

From snob to monk

Hans
Kloosterman

**FROM
SNOB
TO
MONK**

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PROLOGUE

○ n my way to Belgium, at ‘St. Job in het Goor’, a sudden cloudburst storm erupted. I slid with my Smart Convertible through all the water and flew 120 kilometres per hour against a concrete pole.

First, I wasn’t really aware of what was happening. Suddenly I rose up into a beam of light. (Just like in Star Trek: ‘Beam me up, Scotty!’). A deep voice said to me: ‘Would you like to stay or leave?’ I thought: jeez, God is a guy after all! And how can HE now communicate through telepathy? I saw nothing and no one; I did see my body constrained by the seatbelt of the car and my head on the steering wheel. The plastic exterior wraps were gone and the windows were broken, but the chassis of the car was still there. I was able to think, but I couldn’t feel my body. My answer was: ‘I want to stay because I’m not done here yet, I want to try to make people on earth happier.’ Instead of going up into the tunnel of light, I went down and came back into my very painful body. I had undergone a near-death experience...

It was not the first sign that I had had to organize my life differently. But I still hesitated to give up my quite enjoyable and luxurious lifestyle: the parties, frequent travelling and high earnings.

I had already finished a number of yoga and meditation training and teaching a yoga course. And a meeting with the Dalai Lama had made me aware that was living too superficially. But I still hesitated to make the big step. Until the accident. That was the decisive moment to turn everything around, to dig deeper into Buddhism, to live in a monastery for a while and to apply the lessons I had learned from Lama Karta, Lama Zeupa and Lama Tashi Nima, in my life and my business.

I have learned a lot by changing everything around. Now it is time to share these experiences with everyone through this book.

CONSENSUS

In the Netherlands everyone is well trained and it is no longer of this time for organizations to adhere to a hierarchical structure. It is time to develop an organizational structure where human values are the point of focus rather than the egos of executives. Only in organizations where people are the main focus can the capacities of all be optimally utilized. To achieve this it is necessary to switch to an organization with a flat structure, one where the responsibilities and powers are delegated to the lower layers.

The Buddha already worked on a foundation of a consensus model, 2,500 years' ago. When making important decisions, the opinions of others were asked until a joint decision was reached. This approach would also be very effective for companies and organizations of today. So it's important for managers and employees to ask themselves: Who am I? What am I capable of? And: what do I want?

YOGA AND MINDFULNESS

In 2007, I left the monastery and since 2011 I teach yoga and mindfulness in companies. I have coached management teams and, on strategy days of an organization, I give kick-off classes with an hour of yoga and mindfulness.

With yoga and mindfulness you create moments of rest, which increase self-awareness and people dare

to wonder who they are, what they are capable of and what they want. As a result, people are more motivated and less afraid, so they are more daring to move on to other functions. Yoga and mindfulness also helps to reduce stress, improve productivity, increase the physical resistance, reduce absenteeism and stimulate 'out of the box' thinking and creativity.

Aegon, for example, hired me to give an awareness training as part of their vitality program. I asked the employees who signed up for these workshops to make a flipchart at home with the questions: What would I like to improve of my performance in business? What gives me energy and what doesn't give me energy? Where do I want to be in a year: professionally and privately? The self-awareness increased, the employees coached each other with the planned arrangements and were ecstatic after the workshop. We are now looking at whether mindfulness can get a permanent place within the organization.

The Ministry of Finances, Nike, Achmea, Schiphol Airport and other organizations have already integrated yoga or mindfulness on a weekly basis. Rabobank has built quiet rooms in their new offices.

Prioritizing the wellbeing of employees is slowly but surely becoming more important to organisations. In more advanced thinking companies, they are even hiring Health- or vitality managers

What's more fun than being an attractive employer who puts the wellbeing of his employees first? Especially younger employees like having a good balance between their work and private lives. Especially now that there will be fewer young people on the labour market, it's a way to retain the best ones for your business.

But: How do you realize such a change among the vision and culture of managers and employees?

BEING AUTHENTIC

Authentic leadership is all about the fundamental life questions: Who am I really? Why am I here? What is my mission? What do I stand for in this life? An authentic leader knows himself, is true to himself and inspires others and leads them on from there. And has no ego.

For employees, authenticity is very important in order to join the team. An integral part for them, it is also important to ask yourself the questions: Who am I? What can I do and what do I want?

In our capitalist countries we have reached an unprecedented material prosperity. However, people are not happy. That's why the wellness centres are overcrowded and there's a yoga studio popping up in every street. At a deep subconscious level, we feel a void and we feel the need for more understanding about who we are and what is the meaning of our life. This need is reinforced by the new ideal to be able to feel, think and act from our own core. Everyone wants to do something with their own recognised talents. Our goal now is to live from the inside out, not from outside to inside as in the previous century.

But: How do you get and stay in your own core? And how do you discover your talents? All people develop fixed thinking- and behavioural patterns throughout their lives, which blur their view on their own life path. Partly because of internal factors such as genes and character, but also by external influences such as upbringing, education and the social circles in which one moves. These influences form, on a subconscious level, your habits, your autopilot. Yet, you are aware of only ten per cent (and unaware for ninety per cent!) of these behaviours, habits and thinking patterns.

To make your life path and life fulfilment clear, it's important to lift these fixed thinking and behavioural patterns to a more conscious level. To do this, you can look for answers to the questions 'Who am I, what am I capable of? And what do I want?' You will need to turn inwards, to learn to observe yourself. You will then recognize and accept yourself and become aware of what you are capable of and what you would like to change or transform.

PURPOSE TRAININGS AND BOOK

My life mission is Creating Awareness, helping people to gain an understanding of their automatic pilot and their fixed thinking and behavioural patterns. Retrieving this understanding helps you to find your own life path.

That's the purpose for giving mindfulness training and writing this book. Mindfulness helps you to actively lift your unconscious thinking- and behavioural patterns to a more conscious level. Whenever you are able to observe yourself, you will also be able to come closer to your life path.

I have personally gone through a path in life that was slightly astray. It went from working in a commercial environment to a life where commerce and spirituality are more in balance. In this book, I want to share with you my personal quest to my life path and the knowledge that I have gained on that path.

I draw lot of inspiration for my life and work from Hinduism, but even more from Buddhism. Everyone recognizes the situation in which pleasant external or internal influences make you happy and the unpleasant ones unhappy. In Buddhism it is assumed that you create these influences yourself. By thinking, speaking and behaving soundly, you increase your happiness. By not

thinking, speaking and behaving soundly you diminish your happiness. It's a matter of cause and consequence. Every action leads to a reaction: you decide your own karma.

Many Religions and life wisdoms have developed ways to make you a better person: practicing ethical principles, singing prayers and mantras or performing rituals and offerings. The aim is to make you live in harmony with yourself and your surroundings.

Buddhism places the key to happiness within yourself and that's why it has developed many ways to transform yourself and reduce disturbed emotions like fear and greed.

There's one thing I know for sure: you're perfect as you are. If you are completely satisfied about your life, then don't change a thing at all. But it is human nature to be caught in an existence of duality between positive and negative events. With Creating Awareness, I would like to support you in getting a clearer life path and to become a better version of yourself!

METHOD

Mindfulness training offers people tools to obtain clarity of their own life path. For my trainings, I have let myself be inspired by John Kabat Zin, an American professor working in healthcare and psychiatry. He has poured the physical and mental Hinduistic and Buddhistic theories into a mindfulness training of eight weeks in a genius way. In it, he combines theories on how the mind works with yoga exercises and meditation techniques. The purpose of this is to increase the awareness process and self-understanding Millions of people over the whole world are nowadays participating in this mindfulness training.

My mindfulness trainings are based on his approach, together with my Buddhist knowledge.

The main point of my mindfulness training is the awareness process of your behavioural- and thinking patterns. This develops in three main phases: recognizing, accepting and transforming. By recognizing your thinking- and behavioural patterns and then accepting them, you will be able to observe yourself. You then decide what you find pleasant and what you find unpleasant. You can increase what you find pleasant and reduce what you find unpleasant.

During the awareness process, I focus on three levels: physical, emotional and mental. Just like Kabat-Zinn, I hereby make use of yoga. Yoga provides awareness and self-understanding through the practice of body and breathing exercises and meditation. You learn to ask yourself - and to answer: Who am I? What am I capable of? And: What do I want?

Thanks to yoga and meditation exercises you will gradually see your own life as a process. This way you will be able to recognize the path that has been laid out for you and walk it.

Yoga and meditation furthermore stimulate finding potential talents. You can further develop these talents and implement them in society. This will give you fulfilment and you will experience life as more meaningful. Many find the word 'mindfulness' an annoying word with a new-age connotation. I don't agree with that. It's smart to give the combination of yoga and meditation training a new name. This prevents the first association to give you a too much of a spiritual feeling.

Besides that, mindfulness is a term that refers to the eightfold path to enlightenment, which is part of Hinduism as well as of Buddhism. The seventh step on this path is: mindfulness or developing the right attention and

concentration in the present moment on three levels: physically, emotionally and mentally, without judgment or other disturbing emotions. Through yoga and meditation you work to gain this mindfulness.

This book wants to entice you to find your own life path by reading my life story and examples of how I have applied mindfulness through yoga and meditation techniques

Use the book as you like: read it as any other book or consider it a workbook.

PART 1

BIOGRAPHY OF A QUEST

1:

RELATIONSHIPS AND WORK: MY LIFE UNTIL 35

THE SURPRISE

Child, we are carrying you upon hands
to the water of the source
cause your life can't get stranded
can't dissolve in the why

Through the water sooner or later
You will get close to the secret
in the high heavens it's said
that you're allowed to be a child of the Light

When your name is being pronounced
Over dusky water
Your loneliness will be broken through
You won't be here alone any longer

Water, water, let it flow
Sign and memory
From eternal nostalgia dreams
From an endless new beginning

Absorbed and connected
With the Name which is peace
Your life won't perished
And won't be erased

- *Hanna Lam* -

It's January 2, 1964. My mother had just given birth to a beautiful seven-pounder with the name Dirk. My father immediately called up his mother and mother-in-law to announce the birth of a son. Everyone around the house was eating cream cakes to celebrate. My mother remarked that her belly had remained quite big after she had given birth and told the doctor. "That's quite normal Madam, You all expect to become instantly slim again nowadays," was his reply.

However, after an hour and a half the contractions started again and my mother panicked. The doctor came back upstairs and was also surprised that there turned out to be another baby inside of her belly. My mother immediately worried about the fact that she didn't have a second bed and a name for another boy or girl. During the contractions, she asked the doctor what his name would be, in case it would be a boy. He suggested the name Hans with the baptismal names Henri Johan. Shortly after, another seven-pounder was born, and I got the name Hans.

So my father called both mothers again. First, his mother-in-law thought that my father was confused because he had called earlier, but very soon she began to understand what he was saying. There was a two-egged twin born. My oldest brother Jaap had to give up the centre of attention for two other brothers, Dirk and Hans. Dirk was the oldest and I was born second with a caul around my head.

GROWING UP

The setting of my youth looked as following: a farm in Noordwelle in Zeeland, with a lot of animals, a lot of

space and modern parents and grandparents. My mom used to practice yoga as well and my parents used to sail, hunt and loved travelling. We had three helpers around the house, two employees to work on the land and a nanny day and night and for support during the holidays. I remember my grandfather's vaguely. The grandfather from my father's side was a partner in a big tax office and had whole streets in Rotterdam in his portfolio. I was very young when he died. The grandfather from my mother's side was a wealthy gentleman farmer in Zeeland. He practiced yoga, I remember him standing on his head in the garden. He survived a train accident, but he later died of complications.

My father grew up in Hilgersberg, an area in Rotterdam, and my grandmother kept on living there after the death of her husband. As I got older, I loved going shopping there in 'de Bijenkorf' and to watch new movies, that weren't available in Zeeland until years later.

My mother is from Goes in 'South Beveland'. She is short with black hair and dark eyes; my father on the other hand was tall, blond and had blue eyes.

My mother was chaotic and could not function without any help around the house. We had a nanny day and night until we were seventeen: Marianne. She was great. My parents were always there when we needed them, but Marianne was our second base to reach out to for support.

My father was a complicated man, and as I got older, I tried to stay away from home as much as possible. He started drinking juniper with berries at 11 o'clock in the morning and then gradually became violent, suspicious and a psychological manipulator. Until eleven o'clock he was a fine, sweet, sensitive man, but after eleven o'clock he became a tyrant and dictator. His motto became: whoever is not with me is against me

He was an amazing guy to the outside world, but a complete nightmare to us at home.

To avoid my father, I frequently went to my grandmother's, my father's mother. In addition to her home in Rotterdam she had a second house in Schouwen-Duiveland. Whenever she was there, I usually slept at her place. I then got all the attention and we used to play games. The house was in the dunes and closer to my primary school so that was also convenient. From the farm I had to bike about six miles to Burgh-Haamstede and from my grandma's house only three, so that saved me twice the effort.

My twin brother Dirk and I were opposites. I was an introvert, he extrovert. He technical, I wasn't. He wasn't very concerned about his appearance, while I was occupied with it throughout the whole day. My oldest brother Jack and my dad were not very interested in us; they used to go fishing and hunting a lot together. We did our best to get my father's attention, but with no effect.

My twin brother Dirk and I spent a lot of time together until we were eight years' old. After that he started to seek more contact with my brother Jaap because Dirk used to take motorbikes apart and fixed up boats.

My family was a lot on the water; Enjoying sailing, swimming, fishing, setting basket traps, hunting and water skiing. We were often in the South of France, Normandy and Bretagne. We were continuously in Ireland where my father had lost his heart and he had bought properties. The ideal country for fishing, hunting and drinking.

My interests differed from those of my brothers. I had a lot of female friends, rode horses with my mother, painted and read a lot about philosophy and art. Reading marketing books would come at a later date. I remember that at the time I was really fascinated by reading a book about the career of Walt Disney.

Ultimately, the marriage of my parents ended up in a divorce. When I was nineteen, I left home and my father unexpectedly announced that he was leaving to Ireland. Where, to the dismay of my mother, he turned out to have a blond bimbo. She was a divorced woman, with two children and an alcoholic as well, of course.

My mother was inconsolable. The plan had until then been that when I would leave the home they would sell the house, because none of us three wanted to take over the farm. My parents would then live in Ireland for six months and the other six months in Zeeland in another house. That turned out differently.

A sailing friend of my father, then director of the Delta Works took care of my mother for two years and they ended up having a relationship. He has been in the family for already 25 years and we see him as our step-father. He was everything my father wasn't, so that was beautiful.

My father slowly disappeared out of our lives. In the twenty years afterwards, I saw him four times. However, he did remain dutiful by paying for all of our studies and giving us a monthly allowance.

He died on his seventieth birthday behind his drum kit. He drummed his whole life, so on this birthday he decided to perform in a pub in Sneem. This is a town in the southwest of Ireland, where a warm gulf stream runs past and therefore has a somewhat mild climate. The whole village was invited and after a stunning performance at the pub, he died behind his drum kit: cardiac arrest.

When my father died, I was on vacation in South Africa. I flew back on the 5th of April, on my father's birthday, and I remember suddenly feeling as if the energy I was made of, flew out of me. What went through me was: 'It's as if my father is dying.' When I got home, there was nothing on my voicemail. The next day, I was awoken by

a telephone call from my crying mother, telling me that my father had passed away the day before. Isn't that unbelievable? Talking about clairsentience!

DYSLEXIA AND CLAIRSENTIENCE

This clairsentience or clairvoyance was already revealed to me at a very young age. According to my mother, it was because I was born with a caul on my head and I even had shortness of breath while being born. For a second, I was somewhere I wasn't supposed to be.

As I child, I could easily feel how honest, sincere and energetic a person really was.

I could also see people's future in front of me and that's because I was a visual thinker. I was able to see which choices and possibilities they were going to face on their life path. The books my mother used to give me from the age of ten, really tied in with this. They had themes like: positive thinking, visualization and the power within yourself. This coloured my perception and vivid imagination.

I didn't start talking about it until later on, because I thought it wasn't really necessary to do so. I had the feeling that the outside world would see me as divergent, if I told them what I saw.

When I was nine years old, my mom discovered I had dyslexia. I got glasses with prisms to reduce the coordination problem that I had between my left and right side. Besides that, I used to practice my eye-hand coordination exercises and other difficult homework with a private teacher.

My disability decreased and I was able to finish high school successfully. I did have to study harder than other students because I read slower. I used to get half an hour

extra to finish my exams. My disability still remains but now it's reduced to a minimum. It still affects my ability to read in a rapid tempo, everything I write needs to be re-read, to prevent me from forgetting words or misplacing them.

FASHION AND MARKETING

I was quite young when I got my first job. I used to babysit young children to avoid my father as much as possible. This way, I could study in peace and escape from the tensions at home. When I was twelve, I worked as a cook preparing the appetizers and desserts at a restaurant called 'De Waag', in a the small town of Serooskerke. Another escape from my situation at home.

After high school, I wanted to go to the conservatorium to become an opera singer and then cross over to pop music. But the dyslexia prevented me from taking this career decision; reading notes would have been too difficult for me. My parents did advise me to choose a creative career path. I used to draw and paint a lot and I had taken a lot of courses of both, in the Netherlands and abroad. My attention was drawn to fashion and interior design and I choose to go to the fashion academy Jacques Montaigne, a private school.

The fashion academy offered me the opportunity to get out of Zeeland and no longer be shut off from the latest developments in fashion, film and art expositions. I wanted to go to Amsterdam to discover the world and move in with my second boyfriend Jacques – I'll come back to him later on.

Trade and marketing also interested me. After the fashion academy, I went to a technical school to study RTW, read-to-wear industry. Since I was very passionate

about my marketing books from a young age, I also went to study Nima A en Nima B. Later on in my career I would add an MBA.

MY BROTHERS

My twin brother didn't like studying, be he did like boats. My father got him a job on a private yacht of a rich friend of his. That was a smart move, because he decided then to get his steersman and captain's license. When he became captain, I, in company of my boyfriend Jacques, used to fly over to where to yacht was moored and sleep on board when his boss wasn't there. Yachts like that are in use for about three weeks a year. The rest of the year it's held ready to sail by 5 employees. What a different world...

On a nice yacht of 50 metres, I would sit on the after-deck reading a golf magazine, in Puerto Banus, Antibes, St. Tropez....what a wonderful lifestyle. Later on, he became a personal assistant to rich men and be in charge of building boats for them in the Netherlands, Hong Kong and Northern Germany.

Even though we weren't identical twins, our paths seemed to run parallel to each other many times. When I was in Hong Kong to get clothes made, he was there to build a boat. When I started a new course or moved to another place, the same would happen to him.

My brother Jaap went to study in Wageningen but came back to Zeeland after two years. A dropout just as my father was. He got a job at a frozen food merchant, where he quickly became the manager. Then the company was taken over by Deli Xl and he became the director. My brothers are home-lovers, still have the same job and keep themselves far away from any career shift.

THE CODE OF THE FORTUNE TELLERS

When I was 24, I started working at the ‘Bijenkorf’ as an assistant-buyer.

Thereafter, I switched to Kreymborg as a purchaser of shirts and ties and became the head of purchase and styling, when I was 27.

This involved a lot of travelling to Hong Kong, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, China, Thailand, and Vietnam to book the production capacity in factories. I brought 60 percent of the models and clothing to low-wage countries and 40 percent to Europe, where the delivery times were shorter.

During these trips, my interest for other cultures, in their world-vision and spirituality, grew. When I was 25, I started practising palmistry, sharing the interpretation of the hand lines with people. It was a more acceptable way for me to be able to give them advice about important decisions. As I mentioned earlier, I was able to see people’s strengths and areas of improvement. The only thing missing was a way to communicate this to them and palmistry was a way to do so.

Meanwhile, I had met a manufacturer in India with a lot of knowledge about palmistry. He coached me and made sure I got the right books.

He taught me how to take someone’s hand; open up to the channel or cosmos and thanks to, among the rest, the knowledge I gained about hand lines, the words to say came automatically.

I did keep to the codes of foretelling which the manufacturer taught me:

- *Rather not say anything about the future.*
- *Focus on the moment, on the now.*

- *Only tell people things that make them more conscious about themselves. Focus on their strengths and areas of improvement, so that the person can take the right decision him/herself.*

Soon the palmistry became a form of amusement at parties, but I did take it seriously. Slowly, I got the feeling that it wasn't very ethical of me to take a look into someone else's life. So I decided to only read someone's hand at parties if they were faced with difficult decisions to make. I then helped them to broaden their insight concerning the decision they had to take. Besides that, I decided not accept any other proposals.

MAXEDA GROUP

Kreymborg was part of the Maxeda group (used to be VendexKBB) and also had a retail chain in sportswear, where, In 1998, I became 'sales manager in training'. My region had 8 branches and the deal was to work within this function for two years and then move up to the operating company of the Maxeda group.

Within my regions, I started a process for change with the stores. I included the shop managers actively in this and asked them where they needed guidance.

Three areas were identified:

- *Developing new, more sportive professional wear.* Until 1998, the employees in sports stores walked around in a suit and tie. In consultation with the styling department, we decided to change this into polo's and jeans. Until this day, the working clothes haven't changed.
- *The shop managers wanted to switch to a more coaching way of leadership.* Together with a group of

five enthusiastic shop managers, we made a plan of action. To make this transition, we hired an external trainer.

- *Guiding the shop managers in making shortened six months' local business plan.* They wanted to be able to present two A4 paper sized pages including: the weekly revenue in items and value, the developing local promotion policy, additional desires for the presentation, employee and product desires. This would be presented to the regional manager, who had about fifteen branches to coach, who could then merge the plans for his own business plan and present this to the sales director and general director.

The shop managers found it very motivating that their desires and ideas were being heard; they had about enough of top down management. I developed every plan and idea in consultation with the general director, discussed these with the director of human resources, so they could keep following my approach.

One day, I got called in at the general director's office. He asked me what my future plans at the company were. I immediately became alert, because I sensed that he felt threatened by me. My answer was: 'I've been sent out to sportswear retail for two years to get familiar with sales and to deliver as much of good work as possible. It certainly isn't my desire to become the director here.' I thought I had given an answer he wouldn't feel threatened by.

It turned out to be a totally wrong answer! I was fired right away. Even now, it's still inexplicable for me. I had been working for Maxeda for seven years and had outstanding evaluations, had won Maxeda Trophies for improved margins and was seen as the most successful purchaser who worked with self-developed budgeting

programs in Excel, to prevent me from purchasing too much. Purchasers tend to buy too much very quickly, which results in unsold products and a large amount of the supply in discount. I had also joined a 10-days higher management training at Krauthammer and had just started my MBA course on Maxeda's expenses.

So why fire me? The case was submitted to the Employees Council but they couldn't reverse the situation. I was standing in the company's elevator and was really in shock that I was being laid off. What disappointed me the most was that the director of human resources and the group director didn't support me and also didn't want to relocate me into another operating company. Their argument was that I was too innovative for the whole Maxeda group.

I was very involved with the staff at the retail sportswear chain, so I did feel bad I couldn't finish all projects. The coaching leadership and the development of a shortened business plan were never implemented. For seven years, I had worked night and day and during the weekends – with a lot of pleasure – and was being dismissed. I felt very happy about it afterwards of course, because it led me to an independent entrepreneurship.

But I wasn't there yet. At the time I was mostly angry, sad, disappointed and had an offended ego.

A DIFFERENT INSIGHT

After the affair with Maxeda group, I got a job with a women's fashion retail chain, as purchaser and styling manager.

I got along with the management team and the owners of the Fashion Group that owned the women's retail chain, but I started off on the wrong foot with the pur-

chasing people working there. The group of ladies was like a wasp's nest. The retail chain had existed for only four years and the director had built it up from scratch with a group of purchasers and the last thing they wanted was a purchase manager with strategic thinking skills. The ladies wanted a glorified secretary.

Our relationship got even worse when I started to analyse their working method and found out it wasn't any good. Their working method was to copy a lot of the successful models of the Main Fashion Group and dispose their slow sellers to their own outlets. This way, they could continue purchasing. So it looked like someone's a good purchaser, but once you process the results, it shows purchasing with low-margins.

I decided to prepare a strategy day, so that everyone could point out what they wanted to accomplish on a strategic, organisational and operational level. My goal was to collectively brainstorm about developing an identifiable clothing line, in collaboration with the styling department. I sent them a questionnaire about their vision on returns, budgeting, target group of choice, collection range and price level. I wanted to present the answers on the strategy day, but they didn't hand anything in. The ladies did decide to complain about me to the director of human resources and the general director. They wanted me gone.

Looking back on it now, I think they were afraid of change. In the meanwhile, I had started working in Turkey and I wanted to bring the basic production of the t-shirts, polo's, blouses and trousers to the Far East. The ladies wanted to keep working with overpriced local mediators, situated nearby. Admittedly, they were able to deliver on a short-term, but there were already other solutions for this in Europe. People often have resistance to changes and a preference for the way they are used to.

That meant continuing copying successful models of competitors and of the parent company instead of creating an own fashion image with styling. All collaborations with styling were being cast off and we weren't able to create our own signature.

I was becoming slightly stressed because of these ladies, who were very kind to me to my face, but behind my back they were trying to get me fired. Sadly, the director didn't support me either. I wanted to fire two purchasers, the rotten apples, to improve the atmosphere in the group, but I wasn't authorized to.

It was game over. I could only blame myself for not being able to gain the group's trust and move them to change. I had it coming. And I was out.

I was 34 years' old and I was asking myself: What now?

RELATIONSHIPS

MAGNETIC LOVE

I have met love
She looked at me smiling
Took me in her arms
And started kissing me

I have met love
So warm and dense
Every day again like
the softness of sheep fur

I have met love
She brought certainty with her
The desire also for more
Followed her with ease

Will get to know love even more
Cause she draws me to her each time
Fascinates me repeatedly
Will certainly never let her go

Love poem by: Tine de Jong

CHILDHOOD CRUSHES

I was an early bird when it came to love. My first love was Ansje, a childhood crush that started in the second class of primary school. When I was nine, Sabine, 13 years old, came into my life. She taught me how to kiss with clear instructions: mouth more open, tongue less stiff and use more or less saliva.

My parents discovered Sabine and I making out intensely in the haystack of our farm. They directly panicked because I was quite young: NINE years old! I did look like I was three years older, was tall and it all started functioning since I was seven years' old. I hope that things that quickly mature doesn't lead to rotting faster... I had to tell my parents exactly what we had done in detail and afterwards my brother and I got a general lecture on sex education. From that moment on, we had condoms lying in our bathroom cabinet. Sabine got the same interrogation from her parents and had to start taking birth control.

Then there was Joyce. I made her my most beautiful drawing: a green bottle fly drawn with Indian ink with shining wings. To give the wings a metallic sheen with a green and blue gleam, I used aquarelle paint and varnished the wings with a shiny polish.

When I was 16, my relationship with Joyce ended.

COMING OUT

From the age of ten, I had an interest in boys as well. I always thought that it was part of growing up and the development of my sexuality. I thought it would pass once I got older. My brothers used to say to me: 'Just come out', but I would act as if I didn't know what they were talking about.

And then there was Patrick, a clay pigeon shooter who won silver at the Olympics Games in 1976. He regularly spent the night at our house during the weekends, because he was a friend of my father with whom he would hunt and go fishing. Patrick was a handsome, dark, tall man; manly, hairy, bright blue eyes and an olive coloured skin. Fifteen years older than me, but I was extremely attracted to him. I didn't have any sexual experience with boys and wasn't quite ready to surrender to it. I wondered what to do now? Do I move on with girls or do I go over to boys? It felt deviating to choose for boys; it makes it impossible to have children and it's socially less accepted. It wasn't only: Whom do I share my bed with? But: which life do I choose?

I eventually decided to talk to my mother. I still remember that day. My mom was busy in the kitchen and I asked her if we could discuss something in my dad's office. My mom had an alarming look on her face and thought: 'Ai, did I miss something.....?' We sat down and I told her that I was homosexual because I felt strongly attracted to boys. I thought that she would be very upset because I wouldn't be able to give her grandchildren, but my mother immediately replied: 'I have two other sons.' And guess what? Despite my affair with Sabine, my parents had already figured out that I was different from the rest since I was little. Since I was seven years old, I wore eccentric clothing, played with dolls, had only female friends, rode horses, liked drawing, I had designed and decorated my own bedroom and used to read a girls' magazine - *Tina*. My mother had even read books about: How to raise a homosexual child.

Still I asked my mother not to tell my father. Whenever he watched the music program *Top of the Pops* on television and there were effeminate males on the show, he would shout: 'Look at those gays'. I started crying and

I couldn't stop, it was as if my body was running empty. My mother got me a tea towel and it got soaked within a minute.... what a relief.

After my conversation with my mother, I drove my self-designed Zundapp – cherry red with golden coloured surfboards – over to my best friend's house, Hanneke. She wasn't surprised when I told her. In the meanwhile, my mother had driven over to the farmland where my father was working together with the helpers. When I got home, my mom took me aside. She told me that my dad felt terrible about me being afraid to tell him. For him, I was still his son and he didn't have any issues with me being a homosexual.

My mother then took me to the bookstore in Zierikzee to buy a book about sex education for homosexual men. I waited outside of course, because I was too ashamed of my vigorous but of course sweet, well-meaning mother. She got me a book explaining all the positions and I finished it in one night read.

INTRODUCTION IN THE GAY SCENE

It was my mom who suggested asking Patrick if he could introduce me to the nightlife in Eindhoven or Antwerp. She said: 'I think he's gay too, what a pity actually, he's such a handsome guy. If I had wanted to have a lover/fling, I would have picked him.' I teased her: 'Well mom, maybe I'll get the chance before you do' We both laughed about it cordially.

