meetings

- a. Be realistic with yourself and members of your coordination group about how much time you can commit to the practice group on an ongoing basis for the first 12 months and then determine how often you'd like to coordinate a practice gathering.
- b. Would it be a bi-weekly or monthly group? It is important to balance your inspiration with the time available and with your capacity to commit in the context of your current life situation. If you are renting a space, what is the cost per week/month, etc.?

3. Determining the duration and structure of meetings

a. Here is an example of a typical 1.5-2 hour practice session:

- i. 5 mins Brief check-in with each other
(suitable for a smaller group with 3-6 people)
- ii. 45 mins Brief Recorded Talk and/or a Guided Meditation
- iii. 15-20 mins Just Sitting
- iv. 20 mins Sharing experience
Socialize

4. Coordinating, setting up, and dismantling the practice space or Zoom room

a. Another avenue for structured practice is to invite group members to enroll in a Dharma Ocean online program that fits your group's level, and then meet throughout the program to practice and study together.

5. Inviting, communicating information to group members and potential members

- a. Some people who find your group may already be familiar with the Dharma Ocean community and may be visiting your group as a support to their practice. Others may be very new and have little or no information about Dharma Ocean, our somatic approach, the path of practice that is available, the resources available online, or how to find out about opportunities for retreats, online programs, and other ways to connect.
- b. Consider pointing newcomers toward the information available on the Dharma Ocean website. www.dharmaocean.org and www.dharmaocean-europe.org

6. Preparing and playing guided meditations, livestreams, or other media

- a. Each practice group decides on what teachings and practices they focus on at any given time.
- b. Below is a list of Reggie's teachings that are suitable for beginners or those who are new to Dharma Ocean.
 - i. Guided meditations on the website www.dharmaocean.org
 - ii. [Sounds True Published Works](#)
 - 1. Meditation in Seven Steps
 - 2. Meditating with the Body
 - 3. Your Breathing Body Vol 1 & Vol 2
 - 4. The Awakening Body

7. Facilitating peer-experience discussions after the practice session

8. Invite a teacher or mentor to visit with your group

- a. You may invite teachers and other mentors to visit with your groups, either in person or via Zoom or other means. It is up to the group to coordinate with the teacher or mentor directly on timing, expense coverage, etc.

Resources

Because of the uniquely faceted jewel and individual needs of each group, we haven't listed a wealth of requirements and specified curriculums. Each group will proceed in a unique way according to its members inspirations and experience with the practices and teachings. As such, we'd prefer to provide contact information for MIs and Mentors who can serve as guides for ideas for working with you and your groups' journeys.

Meditation Instructors

We ask that group coordinators have an ongoing relationship with a meditation instructor (MI), Dharma Ocean mentor or teacher, or an Indra's Net council member. If you have an established relationship with an MI, you may continue to work with that person. If there is an MI you have met and would like to establish a relationship with, you may contact them directly to work with them. If you need an MI, or need the contact information of a specific MI, you may contact practicegroups@dharmaocean-europe.org to make a request.

Mentors

Linn Lillsunde is mentor for the European practice group network, you can contact her at practicegroups@dharmaocean-europe.org

Three Commitments

In order to take responsibility for the lineage in ourselves and for others, we recognize that the purpose of meditation is to connect with the meditative state, known as the awakened state, our own Buddha-nature, right here and right now, as expressed through Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Nirmanakaya. **The ground essence of the**

three kayas, or bodies of the Buddha, defines the fundamental commitments to ourselves, to others and to this lineage. A summary of the commitments is listed below.

Note that each commitment builds on the previous commitment and they are completely experiential understandings. There can be no realizing the sacredness of all phenomena without the realization of egolessness and non-attachment. There can be no non-conceptual compassion without the realization of emptiness and the pure objectivity of arising phenomena of the Sambhogakaya. This teaching on the Three Commitments or Three Samayas is also outlined here: “ Three Samayas” Ray, Reginald A.. ***The Practice of Pure Awareness*** (p. 241).

First Commitment: Our Own True Nature (Dharmakaya) [Most important]

- Our commitment and primary responsibility is to deepen our relationship with our own true nature
- The way we do this is through the sitting practice of meditation
- The fruition is the realization of egolessness or non-attachment in Hinayana, emptiness in Mahayana, and Rigpa/Mahamudra in the Vajrayana
- The entire path is working with this state of being. There is no genuine dharma without this. It must be an ongoing experience and we must continually train in it.

Exemplified by the **Yeshe Tsogyal Chant:**

“Space and the awareness of space. This is the basic message.”

Second Commitment: The Sacredness of Our Own Experience (Sambhogakaya)

- Our commitment is to realize the universal sacredness of all phenomena, to consider our life and other people’s lives to be sacred. This is an experiential understanding and natural outgrowth of our relationship with the Dharmakaya
- When we let go of the subjectivity of our experience it becomes the gateway to our liberation

- This derives from our ability to experience the world in a non-conceptual, non-judgmental, naked way, and to appreciate the fullness, richness and meaningfulness of all experience. We have respect for what happens, without complaint, criticism, blame, doubt or judgement. This is a commitment to never turn away from what is happening and trust all of our experience (even self- doubt), the unfolding situation of our lives. Let the phenomena play.

Exemplified by the **Aspiration**

Chant: “May I develop

Complete acceptance and openness

To all situations and emotions

And to all people.

May I experience everything nakedly,

Completely without mental reservations or blockages.

May I never withdraw from life

Or centralize onto myself.

May my heart be laid bare and

open To the fire of all that is.”

Third Commitment: Relating with Daily Life (Nirmanakaya)

- Our commitment is to bring the meditation practice experience into daily life
- Three aspects of this commitment:
 - The way we set our life up reflects our relationship with our deepest inspiration to deepen our relationship with our true nature.
 - The way we are with other people is an expression of bodhicitta
 - ‘May my practice enable me to be the best benefit to other people. May I not miss one single opportunity to connect with the natural state’
 - We cultivate non-conceptual compassion by developing the ability to relate to the suffering of others in an absolutely direct and spontaneous way. Bodhicitta must be completely somatic and experiential. Abstract or conceptual or constructed bodhicitta is not

bodhicitta at all.

- We take responsibility for our practicing community
 - We act without expectations or personal agenda, judgment or criticism from the view of Dharmakaya and the Sacredness of everything.

Exemplified by the **Bodhicitta Chant**:

“So that they may find relief in the luminosity and boundless space of their own true nature, I generate immeasurable loving-kindness and compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, the very heart of bodhicitta.”