

# Karuna Training



**A Training in Contemplative Psychology**





# INTRODUCTION

Karuna is a Sanskrit word that means “selfless compassion intended to alleviate suffering.” Karuna Training is a curriculum dedicated to sharing the principles of Buddhist-based Contemplative Psychology and embodied compassion with Westerners. Although the curriculum is drawn from Buddhism, one doesn’t need to be Buddhist to apply the work. With practice, Karuna Trainees learn to offer themselves in compassionate exchange with others and the world.

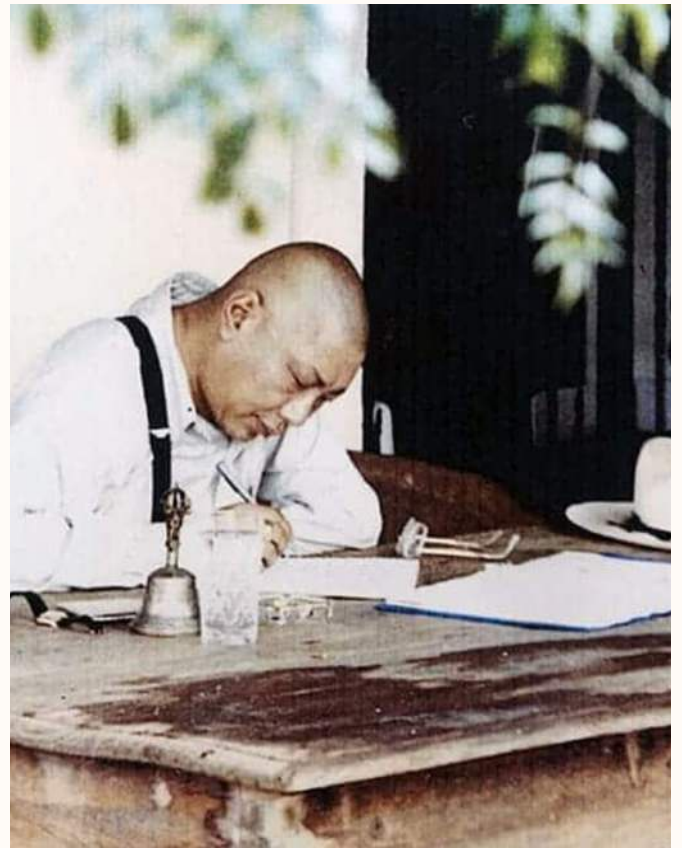
Karuna Training is offered in a cohort model, where participants wake up to hidden information about themselves in relationship with Karuna faculty and fellow cohort members. The training provides meditation instruction, online and in-person courses, individual study, mentoring, and group retreats. The in-person group retreats offer a supportive environment where participants are encouraged to lean into the discomfort of challenging emotions. Instead of rejecting emotions, Karuna practitioners train in witnessing, allowing, and opening to the potent wisdom emotions contain.

Karuna Training has been offered in multiple formats in the following countries: Germany, Netherlands, France, Spain, Austria, Poland, Denmark, the UK, and the United States. In the States, Karuna cohorts have been offered in Berkeley, CA; Seattle, WA; Albuquerque, NM; Baltimore, MD; and Los Angeles, CA. And Denver, Co.

# WHAT IS CONTEMPLATIVE PSYCHOLOGY?

Contemplative Psychology is a study that supports the practice of deep mindfulness and an embodied experience of loving-kindness and compassion. The path of contemplative psychology integrates meditation and compassion training, creating a valuable skill set for building an authentic relationship with oneself and with others.

Learning to practice and live contemplatively means learning meditative tools for being with ourselves. When we're angry, in pain or dealing with challenging emotions, contemplative psychology helps to fully experience our emotions versus trying to manage them or push them away. With exploration and practice, we learn to transmute the confusion of emotions into the intrinsic wisdom they contain.



Chogyam Trungpa at Casa Werma, 1982

## ORIGINS OF CONTEMPLATIVE PSYCHOLOGY



Dr. Ed Podvoll (center) Naropa University, 1984

Contemplative Psychology, taught in Karuna Training, originates at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche founded Naropa Institute in 1974 as the vanguard of Buddhism, Psychology, and the Arts in the U.S.. Naropa Institute offered its first two summer sessions in an old bus depot in Boulder. Faculty included Kobun Chino Roshi, Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman, Ram Dass, Gary Snyder, Herbert Guenther, Joan Halifax, John Cage, Gregory Bateson, and other well-known writers, performers, and scholars. More than 1,500 students attended— 6 times more students than expected.