Besides, Patrick had asked me out a couple of times before. Usually, I was working in the restaurant when he dropped by, so the timing was off. This time, I didn't feel much like waiting around for what might happen

and took action myself. I called him and asked him that if he was going to drop by one of these weekends, would he like to go horse riding with me in the morning. He liked that and so we did. We rode the horses to Renesse, through the dunes to the beach. We made some small talk and then I said to him: I revealed to everyone that I'm a homosexual and I've got the feeling you're as well. A bull's eye: He fully confirmed it.

When I got home, I told my mother that Patrick was indeed a homosexual and was going to introduce me to gay events. That happened three weeks later. My mother put me on the train in Goes and I arrived to Best on a Friday evening. Patrick lived with his parents, who had a hunting gear shop and was staying with them. I instantly connected with his family, who had made me a nice home cooked meal. I even got to stay in Patrick's bedroom while he slept in the guest room.

We went shopping in Eindhoven the next day. The same night, we decided to first go to a gay bar in Eindhoven and afterwards to Antwerp. A complete revelation to me! There were streets full of gay bars and disco's. But I still liked Patrick the most. We drove back and as we approached his house, I couldn't hold myself anymore. He looked at me while driving and so I pressed my mouth on his. Because I bumped too hard into him, my tooth went through my lip.....oops. He stopped the car in front of the house and we stayed there kissing for a while. We went inside and he thought it would be appropriate if I slept in his bedroom alone. Our families knew each other for such a long time and we shouldn't rush into this. Besides, I was 17 and he was 32.

The next morning, I looked outside of the window and saw it was snowing. Everything outside was white. The house was cold and I plucked up the courage to sneak into Patrick's bedroom. He was still asleep, so I sat

on the side of his bed and told it was snowing and that I was kind of cold in the house. He said: "So come and jump in here next to me". I took me a second before I jumped on top of him. We made love as if our life was depending on it. He asked me if it was my first time with a man and I answered: it sure is. He couldn't believe it since everything went really naturally..... I had explored the book my mother gave me and that seemed to have helped.

PATRICK

I was still in high school and saw Patrick on the weekends. We used to go to national and international clay pigeon shooting competitions. I was exposed to a world full of competitive men and women who did everything to win.

Patrick came to my musical performance at school and I introduced him to everyone. No one at school had trouble with my coming out. Besides: if people said one bad thing, my brothers could beat them up in no time. Fortunately, this was never necessary. Patrick's brother was a well-known photographer and a homosexual as well. We visited him regularly and met people like Martine Bijl and Seth Gaaikema.

Everything was a lot of fun and exciting to me and I wanted to move in with Patrick in Eindhoven to finish high school there. The tension my constantly drunk father caused, drove me crazy as well. My father however, forbade me to move in with Patrick. He believed kids should live at home while finishing high school. I was disappointed but I understood where he was coming from.

There were times that I noticed Patrick missing his previous boyfriend, Peter. Sometimes he would stop by at Peter's and I could help noticing that their love wasn't

over yet. Patrick was put under pressure to break up with Peter. by his parents who thought he was too woman-like and come from a bad environment. If Patrick hadn't broken up with him he would have been kicked out of the hunting shop by his parents. Patrick had followed his parents' orders, but it was still nagging at him.

One weekend, we agreed to go to Wiesbaden for a clay pigeon shooting competition. Patrick called me to say he'd rather go alone.... I smelled trouble. I told him I had looked forward to this weekend and after a big discussion he decided to take me with him anyway. But Patrick was very grumpy and absent for the whole weekend and so I gave him the following option: 'Listen, I obviously feel you still have feelings for Peter. Put me on the next train home and call me back after a week to let me know if you'd rather move on with Peter or with me!'

Patrick took me to the train. He kept waiting to see if I would turn back to him, but I was determined. On the platform at Best, I started crying and continued until we reached Zierikzee. My shirt and t-shirt were completely soaked by my tears. It felt as if it was over between us. My mom picked me up, she saw my sadness and cried along with me until we got home. After a week, Patrick called. He told he had moved in with Peter. I was deeply hurt of course. Still, I was happy that Patrick did not have to live further with frustration. His parents were not happy for him but realized that they couldn't stop their son any longer. We agreed that I would go to Eindhoven for a weekend in three months' time to talk things through. Since Patrick was still going to be around the house, we wanted to stay friends.

JACQUES

Three months later, I went to a party at his apartment. During our relationship, he had moved from Best to Eindhoven and I had co-decorated the apartment. It still felt weird for me to stay at his guestroom this time instead of the master bedroom.... Oh well, life goes as it goes.

On a previous party, Patrick had introduced me to Jacques, the Dutch clay pigeon shooting champion. He was an extremely handsome guy with bright blue eyes and a sculptured body. He had a French mother and was raised in a good family. The question was: is he gay or straight? We went out and I had a good connection with Jacques. He stayed with me in the guestroom that night and couldn't stop talking. I actually wanted to sleep; I was tired from looking at Patrick and Peter being I love. It caused me a lot of internal commotion.... But I didn't show it of course...because of my pride.

Jacques kept talking for three hours straight, and as expected, I suddenly felt a hand caressing me. I thought: the best way to get over Patrick is to make out with Jacques. And so I did and it turned out to be nice and exciting. I left the next day and I considered it as a pleasant one-night stand.

Jacques on the other hand, kept called to my parents' house. I asked my mom to help me fend him off, because I wasn't ready for a new relationship. But she began to feel sorry for him and invited him one day. Jacques was a passionate windsurfer, just like me. I wasn't really up for meeting him but it turned out to be fun and on top of that, he was extremely handsome. Jacques kept on visiting and calling me during my senior year. Sometimes he would surprise with an unexpected visit from Amsterdam.

Once I finished high school, I gave in and moved in with him in Amsterdam at 'de Herengracht'.

He lived in a beautiful double house with a 20 meters long marble corridor as an entrance. Very impressive. It turned into a relationship of ten amazing years, but Jacques wasn't monogamous. After his third affair, I decided to leave. I chose for my dignity and for myself and bought an apartment in East-Amsterdam at the 'Entrepothaven'. I continued seeing Jacques on and off for two more years, but after that it was finished.

CHARLES

During this period, I travelled frequently for my job at the Bijenkorf and Kreymborg to Asia. Once during my stay in Hong Kong, my colleagues asked me what type of men I liked. They were always hitting on women, but I'm not much of a seducer. I pointed out three dark-haired guys I liked, on their request. When I came out of the bathroom, I saw one of the boys was waiting for me and he started to make small talk. He was a Frenchman from Paris and had been surfing in Australia. He was now on his trip back home and with his friends had decided to add a stop in Hong Kong. Did I had some tips about Hong Kong for him?

And was I willing to join him and his friends to go to some clubs? I had a busy day at work the next day, so I turned down the invitation. But I wrote down some addresses, including the address of my hotel he had asked about.

After only a few hours of sleep, I heard knocking on my door. And there was Olivier. I got pushed on to the bed, which resulted in a fun night.

I took him with me to breakfast, so that my colleagues could see that I wasn't exactly living as a monk.

Charles and I said goodbye and exchanged addresses. I stayed in the Far-East for another week and expected to never hear anything from Olivier again. But when I arrived home, it seemed my voicemail was full with his messages, at least twenty of them. I invited him over for a weekend in Amsterdam and fell head over heels for him.

Charles was a son of a pharmacist and owned about five businesses. He worked day and night for his father's business in Paris. I would go over to Paris for two weekends a month and he would come over twice a month to Amsterdam. We would sometimes go to his beautiful apartment in an old castle at Deauville, at the seaside of Normandy.

Charles became completely accepted by my circle of friends and I by his. But none of his friends could know that he was a homosexual. It became unbearable for me to live with such a frustration. I used to leave parties before he did and he would follow me fifteen minutes later. After two and a half years, I suggested to move to Paris and move in together. I had been offered a job as purchaser of t-shirts for the department store *Gallerie de La Fayette*. But Olivier wasn't up for it: he wasn't ready to neither live together nor ready to come out and be clear about his sexual orientation.

The weird thing that his older brother was a homosexual and had even adopted children. His family had no issues with that. I finally broke up with Charles. When I'm crazy about someone, I like to be with him as much as possible. Charles accepted it but kept calling me and didn't want to break contact with me. Even though I didn't want to be his partner, he felt that I could at least stay his friend. Charles did, just like Jacques and Patrick, move on with someone else very quickly. His name was Thierry.

To stay in contact, Charles made sure the three of us went on vacation together twice a year. Charles did try to get me into bed the first year, whenever Thierry wasn't around. But it wasn't my cup of tea; I find values and standards to be important. That's why, in the gay scene, I'm called a star refrigerator. So Charles never succeeded.

Charles and Thierry were very generous. They used to invite many friends to their lovely holiday house in Corsica, whom they received hospitably, including me. I had lovely conversations with Thierry about fashion. He worked for Christian Dior as a sales director of several stores. I went along on their vacations for twelve years, but it was never easy. Each time, after about two days, Olivier and I would grow closer together. His friends would then ask him why we ever broke up and we would fall into the same old relationship kind of pattern. Thierry must have felt it too, but he was way more open-minded and had much more patience than I did. Thierry had to wait for another seven years before Charles came out. It wasn't until then that they officially moved in together.

BERNARD

After Charles, I moved from Amsterdam to The Hague, because I was going to work for a ladies wear retail chain as purchaser- and styling manager. I bought a beautiful old apartment in the centre of The Hague. I got a fitness subscription at the gym in my neighbourhood and met Bernard, a consultant at Price Waterhouse, in their sauna. A handsome guy, with a sense of humour and the right Italian suits.

It was nice and fun for the first few months. But I noticed that a crush quickly turned into love. This made me lose my sexual attraction towards him. I began fan-

tasising about other men while having intercourse with him. I couldn't carry on with it and broke up with him; I felt he deserved a better boyfriend. Bernard was in shock and was afraid he'd never get a boyfriend again. I told him I would help him, but the first wasn't a success and the second either. We regularly went to gay clubs in The Hague and there we met Frederik. I found him very attractive and noticed that Bernard was interested as well. I invited Frederik to drive along with us to the next club in my Porsche. Frederik came along and as planned: Bernard and Frederik got into a relationship and are still together. *Mission accomplished.*

2.

ENTREPRENEUR AND MY INTRODUCTION TO YOGA

WAYS OF THE WIND

I close my eyes
And listen
To silent voices
And thoughts
I cover my eyes and I see
In colours
Something beautiful
Standing here alone
I let the powers pound
And the silence break
I hear
Whispering
A soft voice
From different worlds
To new ideals
Crying I hear

The hunting
The blowing of a fearful calling
of lost days
Cheering I feel life
Storming harsh
to different locations
so they might hear that calling

The ways of the wind.

- Life poem by: Alex Boelens -

had been planning to have my own business since I was seventeen. At 35, I used to fantasize, together with my boyfriend Bernard at the time, about building something up in Italy. We loved the climate, the food, the clothing and the culture. However, the crime and corruption rate there kept us hesitating.

The question was: In which country is there a nice lifestyle with a good balance between work and personal life? We chose Belgium and moved to Antwerp. Bernard became a consultant at the ministry of Defences in Bergen op Zoom and I developed a business plan for my own restaurant to finally realize my dream as a free entrepreneur. I had about 350.000 euro for 'my own restaurant' and to buy a flat but needed about 700.000 euros in total. At that time, World Online stocks went on the stock market and following the advice of some investment managers I was acquainted with, I invested almost all of my money in this stock. My business plan had already been introduced to the bank and they had agreed to finance the other 350.000 euros. Meanwhile, there was a prediction that the World Online stocks would double in value. That's convenient, I thought, I can buy an apartment in Antwerp and still have money left over for the fixed costs of the first year of my business. How naive could I be! World Online turned out to be a flop.

After the stock market launch, the value of their stocks dropped swiftly. My twin brother Dirk owned some stocks as well but sold them in ten minutes and was able to make a profit of 10 percent. I lost the biggest part of my money, that I had earned with the sale of my apartment in The Hague, thanks to World Online. This happened just two weeks before I was going to sign the contracts for the restaurant with brewers and architects. I ended up deeply depressed. I couldn't understand why life was leading me from disappointment to disappoint-

ment, despite my good intentions. I was forced to take the path that lead me to the inside, really look at myself and discover how to get back on my own life path.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MONASTERY IN THE VILLAGE BUWEKLOOSTER

The result was a heavy burnout and depression. My system gave up, I couldn't realize what I wanted and had no control over it. I went to stay with my mother and stepfather on their land Windewai in Hoenderloo.

The first 6 weeks, I could only lie in bed, I couldn't sleep and my whole body and mind hurt. My mind still wanted to react but my body failed to.

Millions of thought would go through me and I wondered constantly about how I could have prevented all of it. But I slowly got better. I started working in the garden, then paint the windows and tentatively doing more.

My aunt Titia visited us one day. She took me with her to a tiny village in the North of Holland wich is calles Buweklooster, the place where the family Kloosterman (literally translated as Monastery man) came from. Buweklooster is a small place in the province Friesland with only three farms. Our family owned it for ages but the last farm got sold 20 years ago. Near the farms there are the remains of the monastery built around year 1200, together with the cemetery Drogeham with a beautiful belltower. Our family, Kloosterman, originated from this monastery. Not all monks kept their vows of chastity. Some had relationships with women and had children and that's how the line Kloosterman was 'born'. While walking through the garden of the farm, passing the remains of the monastery, something happened to me. I

suddenly felt the old monk blood flowing through me. On our way back home, my aunt Titia and I drove by the house of a Kloosterman widow, who every year helped a child from the village go to college. The family Kloosterman has done a lot for the community. My father was very generous to people in need and was involved with the local community.

For example, if he heard that someone needed dentures and couldn't afford it, he would place an envelope with money in the mailbox anonymously. Even the swimming pool in Zierikzee received a large donation from my father.

When I got home, my grandmother gave me an old box with old letters in it and papers with our family tree. It turned out that in every generation of gentleman farmers, there was an outstanding Kloosterman, who meant a lot to the village community. That's why we have family arms. In the middle ages you would get family arms if you had royal blood or as appreciation for important contributions to society.

After my visit to Friesland, I asked myself what I really wanted to do with my life. I suddenly thought that I actually wanted to study Buddhism in Tibet for seven years. Don't even ask me how this came...it just landed. But I didn't do anything with it then.

For the time being, I felt the need to put things into perspective, to pull myself out of my depression. My mom took out the books of Plato, Socrates, Tao, Buddha and Aristotle. I read them one by one and was surprised that all these wise men, around until 400 years' Before Christ, were all teaching similar ways of living, rules of behaviour and life visions, in different places.

THE PATH LEADS TO RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

After a year I was well recovered from my burnout. A friend visited me, she was a human resources manager at the Maxeda group. She wanted to start working for herself. We had secretly laid out tarot cards before. We did the same this time adding a strength and weakness analyses to it on paper.

Her result was that she had the ability to become self-employed in education, training and consultancy. She used the same strength and weakness analyses on me. My talents turned out to be pointing towards recruitment and selection, because I was focused on people, sympathizing, commercial, convincing and good in acquisition. This result came as a surprise to me. The world of employment management and recruitment and selection didn't seem much of a challenge to me; a very small path even. I did see some kind of path: the ex-boyfriend of my ex-boyfriend used to have a recruitment- and selection agency. He used to talk about it frequently and even told me it might be something for me. And now my friend was telling me the same thing! This gave me an unusual feeling. I decided to investigate this market and to analyse the developments of the past few years to find out more.

My friend found herself a self-employed job at a consultancy agency. I investigated every recruitment and selection agency on the Internet and wrote a business plan. I started the recruitment-and selection agency RetailSelect (later on RS Group). I had chosen the name thoughtfully, so that if you would walk through a shopping street you would be able to say that

RetailSelect recruits employees for headquarters as well as for the stores.

MATCHING WENT EFFORTLESS

The RS group took in vacancies from retail chains and found the appropriate employees to fill them. It was easy for me because I turned out to be good matchmaker. My sympathizing, clairsentient and visual abilities helped me ask efficient questions and draw the right conclusions.

In the first period, I lived with my parents and sat one or two days in a restaurant to talk to candidates. Meanwhile, I had bought an apartment as an investment, in The Hague and I still had an apartment in Antwerp as well. I focused on the Dutch and Belgium market. It was convenient to take on two countries because a lot of European headquarters were located in Brussels or Antwerp, such as: C&A, Levi's, Esprit, Tommy Hilfiger, Ralph Lauren, Lee, Wrangler and Walt Disney.

I didn't expect any returns for the first year. I assumed it would take me a while before I took in vacancies and even longer to be able to fill them. I however had a turnover of 250.00 euro in the first year. I exchanged my rented apartment in Antwerp for the first floor of an old coffee warehouse and started to make use of my just bought apartment in The Hague. I extended the RS Group with an office manager, a freelance recruiter in the Netherlands and several interns. Later, some of these people became paid employees. For Belgium, I snatched a manager who was going to work for a competitor. It went so well in 2004 that the RS Group was able to rent a beautiful art deco building nearby the Waterloo Boulevard in Brussels.

It slowly became clear to me that there was a reason why I took the path of recruitment and selection. It would have been a waste to not use fifteen years of experience and connections in the fashion business and instead focus on my ego's need: a restaurant. For now, I

have decided that in the strength of my life, I will contribute to society and from my sixtieth, I will focus on my ego's need of owning a restaurant. For the first two years, I still doubted if the RS Group had been a good decision. However, the more time passed, the clearer it was for me to see my calling: to help people on their career path.

In the first instance, I focused with the RS Group on the fashion industry. This sector made fewer turnovers every year because consumer's priorities were changing. Many organizations went bankrupt: Kreymborg, Elysio, Fooks and many more. All the employees of these organizations had to find alternatives. I found it significant and a nice job to find a new place for these employees.

HATHA YOGA

Despite it all, finding a suitable job didn't satisfy me completely. I wanted to help people on their life path as well. I used to follow yoga classes and enjoyed them very much. On one hand it stimulated a process of awareness whenever you were facing difficult decisions and on the other hand yoga helped me to stay calmer in busy working periods and take it easy at work. I wanted to make people more aware of themselves and their abilities or: Creating Awareness.

Having this ability would make them better at making decisions during on their life path and make them happier.

I went looking for yoga teacher trainings and ended up at Osmose where I followed the hatha yoga and meditation training. Hatha yoga is the path of physical wellbeing.

This form of yoga uses body positions (asana's) and breathing techniques (pranayama's). Hatha yoga also

wants to unite contradictions: masculine and feminine, tough and soft, body and spirit. The uniting doesn't happen by forcing something unnaturally, but by using the inner power that is inside of people. Hatha is the yoga of willpower and is meant to be a universal instrument to reach awareness and wholesomeness of the body, spirit and soul. Meditation also plays a role in this.

In western society, hatha yoga and meditation are used to reduce stress and to improve the mental and physical health and vitality.

Patanjali is also called the 'father' of yoga. He lived two centuries before Christ, when knowledge was mainly passed on verbally. In the four centuries after that, the teachings of Patanjali were written down and collected in the yoga-sutra's of Patanjali. All current types of yoga arose out of this original document.

According to the teaching of Patanjali, you're detached from the light by birth. Because of all kinds of obstacles it's difficult to return to this light to your authentic self. Imagine having a ball of clay. You make all kinds of different plants, animals, trees and objects out of it. If you only look at the forms (trees, animals) then you won't see that they are all made out of the same material, which is clay and you'll lose touch with your higher self. The obstacles to returning to the light are, according to Patanjali, laziness, doubt, greediness, desires, lust but also the origin and environment and the personality of a person. A crucial cause of mental suffering, depression or melancholy is that people are unable to reach their authentic self while they, mostly nowadays, feel a great need to do so. Therefore, they stay stuck in their lower self.

Patanjali gives an explanation about how you can get from your lower self to your higher self. It's called the eightfold path of Patanjali. This path consists of the following steps:

1. **Yama** – self-control over ethical disciplines (10 commandments)
2. **Niyama** – rules of conduct at the application of individual disciplines
3. **Asana** – controlling positions/physical exercises
4. **Pranayama** – breathe and breathing techniques
5. **Pratyahara** – senses should be kept under control- one turns to the inside
6. **Dharana** – concentration on one single point or on a task
7. **Dhyana** – Meditation. The concentration flows uninterrupted by meditation.
8. **Samadhi** – state of awareness where duality is dissolved

The goal in the ‘daily’ hatha yoga is to better see who you are and what your life path is. Not everyone will want to follow the eightfold path. The following methods are used in classes to loosen you up from your lower self and to move into your higher self:

- practising body positions and breathing techniques,
- singing mantras
- meditation.

DHARMA

While training at Osmose I learned the principles of hatha yoga. Later, as a Buddhist monk in probation, I was introduced to Tibetan yoga and Chinese yoga (Chi Kong).

This training only intensified my calling and mission to guide people on their career and personal paths.

I still stayed true to my business roots. During this study of hatha yoga I also started the guidance of management teams within the retail industry. For my final

paper wrote a business plan for a yoga school called mama Dharma (my life path). Not my life path, but everyone's life path and the awareness process within it. Below, I explain shortly what in general in Hinduism is meant with Dharma and dharma.

There is absolute Dharma with a capital letter D and relative dharma with a small letter d.

The absolute Dharma is the main goal in everyone's life. This main goal is to keep on developing ourselves and eventually to realise enlightenment (finding our higher self again).

Following the goal in your life, in a way that it evaluates and sustains your life, the life of family, society and the whole of humanity together.

The relative dharma is to sustain society and to guard human values. This may differ from time and place. The Dharma of time refers, for example, to the four different periods of life, in which the dharma differs:

- Branmacharya – growing up – studying
- Grhasthya – starting a family, work
- Vanaprastha – passing on knowledge
- Sannyasa – teaching wisdom

Hinduism also uses castes (varna's) and the dharma's of these castes are described in old scriptures:

- Brahmins took care of performing rituals and guarding the divine energy. They were exempted from earning money and were supported by the community.
- Ksathryas, the warriors, protected the community.
- Vaysas maintained the community through their economical activities.

- Shudras were of service to the community by producing goods and had the technical skills to support the community their own way.

Each one helped bringing the dharma of the whole community into perfection through their individual abilities and qualities, so that people could develop themselves towards self-realisation.

My goal became to support even more employees and customers at finding their own dharma in the community and their personal dharma. But I was far from ready with my own life path or my dharma. I had to take an important new step and that lead me to Buddhism.

KRISHNA VERSUS JESUS

Krishna and Jesus were two different forms of the realisation of the divine, who came on earth in times when dharma threatened to be lost. They came to restore the dharma and to support mankind.

To support people's wellbeing.

To be an example.

To bring a reminder of what potential possibilities mankind has: to know its true nature or the absolute Dharma.

Even a teacher is a realisation of the divine.

A teacher reaches the hand; point out the way and leads on.

Without any self-interest.

3.

THE TURNAROUND

A Sufi-poem

In the mountains, stones and minerals I've been hushed to sleep
In the plants and the trees I grow to the light
In the animals I move forwards and have sight
In mankind I am initially focused on myself

Still unaware of the unity
I am eager to possess and keep
I experience life as a duty
Of which the power is far outside of me
I already gave in to many illusions
And before I rest on my own liability
I get hopelessly disrupted on this road

Eventually I turn inwards for self insight
With attention my inner darkness becomes enlightened
My hart is where the work of love is being done
It's where I am aware of my origin
The big source of eternal calmness and quite
Leave the creation in her natural harmony

I was kissed awake by love

- Deirdre de Bruyn -

My interest in eastern thinking grew after the training I took at the yoga school in The Hague. In 2005, a friend took me to a three-days teaching event of the Dalai Lama in Brussels. My meeting with this man changed my life – and probably those of four thousand others taking the training. At his first entrance, I could only feel love, compassion and humour. During this period, I was working seven days a week, sixteen hours a day and I wanted to rearrange my life. But I wasn't able to get out of my compulsive working pattern and need to achieve. The three days with the Dalai Lama were incredibly educative, funny, wise and inspiring, (nothing fuzzy) and with a clear explanation about how the mind works.

GERALD

Even though I wanted change, I still carried on with my old life. It was an exciting and dynamic life with unexpected sensational meetings and situations.

Two weeks after meeting the Dalai Lama I flew to London with a couple of friends. We stayed at the beautiful Sanderson Hotel, designed by Philippe Starck, the French interior designer and industrial designer. Something funny happened at our arrival. I was wearing a showy coat from the fashionable brand Dsquared with gigantic fur collar and immediately drew the attention of a nice-looking dark guy in the well-known Long Bar of the hotel. He approached me, welcomed us and made some small talk with us.

We went shopping in the afternoon at Selfridges, Harvey Nichols and of course Harrods and in the evening we agreed to meet up at the hotel's restaurant.

I had taken a black trendy outfit with me: a shirt of

Vivienne Westwood and pants of Alexander McQueen with light sparkles processed in it and loose-fitting legs. From a distance it looked just like a gown but then manly. Everyone in the Long Bar took a step back and they were astonished when I walked in. I didn't realise that I would have been such a curiosity to people, but hey, a two feet tall man with a remarkable outfit... I felt embarrassed and took bigger steps to reach my friends, whom I saw sitting at a table at a distance

Before I could reach the table, Gerald stopped me, the handsome black guy I had met the same morning. He turned out to be the restaurant manager and gladly wanted to direct me to my table. He didn't waste any time and directly asked me what my plans were after dinner. The group of friends couldn't stop laughing because it was the most obvious pick up line.

The food was delicious and Gerald kept wandering around our table and trying to get eye contact. After dinner my friends stayed for coffee, but I decided to go to bed. I was never much of a night owl. I said goodbye and got into the elevator. And guess who got in the elevator as well? Gerald. He wanted to show me a couple of bars and had arranged VIP-tickets for a nightclub where celebrities like Madonna came. He wasn't allowed to date guests, so he asked me if I could meet him outside the hotel in half an hour.

No sooner said than done. The bars were nice, but I'm not much of a bar guy, I prefer action. The nightclub/disco turned out to be a better idea. It was fantastic. I was back in the hotel around four in the morning and Gerald used the staff service door to get back to my room.

He kissed deliciously and we started undressing each other. Unfortunately he was completely hairless... I find that less manly and unattractive, but hey, you can also be too critical. Apparently being hairless was a trend

back then and now, fifteen years later, unfortunately, it still is. Whenever I'm in the shower of a gym, all men are hairless and I'm the only hairy one.

THE TURNAROUND

After this amazing weekend in London, I came back on a Sunday night. I then lived in Antwerp and drove in the pouring rain from Amsterdam Schiphol Airport. I first went to my house in The Hague to get my cat Tara. On my way to Belgium, at St. Job in het Goor, there suddenly was a cloudburst storm. Because of all the water flooding the road, I slid off the road with my Smart Convertible and flew with 120 kilometres an hour against a concrete pole.

First, I wasn't really aware of what was happening. Suddenly I rose up into a beam of light. (Just like in Star Trek: 'Beam me up, Scotty!'). A deep voice said to me: 'Would you like to stay or leave?' I thought: jeez, God is a guy after all! And how can HE now communicate... through telepathy? I saw nothing and no one; I did see my body constrained by the seatbelt of the car and my head on the steering wheel. The plastic exterior wraps were gone and the windows were broken, but the chassis of the car was still there. I was able to think, but I couldn't feel my body. My answer was: 'I want to stay because I'm not done here yet, I want to try to make people on earth happier.' Instead of going up into the tunnel of light, I went down and came back into my very painful body..I had had a near-death experience...

As soon as I was back into my body, I intuitively reached to my right, where my cat cage was. The cage was destroyed and Tara was gone. My biggest fear was that she would have walked into the woods to look for me. I reached behind my chair, where she usually likes to hide,

and to my relief I found her. I grabbed a part of the cage and put my bag on it so that she wouldn't escape again. Suddenly, the car approached and I saw four handsome coffee-coloured men with black hair. Oh, did I end up in heaven after all? I thought. They were on their way back to Brussels after a soccer match in Amsterdam and saw me swinging through the road water. They were driving a camper and had parked it with the flashing lights on, behind my Smart that had been thrown back to the right side of the highway.. The four of them pulled my car back on the road shoulder and called the police and an ambulance. I was able to call a colleague of mine to pick up Tara and then the ambulance carried me away with a big collar around my neck.

Fortunately, the x-ray showed no signs of neck- or back injuries. The prognosis was one night of observation and back home the following morning. I shared my room with six other men, all accident victims during the heavy weather that night. Around me there were legs and arms wrapped in plaster cast. Once they heard I was allowed to go back home the next day, they asked me: 'What car were you driving?' They drove big cars like Mercedes, Saab and BMW and all needed at least 6 weeks to recover. I answered: 'A Smart.' This car has proven to have a strong cage construction and I think no one has ever died in a Smart.

When I got out of the hospital, I decided: My life has got to change from now on. I thought of the training of the Dalai Lama and the insight I got from walking past the foundations of the old monastery in Friesland. It slowly became clear to me that besides Hinduism I wanted to study Buddhism as well. My goal was to gain more wisdom of life and use it to help others. I hired a director for the RS Group and left for Nepal and Tibet to look for a Buddhist monastery where I wanted to stay.

HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM

Let me just give you a short explanation about the co-relation between Hinduism and Buddhism. These two religions are related to each other, but also have their differences. The biggest difference is that all Hindus believe in the creator God and that there are no gods in Buddhism. The gods that exist in Buddhism stand for the qualities you want to develop within yourself. Besides that, Hindus believe in a soul and Buddhists don't. Another remarkable difference is that Buddhism was taught by the Buddha, whose parents were Hindus. Hinduism doesn't know prophets or mentors.

There are similarities in meditation techniques of the two religions. Buddhists and Hindus both use concentration meditation and insight meditation. The goal with both is to overcome disturbed emotions – fear, sadness or anxiety– through meditation and to become more peaceful and happier.

Both of them also use an image of a god during meditation. The difference however is that the gods from Hinduism really exist in the eyes of the believers. In Buddhism on the other hand, the gods represent the qualities you would like to develop within yourself. The fact that Buddhists use an image of god is merely a practical choice. People meditate easier with the image of a god in mind.

