

**How to Show Up for Your Life:
A Course on Meditation for Meeting Your World with an Open Heart
Taught by Lodro Rinzler**

Talk 1: An Introduction to Peaceful Abiding

Hi. My name is Lodro Rinzler, and I am delighted to be here with you for this online class, where we will be talking about teachings from the book, *The Buddha Walks into a Bar*. In the next several weeks, we'll be getting into both meditation and how it really applies to all of the nitty-gritty aspects of our day-to-day life, including our romantic relationships and our work life and our family situations and going out for drinks with friends on a Friday night (or whatever you might do with your Friday nights). How can we actually bring our meditative mind to any of that?

We'll explore this through the lens of the four dignities of Shambhala, which are legendary animals or beings: the tiger, the snow lion, the *garuda*, and the dragon. This is a very traditional framework for us to use, and we'll go through all of these various legendary beings throughout the six weeks together. In our second class, we'll launch into the tiger, but for today, I would love for us to do the basic foundational meditation practice that we'll be employing over the next several weeks together. This is known as *shamatha*, or calm-abiding, meditation.

"Calm-abiding" might sound pretty good to anyone that's taking this course—it certainly sounds good to me. We often wake up with a real sense of urgency. Many of us, first thing, we reach for the cell phone, we reach for our calendar—whatever it might be—and we start to plunge into our day headfirst. And once we've made that initial gesture, we don't slow down. We actually speed up: we check our e-mail before we leave for work; then we're running late for work, and we rush through our commute; then we work as hard as we can in our job or at school; then we end up coming home, and we have family activities that we need to engage in or social things that we need to engage in; before we know it, the end of the day has come, and we are exhausted, and we have taken no time whatsoever to take care of our self.

I'm hoping that we could actually switch our mind a little bit, because that sort of day says to me that we are pledging our mental allegiance to struggle. We're always struggling in some way: struggling to get to work on time, struggling to get ahead at work, struggling to make sure that we're noticed—all these sorts of things. Could we actually let go of struggle, and when

we do, what do we find? It's said from a Buddhist point of view that we actually find a sense of peace.

The meditation practice is us actually switching our mental allegiance from that of struggle to that of peace. *Shamatha*, as I said, can be defined as "calm-abiding," but also "peaceful-abiding." It's the sense that when we let go of all of the ways that we struggle internally and then throughout our day, how it manifests in our day-to-day interactions, we actually discover our innate nature. It's said, actually, that our mind is a little bit like this glass of water. It's clear and brilliant and pristine—lovely. There's some real sharpness to this, some crispness, and this is our natural state.

Now, one of the things that often happen, particularly when we encounter strong emotions—something happens that just pisses us off—is that we take the glass of water, and we dump a little bit of dirt in. This is that time when someone cuts you off in line, that time when you get an e-mail and you get really triggered by it, that time when something big happens and you feel devastated or heartbroken. That would be fine if this is all that happens, because at some point, this dirt will just settle to the bottom, and you'll once again reveal your natural state—your clarity, your brilliance—but most of us don't do that.

Most of us start by actually stirring it up. In fact, we start to look for all sorts of reasons of why we should feel bad about it or how/why . . . all the various vindications for why we're upset, and then we start to churn it up. We actually take a spoon, and we just start [*stirs*], as you can see, muddying our mind. Our mind is no longer in its natural state—it's actually quite cloudy. Most of us spend our day going, "Well, here's what I should say in that e-mail. Here's what I'm going to do to get back at them. Here's how I'm going to prove that I'm right." We keep stirring and stirring and stirring. If we could actually take the spoon and just set it down, you would see that this dirt would naturally settle to the bottom, and once more, our natural state—our clarity, our brilliance—would be revealed. But we don't. We keep putting it back in. "Well, what I'm going to do . . . Here's why they're wrong and I'm right . . ."