The master's program in Buddhist and Western Psychology was launched at Naropa in 1976 by Dr. Ed Podvoll. The program integrated Buddhist Psychology with the unique practice of Maitri Space Awareness (MSA). Recognizing the need to support students in developing genuine maitri (loving-kindness in Sanskrit) and compassion, Chogyam Trungpa created Maitri Space Awareness explicitly for Westerners. MSA practice encourages individuals to develop a non-judgmental and compassionate awareness of their thoughts, emotions, and experiences. It emphasizes being present without attachment or aversions, fully acknowledging whatever arises in one's mind. The Master's program at Naropa combined Vajrayana Buddhist intensification principles with traditional approaches to Western Psychology. The training was done in a cohort model that supports newly trained therapists to trust in one's brilliant sanity and the brilliant sanity of others.

# KARUNA TRAINING'S HISTORICAL ROOTS

Melissa Moore, a co-founder of Karuna Training, attended the MA in Buddhist and Western Psychology from 1980 to 1983. While residing in Northern California, she continued working in the therapeutic field, aspiring to bring a contemplative approach to the Western paradigm with much frustration. She began offering short seminars on Buddhist Psychology, primarily to those she worked with in clinical settings. In 1994, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche invited Melissa and her then-husband, David Schneider, to teach and be leaders in Shambhala Europe. She began traveling and teaching Buddhism, Shambhala Training, and Contemplative Psychology in Central and Eastern Europe.



Melissa Moore, Ph.D., 2021

Eventually, Melissa was approached by Lisa Fey, Dagmar Niehaus, Angelica Shultz, Gabby Gokert, and Hubert Backes, three of whom held a psychotherapeutic practice in Bielefeld, Germany. At their request, Karuna Training evolved from a therapeutic training model to a training focused solely on Buddhist Psychology and Maitri Space Awareness. Karuna Training became open to anyone—trainees didn't have to be a therapist or a Buddhist for the training to be relevant.



Sandra Ladley ( w/mic) and trainees, Nor Cal Cohort , 2015

The first Karuna Training cohort was launched in 1996 in Bielefeld, Germany, with a three-year curriculum that ended in 1999. Melissa invited two other Naropa Institute graduates to help: Paul Cashman and Irini Rockwell. Karuna's startup was successful and quickly expanded from Germany to France, Spain, Austria, the Netherlands, and Poland. In 2014, after Melissa returned to the United States, Karuna Training was started in Northern California with help from Sandra Ladley, Kathryn Rile, and Terry Jaworski.

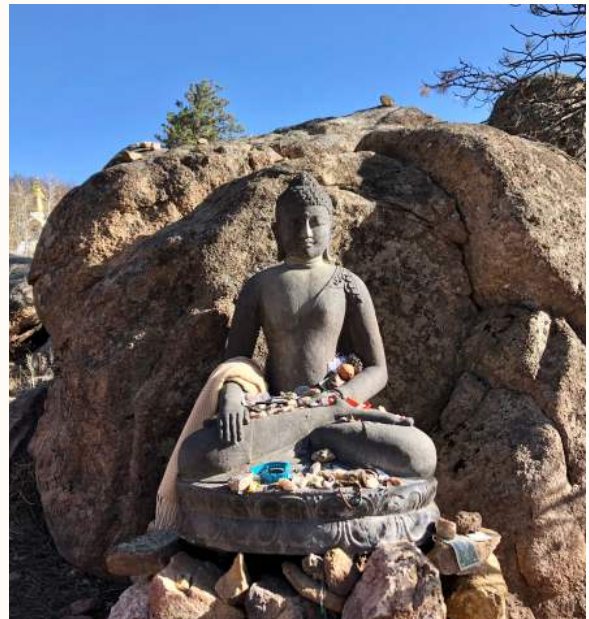


Karuna Trainings have been offered in Seattle, Albuquerque, Baltimore, LA, and Red Feather Lakes, Colorado. The program includes an 18-month Basic Training certificate and one-year graduate training. With the advent of the coronavirus epidemic in 2020, Karuna training converted to an online format for much of its training. Today, Karuna Training is offered in a hybrid format of online instruction and in-person retreats.