KATHMANDU

I found a group trip on the Internet with a hiking tour to several Buddhist monasteries in Nepal and Tibet. The group contained fourteen people and it was nice that all were interested in Buddhism. Also, everyone contribut-

ed something during the trip: there was a hairdresser; a Reiki-master and I gave yoga classes now and then.

Kathmandu was our first destination and I loved the energy there. There are about eighty monasteries located around the valley of Kathmandu. We slept in the Pulhari-monastery, where about two hundred monks from the age of four until the age of twenty were living. The stay was primitive, but the food was great.

In the evening we heard a strange sound. We saw monks clapping their hands. It turned out they were debating in pairs and sets of three. A monk was being questioned about the dharma, the teaching of Buddha. The monk who was clapping his hands actually said: 'Come on now! You can do better... give a better and more precise answer.'

LHASA

We travelled with the bus through regions around Kathmandu and visited beautiful remains of palaces, markets and villages. After a few days, we left with a plane to Lhasa in Tibet. I felt threatened at the airport and no longer free, my luggage was checked and my books and photos of the Dalai Lama were taken out and thrown away.

The city centre of Lhasa is still authentic Tibetan, which creates a comfortable atmosphere. In the heart of the centre you'll find Jokhang, the oldest Buddhist temple in Tibet, surrounded with a pilgrim circuit, the Bakhor. The streets of Bakhor are full of stands with clothes for monks, several objects for the offerings and other stuff. There, in between, are monks and pilgrims walking around through the streets and spinning the prayer wheels that are hanging everywhere.

From a roof of the jokhang you have a beautiful sight

on Lhasa and the Potala-palace. The big white and brown building is standing in the centre of the city and the Dalai Lama used to govern from here during winter times. The summer palace of the Dalai Lama is located in the area of Lhasa in a big park. Tenzin, the present Dalai Lama, escaped from here to India.

The Sera-monastery is also a highlight, because every afternoon around three thirty, the monks have a debating class similar to the one we saw in Kathmandu. The monk also claps his hand here to stimulate the other to give a more precise answer.

The Drepung-monastery in Lhasa is the biggest monastery in Tibet. This monastery is located on the mountain Gambo-Utse, five kilometres west of Lhasa. Since April 2008 it's under strict supervision of the Chinese government. There are some days when it's allowed to visit the monastery from the inside, on other days only part of it and sometimes it's not allowed at all. Before the invasion of Tibet in 1959, there were 15.000 monks in living the monastery. Nowadays, there are just a thousand.

The group was going to hike further to three monasteries at 3.000 and 3.500 meters altitude. You had to climb up with stops in between and spend the night in tents, so it was going to be a big adventure. I however, got sick of heights and thought my head was going to burst. The pills for height-sickness didn't work and after crawling over the floor in pain for a whole night, I decided not to go along. Together with a few others in the group, I decided to go back to Kathmandu, which is located at 'only' 1350 meters altitude. A guide took us to the airport, but when we reached customs it turned out we didn't have the group visa with us. The guide had forgotten to give it to us. The guide was long gone and our plane was leaving in 45 minutes...so it was super stressful.

I suggested to all to meditate in a circle and to visu-

alise that we were sitting on the plane. We were meditating for a few minutes when someone shouted my name. It was the guide! Halfway back to Lhasa he remembered having the group visa and he drove back to give it to us. So it worked, the visualisation!

Back in Kathmandu, we took a cab towards the Pulhahari-monestary. We ended up in a two-week lasting Tara Poedja, which is a beautiful prayer chant to diminish the fears within yourself and other living creatures. The short mantra used and repeated is as following: ‘Om Tare Tuttare Ture Soha’. The meaning is:

Om	Tara’s holy body, word and spirit
Tare	liberation from all unhappiness
Tuttare	liberation from the eight imperfections, the external threats, but especially from the internal threats, the disturbed emotions, the misery.
Ture	liberation from duality, the true termination of confusion.
Soha	may the meaning of the mantra root in my mind.

KARMA TSULTRIM THARCHIN

I was having such a good time in the Pulhahari-monastery that I wanted to study there for the upcoming seven years. I talked to the head lama about it and he asked me where I came from. ‘From Belgium and the Netherlands,’ I answered. He told me there was a Tibetan Kagyu-monastery in Belgium, where three Tibetan lamas teach the same lessons as they do here in Kathmandu. I was surprised: Buddhism in the Benelux? If I wanted to stay in Kathmandu, I first needed four years to learn Sanskrit, Nepali and Tibetan to be able to understand the teach-

ings, prayer songs and ceremonies. Considering my dyslexia it didn't seem like a good idea. At the Belgian monastery everything was translated into Dutch or French, the head lama told me.

After my return from Nepal I visited the monastery in Belgium. Lea and Frans had founded the place. They originated from Belgium and started practising Buddhism thirty years ago in Antwerp. They had founded four training centres in Cadzand, Schoten, Brussel and Huy.

I started studying Buddhism in 2005 and also decided to work as a volunteer on Fridays for Frans Goetghebeur. He was a part of all sorts of committees, had connections with the press, wrote books and was an excellent translator from Tibetan to French and Dutch. So there was a lot to learn and do.

In the first year, I took a course with the three lamas on the basic principles of Buddhism. These three monks came from the Sonada Kagyu-monastery in Darjeeling. A very old Lama Ogyn had helped Lea and Frans to get these three monks to Belgium: firstly Lama Karta followed by Lama Zeupa and Lama Tashi Nima.

I followed several teachings with the lamas Karta, Zeupa and Tashi, mainly about the basic principles of Buddhism. There regularly were also Lamas from Taiwan, India and Europe to give certain teachings. After a year I knew for sure I wanted to dig deeper into the teachings of Buddha, called the dharma, and connect myself to the sangha (spiritual community). The Buddha, the dharma and the sangha are called the three jewels you're devoting yourself to.

To confirm this devotion, you enter Buddhism. Twice a year, there's a ceremony, organized by the Tibetan institute, which you can sign up for. You collectively sing a prayer chant to empower the devotion. The lama cuts off a piece of your hair and gives

you a Tibetan name. Then this peace hair gets burned in a separate ritual on the highest mountain. Lama Zeupa carried out this ceremony on me in 2005. He gave me the Tibetan name Karma Tsultrim Tharchin.

BOEDDHA-DHARMA

In Buddhist tradition, Buddha-dharma means the vision and the teaching Buddha taught. This was at first handed over orally, but later was documented in books.

The main focus in the dharma is the wheel with the three turnings. The first turning of the wheel of dharma focuses on suffering. The Buddha asked himself: What do the people who look for enlightenment want? The answer is: to liberate themselves from suffering that we experience when we see illness, aging and death and when we become aware of the impermanence of the human existence and of happiness. It's traditionally called dukha (= suffering). You can also replace suffering with 'fear'.

The main focus at the second turning of the wheel is gaining insight of prajna. Suffering is caused by the way we experience something. This suffering is based on our expectations, our memories, our hope and fear, meaning: based on what we think we are experiencing. Suffering has no real foundation in this sense and is unnecessary. We can free ourselves from suffering, because suffering is based on an illusion, not on reality, but on the reality as we think it is.

The third turning of the wheel of dharma asks the questions: even when we see the emptiness in the signs, even when we see the emptiness in the reality as we experience it, how can we then deal with the emptiness of this encounter of reality? How to live with and in it? It takes a lot of study and experience to understand this aspect.

DHARMA IN TODAY'S WORLD

In today's world it's the ego and the fulfilment of longings and desires that control our thinking and behaviour. We live in a society where everything is possible and allowed and in which each one of us is looking to fulfil their wants.

It's however important to control our longings and desires – maybe even extinguish them – because they result in unnecessary extra suffering. It's of importance that we make a distinction between a need and a longing. We need food, drinks, a roof above our heads, a warm blanket and some clothing. That's what we need to work for, earn money, have some cover in case of illness and when we get older. It's needed to exist. And the rest are longings deriving from our ego and desires.

Let's diminish our desires and our ego and keep dharma in mind, or: get insights from people's suffering and look at it with compassion. If we only work hard, we'll create stress and disturbance. If we do nothing, we'll create boredom and then the mind will become agitated. That's why it's important to search for a rhythm and to find a balance between work and other matters in life.

The proportion more or less as follows:

10 percent: yoga training and meditation;

30 percent: protector of society;

50 percent: earning money;

10 percent: being of service to others

This creates a balance in our daily life and also space for what needs to be done.

THE ROLE OF DISCIPLINE

Discipline and tapah (enduring discomforts) need to be practised to recover the dharma. People wake up early,

work hard and go to bed late. That's not discipline. That's working hard. Discipline means a right balance between it all.

That right balance involves: getting up early, calmly and relaxed, taking the time to nurture myself, to meditate and do asana's (yoga exercises). You then go to work on time. Besides that, it's important to make time for relaxation, family contacts and visits from friends. Once we apply an ideal structure and rhythm to life, we'll live calmly.

Most people would like to have mystical experiences, but without applying the necessary discipline. Nowadays there are teachers who say: forget all about the discipline... I don't support that. Finding ourselves requires sacrifice and to be able to sacrifice requires discipline.

4.

THE PATH TO MONK

THE TRUTH IS THE PATH

What does the truth consist of?
Of facts, science, opinions or religion?
Make an end to the search for the truth
What you'll find is a treasure
Which will make you what you are
Whatever direction the path goes
Whatever path you're taking
Keep on walking and don't stand still
Or else you'll freeze
The truth is the path
A life shall be her guide

- *L.L.L. Heerlen* -

After a year, I became a Buddhist, including the ceremony of cutting my hair. The next step was to begin with the course of becoming a monk, which appealed to me a lot. Through the study of the Buddha, I wanted to learn to understand how to diminish people's suffering and enlarge their happiness.

Learning and besides that working while being of complete of service to others – like within the RS Group – seemed to me the most beautiful thing there was. I decided to take the path of a monk. It's no coincidence that my name was Kloosterman (Monasteryman)! Monkh-hood runs through my genes.

I tried to talk to Lama Karta about my desire to become a monk. He was the spiritual manager of the Tibetan monastery in Huy. He had a beautiful singing voice and was very good in teaching the three turnings of the Buddhist wheel of dharma. I did call him the 'grumpy lama', because he would often be angry or have an angry face.

Lama Karta always avoided me or told me he didn't have time. After a few months, I got sick and tired of being avoided. When I was in Huy for a weekend teaching, I saw Lama Karta walking down the stairs towards the bar of the big temple. The bardo in Tibetan literally means: the condition between death and rebirth. In this monastery it has a more practical meaning: the bar that's open in the weekend. It's where visitors and students can buy themselves ice cream, luxurious coffee and soda. I walked towards him with a look in my eyes telling him I wasn't going to be turned down this time. And it worked; I could drop by the next morning.

THE QUESTIONS

The next morning I was welcomed in the beautiful room of Lama Karta in the castle. I sat down on the ground in front of him. 'I would like to become your student and follow the path to become a monk,' I said. He asked me why and I answered I wanted to reduce people's suffering. 'The teachings of the Buddha serves this in an extremely positive way. I would like to learn how to teach this to other people.'

I suddenly felt a zigzag-energy going through my body. It was Lama Karta who was scanning me energetically to see if my intention were pure. He answered: 'I surely see possibilities.' I do first have to ask you ten secret questions and only when the answers are correct, you're allowed to begin with the course for becoming a monk.

For the past thirty years, there have been about 35 requests for becoming a monk or nun, but only four were accepted. To give you an impression of the kind of question being asked, I'll give you an example. One question was as following: If you become a monk, are you then willing to wear monks clothing? My answer was: 'No. I prefer not to wear monks clothing, because I'm not used to it and not born in a Buddhist country. Besides, the process of becoming a monk happens from within and doesn't have to be visible through noticeable clothing. If, however, it were a traditional ritual and it would have been disrespectful of me, towards the lamas or the Buddha, to not wear it then I would do it.'

It later turned out everyone had the question about the clothing and almost everyone had answered it with 'yes'. A lot of non-Buddhist people love wearing monks' clothing, because it distinguishes them from other people. The Bordeaux and yellow-orange coloured robes do

look very lovely, but these people buy an image, and to me it is disrespectful.

Once I received the permission to start the course to become a monk, I asked Lama Karta if he would also accept me as his student. He answered affirmatively. I asked him what could go wrong between us two. I felt he was regularly annoyed with me. And I was I right. He told it could go wrong if I were to try and sit on a lama's seat too much. He already noticed that people in the centre liked me. And that I would sometimes practise generosity by handing people gifts they needed or had asked for. Lama Karta put it this way: 'People in this centre come here for me and in your company RS Group they come for you.'

He told me about a monk who worked a lot at their reception and was attracting people towards his own practice to help them with their disturbed emotions. That wasn't really appropriate and that's why I was no longer allowed to hand over gifts, unless I gave it through Lama Karta. I honestly thought it was a better idea to give presents through the lama, because I had already burned my fingers once. There was a very dedicated Buddhist couple in the centre and the woman was severely ill. She had a daughter in Portugal whom she hadn't seen for five years, because she didn't have any money for a ticket. I felt bad for her and since I earned more than enough money, I gave her the three hundred euros she needed. What turned out? She had asked for help to five other people and received three hundred euros from them as well.

BUDDHIST MONK

It's not like I would instantly become a 'true' monk. You first become a monk in training and if you meet up to certain requirements, you get to become a monk. I'm hon-

estly still in this start-up phase and I still haven't decided yet if I do or don't want to become a monk.

Here's some background information about Buddhist monks. They're called bhikkhu, which literally means 'beggar' or 'begging monk'. A bhikkhu is not allowed to beg. But standing still and waiting is, so that the gifts are given spontaneously and the monk's behaviour stays in control.

A bhikkhu lives in a monastic community or alone in an hut. They dedicate themselves to learning the teachings of Buddha. Each one of them has an individual task, mostly simple chores, like sweeping the leaves or maintaining the buildings, but also administrative tasks. They have relatively a lot of time for meditation and the study of the Buddhist scriptures.

A bhikkhu isn't a priest, he doesn't take on the position of mediation between the laymen and a higher being like god.

But it is a part of their job to give spiritual advice to the laymen.

LOCAL TRADITIONS

In traditional Buddhist countries, it's not usual for the men to become bhikkhu. In Tibet it's a tradition for at least one person per household to become a monk. In Thailand is a tradition for every man to become a bhikkhu at least once in his lifetime, if only for a week. In most countries it's not possible for women to become bhikkhuni. They can however become novice (pali: samaneri), or a monastery inhabitant dressed in white.

There's a difference between a monk and a lama. When a monk is done learning, he has been through 'buddhist primary- and high school. After that they may

choose to do a retreat of three years, three months and three days in isolation with other monks and his teacher. They have no contact with the outside world during this period. All learned material gets repeated and supplemented where needed in this retreat. After this retreat, the retreat teacher, in consultation with the monk's teacher, decides if a monk may become a lama.

If a lama gets married, he abandons his vow of chastity and monkhood. That means he's no longer a monk but still stays a lama. Of the hundred monks, only five become a lama and the rest goes back home, get married and find a job in society.

TAKING THE VOW

I got the permission to become a monk in training with an observation period of four years. The other lamas had to give me their permission as well. You live in a small monastery community with lamas, other monks in training and volunteers, so good mutual relations are important.

Lama Karta took the five vows for laymen with me. If you want to take being a Buddhist seriously, you need to obey the following rules of conduct:

- 1. Don't take a life**
- 2. Don't take what isn't given**
- 3. Don't distort the truth**
- 4. Avoid abusing your senses and avoid sexual excesses.**
- 5. Avoid self-intoxication by alcohol or drugs.**

1. Don't take a life

This prohibition is broader than the Bible commandment 'thy shall not kill', which exclusively talks about killing humans. In Buddhism it means not kill any living creature; that's why most Buddhists are vegetarians or vegans.

In daily Buddhist tradition however, it's about not killing creatures yourself and in some interpretations it's even about not killing people intentionally. Within this interpretation it's pretty easy for most of us to keep this vow.

2. Don't take what isn't given (don't steal)

This also goes further than the Bible commandment 'thy shall not steal'. It also means: don't take what isn't given. So even if the little soaps in the hotels look as if they're there for taking, whoever takes this vow seriously, will not...

3. Don't distort the truth (don't lie)

Lying is discouraged in every great spiritual tradition. It goes further though: even half-truths are renounced.

Sometimes we use half-truths to soothe something, but the Buddhist tradition disapproves a white lie.

4. Avoid abusing your senses and avoid sexual excesses.

Laymen interpret this commandment as being unfaithful towards the partner. For monks and nuns it means complete abstinence from sex.

Our 'senses' are the most known: hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling and tasting. Buddhism adds a sixth sense to it: the thinking, the sense that observes.

Under abuse also falls ‘addictions’, like chocolate, smoking but also music.

Avoiding the abuse of our senses is difficult to us.

In our culture it’s absolutely normal to overload our senses with, for example, music. Less and less people are able to handle silence. Turning off the television is already a big step for many. Taking this vow literally may bring you a lot of peace.

5. Avoid self-intoxication by alcohol or drugs.

The vow to avoid self-intoxication regularly gets neglected by hippie like Buddhists who combine meditation with weed or alcohol. From my point of view, it’s a mistake to think that drugs can purify the mind.

Whoever takes these vows, is allowed – a feature of Buddhism – to decide how they interpret them. There’s no objection against trying only one of vows out for a while, just to see how it is. Coffee is a drug as well. Caffeine changes the awareness and that’s why it’s good to avoid it. The question is: is cutting off from coffee significant to your spiritual path. If it’s a too big of step for you, drink it anyway.

GENEROSITY AND SUBSERVIENCE

A part of my course for becoming a monk is to focus not only on Lama Karta, but on the other lamas as well.

One way to do this is by exchanging gifts to practice generosity. I bought Kodak film and parts for Lama Tashi Nimas, who practices photography as a hobby. This lama is the most modest, shy, meditative and non-judging lama. I bought some sports outfits for Lama Zeupa, be-

cause he liked doing sports. He liked swimming, fitness and jogging. Lama Zeupa gave me a very beautiful tangka with a Buddha on it. A tangka is a paint brushed drawing coloured with a pencil with only one or a few hairs. A monk's task – it sometimes takes them months to finish a painting. I gave Lama Karta a beautiful golden watch, coming from my family, with a poem. In the poem, I asked him if I could permanently live in the monastery in Huy to follow all teachings, to study and to serve the lamas.

It soon became clear how I could be of service to them. They needed a good car to, for example, pick people up from the airport. Through my company RS Group, I bought a Mercedes R-class that can transport seven people.

MONASTERY VERSUS BUSINESS LIFE

Many people expect life in the monastery to be loving and peaceful and in business to be very competitive. But the reality is, like always, much more complicated.

There was a good atmosphere within my company and my employees were able to get along with each other. The supervisors trusted and supported me and I had good relations with my clients. There hardly were any fight and talking was the solution for the conflicts that did occur. As a company, we were also involved with the community around us. We used to choose a theme each year – animals, water or people with cancer – and then support organisation that were involved with these themes. The RS Group also worked with local charities in Holland and Belgium. We donated money, organized excursions for addicts or handicaps or restored building as a team. Not enough companies do these kinds of

things and that's a shame. It's meaningful and satisfying to support people who are handicapped, have financial or mental problems or who are extremely ill. It expands your reflecting abilities and sense for compassion, or the desire to diminish other people's suffering.

From the moment it was announced I was going to become a monk in training, hell broke loose. Elsa had already been living in the monastery for a couple of years. She had given all her money to this Tibetan monastery and would do anything to become a nun. But Lama Karta denied her as a student.

Elsa had the keys of all the bedrooms. She went to my room and threw all my stuff out. When I came back from a teaching, I found all my stuff on the ground. I went to her and asked her what was wrong. According to her, I had bought my permission to become a monk. 'You'll find out for yourself. When you stop donating to this monastery, your privileges end as well. Elsa decided not to talk to me again and turned her head whenever I'd walk past her.

Within my business life, but also privately, I was used to living in harmony with my surroundings and trying to get rid of conflicts. Elsa's behaviour disturbed me a lot. I went to Lama Zeupa and told him how I'd expected something else of a Buddhist centre. He told me it's because Buddhist centres attract various kinds of people: volunteers who offer help, tourists, Buddhist practitioners in several grades, monks and lamas, but also people with heavily disturbed emotions, addictions or terminal illnesses.

His solution for dealing with the problem Elsa, was rather surprising: it's nice to help who have problems and to practice and expand your sense of compassion. To realize this, he taught me the tonglen-method.

THE TONGLLEN-METHOD

Here I'll shortly explain the goal of the tonglen (exchanging) method. It's a breathing exercise combined with meditation. I regularly use the tonglen-method in my classes.

In Buddhism it's specified that someone who takes away joy from others and causes them suffering shall not be praised. People who do get praised are the ones who make others happy and take suffering upon them. The goal of the tonglen-method is to create such a turn within you till you become part of the last group.

This method teaches you to see the suffering other people go through when you think about them and the joy we've got to offer them. Some people won't feel comfortable doing this, because they don't feel like doing it or find this too difficult. I find it the wrong way of looking at things. When you make a habit of living in an altruistic way or to practice this tonglen-method, you will no longer see it as a burden. You'll become mentally stronger when you look at others with compassion.

After visiting Lama Zeupa, I practiced meditation and decided to do the same for the next day. I felt my anger decreasing. I ran into Elsa shortly after and she said hello...I thought: incredible, it's working!

The vision of 'interdependence' is very important in Buddhism. We are all connected to each other according to the teaching. Whenever you change something within yourself, it'll directly affect others. I took the anger out of Elsa and sent her love in return. By changing something within yourself, you'll change something within others as well. There will emerge another thinking- and behavioural pattern on an unconscious level within someone else, in this case Elsa. My first step on the path of a monk had been set.

5.

**LIVING AS
A MONK
IN TRAINING**

MEETING YOURSELF

Know who you want to be, with all your strengths and weaknesses

With your discomforts, your pain and the love within you

With your worries, your trust, your joy and your suffering

With what shall still unfold and... the things you would rather forget...

With your warmth, your spirit and with your spontaneity

With your amazing sense of humour, with your style, your dignity

Know who you want to be, then your light will gain power and glow

You will then shine from your core, because that's when you have... met yourself

- *source unknown* -

In 2006 I went to live in the monastery to dig deeper into Buddhism and to be serving during my training as a monk. My director of the three recruitment offices in The Hague, Antwerp and Brussels came to visit me once a month to report on the situation in the RS Group. In the monastery I had my computer, Internet and email, and I was able to remain of service to the organization backstage.

My friends had all bet that I would be out of there within two weeks. To them, I was a man who enjoyed an Epicurian lifestyle and who was focused on appearance, fashion and nice stuff. Not only had my friend looked at me in such a way. When I came to the monastery for the first time driving my Porsche 911, I saw other students shaking their heads pityingly.

This guy didn't get it. They looked even more pitifully at me when I put my Prada shoes next to all the Ecco sandals at the entrance of the temple. To them I was a materialist, a man who used the teachings of the Buddha as material (self) enrichment.

Remarkable was the reaction of Lama Zeupa on my arrival in my Porsche. He said, "Do not make the mistake of thinking that you immediately have to give up all kinds of material things once you start studying Buddhism. This is only important if you identify yourself to material things. You do not have to sell your Porsche, because it's not a part of your identity. Others do; they can't live without a car and then they suffer. Lama Zeupa's opinion was: "Everyone has their own lessons to learn in life.

I came into a largely alternative circuit. People didn't always look neat, most of them had white-grey skin, their hair was messy and their clothes worn out. It was as if it did not matter what you looked like. You came here to work on your mind and that was much more important than working on your body or appearance.

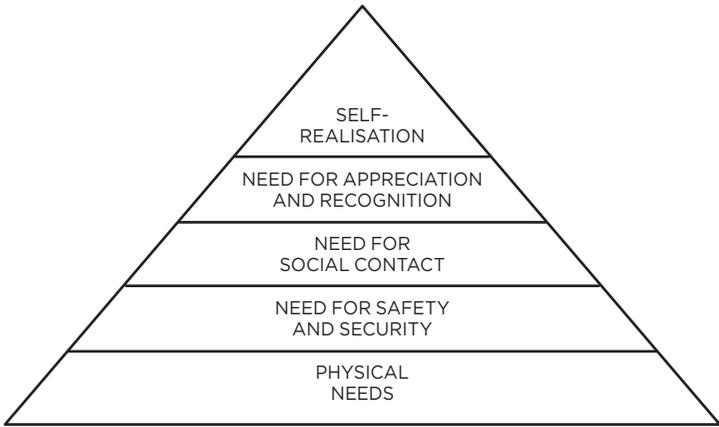
When I looked at my teachers, however, they were always shaved, in clean clothes and neat and looking fresh. Lama Zeupa said that mind and body are inseparably connected to each other and that you're supposed to consider the body as a temple where your spirit lives. I share the same vision.

PYRAMID OF MASLOW

What kind of director-entrepreneur of a beautiful, growing successful company goes to live in a monastery? My mother was worried it would mean the end of the company and warned me regularly. And yet I wanted this. But why? In the material sense, I had it all: three houses, three cars, art, jewellery, expensive clothing, and so on. Honestly, I never lacked for any material things. Not that we were brought up spoiled, on the contrary. We got an allowance, but whenever my two brothers and I wanted to have something extra we had to work for it. I worked on my father's land and as an assistant cook in restaurant since I was twelve.

Exactly because I had everything - and had always had - I felt the need to expand the knowledge within myself and reduce other's suffering. I can best explain this need according to Maslow's pyramid.

The pyramid of Maslow was developed in 1943 by Abraham Maslow. It is a hierarchical structure of the universal human needs according to Maslow. He states: only when the lower needs are satisfied, a person can accrue to the satisfaction of the higher needs in the hierarchy.



1. Our first needs are physical needs such as sleep, food and drinks, but also sex, sports and comfort.
2. Our second need is safety and security. The individual is looking for security in a small or large group by housing and work.
3. At number three stands, the need for social contacts, such as friendship, love and other positive social relationships.
4. Need number four is appreciation and recognition within the group you're related to.
5. Only when all four requirements are met, you will come around to number five: the need for self-development. This is the need to develop and enhance your opportunities personality and mental growth.
6. Need for self-transcendence. In the later stages of his life Maslow nuanced his vision on self-actual-

ization and introduced self-transcendence, or insight. The sixth layer is eventually not shown in the graph. Level 5 and 6 do correspond very well to the theory of Buddhism. These levels are namely developed by silence and insight meditations, as later explained in this book.

Maslow stated that every living creature pursues the same needs. When one need is met, the individual moves on to the next level. When a stairway is missing or lost, the individual will have to meet this need, before being able to continue to rise up again. According to Maslow, it is not possible to skip certain levels.

Imagine someone walking through a museum (search for beauty) and gets hungry (physiological need). He will try to eat something before he can continue searching for more beauty. After eating, the person will move back to the fifth or sixth level, because all intermediate levels have been fulfilled. But imagine he gets the news that his house has been burned down; he will then first go back to that need to 'fulfil' it. All intermediate levels can be attended at different times, without per definition being skipped.

The need for me to further develop personal levels 5 and 6 got bigger and therefore also to help others on several levels on the hierarchy of needs. That's the reason I stepped out of my comfortable life and joined the monastery.

SUPPORT FROM MY MOTHER

At first everyone thought it was funny: Hans wants something else to be special again. For me, however, it was obeying a deep inner voice. Of course I understood that it was difficult for my environment to understand this spir-

itual development. Nevertheless, it wasn't something I demanded from others. Several friends came to see me, but eighty per cent never came.

My mother and stepfather supported me unconditionally. When they stayed over in the monastery for a weekend for the first time, I found a note afterwards saying: "Dear Hans, whatever you do in your life, we will always support you" As you can understand, it made me wipe away a few tears.

My mother still had some doubts about the monastery. At the time when I was a monk, they were building a bigger temple in Huy. There was already a small temple for about fifteen to twenty people and a second temple for a hundred people and now they were building for five hundred people with accommodation for a hundred people.

A lot of volunteers worked here. Our creative monk Tempa worked overtime, making plaster ornaments that were painted to decorate the temple. When my mother and stepfather visited me every two months they would help me painting the ornaments and the temple. My mother also saw what I donated. Keeping the monastery clean, which was done by volunteers, takes a lot of work because it rains often in the Belgian Ardennes. Lots of dirt was coming in from outside and so I had bought mats for the entrance of the temple, so that they had to do less cleaning.

I also supplied flooring for the guesthouse and painted the concrete stairs with a custom made colour. Besides, it was me who drove the llamas around as a taxi driver in my Mercedes R. My mother was convinced of my pure intentions. Our entire family had always been generous over the centuries. But she was afraid that the monastery was still a kind of cult, which defrauds you out of your money.

Despite her objections, she still always pulled out her wallet when she was in the monastery, to support this good cause.

SEXUAL NEEDS

During the monastic life I didn't miss much of my previous luxurious life. I liked living, working and eating with a group of about eight to ten people consisting of lamas, monks in training, like me, and volunteers from the village. There was a pleasant family feeling and I thought living in such a commune was completely fine. The only thing I missed was Diet Coke, so I used to go get it from the village, once a week.

Well, I did find it difficult the first few months to not have sex, not even with myself. In a monastery, sex is prohibited out of respect towards the monks and nuns. Such an energy doesn't belong there. You're supposed to save up as much clean energy as possible to be of service to others. I once asked Lama Karta about how he dealt with his sexual needs when growing up as a young monk. I didn't reply. He however said he had never experienced such a direct monk within the past thirty years. I drove to Lama Tashi Nima for a meeting and asked him the same question. His English is not very good and so his usual answer would be: "Ask one of the other lamas." That was Lama Zeupa, who I was to drive to the monastery in Brussels. When I asked him how he dealt with his sexual needs, he blushed and said, "do not ask a lama." I told him that I could not find any information on how to transform my sexual feelings, even There were methods, according to Lama Zeupa and so he told me to pass by the next day for some advice.