What we're going to do in the meditation practice is notice when we start stirring the dirt up and just catch our self and say, "I don't have to do that. I could actually just relax with my natural state. I could allow myself to return to that clarity—return to that brilliance." Why don't we sit together for a few minutes. This is the basic meditation instruction that we're going to do for these six weeks. There's another instruction on loving-kindness meditation we'll add in on top of this in a few weeks, but for now, let's just become very familiar with our mind. In Tibetan,

there's a word, *gom*, and I love this particular word for meditation, because in addition to being translated as "meditation," it can be translated as "become familiar with" or "familiarization." In other words, we're becoming more familiar with what's going on in our mind. We're becoming more familiar with how we stir up all of the activity that's going on in there. And the more familiar we are, the more we're able to just set that spoon down and rest. We don't have to give in to the habitual way that we normally do things.

I'd like to invite you, if you're sitting in a chair, to go through this first aspect of the meditation posture. We're going to go through three different aspects: the first is body, the second is breath, and the third is mind. To begin with our body, we sit in the center of our chair, or if you're seated on a cushion on the ground, you sit in the center of that cushion. If you're seated in that way, you could sit with your legs loosely crossed, with your knees falling just a little bit below your hips. For those of us in chairs, what we're going to do is just rest with a sense of balance. If it's helpful, you could even rock back and forth a little bit. We're not resting up against the back of the chair and sort of slouching as we normally do; we're sitting up. We're feeling our sits bones dig into the cushion or the chair, our feet or legs firmly on the ground, our feet facing forward, a real sense of solidity—connection to earth.

From this strong base, we elongate upward through the spine. If it's helpful, you could even imagine a string at the top of your head, pulling you straight up. What we're doing here is not forcing the muscles in our shoulders or our back; we're allowing those to relax. We're allowing ourselves to relax with our natural skeletal curvature. It's said that we have a strong back but also a soft front, so allowing ourselves to connect with that soft, open heart.

If it's helpful, you could even drop your hands at your sides for a moment, and then picking them up at the elbows, you just drop them palms down on your thighs. This should be a comfortable spot on which to rest them, and it also provides you a little bit of extra support for your back. Most of us are used to slouching, so sitting upright in this manner might be uncomfortable. This should give you a little bit of extra help.

The head just rests at the top of the spine, with our chin slightly tucked in. There're two aspects of this posture that I want to mention: a sense of feeling grounded/relaxed on the earth and yet uplifted and dignified. We relax the muscles in our face, in our jaw; if that means that our jaw hangs open, that is quite all right. You could even place your tongue up against the roof of your mouth, allowing for clear breathing.

For this particular meditation practice, I invite you to keep your eyes open. There're two big reasons for this. One is philosophical: the idea of the meditation practice is that we are waking up to what's going on right now, with us and within the world around us. Practically, if you are very tired while watching this video, you might fall asleep. So we'll keep our eyes open instead of closed. Your gaze can just rest maybe two to four feet ahead of you on the ground, in a loose and unfocused manner.

I invite you now to move into the second step of the meditation practice, which is connecting to the breath. We bring our full attention to both the in-breath and the out-breath. You don't need to alter or change your breathing at all, just allow it to occur as it always does. Relax with the breath. Feel the breath as it cycles through your body.

[Silence]

The third aspect of this practice is noticing when your mind has drifted off: you're no longer present; you're starting to spin out all of those story lines around strong emotions, fantasies, maybe just discursive thoughts; you're thinking about a phone call you had earlier in the day; you're planning your weekend. When you notice that you're no longer present, you can very gently and silently say, "Thinking." This is not to say that our thoughts are good or bad, but what we want to do is come back to the breath. So we don't say, "Thinking" [*says angrily*], which would have the subtext of, "You jerk, why can't you just rest with the breath?" but, "Thinking" [*says gently*], which is more of a, "Oh, notice that you drifted off there. Why don't you come on back," sort of quality. The same sort of thought may arise multiple times. We just catch ourselves, acknowledge it—"Thinking"— and then come back to the breath. Please keep coming back to the breath.

[Silence]

If you would like, you could come back to our time together, as opposed to just resting with your breath, bringing your attention back to your space and to your computer. Thank you for practicing with me. This is the foundational practice that we'll be exploring. It may seem very simple, but it's not always easy. There're those three aspects: taking the physical form (the body), connecting to your breath, and then noticing the mind as it drifts off and just gently guiding it back, over and over again, to the breath. If we do this, we actually do connect with our inherent peacefulness on a regular basis. It's a training ground for us to connect to this peaceful-abiding core of who we really are. It's us saying, "Oh, I don't have to stir this up right now. I can put the spoon down. Thinking." Every time we say, "Thinking," it's us setting the spoon down

and letting whatever dust/dirt might be swirling around in our mind begin to settle. It's a very practical tool, in many ways, but we'll also be exploring how this level of peace can be brought into our daily life—how we could actually connect with our world from a place of being fully authentic, fully who we are, and that's what we are becoming familiar with through the meditation practice.