## CORE PRINCIPLES/KEY ASPECTS OF CONTEMPLATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

***“Traditional Buddhist psychology emphasizes the importance of direct experience in psychological work. If one relies on theory alone, something is lost. From the Buddhist viewpoint, the theory study is only a first step and must be completed by training in the direct experience of mind itself, in oneself, and others.”***

Chogyam Trungpa, The Sanity We Are Born With, Shambhala Publications, Boston, MA. 2005



Chogyam Trungpa is considered the first Buddhist master to present Buddhism in a psychological language that spoke directly to Westerners and western minds. Contemplative Psychology combines Eastern and Western practices—the study of how the mind works theoretically, coupled with direct experience of the mind through meditation practice. Though Buddhist in origin, this type of meditation is not tied to a culture or a religion. It's a simple meditation focused on seeing how things are rather than how we might want them to be. Contemplative psychology can be seen as a practice of synchronizing the head and the heart through in-depth meditative inquiry.

***“Buddhist psychology is based on the notion that human beings are fundamentally good. Their most basic qualities are positive ones: openness, intelligence, and warmth.”*** (Trungpa, 2005, p.8)

Contemplative Psychology is based on the view that all of us, no matter what problems we have are fundamentally good, awake, and healthy. In some schools of Buddhism, this is called buddhanature. In essence, fundamental goodness and intrinsic health are

the birthrights of all human beings. This idea flies in the face of Western education and most peoples' experience of being in the world. We have problems and most of the time, it's pretty difficult to believe in our goodness or feel openness and warmth because problems seem more real, solid and permanent. Meditation practice gives us a time-out. It provides the opportunity to slow down, observe and hopefully, experience how insubstantial and temporary many problems are. Practicing contemplative psychology as an individual and in exchange with others bears the fruit of discovering this core tenant of our existence.

***"A good taste of meditation is actually necessary in working with oneself and others."***  
(Trungpa, 2005, p.5)

Contemplative psychology differs from Western psychology because of its emphasis on a balance of both intellectual and experiential learning, rather than the primarily intellectual study of theory alone. In many ways, Western psychology focuses on controlling the mind, thoughts, and emotions. Contemplative psychology focuses on awareness of the mind, thoughts, and emotions along with personal exploration into the habits of mind that seem to drive thoughts and stimulate emotional reactions.

***"When balanced with meditative discipline, study takes on much more life and reality."***  
(Trungpa, 2005, p.6)

Contemplative Psychology is based on the Abhidharma, the traditional, comprehensive manual of Buddhist Psychology. Studying the Abhidharma teachings helps the contemplative psychology practitioner to recognize and interpret what happens in the mind during meditation. In turn, meditation translates psychological theory and concepts into vivid and tangible lived experience.





# WHAT IS MAITRI?

Maitri is a Sanskrit word meaning loving kindness towards self and others. Meditation practice is dedicated to making friends with ourselves, which means befriending the parts of ourselves we reject, recoil from, and try to hide. Many of us harbor ill feelings toward ourselves, which is cultural and psychological conditioning we unknowingly carry into our lives and relationships. Developing genuine maitri is a central component of Karuna Training.



## WHAT IS MAITRI SPACE AWARENESS PRACTICE?



Coming to Our Senses: Maitri Space Awareness Retreat 2023

Chögyam Trungpa developed MSA practice for Western students to engage in a contemplative relationship with themselves and others. The practice is to lay in different colored rooms, or wearing colored glasses, positioned in specific postures that correlate to the colors. Afterwards, the practitioner aimlessly wanders to reflect on the effect of the posture on their mind.

The practice is revelatory; gradually, the practitioner begins to see through their solid states of mind. Concretized emotions open up, revealing the innate basic sanity with which we were all born. Maitri Space Awareness cultivates a non-judgmental and compassionate awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, and experiences. The practice emphasizes being present in the moment and fully acknowledging whatever arises in one's mind without engaging or rejecting.

# HOW TO GO FURTHER



## KARUNA LIVE

Karuna Lives are an hour introduction to Buddhist contemplative psychology. In these Lives, our faculty members join participants in reflection, and discussions and lean on innate wisdom as a resource.

Learn more [here](#).



## KARUNA PODCAST

The Karuna Podcast features recordings of Karuna Lives, along with meditations and interviews with our faculty and guests discussing Buddhist contemplative psychology.

Learn more [here](#).



## FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM, AND CIRCLE

We invite you to stay up to date and engage with our content via Facebook and Instagram.

You can find us on Facebook [here](#).

You can find us on Instagram [here](#).

You can join our Circle community [here](#).



## KARUNA TRAINING AND RETREATS

For an immersive experience, we invite you to join us for Karuna Basic Training or one of our retreats.

Learn more [here](#).