Lama Zeupa introduced me to working with the four transcendent virtues: love, compassion, equanimity and pleasure. As advice he said:

- Whenever a feeling of lust arises, visualize the love for all beings, but especially for your mother. The feeling of lust will disappear.
- Breathe in love and breathe out lust.
- Practise yourself equanimity. Breathe in equanimity and breathe out your lust.
- And indeed, it worked ... I was (temporarily) rid of my feelings of lust.

THE PATH OF A MONK

From January to April 2006, I completed the first track of my training as a monk. I spent my time studying books Lama Karta or Zeupa gave me to understand the basics of Buddhism. I took Tibetan classes, worked in the garden, drove lamas around, cleaned up, helped in the kitchen and painted in the new temple.

To internalize the basic principles of Buddhism you start learning and integrating the ethical principles of the Buddha. The first three months you meditate on the four general preparation practices (Ngondro or Ngeundro). These are based on four contemplations or thoughts that lead the mind to the Dharma - teachings and insights of the Buddha.

THE FOUR THOUGHTS OR CONTEMPLATIONS

The four thoughts or contemplations are:

- the precious human life;
- the impermanence of all things;
- the rules of karma;
- cause and consequences and the wheel of samsara (suffering).

You watch these four thoughts from all perspectives to drench yourself with them and to see something good in them, to find out the reason for having these thoughts and experiencing them.

The precious existence as human being is illustrated in the following state: “The chance to be born as a human being is as big as the chance a blind turtle sticking his head through a hole of a piece of floating wood somewhere in the middle of the ocean. (...) When you realize how small the chance is for you to be born as a human, you’ll see your human existence from a new perspective.

The impermanence of all things and the inevitability of death refer to life as finite. Everything is constantly changing: pleasant and unpleasant things. Our life is finite, even though we like to think that we have an eternal life. Once you become well aware about how everything is finite, even your life, you’ll save yourself a lot of sadness and suffering when you start letting go of life.

Everything you feel, think and however you act has a consequence. Every choice you make has a consequence. That is the law of karma, cause and effect. According to Buddhism, you are responsible for your life. You shape your life through proper thoughts and actions or faulty ones - that choice is yours. In the first few months as a

monk you think about the choices you have made and their consequences on yourself and others. You use meditation for this. You'll realize that everything is mutually interdependent and that nothing exists on its own.

The wheel of samsara stands for the process of life, sickness, aging, death and then rebirth. You learn to think about suffering and limitations of samsara.

Life is short. If you become truly aware of that, you'll see the relativity of everything around you and you'll become less agitated.

Reincarnation is an important subject, in the Buddhist book about life and death. My attitude towards life changed by studying reincarnation. I would have loved having kids, but I haven't had the chance to. Moreover, having children isn't an option when you choose the path of a monk. The chastity vows stand in the way of this. Now I know I may fulfil my desire for having children in a next life. By understanding the wheel of samsara it is easier for me to accept that some things cannot be realized in this lifetime.

One major cause of suffering according to the wheel of samsara is the separation of your individual energy from the universal energy. This happens when we're born. After we're born, we together with life bring up all kinds of obstacles that impede us to return to the universal energy. Buddha, however, gave us a way out of suffering: the eightfold path to enlightenment. If you follow this path, the union with the universal energy can take place and the suffering can be stopped.

Buddha said: "This, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Way leading to the elimination of Suffering. It is simply the eightfold path: right view, right intention, right way of speaking, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration."

The eightfold path of the Buddha, as I have gone briefly described, is further explained in Appendix 3.

FOUR SPECIAL PREPARATIONS

After the four contemplations follow the four preparatory practices. In the book, *The basic practices of Tibetan Buddhism*, Kaloe Rinpoche gives an extensive explanation about the four preparatory practices. Here's a short description

The first preparation is to develop devotion to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. You'll realize this by doing 111,000 bows along with singing a prayer song and mantra.

The second preparation is to purify the body, speech and mind of your own and of all other living creatures. To do this, you practice a Dorjee Sempa-purification meditation, as I have done for three months in the Himalayas (see Chapter 7).

The third preparation includes the mandala-offering, something I'm practicing now. This is a symbolical offering of the entire universe through the use of a set of Mandala-rings.

The fourth preparation is the guru-yoga. This practice ensures all teachings to be well received. It is important that in everything you practice, you don't make you ego bigger and you don't get to feel like an almighty guru. I won't explain these four preparatory practices any further; it's up to a teacher to explain it verbally. They should consist of visualization, singing a prayer song in combination with a mantra and an activity.

You practice each part a 111,000 times. So in total, approximately 444,000 times. You may choose to spend every day on it for a certain period or practice it at once so you're busy with it for about six weeks to three months, depending on how many hours a day you're able to spend on the practice. This large number is needed to achieve an upheaval in the mind or a transformation in your energy.

If you don't do the preparatory practices then you create a water barrel without a bottom. Everything you put into it falls right through it. So, the preparatory practices form a good foundation to receive and practice the Buddhist teachings.

YOGA WITH LAMA ZEUPA

In the nine years that I studied Buddhism, I have had many yoga classes and retreats with Lama Zeupa. I've studied hatha yoga at Osmose in The Hague. Lama Zeupa taught me Tibetan yoga and Chi Kong.

All kinds of yoga give you new energy, strength, openness, trust and relaxation. Yoga also supports the self-healing ability of the body, because it softens your ego-focused consciousness.

Hatha is the yoga of willpower and is used as an universal tool to achieve awareness and wholeness of body, mind and soul. You also pay attention to meditation. In the west all yoga being given is almost always hatha yoga, and it is practiced to reduce stress and enhance mental and physical health and vitality.

TIBETAN YOGA

Monique van den Brink gives a detailed explanation about Tibetan yoga on her website (www.lujong4life.com). Hermits who lived high up in the mountains developed Tibetan yoga. They were in close contact with nature and discovered that the elements of nature (earth, wind, fire and water) were also present in their own bodies.

By studying nature and animals, they developed

smooth movements combined with breathing. The aim was to purify the natural elements in the body and to bring them back into their original state. That's how they managed to stay healthy, to keep the harmony between body and mind and make physical and mental blockages disappear. The movements and breathing exercises were later on supplemented with the knowledge from the Tibetan medicine and Tibetan Buddhism.

By practicing Tibetan yoga, we develop sensitivity for our body and mind and we are able feel better what is and isn't good for our body. In addition, this yoga stimulates the organs and allows energy to better flow through the meridians. Regularly practising these exercises keeps the body and mind healthy. Tibetan yoga exercises provide a clear mind, the 'being present' with both feet firmly on the ground and results in being connected with your inner power as well as with everything and everyone around you.

You'll enjoy the relaxation in your body and the result of a calm and clear mind. This way you give yourself more space, it's easier for you to feel what you need, what is truly important and will change the way you look at things.

CHI KONG - CHINESE YOGA

Chi Kong presumably emerged as a form of a healing dance, developed for healing and health. It is based on the discovery that body movements and different ways of breathing could help stimulate certain functions in the body.

Chi Kong has four periods. In the first period, they developed breathing techniques and in the second period the meditative methods by which they laid the religious

foundations of Chi Kong. In the third period, the martial arts were integrated. Many different styles were developed with the foundation of Chi kong such as Tai Chi and Shaolin Wai Dan. Medical Chi Kong got developed in the fourth period giving it an international reputation. There are thousands of Chi Kong exercises and Chi Kong masters are still creating new forms.

OUT OF THE MONASTERY

In 2007 I went with Lama Karta to the Abbey of Orval in Belgium. The lamas were singing there with the Benedictine monks. The abbey of Orval is one of the most beautiful places I have seen on earth. It is a huge building, built in sandstone, where the old and new abbey stand next to each other.

We drove through the beautiful forest of Huy to the Abbey. Lama Karta criticized me because I went swimming with cook Trinlé that afternoon in the pool in Huy. The Tibetan cook and I had worked hard for a whole week and a whole weekend. We set up a weekend program for two hundred visitors and during the week a weekly program for eighty people. I wanted to take the cook just to chill in the swimming pool and sauna out of compassion. Lama Karta said: 'Do you think I would go swimming or take a bath upstairs while knowing there is a group of people who are working very hard in the temple. In such a situation, I help them and that's what you should have done, instead of going swimming!'

I exploded and told him that the bow can't always be bent. I also added that I found his comment hypocritical, because I had heard from one of his sponsors that he had just spent a weekend in a luxury hotel in Geneva and gone to an Opera. 'How dare you blame me? Make sure

that you first PRACTISE WHAT YOU PREACH. “

I had never seen Lama Karta so angry. I don't remember what he said as a response, but one thing was inevitable. I admired Lama Karta as a teacher; he masters the theory of dharma like no other. I was having more trouble with Lama Karta as a human.

We didn't speak to each other during the car drive. Later that evening a Benedictine monk came to get me for an audience with Lama Karta. He discussed the program for the next day with me, as if nothing had happened.

Slowly but surely, more confrontations took place between me and the managers in the monastery. They had hired five Bhutanese people to build a five meter high Buddha, sitting on a throne, in the new temple in Huy. They first make a form out of iron wires and then they cover it with clay. The Buddha is then filled with rolls of parchment with prayers and mantras written on them and other sacred objects, such as crystals, medicines and dried spices. These are all objects that can help him during his multiple lifetimes. These images get blessed through a special ceremony. Enlightened creatures get invited to this ceremony to take a seat on the throne so that it is able to provide immense blessings.

On one day, the commercial director of the monastery asked me to visit him. He told me that the five Bhutanese guys who had built the Buddha statue wanted to go home. But the monastery didn't have the necessary 35,000 euros to pay them for their work. He thought, this was the time for me to show generosity and subservience.

I did indeed have this amount on my account, but I wanted to keep it to prevent a part of my company from bankruptcy. Shortly before, the recession had begun and the turnover of my company in the Netherlands and Bel-

gium went down from 180,000 to 0. So my answer was 'no'. The director could not appreciate this and he told me that in that case I could not go to India with Lama Zeupa as planned. The lama would really blame me for this behaviour and I could forget about certain privileges that I had gained in the monastery.

Of course, I realised this, but I decided to continue my path as a monk, within society. I now wanted to be of service to my own business, my colleagues and clients. That's where my priority was at this point.

It indeed seemed time for me to leave the monastery, but not the training to become a monk. In Buddhism it's possible to continue this training even outside the monastery. I grabbed my stuff, including my TV, which of the RS Group gave me for my room a year ago. All the lamas had a TV in their room, but I decided to put mine in the common room. I had also decorated this room in a cosy way, so we could sit together during the evening instead of separately in our rooms. I got asked an explanation for taking the TV. Everything brought into the monastery was seen as a donation and wasn't supposed to leave the monastery. I didn't agree with that at all. I had pre-recorded in writing that if I would leave, I would take my stuff. I donated about 20,000 euros in the first years, but I didn't ask them back of course.

I realized people are people, with their strengths and weaknesses, whether they live in a Buddhist monastery or outside. Lama Karta had taught me this lesson himself: 'It's one world. We divide it up in private and business, life inside and life outside the monastery, but that is not wisdom.'

I went back to the outside world to put my Buddhist lessons into practice.

6.

A MONK IN BUSINESS

STANDING UP FOR YOURSELF

I still can't explain it
That after all these years
I have still lost that piece of myself
A voice inside of me says:
'that I will never get it back'
but that seems to absurd to me.

I would like to go on with my life.
With re-experiencing that fear
Unthinkingly start over
and not first think about everything.

I need the support of others.
That's not unnecessary
Some love is all I dare to ask for.
Before I start chancing things.

When the time is there
and feel the love flow.
when I dare to undertake things again myself.
and also dare to accept it.

Not constantly think I'm not worth it.
People may notice me.
I am allowed to exist.
So in the future just let me tread

- *Wilma Blom* -

At the end of 2007, I got out of the monastery to save the RS Group. I found a rudderless organization. In the office, a passive group of people who were unable to respond to the recession.

A big intervention was needed. I fired the director to save costs; I declared the Belgian branch bankrupt and closed the offices in Antwerp and Brussels. I didn't want the Dutch office to go bankrupt; it was the place with the most entrepreneurial recruiters. To be more flexible, I decided to work with other self-employed people, who were then allowed to keep fifty percent of their turnover. I focused myself on acquisition, marketing and office management. I had put my office, of five hundred square meters with a large roof terrace, on the Internet for rent. Luckily I found four parties with whom I could share the rent of 6,500 euros per month.

The recruiters could work from their homes and they came to the office once a week for a group meeting and for yoga and a biological lunch, that I provided to give the feeling of unity. The organization survived and we were able to continue.

I stayed connected to the monastery; I regularly went back there for teachings. I was not angry or offended by what had happened. We all have pleasant and less pleasant aspects and you learn something from each situation.

During the time I lived in the monastery, I had dedicated myself to the people who lived and worked there. If someone was sick, I would drive to the pharmacy for medicines, gave attention where needed and was kind and generous to them. When it went bad with my company, I had a rough time, but didn't hear anything from anyone from the monastery. No one contacted me.

Of course I didn't join the monastery to expect something in return. But I did expect some kind of sympathy

and interest from a monastic community, in which I had lived together for one and a half years, especially when someone is in trouble. Everyone in the monastery is in fact continuously trained in kindness, patience, generosity, compassion, enthusiastic effort, equanimity and love. Concerning this situation, an old sober Dutch saying is more appropriate: out of sight, out of mind. Many Buddhists understand the theory of kindness, generosity and compassion, but that does not mean they have integrated it into their mind, energy and their daily behavioural patterns.

CONSENSUS MODEL

In Buddhism, it's not necessary for you as a monk to live in a monastery to practice subservience. Since I got out of the monastery, I wanted to set up the structure of the RS Group differently and introduce a part of my Buddhist knowledge in the daily practice of my business.

Everyone is well educated in the Netherlands and out of date to set up an organization in a hierarchical way. It is time that we will develop an organizational structure where human values become the point of focus rather than the egos of the executives. Only within organizations where people are the main focus, is where the capacities of all can be optimally utilized. To achieve this it is necessary to switch to an organization with a flat structure, one where the responsibilities and powers are delegated to the lower layers.

The Buddha already worked on a foundation of a consensus model, 2500 years ago. When making the important decisions, the opinions of others were being asked and they then came to a joint decision. This approach would also be very effective for the companies

and organizations of today. So it's important for managers and employees to ask themselves: Who am I? What am I capable of? And: what do I want?

DEPARTMENT STORE JOHN LEWIS

From the beginning of the RS Group we thought about an organization where the colleagues (employees) would be able to act as co-entrepreneurs. The goal was to create an environment where everyone can develop their talents to the maximum and at the same time ensures the continuity and profitability of the company. Profits are usually a natural organic result when you take the wellbeing of the people as a reference point.

The department store John Lewis in London had the necessary experience with a consensus-based organization. More than 150 years ago, John Lewis created an organization in which every employee became a partner. About seventy percent of the profits is shared with all the staff and nobody can be fired.

This organization has been declared as the most human-friendly and profitable organization in the world eight years ago. They have found an answer to the question: how can you make all parties happy?

John Lewis made its knowledge available to others and the RS Group has gratefully integrated it. We have visited the company in London. You then sit down at the table with the Director of Human Resources of John Lewis, who is responsible for 70,000 people. I, at that time, had "only" fifteen employees. That wasn't an issue for John Lewis and they have assisted us in developing a social democratic model for our company.

SERVANT LEADER

Choosing a less hierarchical organizational structure meant that I had to fulfil my role as a manager differently. Inspiring to me was the concept of the servant leader, developed among others by James Autry. A servant leader is constantly working on his own development and encourages others to do the same. This means that such a leader must have the following characteristics: being authentic, being able to be vulnerable, to be accessible, present and useful within his organization.

You'll find more information about servant leadership at the Servant Leadership Centre, the Dutch representative of the Greenleaf Centre for Servant-Leadership. This is an international non-profit organization that propagates the ideas of servant leadership and offers support to make it grow into the leading leadership style of the 21st century.

BEING AUTHENTIC

Margrete van den Brink states on her website: www.authentiekleiderschap.nl.

The important characteristic of a servant leader is to be authentic. Authentic leadership is about asking the fundamental life questions: Who am I really? Why am I here? What is my mission? Where do I stand for in this life? An authentic leader knows himself, is true to himself and inspires others.

Stephen R. Covey has written a lot about the qualities that an effective leader should possess. One is: discover your own (inner) 'voice', spread it out and help others to find their own voice and share it. With that inner voice you're able to bring out the best in yourself to the

surface and be more creative and get better results. This applies to people personally, but it also enhances creativity and results within organizations.

Authenticity is very important even for employees to be able to feel as a valuable part of the team. They also should ask themselves: Who am I? What am I capable of? And: What do I want?

But how do you get and stay close to your own core? Or how do you find your talents? All people develop fixed thinking- and behavioural patterns throughout their lives, which blurs their view of their own life path. Partly because of internal factors such as genes and character, but also by external influences such as upbringing, education and the social circles in which one moves. These influences affect you on a subconscious level, your habits, your autopilot. Yet, you are aware of only ten percent (and unaware for ninety percent!) of these behaviours, habits and thinking patterns.

For a servant leader it is important to develop himself on an intellectual (IQ), emotional (EQ), but also spiritual (SQ) level. With the last I mean: finding your own core. Buddhism has developed methods and a Bernardry, for this, which helped me a lot. I manage to get better at getting a clear vision of my life path and life fulfilment. Little by little I'm getting an answer on the questions: Who am I, what am I capable of and what do I want?

I used my business knowledge and my Buddhist insights to build up the new organisational structure for the RS Group, which I discuss here.

RS GROUP IN A NEW ORGANIZATIONAL JACKET

In 2008, the following actions were introduced within the RS Group:

1. Introducing a horizontal organizational structure

We made a horizontal organigram with the intention to make all decisions jointly. The vertical organigram described a decisions hierarchy for in case of situations in which decisions couldn't be made.

2. Introduction of a democratic consensus model on an operational, organizational and strategic level.

In the two weekly meetings we discussed and defended two agenda items. We then voted by a show of hands to take on a proposal or refuse it. I did have a right of veto as founder, owner and manager. I however never had to use it. I thought the decision taken by the whole group, was always the wisest.

3. Establishing a bottom-up operative group coordinator instead of a top-down manager

We mainly worked with freelancers who weren't waiting for a guiding top-down manager. I appointed someone from the team who was good in working bottom-up, which had a great base of support within the group.

4. Providing a web-based virtual office

The web-based virtual office contained: agenda management, information about companies and candidates, management reports and a billing system where the bookkeeper puts in the costs virtually each month. Anyone could log in anywhere on this interactive office system. Also, less interdependent communication was necessary because everything could be found using this virtual office. However, I did ask everyone to have an administrative discipline and to record all the data correctly.

5. **Offering flexible work and working from home**
Everyone was happy with working from home. We did work at the office once or twice a week to maintain the we-feeling and a good flow of communication.
6. **Introducing openness and transparency about all figures and data**
Revenues, expenses and profits were visible each month and also how the recruiters performed. The group determined my salary.
7. **Hiring only freelancers for the commercial functions to enhance the entrepreneurial mentality**
It was not easy to find the right freelancers who wanted to pull up the organization together, but we managed to. Nowadays, you see more and more partnerships between independent contractors, but that wasn't so common about six years ago.
8. **Using extensive evaluations twice a year**
We had developed a format that was completed prior to an evaluation. It consisted of five open questions as well as a list of competencies on which you could give yourself a rate. So you evaluated yourself on how you functioned and how you thought someone else functioned. This created good horizontal discussions. As a servant leader you should dare to be vulnerable and not judge anyone on their openness and honesty. If you do, people will keep their mouths shut out of fear of losing their jobs. To avoid such a "temptation", we agreed that no one could get fired without a group's consensus.
9. **Every week one hour of yoga**
I taught an hour of yoga every week to increase self-understanding, the awareness and productivity of employees, and for the group feeling.

10. Three minutes of meditation before each two weekly meeting

We meditated for about five minutes in order to make the meeting run better and to leave behind previous work and just to be quiet and focused. The meeting would then run faster, be more effective, less emotional, and less detailed.

HUMAN VALUES

It seemed like a good idea to also bring in some of the Buddhist teachings into the RS Group. I wanted to bring the SQ (spiritual quotient) to a higher plane with the staff, both on an unconscious and conscious level. Most of the staff had visited me in the monastery at Huy when I stayed there. I didn't want them to get all kinds of fantasies about me staying in the monastery. During their visit, they could see where I was staying and meet the lamas, while I explained why I wanted to stay there.

In 2008 and 2009, I invited Lama Karta and the commercial director of the Tibetan Institute to one of the strategy days of the RS Group. They spoke about the importance of an organization structure where human values are the main focus rather than the egos of the executives. Only in organizations where people are the main focus, everyone's capacities can be optimally exploited, the employees explained.

Another way to put human values as a main focus was through charity contributions by the RS Group with time and money. During 'Santa Claus' or Christmas we bought gifts for the children staying in a women's refuge shelter with their mother or father. It came as a surprise to me that there are women who abuse their husbands as well.

'Make a wish' was another charity that we supported. Children who are terminally ill get to make one last super wish, like shopping in Paris, walking along on a fashion show or going to Disney World. A company then makes sure that this wish comes true.

I also contacted Parnassia in The Hague, a psychiatric institution where about 2,500 people are staying because of psychiatric problems or because they are addicted. Once or twice a year, we did something with a group of patients. We went for example to the 'Omniversum', the municipal museum in The Hague and the 'Dolphinarium' in Harderwijk.

THE RS GROUP OPERATING

The many changes were welcomed with open arms and worked well. There was a great harmony within the group.

I had set up a happiness barometer for the evaluation meetings. You could fill in how happy you were with the most important aspects. I had three categories: unhappy, reasonably happy and very happy.

The list consisted of questions including primary and secondary working conditions, the involvement at the decision-making, the job content, job satisfaction and the proportion between private / business. We came up with a score of nearly 95 percent of happy experience!

I also made up a buddy project. We brought up each other's strengths and weaknesses and made complementary pairs. These duos arranged the daily state of affairs with each other; whenever they couldn't figure something out, I came into the picture.

In 2012, I found out that the group kept operating too dependently on me. I started a project group and went

to investigate how I could enhance the group's independence and self-guidance. It turned out that revenues division and consensus model still weren't good enough. We decided to make the freelancers franchisees; they got to keep seventy per cent of their turnover. They needed to hand over only thirty per cent to the franchisor - RS Group - to finance the back office, the maintenance of the virtual office and advertising expenses. We implemented the system on 1 January 2013. It worked: because of the franchise system, the group became more independent and entrepreneurial.

The new structure gave me the freedom to follow my next Buddhist purification module for three months in the Himalayas.

7.

MEDITATING IN THE HIMALAYAS

THE SILENCE

The silence of the night
A purification of the soul
Sleep saves up on a power
Throws away what never enchanted

The silence gave me peace
far from a hasty life
As if the moon kisses me
and the stars give me love

The silence feels pleasant
Music astonished for a while
A moment to stand somewhat still
before tomorrow comes

The silence lives
free from thoughts
Whoever is in peace
has nothing to expect anymore

The silence comes, the silence goes
and will surely find her moment
As long something as silence exists
I get spoiled by faith

The silence, a heavenly present
and now reserved to me
All beloved whom I recollect
and whom we would never forget

The silence is a part of me
it's to keep quiet sometimes
Feel love flow, I am free
Willing to give everything, and get everything

The silence of the night
As good as it feels now
Pleasant peace, in all glory
is what floods me now

- *Pierre de la Montagne* -

In mid-December 2012, I left for Delhi, India. After two days of looking around and shopping in Delhi, I flew to the northern province of Sikkim. Sikkim is one of the most beautiful green provinces of India with beautiful nature and amazing mountains. A lot of Indians go there to visit holy places and natural water pools. My plan was to do that until the end of December and visit about thirty monasteries with the help of Lama Zeupa's family. My aim was to find a monastery where I could follow my Buddhist module for purification.

Lama Zeupa's sister arranged everything. Their family had just set up a centre to receive guests who travelled around Sikkim and who were interested in yoga classes. I was her first customer, so this way I could help her with some income. After my trip, I decided not to settle in a monastery, but at Lama Zeupa's family house. I had a great connection with his mother, a devoted Buddhist (how could it be any different!), she sung pujas (prayer songs) and mantras the whole day to wish everyone the best. She had a revolving Tibetan prayer wheel containing the rolled up mantra Om Mani Padme Hum, and a mala (prayer necklace with 108 beads) with which she counted the mantras. Her daughter Dicky also still lived at home and took care of her mother and the food. Zeupa Lama's brother, his wife and two daughters also lived in the house temporarily because their house was being renovated.

This was the place, where I would begin my second preparatory practice: the purification. This means chanting a purification mantra: dordjee Sempa a 111,000 times. You purify the body, speech and mind of your past and previous lives. You do this for yourself and all other living beings or living creatures on this planet and in the universe.

I kept a report from mid-December, keeping a re-

cord of the trip and the meditation period and the most important parts of my stay in Sikkim. The extended version can be found on my website under the button 'travel blog'. I can already tell you that after this trip I was done seeing monasteries.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2012

On my way to Sikkim, I sat next to a toilet salesman and his colleagues. He appeared to have missed his calling because he was really a stand-up comedian. The flight lasted one hour and 45 minutes and he kept on making me laugh. For example, he asked me if I knew what I had been in a previous life. According to him, I had been a criminal, and I tried to compensate for the suffering I caused in my previous life. I told him that I thought I had been a female whore and got so sick of men that I no longer wanted to get into a relationship and became a monk. Gender. The toilet salesman said he probably knew me from that past life, and had spent all his money on me ... you probably understand, I could not stop laughing!

Arriving at Sikkim, I get picked up by Yapchung, my guide and driver. We first go to the house of Lama Zeupa. The journey takes about six hours because we have to stop regularly due to boulders falling down the mountains. First I thought: I won't last for even half an hour! But at some point your body and mind get used to it and I even fell asleep while I swung back and forth in the car. The gentlemen here constantly picked their nose, rasp and spit out of the window. This question arose: 'Can I handle this for three months?' But I get used to this as well and moreover I could practice my tolerance again. On the way we encountered a hundred other jeeps all

packed with tourists. Apparently, it is quite popular to see the magnificent scenery in Sikkim.

We arrive at seven o'clock in the evening. The family of Lama Zeupa meets us: his mother, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and aunts. His father passed away a few years ago during a raid on the house.

Lama Zeupa comes from a prominent family; one uncle is a minister in the government. Lama Zeupa is also coming to Sikkim at the end of January. This is later than expected because our Lama Karta got cancer and Lama Zeupa must take over a lot in Belgium, such as teachings, which are a part of the management and coordination of the training centres. Lama Karta unfortunately died on February 23, 2013.

Lama Zeupa's mother offers me a katha and I get invited to have a delicious meal with rice and spinach. A katha is a long thin scarf with lucky characters, which is offered out of respect and to wish you a long life.

There is no heating in the house and it is around freezing point. Again I thought: how I'm going to keep this up? I hate cold and damp. When I go to bed at nine o'clock, I quickly put on my thermal underwear and two sweaters, but I still felt cold in bed. Yet I woke up in the middle of the night, because I was hot. I took the sweaters off but kept the thermal underwear on, just in case. I am really surprised about how quickly the human body adapts to all kind of situations. Once you give up the resistance, acceptance comes naturally.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2012

After breakfast I leave to visit all local monasteries by foot. Besides the family house of Lama Zeupa, there is

also a monastery for nuns with about 45 nuns. Lama Zeupa donated this land to the nuns. I offer one of the nuns some money too. She doesn't really appreciate this. I had forgotten that the nuns aren't supposed to come into contact with money ... So I take it back and put it in a donation tin. I got offered some butter tea, but I spontaneously get nauseous after a few sips. This really wasn't my cup of tea. There were almost no nuns present. Most nuns had gone to a festival in Bodhgaya. This is where they sing menla prayer song, to wish all living creatures a healthy body and healthy mind.

After visiting the nunnery, I want to go to a monastery thirty minutes away from here. Since I'm not a fan of walking, we take a motorcycle. We drive through a beautiful jungle and feel the energy of nature vibrating through our bodies. We arrive at a beautiful old monastery next to a fairy tale lake, surrounded with lots of bamboo sticks with prayer flags. Again, no monks present, they also went to Bodhgaya. Bodhgaya is the place where the Buddha became enlightened underneath the boddhi-tree. He then started teaching in the roe deer forest in Benares. The government and big monasteries largely pay for the festival in Bodhgaya.

SUNDAY,
DECEMBER 23, 2012

The guide and I are going to Vugdhora today, where a lot of monasteries are located. They just built a thirty meters tall golden Buddha, looking over the snowy mountain peaks of the Himalayas. We visit about three monasteries in Vugdhora. What really surprised me the most is the environment pollution of nature over there. There is trash everywhere, on the roads and in the jungle; strange

contrast with such a beautiful setting. After attempting to visit the third monastery locked because of the festival in Bodhgaya, I was done. We are having lunch in the city Bagdora: rice with goat's milk, a bowl of dahl soup and a delicious thickened cottage cheese. It is hot today with 25 degrees, a sharp contrast to the night time when it's minus 4 degrees. I buy a huge tin full of cookies for Lama Zeupa's mother as a token of appreciation for sleeping in their house. Tomorrow we'll leave for West Sikkim and by the end of the year to East Sikkim. I'm skipping North Sikkim because it's quite impassable due to the bad roads.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2012

We were supposed to leave at half past nine to visit monasteries again in a nearby village. The taxi driver, however, is stuck in traffic... unbelievable in such a quiet area like Sikkim, but the causes are usually road constructions, rocks or trees falling from a mountain. We finally leave for Namchi at 11.15 am, for a thirty minute's drive.