There are a few tips that I would like to offer about setting up a home practice, for those of you who may not already have such a thing. It's basically me saying, "Consistency," four times in a row, but I will do it in different ways.

The first thing is a consistent amount of time. Ten minutes a day is absolutely phenomenal—a little bit like picking up a guitar for ten minutes a day. If you did that, it might be a few weeks, but you would actually start to notice that you've gotten quite good at the guitar—you've been able to play simple songs where it used to be that you didn't even know how to hold it or how to strum. If you're new to meditation, ten minutes a day is going to make that sort of difference. The changes that happen when we start to meditate are very subtle. We might notice that we become more present or more kind or more available to those around us—subtle but very powerful. So I invite you to do ten minutes a day, and that means setting a timer. There're all sorts of apps these days, like Insight Timer, or you could set something on your kitchen counter, your phone—whatever you would like. When you notice that you've been sitting, and it feels like ten minutes when in fact you look down and it's been three, don't jump up from the cushion and say, "Oh my God, I'm done with this." When you notice that you are completely at peace and your timer goes off and it's been ten minutes, don't assume that you should do more. Just get up and let that be ten minutes. Ten minutes of becoming familiar with who we are is just ten minutes of becoming familiar with who we are. We spend so much of our day judging all aspects of who we are and what we do. Let's not judge our meditation practice and say this is a "good session" versus this is a "bad session." It's just a session. So ten minutes is ten minutes.

Then I'd like to mention that you could also have a consistent time of day that you meditate. Some people like to meditate in the morning right when they get up, right before they go to work, right when they come home from work, right before bed—whatever you would like. You could experiment for a little while, see what makes the most sense for your schedule, and then when you have a sense of that, just do that. For me, I wake up, I shower, I get dressed, I walk my dog, I have my coffee, I meditate. And I also brush my teeth somewhere in there, but

you don't notice me mentioning that because it is just part of my routine, in the same way that the meditation practice has been folded into my routine. If it's helpful, you could fold it into existing routines: just ten minutes as part of your unwinding after work (whatever it might be). No specifically preferential time for when you should do it. The time that you can consistently do it is the time that you should do it.

Another type of consistency I'd like to mention is consistent environment. It's important to have some space in your home that you meditate in. It could be a corner of your living room, a spare bedroom, a closet that doesn't have much in it—whatever you would like—but having a consistent space that you go to, you know that's where you go to meditate, is really important. You could mark that with a meditation cushion, if you want to invest in such a thing, or even just a candle, an incense burner, an image of someone you admire, a statue—anything like that. But something that says, when you walk by it, that's where you go to meditate. It's very helpful to have that space that you're magnetized to.

The final form of consistency I want to mention is consistent pacing. Now, it's said that after eleven days of doing any new positive habit, your brain starts to incorporate it as just part of what you do, and after twenty-one days, it's said that this new positive habit is fully a part of the way that your brain operates. It feels a little bit like if you skip a day, it's as if you skipped brushing your own teeth. I've seen science that says this is 110 percent accurate and science that says this is completely bunk, but I will tell you this: in my experience, anyone that has meditated for twenty-one days in a row, even if it's ten minutes a day, has walked away saying, "This is so much easier to do and to incorporate as part of my day-to-day life," and they've also seen the effects of meditation during that time, in terms of just how they have developed on their spiritual journey.

I would like to ask for those of you who are doing this class and are new to meditation, you do this basic shamatha practice—the calm-abiding practice that we just did together—for ten minutes a day, going forward. For those of you who have a meditation practice already, I'd like to ask that you increase your meditation practice during the period of this course by five to ten minutes—five to ten minutes above what you normally do. We will all be doing this practice together: I am here, you're there, but through this particular course we're all connected. Have a wonderful week.