Along the way, we stop at a huge statue of Padmasambhava of about 110 meters high. Padmasambhava, or Guru Rinpoche (Precious Master) as the Tibetans and Bhutanese call him. In Buddhist history he is seen as the person who is responsible for the introduction of organized Buddhism in Tibet. In one of the Buddhist schools (Nyingma) he is considered the second Buddha.

After that we did a little shopping in Namchi and had lunch. There sure are a lot of Indian tourists here, but I'm the only white person at the moment so I'm being noticed. I buy a nice scarf for the sister of Lama Zeupa because she takes care of me all day and does my laundry. On the way back we take a monk along with us. Anyone

with a car takes hitchhikers, who pay a small amount for the distance they drive along. We stop at a tea-plantation; there are already some flowers visible in the tea bushes. The tea picking doesn't start until April and stops in October.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2012

We are visiting an old uncle of the guide in Kewzing, which has set up a monastery with forty monks. On the property four families live in one house, there's also a guesthouse for fourteen people: seven cottages with each two beds. This looks neat and would be suitable for a retreat. A sixteen-year-old monk cooks us a delicious meal. There are two small, affectionate kittens walking around and lots of chickens, calves and goats. For a second I feel completely at home, it reminds me of our farm in Zeeland where I grew up.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2012

We are visiting a beautiful waterfall and a holy lake where Padmasambhava is said to have been. We are on our way to the town Gyalshing where my guide Yapchung lives. His brother, married to the sister of Lama Zeupa started a bed & breakfast in Gyalshing. As you already expect: I'm sleeping there of course. Most of the money that I'm paying for this trip goes to Lama Zeupa's family. It is a journey along famous Buddhist sites in Sikkim, but since the family lives spread over Sikkim, it is also a journey along this big family. It doesn't matter to me, I think it's

nice, it has a personal touch. I get another box of expensive cookies to hand over to the sister in law and some sweets for the two daughters. Again, I'm the first guest here as well; I get a nice purple room and delicious food.

All towns in Sikkim look alike. They look poor and have the same shops selling the same stuff everywhere. Yet all of these stores can exist. I ask the guide how this is possible. He says: "They all have separate clients." Unbelievable.

Women and men mostly do everything separately. Women stay at home during the day with the kids and do the cooking, laundry and housekeeping and the men go out to work. They are still very traditional. Most women are therefore fatter, because they don't do a lot of movement.

In Kewzin I'm sleeping in a noisy street full of shops. I would rather sleep outside the city overlooking the snowy peaks of the Himalayas ... but hey, we are sponsoring the family, so to speak. I'm going into the town and am once again the only white person. I walk around with the prayer chain and recite the mantra Om Mani Padme Hum (with this you ask for compassion for everyone). People are finding it weird because white Buddhists do not exist for them. White people are always Christians to them.

After lunch we return to Lama Zeupa's family house in Ravangla. On the way back we visit a sacred cave where Padmasambhava meditated. When I enter the cave to meditate, I experience something special: my whole skin begins tingle.

There is also a natural heat source where you can bathe. I entered the warm bath together with my guide. It is suitable for eight people; Men and women have separate hours for bathing. I get undressed and notice that all

men are looking at me. They apparently haven't seen a white man getting undressed that often.

FRIDAY,
DECEMBER 28, 2012

Today was a day off. I'm starting off with yoga in the sun at nine o'clock. Norsang, Lama Zeupa's brother is joining. Everyone here does yoga in his room at six thirty. That's way too chilly for me because around that time it's around freezing point in my room. Around nine o'clock, it's already eighteen degrees in the sun. I decide to clean up the plastic around the house and the monastery. Daisy, Norsang's daughter, helps me. She first asks me what I'm doing; to her it is very common to throw garbage on the ground. I see that really differently. In this beautiful jungle at the foot of the Himalayas, I wouldn't want to encounter empty crisp bags everywhere. It gets clear to me that the consumer society is advancing here as well.

The lunch was amazing again, all home grown vegetables. First, a cup of fresh yogurt, then lentils or spinach soup, white rice, some dried beef with some hot chilli and broccoli. Then take a nap, meditation again and hopefully watching a movie tonight. Norsang ensures me that my TV is getting installed, so I can watch an English movie.

It is a challenge to meditate here. There are about ten young children playing around me the whole day and dogs barking everywhere. But well, my teachers meditate while performing their tasks throughout the whole day. They are already so advanced that external distractions don't matter to them. Lama Zeupa's sister is coming over for dinner tonight, so that will be fun!

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2012

Nine o'clock yoga and then up to the village for a massage from the barber. I get the assistant, which is terrible. He massages my head and the rest of my body way too hard. At one o'clock there is a puja, a prayer song to develop a certain quality within yourself and all other living creatures, such as health, enlightenment and compassion. Because of the holidays they do three in a row. They do the pujas or Sahana's differently and much faster than in our monastery in Belgium and I'm not able to follow them. I find the solution to this by closing my eyes and just let the vibration enter...It works.

Lama Zeupa's house is a fine place. The nuns who are in Bodhgaya now, are coming back on January 3. I will then ask them to do these two sessions in this temple during the day. The temple is quiet; there is a special atmosphere and a pure energy.

As of January 1, 2013 I'm joining a purification retreat until the end of February. That means: at 4:30 am, showering, washing and yoga. From 5:00 to 8:00 pm the first meditation session. Then an hour break and from 9:00 until 12:00 o'clock there's a second meditation session. After lunch the third meditation session from 14:00 to 17:00 and then from 18:00 to 21:00 the fourth meditation session and then it's bedtime. During the purification retreat the food's vegetarian; the portions are moderate and contain no sugar.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2012

We're going to Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, a two and a half-hour drive away. I'm going shopping there, to buy

a cake and look for an Internet café to read my emails. At Lama Zeupa's family home and surroundings, there's no internet or Wi-Fi. On Monday, December 31, I celebrate my birthday, so that on Tuesday, January 1st, 2013 I really begin with the retreat.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 1, 2013

It is not that difficult. The family has gone to bed at midnight, but I wake up at five o'clock anyways. During the Dordjee Sempa-purification practice I extend my energy field to the six levels of existing worlds: gods, demigods, humans, animals, hungry and thirsty ghosts and hell beings. I purify with these existing worlds. A great sense of compassion overwhelms me and I feel the enormous suffering of all living creatures around me. It brings tears to my eyes and I didn't expect that.

There's breakfast at eight o'clock. New French guests arrived, but I'm keeping some distance. I am focusing on the inside and don't want to step out of my build up energy.

After a short walk, I start a visualization session. We purify body, speech and mind from all accumulated impurities and negative actions. I can think of plenty from the past 49 years, so I have no trouble doing this—especially not with all the realms we're including during the purification.

REMY FISH

Every day I walk through the meditation session along a lake nearby. There's always a black catfish swimming about forty inches near me. I give him the name Remy. In this lake, however, there's no other fish to be seen. After a few days I start to feel sorry for him. Norsang, the brother of Lama Zeupa, is in Gangtok that day. I text him if he can bring back four carps, so Remy won't longer be alone. I would then like to get the fish blessed by the fat monk - who eats everything - so I'm sure he leaves the fish alone. The family explains that has no use, because everyone eats everything over here except for small birds. And it's true; I have not seen one deer, rabbit or even rat. So ... Remy is not getting any company from other fish.

A GO-GETTER

In the monastery next to our house there's a ceremony with lunch and I'm going there with Norsang. The roof of the monastery and the welcome gate have been renovated. From eleven till twelve o'clock, I had a clever boy standing next to me, who isn't leaving my side. He repeatedly asked me questions: what movies I liked, what is my favourite flavour ice cream and much more. He apparently wanted to practice his English. I'm trying to shake him off, without any success. I eventually walk back with Norsang towards the lake to meditate. Finally some peace and quiet. But after ten minutes, I see

the same boy walking towards me. I kindly tell him that I am meditating. He says, 'Sorry' and starts watching me from ten meters away. That's not helping either of course. I tell him to return to his mother and luckily he does.

But he is back ten minutes later. He tells me that he got permission from his mother to be taken home by me. I tell him that's not possible, because I'm meditating. 'No problem, sir. I'll wait till you're ready.' Again, He waits for me from a 10 meters distance. I try to continue my meditation, but after two minutes I decide to bring him home to be done with him. He looks at me triumphantly because he's getting what he wants. I never knew a child could already be so dominant. And it does not end there. He kept on talking to me on the way to his house. He asks me if I would like to go jogging (nine years!) with him the next morning and then go swimming in the hot spring close to his house. I tell him that I will probably not have time for that. He tells me he expects me to be at his house at nine o'clock in the morning... We arrive at his house. "Here is my house and there's your house, and this is when we say goodbye," he says firmly.

I got tired from all the talking and I want to go to sleep. After half an hour, someone knocked on my door. I expected it to be tea, which was usually served around four o'clock. But I didn't open the door because I was having a feeling that ... and indeed I see the boy walking away passed the curtains. He installs himself next to Lama Zeupa's sister outside on the grass and asks all kind of questions about me. He comes knocking for a few more times, but I pretend to be sleeping. He eventually leaves disappointed. What a go-getter!

SUNDAY,
JANUARY 13, 2013

After almost two weeks, I notice that my dreams are changing. The first week during the practice of purification, I dreamed about all the events from the past 49 years. Since this weekend that's over and I am now having dreams about the future. In the book of life and death of Tibetan Buddhism it says that at your death you'll end up in a state between death and rebirth for a period of 49 days. During that period, it says you will look back upon your life to observe what went well and which situations caused suffering. After I turned 35 I felt like I was swimming against the current. I found it difficult to accept things from others and a challenge to start something new. "You always want to reinvent yourself," said a former partner to me once. I was definitely good at continuously making up something completely new or different.

My stubborn behaviour and impatience have not made my life easier. Buddhism teaches me to go with the flow, see whatever I get served on my platter and work with that.

By constantly changing myself, I do feel that I have been able to develop my talents and the potential that I have within me, for the most part. It has also helped me to transform into a better human being, without the rough edges. Until I turned 35, 'I' was the main focus. Since I am 35, I'm going to have a more altruistic attitude. For the past fifteen years, I've mostly been putting efforts into helping others develop their talents and find their path. I did this by looking for a job for others, giving them career advice and coaching people on problems at work. Through my yoga and mindfulness classes, I help people to learn to relax, to look at their lives with more clarity and become aware of their talents.

Over the next fifteen years, I am looking more for a combination of both. I want to explore what the best qualities are that I have developed so far and how I can add them to my surroundings. I would like to develop the best within myself in combination with the best for others on a spiritual and financial level.

FRIDAY,
JANUARY 18, 2013

Thanks to repeating more than two thousand mantras every day and holding on to the purification image of dordjee Sempa it's becoming easier to just meditate on nothing. There are still thoughts passing by, but I'm not trying to hold on to them or go into their content.

To my surprise, I discovered that there is a very logical sequence in the construction of the Buddhist teaching. Each completion of a previous module makes access to the next module easier again. I have also noticed that the connection with nature and animals increases tremendously by meditating in the jungle every day. Birds, butterflies, dogs and children come along with me when I'm going for a walk.

MONDAY,
JANUARY 21, 2013

The family puts a break from my purification ritual and wants to make a trip to a warm natural water source a half hour drive away. I want to go back and forth in one day, not lose my rhythm in the purification process. The family wants to stay longer. We'll see, I guess, and we are off with brother, sister-in-law and two children. After

driving an hour and a half through a barren area with a lot of detours, we're almost there. We still had to go by foot for another hour. No problem, because I need to lose weight anyways. Arriving at the bottom, I see about forty straw huts with plastic roofs. Lots of families spend their holidays here, but of course I am the only white here also. We are welcomed with a delicious lunch in one of the huts. It is very hot in the cabin of two by two meters. We are sitting there with ten adults, five children and not to forget the twenty meat-flies that take a bite out of the prepared lunch. Together with the family, I get a cabin assigned. They sleep on straw, but for me they have brought a duvet, mattress and sheets.

There is a toilet above the adjacent river, but this is not used. Everyone goes outside the cabins to urinate or defecate. There is poo and toilet paper everywhere and difficult to find a spot to quietly meditate and do my cleansing mantras. Is there even a hint of wind, then it smells like a cesspool.

Since I 'm getting the feeling that I have to do my purification exercises in a urinal or cesspool, I decided to go to the hot spring. The hot spring fits fifteen people, but there are approximately 150 in it. A man with severe eczema is extensively washing himself and brushing the eczema off. So I'm not going in there and return to my cabin to get some sleep.

But I'm not getting much rest there either. The meat-flies keep bothering me and the cabin is filled with smoke, because the neighbours lit a fire. I grabbed my stuff and decide to leave quietly, because the family was visibly enjoying it. This is too primitive and dirty for Hans, even though I try to adjust myself as good as possible. There are limits!

I'm walking upwards for an hour and a half with the key of the house in my hands. Getting there, I find some

kind of movie star taxi driver heading my way. Unfortunately I do not have a phone with me so I couldn't call and cancel the ordered taxi, so I sent the beautiful wagon away. And then the boy who carries my luggage gets a phone call. My taxi will arrive two hours later ... Grrrr, he didn't tell me he had a cell phone ...

It's already getting dark and cold. I don't want to sit and wait at the side of the road and decide to ring a doorbell at the only house on top of the mountain. There are five boys having beer and I decided to just drink away on this not-fun afternoon. After two hours, a cranky taxi driver arrives and we drive back home in silence. I do have the house to myself now. Delightful!

THURSDAY, JANUARY 24, 2013

Nearby Lama Zeupa's house there is an English boarding school for children aged between three to eleven years. The owner provides education for poor children from surrounding villages. But to continue doing this for one hundred children he needs to find a thousand euros a year. Lama Zeupa has in the meanwhile found sponsors for twelve children (see: www.demazongacademy.com). I agreed with the owner Pema to stop by and give a yoga class to the teachers and the children at the end of February, after they return from their winter break. I also decide to see what the RS Group can offer, such as sponsorship or sending some old laptops for the school.

WEDNESDAY,
JANUARY 30, 2013

While on the way to check my e-mail in the village, Pema, the head of the English school, drove along in the taxi. He tells me he gives two hours of English class in the nunnery next to Lama Zeupa's family. Pema is doing a renovation and so I asked him whether the forty nuns helped him out with, for example, painting. He gave me a surprised look. No, they do nothing for the environment ... and he finds that quite normal. I start asking myself more often what being in a Buddhist monastery is all about.

SATURDAY,
FEBRUARY 9, 2013

On Saturday, February 9th, I experience something special. Every time I'm at the end of a mala-necklace with the 108 mantras, I visualize Dordjee Sempa above me. This fades into the light and then into me, and I fade away into the light... into the void. I then visualize myself as a sun with a rainbow around it. That means you have lost your solid form; it takes a lot of effort in the beginning because you are used to maintaining your own physical shape and individualism

And guess what happened today? There was a rainbow around the sun, we saw it with ten other people... No one had ever seen it before. Coincidence? I'm not sure what to think about it.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN DAISY (10 YEARS)
AND HANS (49)

Mid February, I feel I need a break. Someone brought me a beer and a cola from the village. I am looking for a place where I can watch the beautiful sunset. Cats, dogs (which become my 'friends'), and the children also feel like having some chips and company, so I am sitting with a whole crew. Daisy, the daughter of Lama Zeupa's brother, is ten years' old and speaks good English. I have not spoken to her yet, because she is very shy. So I decide to now challenge her to ask me whatever she likes. Hereby Daisy's questions:

Why are you so sweet to animals? No one cares about animals around her.

'Lama Zeupa noticed that as well. I am very familiar with animals because I grew up on a farm with all kinds of animals: horses, cows, sheep, goats, pigeons, chickens, dogs and cats. I find the importance of animals one of the nice things of Buddhism. They are only one level beneath humans. As a human being you are able to reach a state of enlightenment with your obtained consciousness, Animals do have a potential in their consciousness, but not the ability to become enlightened. A pigeon sitting on a branch does not think: come on, let's meditate for an hour to become enlightened. It's possible for animals to be a reincarnation of people and in the monastery they teach you to look out where you walk.' You're not allowed to consciously step on a crossing worm because they might be your deceased grandmother or maybe become your friend in another life. All the people around

you, will be around you in another life again, but with another appearance or other character, such as an animal.'

My uncle Lama Zeupa is not very friendly and interested in us. Why is that?

'In the monastery in Belgium, other people sometimes also say he's difficult to approach. In Buddhism, detachment is an important tool to experience less pain and suffering. To not attach yourself (too much) to friends, animals or family is part of the Buddhist teaching. I also practiced this detachment by living in a monastery for a year and a half and now by staying in India for about two months. Sharing happiness with my family, friends, colleagues and animals definitely increases my feeling of happiness, but I'm not completely depending on it anymore.

I think Lama Zeupa really enjoys having his family around. Lamas are however trained not to express all their feelings on their face and to have less mood swings by practicing equanimity.

That's why you'll meet quite distant lamas in the monasteries. An open, natural, friendly behaviour isn't something you'll run into much often, except for with the Dalai Lama. Lama Zeupa is like an oyster, he only opens up from time to time. But when Lama Zeupa opens up, you will get to see a warm and friendly man. But definitely that doesn't happen much. '

Don't you feel lonely outside of your own environment?

'No, I haven't felt lonely for ten years. I used to feel lonely occasionally. The Hindu and Buddhist stud-

ies I've done, taught me to feel a part of everything and everyone. You're never alone; you're at all times connected to nature and the people who are around you in the moment. However, sometimes I miss my own environment, like the cosiness and familiarity. '

So how did you banish the feeling of loneliness?

'After being in the monastery for over year, my lama gave me the assignment to go out alone in the village every two weeks. So I went alone to the movies. It was terrible in the beginning, because I was used to going with two or more people. The assignment was to connect myself with all the people in the cinema and to feel at ease about it. Well, that took me a few weeks.

A second way not to feel lonely is by visualizing your family and friends around you. A third method is to become aware of the fact that it increases your happiness when you're also good at being alone. I've been in relationships since I was seventeen until I was thirty-four years old and now I've been alone for fifteen years. So, in the meanwhile, I have proven to be good at being alone.

Don't you feel very lonely because you don't have a partner or children?

'Since I'm not following the training to become a monk anymore, it sure seems nice to have a partner again. I have set marriage and having children as a desire and experience for an upcoming lifetime. Some things are granted to you in this life and others aren't '

SATURDAY,
FEBRUARY 16, 2013

In company of Lama Zeupa, who arrived on February 2nd, I visit the nunnery next to his family home. I'd like to speak to the abbess, the head of the Buddhist nunnery, about the mission, vision and goals of the monastery.

I honestly had my doubts about what I observed. There's trash everywhere around the monastery and the nunnery barely or never helps the people in the village.

I didn't get much of an answer on my first question about her vision and mission for the monastery. The abbess has never been asked that question and told me the nuns were 'normally' trained according to Tibetan tradition. I then ask her about the financial condition of the monastery. The abbess replied that Lama Zeupa's uncle donated the land for the monastery. Local residents and monks from other monasteries donate materials and food. The government also subsidizes a lot, for example with travel tickets.

The conversation gets even more interesting when I ask how she sees the connection between receiving and giving. First there is a counter question: "What do you mean?" I explain, "You receive all kind of thing, but what you are giving back to society?" Basically nothing, she replies. The nuns receive training that is comparable to a primary and high school in Europe. I explain: "What are the students giving back to society during this period?" She's astonished and repeats the question. 'sharing, practicing generosity and finding the balance between receiving and giving is described in the Buddhist teaching in details.' I keep going: 'But your students aren't putting that into practice!' The abbess replied: 'They mainly get taught the theory. How they integrate it into their life after the course is their own responsibility.' I still get a

bit irritated. I explain to her that the owner of the English school, that's across the street from them is now being renovated. Why not offer, for example, to have ten out of fifty nuns help with painting the place.

The abbess tells me they never thought of that. I tell her that I am surprised and a bit disappointed. There is no teaching in the world describing generosity and sharing so extensively as Buddhism. But not much of that is visible in many monasteries.

Finally, I start talking about maintaining the environment around the monastery clean. I have cleaned up all the garbage laying in the close forest and around the monastery, and burned it. Lama Zeupa, who was translating, stops the story ... It's getting a little uncomfortable. We then drink tea and I make a donation in the donation box.

Lama Zeupa later tells me that they're working on changing the attitudes of the nuns. However, he does feel that too many Western people try to project their ideas on these monasteries too much. Cleaning up trash and integrating into society is not common to these nuns. Frankly, I am surprised that it's something that needs to be taught to the nuns. Many locals help the nuns and monks for sometimes three days a week. They also provide the monastery a variety of materials and they regularly provide nuns with some food.

I find studying the Dharma (the teachings of the Buddha) a beautiful thing, and it's good give people the freedom to study it. But it also seems useful to bring the teaching occasionally into practice because the Buddha invited us to practice and experience the things we learn.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2013

I wake up and realize that I'm through with everything. I sure will continue doing the purification exercises the upcoming weeks, but I'm done with this place, the environment and the people. I say goodbye to everyone and thank them for their hospitality. I cancel the yoga classes for the English school, but I do promise to send them five laptops.

I leave the Himalayas by cab. It's a four hours' drive to the big city, where I'd like to change my flight to a week earlier than planned.

I slowly come back into the civilized world and suddenly ask myself: how did I keep up living nearly two months in the jungle? I take a room in a big luxury hotel and after two months of no desserts, ninety percent vegetarian food and a cup of soup in the evening, I now order a pizza, fries, meatballs and a banana split ... Really delicious, but I immediately feel guilty because I had lost quite some weight. I succeeded in changing my flight and am going home a week earlier, to be in the company of family, friends and colleagues.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2013

My friend Sylvia picks me up at the airport. We have breakfast in Amsterdam with real French baguette and croissants. It's lovely to be back in the luxury and comfort. You don't realize what kind of blessed life you're living until you've lived one with fewer possibilities. Beautiful nature and eating directly from the land provide wealth as well, and it has taught me a lot, but I'm glad to be back.

I decided to start a ten days-tour through the Benelux to visit my family, colleagues and friends. A ten-day tour where I'm celebrating all the birthdays and holidays I've missed. I do hope to keep off the seven pounds I've lost.

WEDNESDAY,
MARCH 6, 2013

I have finished the tour through the Benelux and I have truly enjoyed the conviviality. Today I started working again and I notice that I am much brighter. I have a more realistic view on things and I just see them as they are. I'm super quiet on the inside, even though I'm in the middle of life and talking a lot. I am more focused and feel less like judgemental. There is indeed a piece of consciousness that's transformed. According to the books, this transformation is permanent - I wonder if I'm going fall back into my old behavioural patterns. We'll see.

8.

LETTING GO AND DETACHING

LETTING GO

To let go you need love

To let go doesn't mean I don't care anymore,

It means I can't do it or solve it for someone else.

To let go is not to cut myself off,

It is the realization that I can't control another.

To let go is not to enable,

But to allow learning from natural consequences.

To let go is to admit powerlessness,

Which means the outcome is not in my hands.

To let go is to not to try to change or blame another.

I can only change myself.

To let go is not to care for, but to care about.

To let go is not to judge, but to accept another to be human.

To let go is not to adjust everything to my desires,

But to take each day as it comes

And to cherish the moment.

To let go is not to criticize and regulate anyone,
But try to become what I dream I can be.
To let go is not to regret the past,
But to grow and live for the future.
To let go is to fear less
And love more

- *Nelson Mandela* -

When I returned from the Himalayas, I was finding it increasingly difficult to be enthusiastic about leading the RS Group. I felt that I was a bit tired of the recruitment sector and I wanted to develop myself further. The team of the RS Group was the only thing I still enjoyed. These ladies were (and are) fun, enthusiastic, inquisitive and very pleasant to work with. I unexpectedly got an offer from the gym Health City in The Hague to teach two hours of yoga and mindfulness. A nice opportunity and I seized it with both hands. Then, the yoga school LINGGAN approached me. They were looking for a quieter location. The RS Group was located in a beautiful city palace on the Westeinde in The Hague. Riim and Savitri, the owners of LINGGAN, wanted to rent two rooms from us.

This was good because the turnover of my company was decreasing. I had already rented a part of the office to a marketing agency. So LINGGAN's was a gift sent from heaven. I had already arranged spaces in a way to give yoga classes, but it's much more fun to do this together with others. Sharing and connecting had become an important philosophy in life for me and that I could now put into practice. I took my clients in at LINGGAN and started working with them as a freelancer. One reason for this freelance-construction was that I no longer wanted to deal with positioning, marketing and promotion. I just wanted to be a teacher.

Besides giving yoga classes, I started coaching executives. Depending on their needs, I combined Buddhist mindfulness techniques, yoga and Chi Kong with role playing, family or organization, ranging and techniques from neurolinguistic programming, a methodology for training, coaching and communication improvement. I extended the RS Group with the sections RS Coaching and RS Yoga & Mindfulness.

The section RS Group recruitment was going through a difficult and from June 2013, since I earned enough money with coaching and yoga & mindfulness, I decided to give up my salary coming from the recruitment branch of the RS Group. Yet it became increasingly clear that a drastic decision was needed.

In October 2013, the recruiters and I decided that it was better to terminate the rent of the office on the West-einde. The three people in the back office were fired and the recruiters were now working fully from home; still, everyone came together for a meeting once a month.

A week later a proposal dropped down on me from the universe- I do not know how else to explain it - to sell the recruitment branch of the RS Group to the franchisees; on January 1, 2014 we completed the sale to two franchisees for a what felt like a reasonable amount. They complement each other well and are certainly capable of ensuring that the organization will still be there in five years' time. Once I transferred everything correctly, I began my new future on January 1, 2014.

AND THEN YOU TURN FIFTY

On January 2, 2014, I turned fifty years' old. To celebrate, I had booked a restaurant in The Hague for a lunch with my 35 closest friends and colleagues.

I had strongly simplified my lifestyle the past few years, so I didn't want any presents for my birthday. I did put down a box for people who wanted to contribute to a yoga trip I wanted to take to Formentera in Spain.

Simplifying my life meant that in five years I went from three houses, three offices, three teams, three mail-boxes and three groups of friends in Brussels, Antwerp and The Hague to one house, one group of friends and no

office. The stuff from two of my houses has been partly sold via Marktplaats and some is stored in three containers.

The process of spiritual growth makes me want to detach myself from material things and concentrate on what really matters in life: friendship, love, compassion, sharing, connecting, adding your strengths to society, health and freedom. Thanks to this simpler lifestyle, I feel much more free.

I now live in an apartment that I bought fifteen years ago. It was a good investment and has been regularly rented. In The Hague, I first lived in the basement of the City Palace, where the RS Group was located. In return, I was expected to take care of the neglected garden of a thousand square meters and the courtyard, and keep the side street tidy. In two years, my mother, stepfather, several gardeners and I, reconstructed the whole garden, which hadn't been taken care of for fifteen years.

I decided to redecorate the basement. In collaboration with the landlord I painted and plastered, and built a lighting system.

It was very nice to see that my stuff from my flats in Brussels and Antwerp fit perfectly in this basement. I rented the basement from an event agency, but six months after having everything nicely redone, I was informed that they wanted it back and use it themselves ... and there goes my paradise! But the Buddha would say, "A good test for letting go and detachment."

I couldn't go back to my apartment at that time because it was leased. Luckily I was able to stay in my friends' house for free next to my own apartment. They do development work and are therefore regularly abroad for an extended period of time.

After four months I was able to move back to my

own home. I then realized that I'm working for fifteen years with a process of letting go of: my beliefs, my identification, my ego, my cats, my house, my friends and my family. Until you get to a point when there's nothing to let go of. The Buddha says: 'What cannot be released is ultimately the essence within yourself.'

But I still had one important step to make on the path of detachment: letting go of my Porsche.

SAYING GOODBYE TO MY PORSCHE

I see and hear my Porsche driving away; a nice sound and a stylish image. Despite my desire to detach from material things it caused me pain in my heart to say farewell to this car in my fifties. An asset manager from Brussels had bought the Porsche, exactly to celebrate his fiftieth birthday ... That proved once again: nothing is a coincidence.

When I saw the Porsche driving away I immediately felt that I had made a mistake. This wasn't necessary. I'm taking this letting go and detachment to the extremes. My teacher in the monastery had already warned me that this really isn't necessary. Slowly, I'm beginning to really experience what the Buddha meant by finding a balance. Living in the woods with little food was too much for the Buddha as well. Following the path between rich and poor and between possessions and no possessions was also the best for him.

I honestly did not expect that selling the Porsche would touch me emotionally, because I had already detached myself from so many people, animals and stuff. But I was still overwhelmed by a feeling of sadness. The car had been a "mobile support" to me during difficult times. Whatever happened, I at least had the Porsche.

The Porsche was a gift from my parents for, despite my dyslexia, being able to graduate. My oldest brother got a speedboat when he graduated from high school and my twin brother a sailboat.

It was a beautiful, dark-green Porsche 911 Targa Coupe with green tinted glass, green leather upholstery and Fuchs rims. This Porsche had helped me out with relationships and jobs. During my relationships, I often drove along in the car of my lovers, but once the relationship ended I would still have the Porsche. I used it efficiently and so it still looked like new despite the 193,000 driven miles.

A new lesson about detachment! I soon discovered that I could not completely live without a car. Travelling by train isn't cheap and not always practical because it makes it difficult to get to some of the places where I give mindfulness courses. So I bought a Smart again.

Also, I keep looking for the right place to live. I would still like to live among nature rather than in the city centre of The Hague. So, I'll put up my apartment for rent again. In short, I keep looking for the right balance.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

As of January 1, 2014, I dedicate myself to the mission I was striving for since 2000 in a new way:

Creating Awareness. That means helping people get an understanding of their thinking and behavioural patterns.

With this understanding, it becomes easier for anyone to create their own life

To achieve this, I use coaching, a mindfulness training of eight weeks, workshops and yoga and mindfulness-

weekend retreats at the monastery of Huy in the Belgian Ardennes. The first few months went well. I explored the development of teaching material for my courses and visited locations in several cities for my mindfulness training.

Then I broke my calf- and shinbone. I had to wear a plaster for a week and thought it was awful. The plaster gave me a sense of claustrophobia and itching and I wanted to tear it off. Luckily I was able to recognize everything, accept and transform it into a neutral or positive feeling. Convenient right, these acquired techniques! I quickly arranged substitutes for my mindfulness training so it could go on.

What is the meaning of breaking my foot, I wondered. I looked it up in *The Key to Self-Liberation* written by Christiane Beerlandt. The book gives the following explanation: You're not standing firmly on your own two feet and you are afraid to choose your own direction. You feel oppressed in a "sprained" direction that does not suit you and you are afraid to choose your own. Direction Well, I could not quite contextualize this. Of course I was in a transition from being a director of a recruitment agency to becoming a teacher and mindfulness coach. However, I felt ready for this and had created the right conditions to be able to do this.

My inner voice then said, "Actually, you wanted to take a year off to write a book. However, you started DOING all kinds of new things, like teaching yoga on three different schools and several mindfulness courses, which leaves you no time to write."

My father had also started writing a book, but he never finished it. But I was going to!

After a week, I had surgery on my ankle. After the surgery, I no longer wanted to wear a plaster and the surgeons gave in after a lot of nagging.

I had made quite a fuss about it, because as a yoga teacher - who plans on teaching until he is 104 - I couldn't afford a difficult movable foot.

I did one body scan every day; I wanted to prove that it can cure twice as fast.

I breathed the pain and inflammation downwards - I visualized them disappearing through my leg - and breathed in love upwards through the sole of my foot up. I quickly got much better.

For the past two years I've been giving a yoga and mindfulness weekend in May and September including: Chi Kong, a quiet walk in nature, delicious vegetarian food, hatha yoga sessions, meditation sessions and a teaching of Tibetan teacher Lama Zeupa.

Four weeks after the operation it turned out too early for me to give this weekend retreat in Huy. A friend wanted to drive me there, but I could not do all the exercises. But the cosmos helped me! Corinne, a certified mindfulness trainer, called me and asked if she could assist to gain some experience. The Tibetan cook of the institute led the walk in nature and Chookela, Lama Zeupa's sister gave the yoga class. It turned out to be a wonderful weekend and I was grateful for all the help I got. Moreover, my shoulders were getting more muscular from all those stairs and hills I had to climb on my crutches.

After six weeks, I went to the surgeon for a check-up. He was surprised that my foot had healed so well. I was as recovered after six weeks as others were after three or four months. So I had proven that my foot had healed twice as fast thanks to my meditations. But of course also thanks to the good care and love from everyone around me.

For a while I lived from another perspective, of a temporarily disabled person, and it wasn't that bad. I ex-

perienced the healing power of yoga and meditation, and this could be shared with others.

They received the lesson my body taught me. The book I wanted to write is out now. It's all in your hands. And I also returned the vows of chastity, I also returned, I'm open for a relationship.

PART 2

HOW DO YOU
TRANSFORM
YOUR
THINKING AND
BEHAVIOURAL
PATTERNS?

9.

MINDFULNESS INTO PRACTICE

THE EIGHTEENTH CAMEL

An old, experienced man meets by chance three young boys, during his trip through the desert. They are standing desperate, helpless and sad in front of a flock of camels. 'What happened, my friends,' the old man asks. 'what burdens you?'

The three young men begin to chaotically speak at once.

It takes a while before the rider gets it: the father of the boys, three brothers, has passed away. He left his sons this flock of camels, seventeen in total. According to his will, the oldest gets half, the second gets one third and the youngest should get a ninth part. The three had tried everything already, but they couldn't split the camels according to their father's wish.

The old man stares thoughtfully in front of him and then says: 'Here, add my camel to it and let us see what happens. Half of eighteen - because that's how many camels there are now - is nine. That's for the eldest. Six camels, one third, go to the second son, and a ninth, two camels, is for the youngest. Nine and six and two is together seventeen. My camels remains for me.' saying these word, the old man mounts his camel again and continues on his way.

- source unknown -



Sharing and connecting are my principles with coaching, yoga classes and mindfulness trainings. In this chapter, I want to explain my philosophy behind my work. In the subsequent chapters, I explain meditation, tips for meditation and clarify a few principles of Buddhism.

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE?

People are tired of over consuming. They're only filling a void with it. The I-era of the past century is fortunately now changing to a WE-era. There's an increasing need to do something for society, nature or the fellow humans again. People are looking to connect to each other again. To achieve this connection and to make sure it's sustainable, it's important to first discover your own potential. To answer the questions: Who am I? What am I capable of? You'll get more understanding about who you are and you'll be able to focus on the WE and the world around you again.

CONNECTING

Firstly, it might look egocentric: only focusing on developing your own talents and self-knowledge. On the contrary, by increasing your self-knowledge, you'll better understand the world around you, you are more open to it. Only when you know who you are or want to be, you can connect to the world around you as an individual and mean something to it.

Bianca Vermeij says some interesting things about this type of connection in her article 'Engaged Buddhism: connecting and taking a stand': "When I feel angry, for ex-

ample, because I've done something in another way than I wanted to, or because someone else has done something different than how I wanted it, I experience a sense of shrinking, of seclusion, a narrow field of vision, tunnel vision. I'm not connected to the anger, but my mind is very much focused on what the anger has "caused". (...) When an object of desire or hatred dominates our mind, the environment, the needs of others surrounding us are no longer clear. (...) I'm in a hurry and see people as just objects that stand in the way; I do not "See" them. When desire or irritation rule, there is no connection to ourselves, but also not with others, no engagement.'

The autopilot, which we turn on regularly, ensures that the connection with yourself gets disconnected. You're not paying attention anymore, because you think: I have seen this before; I'm familiar with it already. In those situations, you often see people making mistakes, because they are not mindful, not involved in the moment and the world around them.

Buddhism is one of the ways to develop the connection between an individual and his environment further. But it is not the only way. The life wisdoms of people like Jesus, saint Francis or Gandhi have more in common with the life lessons of the Buddha than differences.

Many religions have developed ways to make you a better person: practicing ethical principles, singing prayers and mantras or performing rituals and offerings. The aim is to make you live in harmony with yourself and your surroundings. Buddhism lays the key to your happiness within yourself and that's why it has developed many ways to transform yourself and reduce disturbed emotions like ignorance, disgust, fear, greed, jealousy, pride and selfishness.

I apply all the knowledge I have gained during my study of Buddhism, in my coaching and mindfulness

trainings. I agree with Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen teacher, who says, “If you’re awake, you cannot fail to act with compassion to help lighten the suffering that you see around you. Buddhism must therefore be involved in what is happening in the world. If not, then it is not Buddhism.”

According to Buddhism, self-knowledge can grow in three ways. The first way is to look at yourself and to overthink your thinking and behavioural patterns. The second way to increase self-knowledge is with reflection. It is important to reflect on your behaviour towards another individual or a group. Buddhism says that it will give you additional insights about yourself beside the internal vision. The third way is to increase your self-knowledge through an external source, such as a teacher or a book.

When CONNECTING, it’s important to connect with yourself, but also to connect with others. So you communicate your knowledge to others, share your experiences and put them into practice. If you do that with the right intention and motivation of truly wanting to reduce the suffering within yourself and OTHERS, then your self-knowledge will grow a hundred times faster than when you sit in a cave. It’s fine to detach yourself for self-reflection for a while, but you’ll eventually have to put the gained insights into practice and test them out.

SHARING your knowledge and experience with the right intention and motivation has a great effect on others. We are all connected to each other, one organism, in a way. If you look at life with this perception, you’ll be more tolerant and more in harmony with yourself and your surroundings.

Sharing is actually multiplying to me. With us all we are one. I used to get annoyed how guests were treated by my parents. They got the best seat at the table, the finest bed and the best food. Now, I see the value of the parts

that I have learned from my parents. That's how an important foundation got laid for how I treat people. Putting others in the first place. REDUCING your EGO. Although I found it difficult as a child...

MINDFULNESS

To help people on the path of self-knowledge I give mindfulness trainings, awareness trainings to teach how to live with the right awareness, attention and concentration in the moment. The Buddha described the eightfold path to enlightenment: 1) the right understanding, 2) the right thoughts, 3) speaking right, 4) right action, 5) the right livelihood, 6) right effort, 7) the right concentration and meditation, and 8) the right insight and wisdom. A clear and logical path to gain more self-knowledge.

The seventh part of the eightfold path of the Buddha is the right concentration and meditation. In the seventies, Jon Kabat-Zinn developed this seventh part further into mindfulness. These techniques are now used all over the world. Kabat-Zinn is the founder and former director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the health center of the University of Massachusetts, to which he was connected as a professor. He developed techniques for mindfulness training to teach people how to cope with stress, anxiety, pain and illness. He called his program Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). His mission is to bring mindfulness training into the picture within mainstream medicine and within society as a whole.

Kabat-Zinn has made significant contributions to modern health care. He did research on the interaction between body and mind, and to the clinical application of mindfulness training for people with chronic pain and stress-related complaints.

In 1979, Kabat-Zinn began teaching MBSR. He initially worked with end-stage patients with chronic pain and / or stress symptoms and gave them an eight-week course to teach them how to cope with their pain, sorrow and grief. In MBSR they use a combination of meditation and hatha yoga, with the aim to be aware of the moment.

RECOGNIZING, ACCEPTING, TRANSFORMING

The main focus in my mindfulness training is the awareness of your behavioural- and thinking patterns. This involves three main phases: recognizing, accepting and transforming. By recognizing your thinking and behavioural patterns and then accepting them you will be able to observe yourself. You can increase what you find pleasant and reduce what you find unpleasant.

During the awakening process, I focus on three levels: physical, emotional and mental. Just like Kabat-Zinn, I hereby make use of yoga. Yoga provides awareness and self-understanding through the practice of body and breathing exercises and meditation. You learn to ask yourself - and to answer: Who am I? What am I capable of? And: What do I want?

Thanks to yoga and meditation exercises you will gradually see your own life as a process. This way you will be able to recognize the path that has been laid out for you and walk it.

Yoga and meditation furthermore stimulate finding your potential talents. You can further develop these talents and implement them in society. This will give you fulfilment and you will experience life in a more meaningful way.

MINDFULNESS FOR BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Besides coaching individuals, I also coach teams and managers in the corporate world. I mainly coach the growth towards the new leadership style of servant leadership (see Chapter 6 “A monk in business”). These executives want their company to grow into a more open, transparent and consensus-driven organization.

Company Mindfulness Trainings can be given depending on the goals of the organization or human resources. Examples of these goals include: stress reduction, concentration and efficiency improvements, reducing absenteeism, raising awareness on a physical, emotional or mental level, finding a better balance between private life and work life or making the organization operate in harmony during an organizational change. When making the transformation to a consensus organization, it means there is a lot of attention going to the manager and too little attention to the employees. They also need to undergo a change.

Company mindfulness can contribute to the journey of discovery to developing a consensus organization with a servant leader. The goal of the training is to make the employees and managers develop their own potential as well as possible in conjunction with the goals of the company.

I also give seminars and lectures on mindfulness and servant leadership, and I am a member of the Speakers’ Academy. On my website there’s a presentation I gave in Amsterdam on 18th November 2010 about the servant leader (serving leadership) and the consensus organisation. Paul de Blot, professor of spirituality and connected to the Nyenrode Business University in Breukelen, has contributed wonderfully to this concept. I in-

vited him to explain about the concept of servant leadership even further. That was a great success. He touched everyone's heart when he invited the people in the room to see the organization as family. The way you deal with each other in a family and support each other can be introduced into an organization. In our minds, we make a division between work and private, while it is one world.

In the past few years I have promoted (company) mindfulness within several management teams and on strategy days of all kinds of organisations. A true integration of yoga classes and mindfulness on the work floor on a weekly basis still seems difficult. During this time of recession, they are mainly focused on cost savings and not on the wellbeing of the employees. Doing more with fewer people seems very normal to the employers. An extra expense is not something they're waiting for. The costs are minimal however.

I ask 175 euro for one hour of mindfulness to companies. The employees can sign up for free. Suppose, four hours in a month means a cost of 700 euros a month. I have an average of ten till sixty participants in such a class. The total amount equals a dinner of the management team. Of course there is also the lack of knowledge about mindfulness, which gives companies cold feet. They're not aware of the benefits yet, like lowering the stress of employees, improving productivity and encouraging creativity and thinking 'out of the box'.

Personally, I think the most important profit is the increase of self-understanding of people. This leads to more motivated people in the organization, a bigger sense of responsibility and involvement.

The importance of (business) mindfulness is gradually being recognized. Aegon, for example, hired me to give awareness training as a part of their vitality program. I asked the employees who signed up for these work-

shops to make a flipchart at home with the questions: What would I like to improve in my performance in business? What gives me energy and what doesn't give me energy? Where do I want to be in a year: professionally and privately? The self-awareness increased, the employees coached each other with the planned arrangements and were ecstatic after the workshop. We are now looking at whether mindfulness can get a permanent place within the organization.

The Ministry of Finances, Nike, Achmea, Schiphol and other organizations have already integrated yoga or mindfulness on a weekly basis. The Rabobank has quiet rooms in their new offices.

Prioritizing wellbeing of employees is slowly but surely getting more important to organisations. They are even hiring Health- or vitality managers in advanced companies.

What's more fun than being an attractive employer who puts the wellbeing of his employees first? Especially younger employees like having a good balance between their work and private lives. If that's what you have to offer them, you will attract the most talented young people.

MEDITATION AND BUDDHISM

In the following chapters I explain meditation and what you can and cannot expect from it. I have discussed Yoga theoretically in the previous chapters.

In chapters 10 and 11 I explain what meditation is and give some tips on how to practice meditation in the best way. In Chapter 12, I discuss the five poisons of the mind and I go deeper into judgment and prejudices.

Who do you want to be? That is the main question in chapter 13. In the last two chapters, I will discuss some

aspects of the dharma, the ideas of the Buddha, which aims to become more of ourselves and redeem us from suffering. In Chapter 14, I discuss the meditation on the four immensities and Chapter 15 point out the six paramitas or transcendent virtues. The last two chapters are especially meant for those who want to dig deeper into the background of Buddhism.

10.

WHAT IS MEDITATING ACTUALLY?

In silence opens,
What was closed for so long.
Eyes see what was hidden.
Fear does not hold that very much longer.

In silence you give life
If the other likes to listen.
Life which you can pass on
To whoever wants to hear.

In silence you get love
If you let the other in.
If you let your worries
sink within yourself for a while.

In the silence
When your hands open up like flowers
You will, if you listen carefully
Understand god's word again.

- From: de Abdij van Berne -

There are many different forms of meditation. Within Buddhism meditation has been extensively practised for over 2500 years as the most important way to get to know your own mind and work on your happiness.

Some frequently asked questions about meditation are:

- What are disturbing emotions?
- What is meditation?
- Can meditation be dangerous? Can it make you go crazy?
- What types of meditation are there?
- What are the benefits of meditation?
- Are there goals to be reached during meditation or is meditation itself the goal?
- After meditation, I feel disoriented. How can I ensure that this feeling doesn't remain?
- In meditation, I sometimes feel scared. Why is that?
- What are guided meditations?
- What are the benefits of attending a mindfulness training or a longer retreat?

Through the answers on these questions, you'll get an impression of the different aspects of meditation. For this, I have thankfully used the knowledge collected by the Maitreya Instituut, which is published on the website www.maitreya.nl.

WHAT ARE DISTURBING EMOTIONS?

Our mind is often disturbed by emotions of anger, fear, lust, pride, or by evoking thoughts that make us restless. All these emotions arise from ignorance, from not knowing or not being familiar with the true nature of existence.

Everyone knows from personal experience that we make mistakes when we don't understand something and still try it out. Someone who does not know how to drive a car but still goes sitting behind the wheel is guaranteed to cause problems.

The same applies to our mind. Take a look at, for example, desire. This may be the desire of a woman for a man or vice versa, or the desire for material things. If you were to follow this desire, there will be a moment when you won't be able to think about anything else except for the desire. At that moment you are ruled by this desire and you follow it like a slave.

That situation makes the mind restless and we feel discontent. Suppose you try to understand these explanations in this book but, at the same time, in your mind you're with a friend in Amsterdam or Leeuwarden or wherever and you are constantly thinking about that person. Then it makes sense to say that your mind is very restless and you won't be able follow anything explained here.

Generally, there are times when we are peaceful and are able to focus our attention on something, but there are also times when we, due a particular strong desire, or other disturbing emotions such as anger or irritation, no longer have control over our own minds, and are swept along by these emotions.

Anger is an even better example. Experience shows us that a person who is naturally peaceful, is also able to act in an aggressive way once he is really angry. No one feels comfortable when being angry and on top of that it makes others unhappy.

Another disturbing emotion is pride, especially pride that comes from our overconfidence, when we consider ourselves superior to others. This pride can be based on certain qualities, having a beautiful body

or mastering a movement technique. But this pride excludes us from having an objective and sincere contact with other people. We feel so elevated above everyone that we are not able to communicate normally.

Disturbing thoughts, or ‘mulling over things’, are also disturbing emotions. The constant repetition of certain thoughts and not being able to stop that train of thoughts makes us restless. In Tibetan, We call this aimless mulling: *nam tok*, which means unnecessary thinking. For example unnecessarily worrying about something or cherishing all kinds of desires that aren’t achievable anyways. Many people are deeply disturbed due to purposeless and unnecessary thoughts.

Fortunately, there is a remedy to transform the unhappy feelings constructively: meditation.

WHAT IS MEDITATION?

The Tibetan word for meditation is *gum*, which means ‘to accustom’ or ‘make itself familiar’. By meditating you accustom yourself to a positive and realistic attitude. Meditating is not sitting with your legs in a knot with a sacred expression on your face. Meditating is a state of mind. Even with the body in the perfect posture, we don’t truly meditate when our mind is restless and randomly thinking of all kinds of people or things.

During meditation you transform your confused, hasty thoughts and viewpoints in a way that they correspond to reality. We transform agitation and anger into, for example, more compassion and love.

We are often caught up in our own confusing emotions and have prejudices about ourselves and the world. With meditation, we try to create space and clarity in our own mind.

As disturbing factors in our minds diminish, we attain a piece of happiness. In all Buddhist scriptures it is regularly advised to frequently evaluate your mind and investigate which disturbed emotion in your own individual case has the most influence.

You should tackle that particular disturbed emotion first. For one person, it's anger, for another it might be pride or desire. The best and most effective meditations are the ones that decrease our disturbing emotions.

Most meditations are superficial nowadays. That is not very surprising. With only a little practice and a single concentration technique it is possible to escape from the stress and anxiety that we experience throughout the day. Even though such meditation is not very profound and does not go very far, they do reduce stress and anxiety. One way doesn't have to rule out another. It is fine to learn a meditation technique to escape the stress of daily life and at the same time realize that we need to meditate more to overcome our disturbing emotions.

HUMAN OR ANIMAL

'Don't think that researching and understanding the nature of your mind is only an oriental" trip ". That is a wrong idea; it is not an oriental trip, it's your trip. How can you detach your body, or the image that you hold of yourself from your mind?
(...) Through thorough research you will realize that when your whole life is dedicated to looking for happiness through things like chocolate and ice cream, it doesn't really make sense that you are born as a human being. As humans, we have a broader consciousness than animals, even though,

like animals, we have the same attitude in life. When you think you are intelligent, it's possible for you to aim your goals higher than a chicken can!

(...) A strong jet needs a good pilot; the pilot of your mind would be wisdom, who understands the nature of your mind. You can then send powerful energy to improving your life, instead of running around uncontrollably like a wild elephant that destroys yourself and others. '

Off: Be your own therapist by Lama Thubten Yeshe

CAN MEDITATION BE DANGEROUS? CAN IT MAKE YOU GO CRAZY?

To meditate it is necessary to get some directions from a reliable teacher. Some people think they can invent their own way of meditating and don't need a teacher. This is very unwise, because we are also capable of teaching ourselves harmful thinking patterns and habits.

Many people teach meditation nowadays and it is wise to first inform yourself about who you're dealing with. We can trust Buddhist meditation practices that have already been passed on for thousands of years. The exercises haven't been made up by some random person, with no knowledge about possible harmful effects.

WHAT TYPES OF MEDITATION ARE THERE?

Buddha taught a wide variety of meditation techniques. There are two major schools of meditation: meditation

to develop calmness and concentration (shamatha) and meditation to develop analytical skills, insight and wisdom (vipassana).

Besides that, there are all types of meditation with a specific purpose, such as simple meditations that help you become calmer or that make sure you'll worry less for no reason.

Other forms of meditation will help you master specific emotions such as anger, attachment, jealousy, or develop a positive and realistic attitude towards other people. Furthermore, there are cleansing meditations to cleanse you from negative activities (karma) and stop gnawing feelings of guilt.

And types of meditations that make you look over your fantasies, build up realistic self-confidence and a positive self-image.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF MEDITATION?

During meditation, you build up a positive state of mind, causing your behaviour in daily life to gradually change. It's possible to experience these meditation results very quickly. You may, for example, become less angry and better able to make decisions; you become less dissatisfied or restless.

It is important to meditate every day, even for a short amount of time. It is best to do this in the morning, before you start your day. Especially in this stressful modern society, it is very important to think about what you are doing and have done and why.

Each person spends a lot of time each day feeding the body. So why not spend some time each day to feed

the mind? That's equally important for a healthy and happy life.

ARE THERE GOALS TO BE REACHED DURING MEDITATION OR IS MEDITATION ITSELF IS THE GOAL?

It depends on how you use meditation. If meditation is used as a relaxation exercise, then the goal is relaxation and it won't take you any further. If you integrate meditation into a spiritual path, it will take you further. Within the Buddhist tradition meditating ultimately leads to liberation and Buddhahood.

AFTER MEDITATION, I FEEL DISORIENTED. HOW CAN I ENSURE THAT THIS FEELING DOESN'T REMAIN?

If you have experienced a strong sense of spaciousness during meditation, it may be that right after, you feel as if you're not back in normal reality. That's because your mind has let go of your common perception of reality; when it has nothing to cling on to, it has no choice but to let go.

Initially, you may feel unbalanced after meditation, but that feeling won't last. Soon you will feel more at ease in the mental space that meditation gives. If the feeling continues, try a concentration meditation like a meditation on the breath.

Or make sure you bring your attention to your feet and breathe towards your feet, so your sense of grounding comes back.

IN MEDITATION, I SOMETIMES FEEL SCARED. WHY IS THAT?

Fear is often a sign that the exercise is working. If you feel anxiety during meditation, it is because changes are taking place: your common ways of thinking and old self-image are no longer matching. At first, you may feel some confusion in finding yourself in such a new area.

WHAT ARE GUIDED MEDITATIONS?

Guided meditations are group meditations, guided by a teacher or an advanced student. For example, during analytical meditations and visualizations, the teacher explains what you can think about it and what you can visualize.

It starts with, for example some prayers, followed by the actual meditation. The closure consists of dedicating the positive energy to all living creatures. If you meditate in a group, the experience is usually much stronger. Especially when this meditation lasts several days and there is little distraction. Our mind becomes more focused and more open.

What are the benefits of attending a mindfulness training or a longer retreat?

Daily life is very busy. We are so immersed in the joy of the senses and our various social obligations, that a retreat or mindfulness training is the only moment we have to relax. In a retreat situation you can't escape looking deeply at yourself and meeting yourself.

A retreat also provides time to put the knowledge you obtain, the development of affection and loving kindness, directly into practice. You get directly into practice.

The same applies to mindfulness training that last for several weeks.

MEDITATION EXERCISES WITH HANS KLOOSTERMAN

	Form Hindi	Content	Translation into Tibetan
1	Shamatha-meditation	Concentration meditation	Shinee-meditation
2	Vipassana-meditation	Insightmeditation	Lhagtong-meditation
3	Samadi-meditation	Non-dual meditation	Mahamoedra-meditation

No. 1: Shinee meditation (Shamatha) can be done in three ways:

Goal: It teaches you to hold your attention, fixation, focus, and realize stillness.

Why?: For relaxation, reducing thoughts, reducing distractions, to stay in the moment, to increase your clarity, to prepare you for the vipassana (insight meditation).

Methods

a. Meditating on the breath

You follow your breath second by second to learn to stay in the moment and your concentration will increase.

The meditations can be listened on my website:

www.hanskloosterman.com/nl/publicaties/meditaties.

b. Meditating on an object outside of you

Put a random object in front of you and return your attention to the object second by second.

c. Meditating on an object in your imagination

Place an object in your mind and visualize the object clearly, like a mirage. The quality of this meditation is determined by how well you are able to visualize the image clearly, every single second without being distracted.

Each guided meditation is a film of objects / images in your mind. Examples of these meditations: mindful walking, short and long body scan, short and long sitting meditation, mountain and lake meditation.

You can listen to these meditations on my website as well: www.hanskloosterman.com/nl/publicaties/meditaties

2. Lhagtong-meditation (Vipassana). Analytical or insight meditation

Goal: to analyse your physical, emotional or mental state and thereby obtain insights and wisdom.

Why?: To increase your clarity, self-understanding, expand your consciousness, takes you further into the process from being unconscious to becoming aware, from ignorance to knowing, helps you see the absolute reality instead of the relative reality.

Methods

a. Breathing space and coping.

This is a combination of shamatha while focusing on the breath, to quiet the mind; you take a subject in mind that you would like to improve. What is wisdom? Constantly returning to this question will eventually bring you an insight or a solution to your problem. By obtaining the insight, you will be able to move further and put it into practice. You meditate to improve your connection with yourself or others

in your daily life.

b. Work with opposing forces on an individual level (tenang)

You may observe that you are, for example, very impatient. First, you will want to take this to a more neutral feeling and then to a positive feeling. Start with the Shamatha while focusing on the breath and analyse what is bothering you. You can concentrate on physical or emotional sensations or the content of your thoughts.

Examples:

- *Physical problems.* You have pain in your stomach. You focus on your pain in the stomach and ask where the pain is coming from. What is the cause? Then how would you be able to improve it? You keep going back to the question and see if an insight shows up to you in the form of an image, text, or other insights. Then, you can send positive energy and love to that place and observe if the pain subsides.
- *Emotional problems.* If you are having trouble feeling loved. You meditate on why you are not loved. What is the cause? After analysing this, you concentrate on the question: how can I improve this? For example: breathe in love to yourself and breath out the feeling of not being loved.
- *Thoughts.* If you continuously have negative thoughts or too many thoughts. What is the cause? After analysing this question, you concentrate on how you can improve this. Again, you can breathe in positive thoughts and breath out negative thoughts. Or in case of too many thoughts: breathe in silence and breathe out the overflowing amount of thoughts.

c. Work with opposing forces + the contribution of Compassion (Tonglen).

You start with shamatha while focusing on the breath. You visualize your greatest disruptive emotion such as anger. Then you breathe in the anger of all living creatures into your right nostril, you hold your breath to burn all the anger in your heart. Then breathe out love from the heart through your left nostril. Your anger will decrease as well as those of others. When you are actively trying to reduce the suffering of others (= compassion), you automatically decrease your own suffering.

Try out the exercises for one week. Observe yourself during and after the exercise and see what is changing on a physical, emotional and mental level. Write down in a notebook or on your computer, what you observe each day.

Physical observing includes: heat differences, itching, pain, stress and physical relaxation. Emotional sensations take place in the mind and include: sadness, hate, fear, anger and jealousy. Mental observation looks at the questions: How many thoughts are there? Many or a few? Are they positive or negative? Related to the past or the future? Indeed, there are 54 categories of thought. Note that: any physical or emotional sensation eventually becomes a thought. You, for example, feel pain in your foot and that eventually becomes a thought: I'm in pain. You become and are therefore your thoughts.

Listen to or download the meditations on:

www.hanskloosterman.com/nl/publicaties/meditaties

3. Mahamoedra meditation (Samadi)

Mahamoedra means ‘The great symbol’ or ‘the great seal of reality’ (the things as they are). The Great Seal defines the sequential series of exercises and meditations, as well as the awakened state of enlightenment to which they lead. It is the essence of the whole Buddhist teaching and the highest form of meditation. The state of Samadi is not easy to achieve. You become free of the process of attraction and rejection. It’s a condition in which you no longer reach out to the content of things. You reach a state of non-duality. You rest in the true nature of mind: your Buddha nature, your core that is peaceful, timeless and spaceless. Understanding and achieving this state requires the guidance of an experienced teacher and a lot of study and practice.

For my mindfulness training, I combine these forms of meditation with yoga sessions. Many people are sceptical about meditation and distrustful view. I recommend the scientists among us to watch the following documentaries: *Effect of meditation on the brain* of VPRO Labyrinth, an interesting online documentary (www.wetenschap24.nl) and *Scientists investigate meditation* of BOS (www.bosrtv.com).

11.

**MEDITATING WITH
VISUALISATION
OF NATURE**

BACK TO NATURE

There was a man, I won't say who he was,
Who loved nature,

At least, that's what he thought,
Because he had heard that there was a lot to find there

The silence, freedom, happiness and yourself and stuff,
enough anyway to visit it once

- *Rutger Kopland* -

For me it is important to be in nature regularly. It puts me into balance and I am constantly amazed about her beauty. Nature gives me strength. When I walk in nature or bike, I breathe in the green energy of nature and breathe out my own individual energy; so I become more in touch with the sense of 'WE'. My ego and individuality are reduced and I charge myself with the energy and power of nature. I have a serving and giving profession and so it is important to continuously charge myself to be able to give enough.

My teacher says that if I master the power of visualization and concentration well enough, I can also charge myself on a distance wit, for example, the power and energy of the jungle in Sikkim, where I meditated for three months. I pull it off sometimes, but I also think it's nice to actually feel nature around me, like a warm blanket. The more I am charged, the more I can give.

Francoise Vaal (www.vaal-counselling.nl) has created a blog of 365 days about going back to nature. In her last blog on day 365, she writes: "Making the connection to nature has let me experience how it is to exist without "thinking ". For me, "experiencing", with all the senses that enrich me (and along with that putting the thinking / worrying / analysing off), has become the way to Be. Because nature is just one big example of Being. And since I, as a person, originate from nature and have a lot of senses in common with other organisms, it is natural to feel comfortable there.

MEDITATION AND YOGA

When the weather allows it, I teach on the roof or in the courtyard of my yoga studio in the centre of The Hague. The effect of the exercises is much stronger outside in

nature than when you are doing the exercises inside. The meditative walk on the grass is a different experience than doing it on the plastic tiles on the roof. I will talk about three meditations with the subject nature, focusing on inner peace, increasing energy, stability, grounding and experiencing space.

WALKING MEDITATION

The breath is always there. It is natural and rhythmic. Just like breathing, walking has a natural rhythm as well; it can help you to develop peace, stability and awareness. Walking meditation can always be practiced. It is a useful exercise to improve concentration. If you feel drained and inactive, you can use this meditation instead of a sitting meditation.

The art of walking meditation is to learn to hold our attention while walking. The natural movement of each step is used to develop observation. The rhythmic and the repetitive act of walking stabilize the breath and at the same time the thoughts. Now try out the walking meditation in less formal circumstances, like during a lunch break, after a day of hard work or during a vacation.

For the description of the walking meditation below, I used the Meditations by Jane Hope.

WALKING MEDITATION EXERCISE

Find a quiet place where you can take at least ten to twenty steps in a straight line. Walking in circles in a small room is not the best way to practice a walking meditation. For an optimal result, walk barefoot.

1. Go and stand at the end of your route. Find a standing posture that feels stable and balanced. Feel the space around you, before you, above and behind you. Feel your feet placed firmly on the ground and the energy that rises up from the ground to your crown.
2. Place your hands, if you like, in the Shashu position to increase the feeling of concentration. The Shashu position is as following: make a fist of your left hand, enclosing your thumb. Cover the fist with your right hand and keep both hands slightly above your belly button.
3. Focus on the feet. Feel your feet on the ground and the texture of the ground or floor.
4. Slowly start walking. Keep your pace dignified and relaxed, but not majestic or devout. Bring your attention back to your body.
5. Be aware of every step when lifting up your leg and placing your foot on the ground. Feel the contact with the ground and your heel, your foot, and finally your toes. Feel the change in balance when you stand on one foot after the other.
6. Relax your body consciously. Ensure that your walking is easy and natural.
7. You will notice that your mind wanders. If the thoughts are brief and temporary, then just turn back to the movement of walking, or focus on the movement of the breath.
8. Turn your attention back to walking. You don't have to punish yourself for straying off. Simply acknowledge that you have had thoughts and focus again on the now.
9. Initially practice five minutes and build it up to fifteen minutes. Many people are surprised how much concentration walking meditation re-

quires. After some practice, you can use the walking meditation to focus during daily activities and to be in your body in a more observant way.

Question: I don't seem to make any progress with the walking meditation. What should I do?

Answer: It takes time to acquire a new skill.

Playing the piano can't be learned after two or three lessons. You go through a long process of constantly repeating exercises. Learning to meditate also takes time.

It is also possible that, due to your desire to see instant results, you're not seeing the step-by-step progress that you're already making. It's as if you're taking a walk on a foggy day. You do not notice getting wet, because it happens gradually. You are often the last person to notice that you've changed, but one day you suddenly no longer feel so tense and have fewer problems.

MOUNTAIN MEDITATION

You sit in the meditation posture in a quiet pleasant place. Close your eyes and become aware of the contact with the ground. You anchor yourself, so to speak, in your lower body, from which the upper body rises. Feel the stability and strength of the ground and give it your attention. Your head is straight, your shoulders are relaxed and the shoulder blades gently come together to open your chest. Your hands are resting on your knees, in your lap or on each other.

1. Now bring your attention to the flow of the breath: observe and feel each inhalation and each exhalation.
2. Just observe how the breath is without trying to change and come fully in this moment.

3. Then visualize a majestic mountain. Let the image of this mountain become clearer. See the shape, the top, the sloped sides, and solid base that is firmly grounded in the earth. Observe the mountain while remaining anchored in your body and notice how massive and powerful he is, just himself in the midst of all changes.
4. See whether it is possible to become one with that mountain, so that you'll become one with the enormous strength and stability of the mountain. Become the mountain. Ensure that there's a firm contact with the ground. Let your mind become one with the top of the mountain. Let your shoulders and arms become one with the slopes of the mountain while your buttocks and legs provide a solid base with the ground or with the chair.
5. Become a breathing mountain. Experience the breath deep into your belly when inhaling, and also feel the uprising power from the ground as you exhale. Increasingly, become the breathing mountain from your base with each breath.
6. Sit still and stable as a mountain. Moment by moment, breath after breath.
7. Experience a powerful, unmovable presence.
8. The beauty and the glory of the mountain remain. Whether it is in the sunlight or between the clouds, daytime or night-time. The mountain just stays itself. Untouched by what comes. Sometimes visited by storms and violent winds. During all this, the mountain remains settled in its majestic power. Unmoved by the weather, unmoved by what comes and goes. Sometimes we experience severe storms in our own mind and body. We are bombarded by winds, by cold and

rain. We undergo periods of darkness and pain and periods of joy and pleasure. By connecting to the quality of the mountain, we will be able to, even in the midst of changes during our lives, highs and lows, be present with the stability and the strength of the mountain. The mountain remains the mountain, while seasons merge into each other.

9. Just sitting in the middle of the continuous duality that presents itself in our lives. Sitting with an open heart and an open mind, based in the stability of the mountain. Fully present to the spectrum that life has to offer; open to the richness of this unique moment.
10. Be open to what presents itself, open to the experience of life, firmly settled in the body. See what's coming and just let it be. See what's going and let it go. Open your mind to the moments of light and moments of darkness, the moments of colour and moments of drabness. Without attachment or aversion.
11. While you remain in the stability of the mountain, you'll also be able to connect more and more with the expanse of the sky that is silhouetted on the mountain. The qualities of openness and space. And how clouds come and go. The wind comes and goes, and how there is a storm sometimes.
12. In the midst of all these changes the sky remains the sky. Whether it's sunny or rainy. The sky remains untouched in its essence. See if you can emotionally make a contact with the qualities of the sky. The qualities of awareness itself. Bright, vivid, stretched out, silent, all bearing and embracing.

13. Observe how thoughts and emotions are something transient. Just like the clouds in the sky or like the weather above the mountain. And take the things that come on our path, less personally, but as something that comes and goes. Sometimes there is praise, sometimes there is criticism. Sometimes there is joy and sometimes there is pain. Just give space to what is coming. It is here now anyways.
14. Give space to what is there. Allowing and letting be. Including the feelings of irritation, aversion or attachment. Experiencing while staying anchored in the stability of the mountain and the openness of heaven. And discover some of the totality of life, life fully, and thus maybe also discover a deep silence and wisdom that can inspire in all aspects of life. That's what that mountain and the sky are able to teach us.
15. If you feel that something is touching you, then you might allow it if it inspires you further. Simply acknowledge the possibility to meet life with the qualities of the mountain life. That unmovable peace, majestic power, the staying centred in the midst of all the changes. However, combined with the qualities of the sky, with the openness and softness that we can apply at any time. Thus, the mountain and sky inspire us to meet, whatever is offered on our way, with respect and kind attention.

LAKE MEDITATION

When doing a lake meditation you lie down as stretched out lake, as comfortable as possible. If necessary, put a

pillow under your knees and neck. Depending on what feels pleasant, you can close your eyes or leave them open.

1. Focus your attention on your body and breath. Become aware of the contact that you are making with the floor with your back, your arms, shoulders, buttocks, legs and heels. Become aware of the belly and the chest rising with each inhalation, and descending with each exhalation. Experience the breath like a wave going through your body.
2. Visualize a lake. A lake can be deep or shallow, it can be blue or green, or another colour. It may be blurry or clear. Look at the fact that water always moves towards the depth. Water lies in its own bed without any effort and takes its own form effortlessly but very precisely.
3. Without wind, the surface is calm and smooth. As a mirror, it reflects everything around it. The trees, rocks, the magnificent sky and clouds, the birds flying over the lake. The lake is simple, natural and relaxed, present in the landscape and reflects whatever is nearby undistorted.
4. But it won't always be quiet on the lake. It might storm on the lake. Just like it might storm in our lives. The surface becomes restless. The wind will cause waves. Perhaps small waves, maybe big crashing waves with crests on them, and the reflection gets distorted or perhaps even disappears. The sunlight can then still sparkle and dance on the waves, like a blanket with sparkling diamonds. And when the night falls, it is the moon's turn to dance on the lake. If the surface becomes calm again, the lake will reflect the moon together with the shadows of the trees and rocks.

5. During winter, ice can form on the surface. Even though the water can take all kinds of different shapes, the lake always stays itself. While you are lying here and sinking deeper into the mat with each outbreath, you might be able to, just like the water coming from the mountains and accumulating in the lake, bring your attention to the depth of the lake. Let body and mind melt with the image of the lake. Let the experience carry this moment with the openness and responsiveness, with which the earth carries the water.
6. Mirror anything that comes close. While you are lying here, you might want to look at the different energies that move through your own body, mind and heart. The flow of thoughts and feelings, impulses and reactions that come and go, like waves going up and down.
7. Make contact with the different energies that play in the lake: wind, waves, light and shadow. Make contact with your thoughts and feelings. Maybe they disturb the surface and clarity of the lake of your mind. Perhaps they make the water muddy and blurry. Will you allow that? Aren't waves a part of the lake?
8. Perhaps it is not only possible to identify yourself with the surface of the lake, but with the whole lake in all its depth. So you can become aware of the peace under the surface. Because no matter how intense the storm on the surface is, deep in the lake there is only a slight agitation noticeable. The storm only touches the surface. A few meters deeper you will get to a place that is not affected by the storm.
9. Maybe you can, in the same way, keep in touch with the lake, in your meditation and in your eve-

ryday life. Not only with the changing content and intensity of your thoughts and feelings, but also with the immeasurable awareness just below the surface of your mind. The lake can teach us and help us remember ourselves. You can use the image of the lake to deepen your meditation. You can also use it more as a guide in the world, as the days unfold. And thus carry along a solid supply of mindfulness in your heart.

Question: Since I started meditating, it seems like I have twice as much thoughts and have become more neurotic than I was before. What is going wrong?

Answer: There is nothing wrong. When we begin to meditate, we want to see results as soon as possible. We hear that we can become calm and focused through meditation and want to experience that immediately. In some way, we expect that meditation is a pill that instantly creates results. What happens, according to me, is that you become aware of many things now that you are meditating.

When we want to change things in our lives, our motivation usually leans on low self-worth or even aversion to ourselves. Through meditation you learn to open up for who you really are. Meditating is about becoming your own friend, and for that you need patience. The first step to appreciate yourself is to accept all the things that we don't like about ourselves. Seeing clearly is the first and most important step. At first it may however feel uncomfortable, because the brightness is unfamiliar and we are not used to it.

These meditations can be downloaded from my website:
www.hanskloosterman.com.

12.

THE FIVE MENTAL POISONS

(PRE) JUDGING

A boy was ashamed to leave his house, because he thought that people would think him ugly. His father told him that he shouldn't worry so much about what other people thought and that he should follow his own thoughts and heart. He suggested to his son to walk with him to the market the following days.

On the first day, his father rode the donkey and the child walked along. When they were on their way they could hear how passersby criticized the father because he was letting a little child walk during the hottest time of the day.

On the second day, the child rode the donkey, while his father walked next to him. This time people commented on how disrespectful the child was for letting an old man walk while comfortably sitting on the saddle himself.

On the third day, they came to the market, both walking next to the donkey. They heard people talking about how dumb they were: 'Don't they know how to sit on a donkey?'

The next day, the father and the son sat on the donkey together, and the people were upset about that they were so cruel to burden the animal in such a way.

On the fifth day, they carried the donkey on their shoulders. Everyone at the market laughed at them and embarrassed them.

The wise man then said to his son: 'you see, no matter what you do, there will always be people who will prejudge you.'

- *Aesopus* -

Many Tibetans, recite the mantra Om Mani Padme Hum, not only during prayer or meditation, but many recite the mantra almost continuously during the day. The mantra can be found in prayer wheels, in rocks, amulets and certainly on the lips of most Tibetan pilgrims in Tibet.

By saying the mantra, creatures get freed from suffering by the five mental poisons, which correspond to the six realms in which you can return after reincarnation.

Om frees of pride, the main reason for a rebirth in the world of gods.

Ma frees from jealousy, the main reason for a rebirth in the demigods world.

Ni frees from lust and passion, the main reason for a rebirth in the human world.

Pa frees from ignorance, the main reason for a rebirth in the animal world.

Dme frees from attachment, the main reason for a rebirth in the world of hungry ghosts.

Hum frees from anger, the main reason for a rebirth in the hell world.

There are very many ways to explain the mantra and it is said that it contains all the teachings of the Buddha. Reciting the mantra gives a particularly strong positive energy to the whole world, because we get inspired by it to be more compassionate and apply more wisdom.

PERSONAL PROCESS

If I look around me, I see that judging and condemning today cause a lot of suffering in the world. All of this can

be traced back to the five mental poisons: ignorance, attraction (lust and passion), rejection (fear and anger), jealousy and pride. Many attempt to create a situation around them where they can get what they want. When failing at it, there is suffering. In the same way we try to keep out and reject negative people, unpleasant situations and negative emotions. We do this mainly by judging or prejudging people and situations.

We have about 40,000 to 60,000 thoughts a day and fifty per cent of consists of judgments. This is the biggest poison of the mind. Judging will cost you a lot of energy every day and it's unnecessary. You experience more happiness when you don't judge, and you will lose less energy.

By learning not to judge, I got more encouraged to work on myself and I put less blame of the causes of my suffering on someone else. I started accepting people or situations more as they are and thus the feeling of the attraction or the rejection of people or situations decreased. My tolerance and equanimity have thereby absolutely grown.

In Buddhism it's no virtue to (pre)judge. It is important to reduce it in your mind. In Buddhism, the idea of interdependence is a very important idea to meditate on. The Bernardry says that nothing exists in isolation. Something can only exist by the grace of something else. You're here because your mother and father did something together. Your parents are here because ... and so on. Your judgments and prejudgments come from somewhere. In Buddhism, it is important to gain the insight about why you judge. That knowledge will result in less judging and more happiness. Self-awareness and happiness are inextricably connected to each other.

JUDGING

According to author Marisa Garau, our brain likes to quickly judge and to divide reality in good and bad. It makes life simpler and clearer. This might be useful in some situations, because it's necessary sometimes to make decisions quickly. However, it also has disadvantages. Quick judgments attenuate our existence and because it is a strong and impulsive reaction, it does not leave enough room for a neutral answer on difficult, stressful situations.

Moreover, judging is also not good for our health because it promotes the unnecessary production of stress hormones. Nevertheless, we often make automatically all day all sorts of judgements about everything around us. Once we understand how stressful and depressing our judgmental behaviour actually is, we can let it go and thus become more open to the multi-coloured reality. The reality is as it is and can surprisingly manage to remain well without our exhausting judgments, states Garau.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JUDGMENT AND OPINION

An opinion is often accomplished without people knowing the whole story, without having looked at it from someone else's perspective, or without having asked someone else what really is going on. When such an unfounded judgment come across you, you often feel threatened personally and resistance.

An opinion is a personal statement without involving the other in the process.

You can't say: 'You do not have discipline, you never

clean anything up and that's why it is always a mess over here.' A better way to formulate that is: 'I cannot stand clutter. You do. Can we look at how we can solve that?'

Learning to communicate without judging (or to blame) is conducting an open dialogue from your heart. This means that you remain true to yourself, you share whatever it is that you want and what you need.

You can't be pointing any fingers, because then it is a judgment. So you open up the situation by saying what's important to you and where you like to go instead of judging another and give them a negative feeling.

Such an open arrangement makes conversation go easier and makes your intention to reach a positive solution clearer, not to prejudge one another.

What helps to communicate more from within your heart and to not judge?

- To have the vision that we are all equal.
- Accept that people are good as they are.
- Put yourself in someone else's shoes.

SEPARATING JUDGMENT FROM AN OPINION

Suppose you have a friend who talks a lot (judgment). When you meet, she keeps on rattling on the whole time, but once you want try to start telling your own story, she usually leaves. You want to say something about it, but you do not know how.

Judgment: I find her dominant and it leaves little space for me (not a fact + negative message + pointing fingers).

Opinion: I think there must be a balance between telling her and my story (fact + neutral message + no pointing fingers).

The solution is to communicate from your heart. Indicate how you experience something without attacking the other. Once you bring someone in a defence mode, a positive end often become impossible.

Learning to communicate from the heart brings harmony within yourself and harmony in relation to the other.

How do you handle the situation with the excessive talking friend? Invite her to come over and tell her that you would like to have a personal conversation with her about a certain subject. Now make sure there is a friendly atmosphere, where you both feel at ease.

One suggestion for addressing this conversation: “I wanted to talk to you about our encounters. I find them very nice, cosy and inspiring. But I find myself mostly listening during our conversations. And I like doing that, because your stories are very nice and you are very important to me as a friend. For that reason, I would like to share my own stories with you as well. But due to listening attitude I’m often not assertive enough to get through with my stories in between your stories. I’ve decided to bring change into that and also to share more of what is keeping me busy. I think that will make me feel better during our meetings. What do you think of that? And would you like to help me with that? “

And then see how it ends.....

CONCENTRATING ON THE BREATH TO REDUCE (PRE)JUDGMENTS

Negative thoughts and judgments can be reduced by yoga, concentration on the breath and meditation course. These exercises help to reduce the number of, mostly

negative, thoughts.

Marisa Garau gives a practical example in her book *Haal Meer Uit Je Leven Met Mindfulness* of a concentration exercise on the breath. Breathing with awareness brings us directly into the present moment, where there is no good or bad, but just the reality as it is. If something happens that you really cannot approve, Garau advises you to not form a judgment anyway, but to become aware of situation and to force yourself to deeply breathe in and out.

Breathe in and out.

Breathe in and out.

Feel your belly slightly expands and falls back again.

Breathe in and out.

When your mind is being stimulated to judge and to react, you can use the breath to control the urge that usually makes you judge blindly. Concentrating on the breath transports you straight to the here and now. And once in the now, the subconscious mind doesn't have any other option than to let go of its short-sighted judgments and sharp opinions.

So stick to your breathing.

Breathe in and out.

Breathe in and out.

First breath calmly before you speak. And say for example: 'I do not know yet, I have to think about my answer.' Walk away or just shut up.

With this exercise you will notice that breathing with awareness in contrast to reacting impulsively and unaware – is creating a healthy distance between the issue and the social pressures that often comes along with it. Due to that distance, clarity can occur, so that you look at

the situation in a peaceful and mindful way. It may even happen that you won't have to say anything, which is often better; you will prevent painful words being said, to yourself or to others. In such a moment of mindfulness, you are the master and not the slave of your judgmental mind.

One additional exercise: when you breathe calmly and answer a stressful situation peacefully and aware, pay attention to the people around you. You will see that they will calm down as well. The issue will not escalate, because you have no extra judgements, stress and drama to add.

Meditation and visualization against (pre) judgments

In my classes I practice releasing eternal judgments. Besides concentrating on the breath, I also teach meditation methods as I've discussed before.

I am myself all day alert of judgments or negative thoughts. I try not to suppress them but to recognize, accept and then transform or remove them.

One of my methods to reduce my thoughts during the day is to visualize the screen on my audio system. It shows a graph of the measured pitches. On the installation, you can adjust the higher and lower tones. In my mind, I bring that chart pitches back to a straight line and then my thoughts become quiet.

Another method is to visualize a rough sea. In my mind, I transform the sea into becoming calmer until the sea eventually becomes completely flat. In my classes I teach you how to implement this visualisation fast and effectively to remain in the here and now and not to get sucked in by judgment or conflict.

13.

WHO WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE? MEDITATIONS ON YOUR CHAKRAS.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous,
talented, fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be?

You are a child of God. We were born to make manifest the
glory of God that is within us. .

And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give
other people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence auto-
matically liberates others.

*- Marianne Williamson (recited by Nelson Mandela during his
inauguration as a president of South- Africa) -*

Talent is God given. Be humble.
Fame is man-given. Be grateful.
Conceit is self-given. Be careful.

- *John Wooden* -

The practice of concentration or mindfulness meditation (shamatha) and insight meditation (vipassana) is part of all Buddhist traditions. Mindfulness meditation is the basis for the journey to self-knowledge. In this section, I will rely partly on the text of Yoga Centre Shambhala Netherlands. Anyone who wishes to learn more can go to their website: www.shambhala.nl.

With mindfulness meditation you focus on controlling your mind. The aim is to try to overcome all sorts of worries and tension, as well as all kinds of familiar thinking patterns, so that we will be able to look at ourselves better.

Life is not simple and often filled with huge responsibilities. With mindfulness, we can reduce everything to a simple level. We call it the journey or the path (dharma), pointed out by Buddha: repeatedly trying to recognize that we can relax and just be who we are. Practicing meditation starts by simplifying everything. We sit on a cushion, follow our breath and observe our thoughts. That's all.

Mindfulness meditation helps you realize that our life is a series of all sorts of moment and that we cannot deal with more than one moment at a time. Even though we have memories of the past and ideas about the future, we can only truly experience the present. We may feel that thoughts about the past or the future, enrich our lives, but by not paying attention to the current situation is precisely what makes real life pass us by. There is nothing we can do about the past and the future is completely unknown.

It is important to understand that this is not getting to a 'higher level' or reaching a higher state of mind. The focus point in Buddhism is not that our current situation is unworthy. On the contrary, the current situation is accessible and open-minded, and we can begin to see that by practicing mindfulness meditation.

DISCOVER WHO YOU ARE

In meditation we discover over and over again who and what we are. That can be quite frightening, or rather boring, but after a while it sinks away. You'll also find that we are repeatedly getting distracted from our original state, our natural being. During the day everything pulls us away from our natural attention, our being present. We are too scared or too ashamed or too proud, or just too maniacal to be who we are. The mind is constantly looking for complexity rather than simplicity. Through mindfulness meditation fear and anxiety will disappear. We get into this kind of natural rhythm and begin to discover our minds and our hearts in a fundamental way.

The Buddha also just became the Buddha by simply sitting. He sat under a tree and didn't move. He did nothing but practice mindfulness meditation. The most important thing the Buddha discovered was that he could be himself completely. The Buddha, "the Awakened One", woke up and realized that he did not have to try to be different from what he was. The entire message of Buddhism is to no longer rediscover who we are.

By living mindfully, you don't only discover who we are, it also improves our functioning, says Ellen Langer, an American psychology professor. If we regularly take the time to practice mindfulness meditation, we will strengthen our immune system according to Langer, our happiness and energy level rise, we improve our memory and creativity and we learn to accept ourselves more but also others.

OVERCOME OBSTACLES

What Mindful Meditation also brings up, is the vision you have of yourself, your self-image. You will also find

that the self-image consists of all sorts of convictions that may stand in the way of reaching your own talents or potential.

In his book *Choose the life you want*, Tal Ben-Shahar says that we all have an idea about the way we are or the way we believe we should be.

This self-image can have a positive influence on us, but it can also hurt us. The self-image could for example contain the following: “I am intelligent,” “I am attractive ‘or’ I have empathy.” On the other hand it can also contain limiting beliefs like “I have to be perfect,” “I’m bad at maths” or “I’m worthless.” The image, whether positive or negative, finds its origin in a message that we used to receive as children from adults, or in an experience or even a deep-rooted cultural norm.

These self-images are obstacles you have to overcome to get to yourself. Below I have included a list I developed myself that might help you to get your self-image clear, but also be who you want to be.

If you like to have everything perfect, then you will often have thoughts like: ‘I’m not good enough’ or ‘I cannot make any mistakes.’ These beliefs cost lots of energy. It is better to replace them by messages are more helpful, as “I allow myself to be human,” I play and am playful. “

The negative messages don’t disappear immediately and perhaps never completely. If we persist in using alternative messages, the negative messages will over time disappear from the centre of our thoughts, lose their overwhelming power and exert less influence on us. Ben-Shahar checks each day his list of messages that he wants to teach himself. He spends half a minute on each message, thinking of what the message means to him and imagines and feels how it would be if he would be who he wants to be. Instead of responding to an image that you are given, you create your own image and your own destiny.

Fill in the table in appendix 4 on the messages that you are giving yourself and what messages you would like to give yourself to become more of who you are. You can complete the list from a business or private point of view. The number 1 is extremely poor and the number 10 means excellent.

MODESTY

Changing a self-image is hard work, says Ben-Shahar. But no mountain was climbed, no useful purpose was achieved without perseverance. Ben-Shahar emphasizes that whenever he feels like giving up, he reminds himself that no one is immune to feelings of doubt and uncertainty: “That all people who have achieved something great, had to pull themselves through times and were seduced by the singing sirens of surrendering. But they stayed on course to their destination and when they took a temporary break it was only in case of needed and deserved rest. There are moments when I feel like throwing the towel in the ring, I feel like giving up my ambitions and aimlessly drifting along with the flow. At such a moment, I remember that the only way to realize my dreams is perseverance, dedication and hard work. “

And even when you succeed in this, you're not there yet. It is important to protect yourself from becoming arrogant or immodest. Arrogance is a sign of insecurity and a lack of confidence. Modesty is the hallmark of someone with a good sense of self-esteem. If I respect myself, I'll probably be more modest in my behaviour, because there is no need to place myself higher in the eyes of others in order to “fix” my wounded self-esteem. If I appreciate myself, I don't feel compelled to flaunt my successes and brandish my trophies.

INSECURITY ISN'T MODESTY

Rabbi Simcha Bunim always said we should walk around with two pieces of paper in our pocket, one with the text 'The world was created for me' and the other with the words: 'I am not more than dust and ashes.' Together, these pieces of papers should help achieve an emotional balance. If we feel down, then the first one will remind us that of how important we really are. When we imagine ourselves being overconfident and invulnerable, the second paper reminds us of our humble origins and the ultimate end.

Ben-Shahar also cites the psychologist Abraham Maslow, from the pyramid of Maslow. According to Maslow, both an excess of confidence as well an excess of insecurity stand in the way of our growth. If you are arrogant and proud, you will probably hit your head and experience frustration and disappointment.

If you do not believe in your talents, you will probably not succeed. Maslow wrote that integration of humility and pride is absolutely necessary for creative work. You must not only be aware of the divine possibilities you have, but also of the existing human limitations.

Imagine yourself carrying these two pieces of paper in your pocket. Remind yourself of their messages, so you will find a healthy balance between humility and pride.

CHAKRA-MEDITATION

If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavours to live the life that he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.

- Henry David Thoreau -

Mindfulness and insight meditation are a good way to get an insight within yourself. With a chakra meditation you can explore your potential, to become aware of you want to be and how to become it. In my classes I teach these forms of meditation.

WHAT ARE CHAKRAS?

Chakra (Pali: chakka, Tibetan: khorlo) is a term coming from the traditional Indian culture / religion for places in the presumed ethero double or energy body of humans, which within that tradition are considered important for their life force. Chakra (Sanskrit: cakram) means circle or wheel.

Physiological or other medical influences of chakras on the human body are not scientifically proven, nor the existence of chakras themselves. It is a metaphysical / philosophical concept.

THE SEVEN CHAKRAS

There are many interpretations and explanations of the term chakra, depending on tradition and cultural differences. Most traditions use the following seven chakras.

First Chakra - Muladhara

Muladhara means root and this root chakra is located just below the tailbone.

The Muladhara would be the link between the body, the earth and the way you move in the world. Each chakra has physical, emotional and spiritual components.

Physically the first chakra is associated with problems in the lower back, colon, bones, hips and buttocks. All of these parts are included in the lower part of the body, where the first chakra is located as well. These are mostly the solid parts that provide support and the base, such as the pelvis.

Second chakra - Swadisthana

Swadhisthana means sweetness, and is situated at the height of the sacrum. This is also called the sacral chakra. The Swadhisthana (sacral chakra) is connected to the gonad, genitalia, sacrum, pelvis, uterus, kidney, bladder, blood circulation and water control.

Third chakra - Manipura

Manipura means shining jewel or filled with crystals and is situated at the height of the navel.

The Manipura (navel chakra) is seen as the main venue for saving up energy. It is associated with the pancreas, stomach, gall bladder, liver, spleen, small intestine, stomach cavity and vegetative nervous system. This chakra controls the digestion and has a great influence on the operation of the lower body, the stomach, liver and spleen.

Fourth Chakra - Anahata

Anahata means unharmed and intact, and is situated at the height of the heart.

The Anahata (heart chakra) connects the lower three chakras of the instincts with the three upper chakras of the higher human consciousness.

This chakra controls the operation of the heart, the lungs and the breathing. A stable circulation, a strong heart, a healthy heart rhythm and a deep, relaxed breathing indicate that the heart chakra is in balance.

Fifth Chakra - Vishuddha

Vishuddha, also called Vishuddhi, is situated at the height of the throat.

The Vishuddha (throat chakra) forms the body's sound and speech centre. It connects the heart centre with the forehead chakra and is considered the mediator between feeling and thinking. This chakra makes them tune in with each other and ensures that, for example, the ratio is in balance.

Sixth Chakra - Ajna

Ajna is located on the forehead and is also called the third eye chakra.

The Ajna (third eye chakra) provides, as a spiritual centre, of attention and awareness. An important symbol of the sixth chakra is Shakti Hakini, an androgynous god who represents both the male and female aspect (duality is transcended).

The Ajna-chakra provides the connection with the spiritual world and opens the gates to intuitive knowledge and refers to a reality that emerges once the dualistic perception of the world is transcended and the thoughts are calmed. Because the forehead chakra affects the operation of all endocrine glands, it is essential for health.

Seventh Chakra - Sahasrara

Sahasrara is located above the head.

The Sahasrara (crown chakra) is associated with spirituality and enlightenment. The seventh chakra has to do with the pursuit of higher states of consciousness. An opened seventh chakra causes a feeling of deep peace and harmony, beyond duality. This leads to experiences of total happiness and brings the connection to a reality that is beyond thought. The energy of this chakra can cause one to reach the Mahatma, 'the great soul'.

MORE OR LESS CHAKRAS

According to Tantrism (shaktism) there are eight instead of seven chakras. Bindu is an extra, seventh chakra, which makes Sahasrara shift a number making it the eighth chakra.

There are also movements who presume there are fourteen chakras, whereby the remaining seven chakras reach further into the universe. Various Tibetan Buddhist movements know only five chakras.

CHAKRA MEDITATIONS

BECOME WHO YOU WANT TO BE!

This meditation increases your visual ability, your ability to focus and the understanding within yourself.

1. Sit down in the meditation posture.
2. Breathe thrice seven full breaths, which slows down your breathing and makes you focus even more on your breathing.
3. Visualize or feel the force and heat of the sun and let it shine through your body.
4. Concentrate on your lower chakra and visualize a closed red flower that slowly opens up by the warmth of the sunlight.
5. Ask the question: Who am I physically, emotionally and mentally? Keep returning to the question until you have a clear understanding of who you are. Not who you would like to be, but who you are at this moment. Think about this for two minutes.
6. Then go to the second chakra. Visualize a closed orange flower that opens up slowly by sunlight and the warmth of the sunlight. Take your time. Work on your concentration and visualization ability to optimize the effect of the exercise.
7. Then go to the third chakra. Visualize a closed yellow flower that opens up slowly.
8. Connect the lower three physical chakras with the breath and ask again: Who am I?

9. Go to your heart chakra, the fourth chakra, and visualize a closed green flower. The flower opens up slowly by the heat of the sun.
10. Ask the question: What is my potential? What are my strengths: physically, emotionally and mentally?
11. Go to the fifth chakra, the throat chakra, and visualize a dense blue flower. The heat of the sun slowly opens up this flower.
12. Go to the forehead chakra between the eyebrows and visualize a closed purple flower. The heat of the sun slowly opens this flower.
13. Ask yourself: Who would I like to be: physically, emotionally and mentally? Take a few minutes to formulate and visualize this well.
14. Go to the head chakra and visualize a closed white flower. The heat of the sun slowly opens this flower. When the flower is fully open, send whoever you want to be, the better version of yourself, into the universe.

MEDITATION ON OPENING CHAKRAS THROUGH SOUND

Working with the vibrations and sounds can help to open up the chakras. As known, it is very important that the chakras are opened in the right way, making a good flow, connection and exchange possible with and between the chakras. Our chakras determine for a large part who we are. By tuning the sounds of the chakras, you'll be able to feel the chakras well - even that they're actually opening. This increases your awareness of the chakras. The chakras all have a colour. These colours help you focus during the visualization process.

Exercise

1. Drag your attention and the corresponding tone to the first chakra. The tone is described in the exercise below. Sing the sounds of this chakra on the pitch that feels right to you. Simultaneously visualize the colour associated with the chakra. Feel how the sound resonates with this chakra and feel how the chakra gets purified and cleansed.
2. Then ask the question associated with this chakra and look what's happening on a physical, emotional or mental level. Is there a picture or insight?
3. Then do the same with the second chakra and keep on going. Go through the chakras following their order and if you want to re-start, begin with the first red base-chakra.

The sounds and colours of the chakras are:

Chakra 1

Base-chakra (tailbone)

Sound: OOOO

Colour: red

The words that you can use here: I AM

Chakra 2

Sacral chakra (sacrum)

Sound: OOOE

Colour: orange

The words that you can use here: I CAN

Chakra 3

Solar Plexus-chakra (navel)

Sound: AAHH

Colour: yellow

The words that you can use here: I WANT

Chakra 4

Heart-chakra

Sound: EEEE

Colour: green

The words that you can use here: I AM LOVED

Chakra 5

Throat-chakra

Sound: IIEE

Colour: blue

The words that you can use here: I AM HEARD

chakra 6

Third eye-chakra (forehead)

Sound: MMMM

Colour: purple

The words that you can use here: I SEE

Chakra 7

Crown-chakra

Sound: NNGG

Colour: White

The words that you can use here: I KNOW

14.

**MEDITATION ON
THE FOUR
IMMEASURABLES**

Delay. Delay. Delay your step.
Walk slower than your heartbeat asks.
Slow down. Slow down.
And disappear modestly.
Don't take your time.
Allow the time to take you.
Allow

- *Leonard Nolens* -

Many people notice that meditation enables them to handle life better. They start to control their emotions and a certain balance develops within their lives. At that point many of us have the desire to protect that relative calmness by shielding themselves from the chaos of other people. But meditation shouldn't be used to isolate ourselves from others, because that would be a self-centred and selfish discipline. Ultimately, we have to open our hearts and face our relationships and the chaotic reality.

Meditating helps develop two skills that soften the harshness in our heart. The first is a clear view of the world and ourselves. After several months of practice, we become aware of everything that happens in the mind. We are able to see our negativity clearly, feel our anger, cowardice, jealousy and egoism. As we face this negativity, we don't have to project them on others.

The second skill that meditation develops is trust, kindness and gentleness of the heart. We learn that despite the negativity in us, we have an amazing ability to experience emotions and love. The combination of these two resolves any feelings of self-hatred. That's the first step to true compassion for others.

FUNCTION OF THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES

Meditation on the four immensities: equanimity, loving kindness, compassion, and joy - is important to develop in yourself and then connect yourself with the world, says Traleg Kyabgon in his book *Mind at Ease*. The meditation on the four immeasurable is a Buddhist practice that offers us the possibility to have a dialogue with the world instead of seeing the world as a reality that needs

to be rejected, resisted, defeated or which should and can be escaped.

In the Pali there are four immeasurables mentioned:

1. **Upekkha** – equanimity
2. **Metta** – loving kindness
3. **Karuna** – compassion
4. **Mudita** – joy

By using the four immeasurables to focus on other people, the ‘self’ will transform without having to focus obsessively on our own well-being.

When there is too much emphasis on discovering the self, we might not find what is worth discovering. The important Buddhist teacher Shantideva says about this: ‘The more we exclusively focus on ourselves and exclude relationships with others during our practice, the more the personal irritation, frustration and despair will increase. The more we focus on the personal experiences in relation to another, the more we will look at our own experience differently. With the result of finding it easier to be more loving than hateful more compassionate than rejecting, and cheerful instead of depressed.’

The meditations on the four immeasurables are designed to bring the feelings, emotions and thoughts up within yourself and increase the ones that have a positive effect on your character and surroundings.

Many of our actions are self-destructive, because they come directly from our own not investigated egocentric attitudes. We try to rationalize our egocentric behaviour so we don’t have to see that even our altruistic acts are filled with self-centeredness.

Meditating on the four immensities offers you the opportunity to refocus yourself and transform your limited self-righteous state of being. According to the Bud-

dha, you then develop to the life form of an enlightened being, where less suffering for yourself and others exists.

Cultivating equanimity, loving kindness, compassion and joy leads to skills that are directly related to the six transcendent virtues, or the paramitas: ethical discipline, generosity, patience, dedication, meditation and wisdom (these will be discussed in the next chapter).

When developing the four immeasurables, compassion is very important. You develop the desire to decrease the suffering of yourself and others. When developing compassion, you benefit greatly from the first four of the six transcendent virtues, that is: ethical discipline, generosity, patience and dedication. The fifth paramita is to develop attention and concentration using meditation techniques. The sixth paramita is understanding and wisdom; this stems from the practice of the first five paramitas.

By developing the four immeasurables, it becomes easier to apply the first four paramitas. When we develop these qualities in our minds, our stability will grow. This stability is needed to continue to develop spiritual well being.

We will slowly increase the sense of equanimity, loving kindness, compassion, and joy in ourselves and not give in to mood swings and instability. The two biggest improvements I've been working on the last ten years were the paramita of patience and the immeasurability of equanimity. With small steps it is getting better.

In Buddhist teachings it's emphasized that an autonomous existence is just an illusion, one of our greatest illusions and a major cause of our suffering. We must learn to increase our empathy and sympathy for others. It's important thereby that you can shift yourself into the position of another. We have to imagine what it would be if we would have the worries, sorrows and fears of the

other. In Buddhism, you learn to develop empathy by a combination of empathy and meditations that focus on concentration and visualization.

In fact, the greatest quality someone can have is the capacity to connect to others in a positive manner. This leads to a mutual positive influence on yourself and others. By practicing the four immeasurables we enrich our ability for caring, sharing, giving and feeling for others.

EQUANIMITY

Often we feel insecure because of our thoughts and we are brought out of balance by their power and importunity. Our thoughts are constantly changing due to changing circumstances.

With meditation exercises, we learn to return to the now. In this way, we learn to trust that the now has to offer everything we need and we become detached from our feelings and fears.

By developing this equanimity, a way of thinking comes about that doesn't include aversion, desire or indifference. This is a basic attitude that is useful to work with the other three immeasurables: loving kindness, compassion and joy. Here I'll discuss one meditation that is suitable for developing equanimity (In my classes I also use other meditations).

MEDITATION ON FRIENDSHIP FOR EQUANIMITY

1. Start with meditating on the breath. Do three full breaths.
2. Visualize someone who you like..
3. Observe how you met this person, and how he/her slowly became a good friend who you've become fond of.
4. Then visualize that this friend is not a friend anymore in the future.
5. Visualize an event that changes the situation from deep affection to indifference and then to a feeling of aversion.

Now turn the process around:

6. Begin to visualize someone you find terrible.
7. See how and why this feeling has arisen in the past.
8. Now visualize the process to the future, how it can transform into indifference, perhaps because that person is moving.
9. Visualize that the circumstances change in such a way that this person becomes your best friend.

Then:

10. Now visualize someone to whom you're indifferent.
11. Meditate on the past to see how it turned out that way. Was it a good friend? And because of which changing circumstances did the friend receive the status of indifference?
12. Contemplate again about how circumstances can change until they become a good friend again.

According to Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoché, these exercises will ensure that you will put your own and other's situation more into perspective. You will realize that because of continuously changing situations, your perception, and often the linked positioning, will change as well. You will always be experiencing positive, neutral and negative events. What's important is the way you handle them.

I am convinced that enlightened beings will have bad days as well. The Dalai Lama, for example had to escape from Tibet because it was unsafe for him to stay in Lhasa. He was degraded to the status of a refugee, and that could have pulled him completely out of reality if he had been an ordinary person. In the first years

as a refugee, the Dalai Lama was not as popular as he is now. When he escaped from Tibet, the Tibetans were the only ones who knew him. He came across an incredible amount of difficulties and obstacles as the leader of the refugees. It was his Buddhist studies, his practical experience and his level of development that enabled him to cope with these difficulties. He has no bad intentions against the Chinese and instructs us to arouse love and compassion in ourselves towards them.

EXPERIENCING CONTINUOUSLY CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES

The happiness we seek is not something that's temporary but a perfection, a stable state of happiness. This exercise is to realize how circumstances can change in such a way that for a moment they make you experience happiness and five seconds later suffering.

You'll realize that there's a very thin line between these and, therefore, can shift quickly. This insight meditation exercise can be very useful to develop a greater sense of equanimity (enforced with compassion).

1. We lie down on our stomach on the floor, the four limbs stretched out, and we think about the suffering of friends, family, acquaintances, strangers, animals and enemies.
2. We lie on our backs, limbs stretched out, and we think about the welfare and happiness of friends, family, acquaintances, strangers, animals and enemies.

3. As we think about (insight meditation) on how all this happiness and all this suffering are subject to change, we roll on the ground for three times to the right (clockwise) and three times back.
4. We stay laying down for a while and observe what insights arise.

LOVING KINDNESS

The meditation on love or loving kindness teaches you to experience the fundamental of a loving feeling, as often described in Buddhist literature. Love or loving kindness is an emotion that is not contaminated by other disturbing emotions or feelings. This emotion is pure. The sense stands for romantic love, love for family and love for friends. The definition that can be used here: wanting the other to be truly happy. Again, I will introduce you to two meditations here (but in my classes I also use other forms).

MEDITATION ON LOVE

1. Start meditating on equanimity before starting the visualization.
2. Visualize love for three groups of people. Start with the one that is close to you, such as your partner, and then go on to family and friends. Start with the visualization that you grant your loved one love and happiness. Then you expand this to other groups and finally involve all living creatures.
3. When you meditate for a specific person, you can think: What makes this person happy? What would this person wish? What does this person need on a physical, emotional, financial, spiritual and mental level?
4. Whatever the wishes for him or her are, imagine vividly that the love that you send will honour all these wishes and that the person is moved by your love and generosity. Visualize the person totally happy and joyful.

5. End the meditation. Make sure that you just stay in the state of equanimity. This is important because strong feelings may come up and it's important to quiet them.
6. Now visualize an acquaintance or an unknown person. Ask yourself what this person wants or needs on a physical, emotional, mental or spiritual level. Visualize that all his or her wants, needs, desires and dreams come true by sending them love and loving kindness
7. Visualize the positive effect that this has on the person. Visualize his joy.
8. Then go back to the state of equanimity.
9. Now visualize someone you absolutely don't like.
10. Observe why you don't like this person. Do you think he's arrogant, aggressive or unsympathetic? Then visualize that his behaviour softens and that the effect of this is that the person becomes happier and as a result becomes nice to you. Involve more people or other living creatures in your meditation, so it will have a positive effect on them as well.
11. After this, go back to the state of equanimity.
12. Then you recall the state of love without thinking of a person or object. This is called: evoking the sense of love in the mind without an object.
13. In the last state, you experience tranquillity in a natural state of the mind and that is called the 'Buddha-nature.'

It is important to realize that the feeling of love can become contaminated by exaggerated attachment or possessiveness. Attachment implies that we are fixated on a thing, person or idea. The fundamental basis of this feeling of fixation is fear. Is this fixation is too strong,

than the fixation possesses you instead of the other way around. Love, which is therefore contaminated, can easily turn into hate, and get mixed with other negative emotions, which usually leads to destructive forms of behaviour. True feelings of affection and care can be separated from attachment. In this love, which we are trying to awaken in this exercise, it is important that we let go of our selfish motivations and attachments. The feeling of love needs to be pure without disturbing emotions being involved.

MEDITATION ON LOVING KINDNESS

The practice of loving kindness is focused on developing compassion towards everyone around you. The meditation is a stimulant that activates the mercy that everyone already carries. This meditation teaches you to become friends with yourself and have greater empathy for others. After a while you will notice that your heart opens up more and that your ability to love is strengthened.

A traditional Buddhist prayer reads:

Let all beings experience happiness, and the origin of happiness.

Let them be free of suffering, and the origin of suffering.

Let them not be separated from the great happiness which is free from suffering.

Let them stay in the great equanimity, free from passion, aggression and prejudice.

1. Sit in a relaxed but alert posture.
2. Concentrate. Keep in mind that you want to come in contact with your own heart during this medi-

tation and your inborn feelings of goodness.

3. Let your mind and body relax. Leave all thoughts that concern you at this moment.
4. Bring to mind a situation where you had a sense of happiness and satisfaction. Remind yourself exactly where you were, with whom and how you felt exactly. Take the time to recall that situation and feel the sensations in your body.
5. Look for words that describe the feelings of happiness that you had then. You can think of words like 'satisfaction', 'pleasure', 'happiness', 'joy'. Choose the word that is most suitable for you.
6. Let the details of that recalled situation go. At the same time pay attention to the feelings of happiness that belonged to that situation. Remain in the experience and let yourself feel it intensely.
7. Repeat to yourself while you feel happiness, the sentence: 'May I be happy' or 'May I experience happiness and satisfaction'.

FOUR IMMEASURABLES ARE MENTAL EXERCISES

These meditations need to be done repeatedly. Practicing equanimity helps to relax the fixations in the mind. A lot of suffering occurs because we make a habit of fixating the wrong ideas in our minds. When we meditate on equanimity, our sense of arrogance, self-centeredness and self-absorption will decrease. When meditating on love, feelings of anger, aggressiveness and hostility will slowly disappear. When we meditate on compassion, our attachment, greed and gratification will be reduced. And jealousy decreases as we meditate on joy.

Traleq Kyabgon Rinpoché recommends keeping on the existing order of the four immeasurables. He argues that equanimity works as a powerful force to stabilize the practice of love, compassion and joy and to restore its balance. Also equanimity can make love, compassion and joy rise up spontaneously from the mind.

If that space in your mind is there, your emotional intelligence will automatically come up, because relaxing your fixation creates this intelligence. In the Buddhist way of thinking we do not solve problems, but we learn to let go so that they are no longer issues. In reality, nothing stays the same, so it's easier if we accept that fact. Stability of the spirit comes from the realization that everything stays in motion.

Just like equanimity, love, compassion, joy and being thoughtless, it is easy to develop other graceful qualities, says Traleg Kyabgon in his book *Mind at Ease*. By this he refers to the six paramitas, discussed in the next chapter. When we practice generosity, we do it with equanimity, love, compassion, and joy in mind. We practice the other paramitas in the same way, using for example ethical discipline, patience and enthusiasm.

THE TEMPLE WITH A THOUSAND MIRRORS

There once was a temple with a hall of a thousand mirrors. One day a dog got lost in the temple and ended up in this room. When he was suddenly confronted with a thousand reflections, he growled and barked at his alleged opponents. They showed him a thousand times their teeth and barked back. To which he responded as an even wilder dog. This eventually demanded too much of his strength, so he fell down dead from excitement.

Some time passed and one day another dog appeared in the same room with a thousand mirrors. This dog was also surrounded a thousand times by his own reflection. He waved cheerfully with his tail and a thousand dogs waved back at him and had fun with him. Happy and in good spirits, he left the temple.

15.

MEDITATION ON THE SIX TRANSCENDENTAL VIRTUES

LIMITED VIEW

Sometimes the things in life,
aren't what they seem
We are simply limited
as far as we can look
From our heart,
Not with the eyes
Because sometimes that's
About believing
In something we think
we can't see
Limited vision, in this poem,
I want to tell you
About the creator of light
Its presence
here on earth,
until in the endless paradise
On each face
There hides the most beautiful painting,
In a gold frame

In the bible described,
It's about you and me,
About the holy spirit,
silent by your side
That's how the day go by
Where darkness rules
it makes sure that the sun shines there as well
Without looking further
with a limited view,
for us there is always the truth,
from the creator of light

- Patrick S -

MAHAYANA- AND THERAVADA-BUDDHISM

Two streams of Buddhism that coexist are the Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism. These streams are respectively called the southern and the northern tradition, in Asia. Theravada Buddhism is mainly found in Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Mahayana Buddhism is mainly found in Tibet, China, Mongolia, Vietnam, Korea and Japan.

Theravada is the earliest stream and was influenced by Indian culture from which Buddhism originated. Later on Mahayana developed its influences from mainly Tibet, China and Japan.

In Theravada, the Buddha, the historical figure Sidhartha Gautama, is the only point of focus. In Mahayana besides the historical Buddha, the other Buddha's and the male and female bodhisattvas are also important.

The purpose of the Theravada is to reach nirvana for the individual. The ideal is the arahant, one who has achieved enlightenment and nirvana. In Mahayana they put an emphasis on everyone reaching nirvana. The ideal is the bodhisattva: someone who has achieved enlightenment and postponed nirvana to help others reach enlightenment as well.

The six paramitas or perfections are virtues or actions with which a practitioner of Buddhism can reach enlightenment. In the Mahayana-buddhism paramitas are seen as actions that help you develop compassion. The paramitas, as distinguished in Mahayana Buddhism are:

1. Shila – ethical discipline or quietness
2. Dana – generosity
3. Khanti – patience
4. Virya – dedication or enthusiastic effort
5. Dhyana – concentration or meditation
6. Prajna – insight or wisdom

Rianne Pelleboer has made a series about the paramitas for Bodhi TV and is available on the Internet. She explains it well and with humour. I asked her permission to take an adapted version of her explanation for this chapter. We will not reinvent the wheel if someone else has done tremendously well in describing these six elements. Share and connect! I have added the meditations to her descriptions.

ETHICAL DISCIPLINE

Shila is the paramita of discipline or correct ethical behaviour, and this exists on three levels. The first correct ethical behaviour is not hurting yourself and others. The second is the commitment to do good things for yourself and for others. Zen teacher Aitken Roshi says: “It is my vow to express love. From that intention then the third level of discipline effortlessly follows: helping others. “

In some Buddhist traditions, the paramitas are described as the six perfections. An impossible task, it seems. No matter how hard we try, we all are and remain people. We all have our own characters, our own story and our own habits. Sometimes we bump up to each other because we are so different. No matter how hard we try, we eventually stay stuck at a certain level of imperfection.

The only way to fully implement the ethical discipline, is by embracing our imperfection and open up to whom we truly are. Roshi: “If the Buddha had been perfect from the start he would never have gone to sit under a tree. We all have a Buddha nature and Buddha was a human being just like us. “The paramita of discipline is often seen as implementing a lot of rules. What should you do and what not? It’s not about doing everything perfectly and living up to every rule perfectly. The point is that you act from a point of view in which you and others have a Buddha nature. That’s the main point of the paramita discipline, according to Roshi.

‘We can learn to relax and trust in our original nature,’ says Trungpa Rinpoche. ‘That’s the foundation of discipline. We are used to banishing the nasty things in life as far as possible and to draw as much as possible from what we find enjoyable. Things need to go according to our wants. But we can be generous, open up doors

and invite both the pleasant and the unpleasant experiences. The discipline that you must have, in such a case, is to stay who you are. ‘

MEDITATION ON ETHICAL DISCIPLINE:

1. First breathe in and out completely for three times to silent your thoughts.
2. Think about how ethical you are in regard to the mentioned various parts of ethics. Have you developed the right way of speaking and acting for yourself and others?
3. What percentage of that quality have you developed?
4. What is needed to further develop this quality?
5. What actions will you take from now on in your daily life?
6. Go back to your breathing and bring your mind back to the state of equanimity.

GENEROSITY

Dana means 'generosity' in Pali. Pali is the language used in the ancient scriptures of Theravada Buddhism. Buddhism has three types of generosity: giving material things, giving protection and giving dharma. In some traditions, the latest is also called 'fearlessness'.

According to teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, protection is about time and energy: "The time to be there for others. Giving time to someone who is dying or suffering. Being fully present for 5 minutes has a great impact. Time is not just there to make money, but also forms the basis of the gift of Dharma and fearlessness. 'Teacher John Tarrant Roshi once said.' Attention is the most basic form of love. Through it we bless and are blessed. "

Giving dharma (enlightenment) is seen as the highest form of generosity, because this gift is infinite. If you give someone something concrete, your generosity is completed at that moment. If someone is afraid of the dark, you give him a flashlight and then you're done, you've given it. When giving dharma it is more about something lasting, a way of being, the way you embody the Buddhist teaching. That's why this form of generosity is also fearlessness. Not because you're no longer afraid, but because you can be aware of your fears and still stand with both feet on the ground.

Nun Pema Chodron says that letting go is the land of generosity - of your fears, of the feeling that you're not good enough or of your bad mood. Relax in the moment. Being generous means daring to stand against all your fears and doubts, daring to be open and giving. Chodron also uses the word groundlessness for fearlessness: having no ground. With this she explains that uncertainty is inherent in life and that we must accept this, instead of looking for certainties. That's a scary idea, because then

there is nothing to cling on to. But this groundlessness does have one big advantage: there seems to be nothing at all to fall on.

The giver of generosity is also a recipient. If you practice generosity, it will bring you a lot. In Theravada Buddhism, the practice of generosity is seen as a method to overcome selfishness and greed. In Mahayana Buddhism, generosity is the virtue of compassion, generosity and the virtue of kindness to achieve enlightenment for all.

MEDITATION ON GENEROSITY

1. First breathe in and out completely for three times to silent your thoughts.
2. Think about how generous you are on the different parts of generosity: materials, offering your services or giving advice.
3. What percentage of this quality have you developed?
4. What is needed to further develop this quality?
5. What actions will you take from now on in your daily life?
6. Go back to your breathing and bring your mind back to the state of equanimity.

PATIENCE

The third paramita, Khanti, is that of patience or tolerance, and refers to the way we deal with suffering. The paramita of tolerance teaches us that we welcome all feelings, both positive and negative, simply because they are part of our existence.

Khentin Tai Situ Rinpoche, Tibetan Buddhist teacher, says that we should stop avoiding our feelings. 'We have learnt to endure the pain we experience. We can accept that pain is simply part of our lives.' A nice Bernardy, I thought. The fact remains that I keep making an effort every single day to push away unpleasant feelings. I don't want to be angry or sad. I don't want to feel it.

To avoid all these feelings I've found many ways to avoid all that suffering. During a lecture of teacher Acharya Mathias Pongracz I got an enlightening example about how to deal with suffering. He says that you should invite your feelings, the positive and the negative, as if you inviting in your friends. They ring the doorbell, you open the door, let them in and give them something to drink or eat at. This may be your best friend, an acquaintance you've only known superficially or perhaps a relatively unknown person. Regardless of what you think of the persons in question, you give them something to eat and drink, they are your guests and your care for them.

By reading and studying tolerance it became clear to me that I only make it worse by suppressing my feelings and that all those escaping manoeuvres do not make me happier. Even though there are a lot of emotions thrown at me, it's all part of the whole of being human.

Tolerance includes a second step. Allowing your feelings in is one thing, but they are not supposed to hold on to you. That will cause you to suffer even more. You also need to learn to let these emotions go again.

MEDITATION ON TOLERANCE AND PATIENCE:

1. First breathe in and out completely for three times to silent your thoughts.
2. Think about how tolerant and patient you are towards others.
3. What percentage of this quality have you developed?
4. What is needed to further develop this quality?
5. What actions will you take from now on in your daily life?
6. Go back to your breathing and bring your mind back to the state of equanimity.

DEDICATION

The paramita of devotion, zeal and enthusiastic effort - virya - gives pointers on how to deal with adversity. Laziness is the biggest enemy when it comes to this paramita of enthusiastic effort or dedication. Within Buddhism it is said that without devotion it is impossible to implement the previous three paramitas; generosity, discipline and tolerance.

An important part of the paramita zeal is moderation. According to Acharya Lama Sonam rabgye, it is important to find a good balance in what we do. We should not force ourselves to do something just because we planned it. If we put too much energy into what we want to achieve, he says, we become tired, exhausted and things seem to be heavy.

“To be truly zealous,” says Acharya Lama Sonam rabgye, Tibetan Buddhist teacher, “we must be genuinely interested. We are then excited to do what we need to do to achieve something “That is why, he says, in Tibetan we use the term brtson ‘grus’: ‘Joyful endeavour’ If we are not happy or pleased, it is very hard to achieve our goals. Joy gives us the energy to make an effort and to keep going when we encounter obstacles.

It is also important to find a balance between our relationships, friendships, work and hobbies and to encourage ourselves to listen to what our body is telling us.

MEDITATION ON TOLERANCE AND PATIENCE:

1. First breathe in and out completely for three times to silence your thoughts.
2. Think about your dedication or enthusiastic effort.
3. What percentage of this quality have you developed?
4. What is needed to further develop this quality?
5. What actions will you take from now on in your daily life?
6. Go back to your breathing and bring your mind back to the state of equanimity.

MEDITATION

About dhyana - meditation-paramita – it is said to be the paramita without which the previous four absolutely can't exist. By training yourself in the other paramitas, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoché says, you create a large developed awareness. By linking this awareness to the mindfulness meditation, you have got everything in your hands to keep your tamed mind under control. This is, according to Trungpa Rinpoché, not so much about taming the mind, like you do when you meditate, but about having an understanding in your mind at all times. So not only when you sit on a meditation cushion, but at any time of the day.

For this aspect (creating awareness), the American Buddhist teacher and author Lama Surya Das (www.surya.org) has given some good advice: being curious. This means: examining how things work, how we are structured and who the other is, that we may know ourselves better and take on an open attitude every time. Then you may ask at any time, how do I feel now? Am I tired, happy, sad or angry? At the same time keep your eyes, ears and all your other senses open to see how someone else is feeling.

Meditation is normally the exercise you do and breathing is the object where you focus your attention on. With mindfulness exercises you can also focus attention on a movement like brushing your teeth, eating or tying shoe-laces.

By continuing to watch the movements in my mind with an open attitude and being aware of my feelings and thoughts, it turns out to be easier to share my feelings and let them go. To realize this paramita of concentra-

tion and meditation there are of course all kinds of the meditation techniques and exercises suitable, like the ones I've discussed in several chapters. Here I choose the vipassana-meditation.

MEDITATION ON CONCENTRATION, BEING PRESENT IN THE MOMENT

1. First breathe in and out completely for three times to silent your thoughts.
2. Think about how consciously present you are at this moment on a physical, emotional and mental level.
3. What percentage of this quality have you developed?
4. What is needed to further develop this quality?
5. What actions will you take from now on in your daily life?
6. Go back to your breathing and bring your mind back to the state of equanimity.

WISDOM

Prajna, or the paramita of transcendent wisdom, is the paramita from which the other five paramitas grow. This wisdom is the intelligence that you need to be able to distinguish between what is good and what is not good.

Prajna is the intelligence that your understanding gives you about how you should act. With the intelligence of this paramita you know whether you need to apply the paramita of generosity, discipline, tolerance, diligence or meditation. The paramitas could be described as an emperor with various armies on his way to defeat the enemies. Without a commander, all separate armies would go different ways and the fight would have no effect. The leadership of the emperor ensures the armies to work together and achieve their goal. The emperor, the paramita of wisdom, has the overview and can therefore control the armies in a way that yields the best results.

Clear and open communication seems to be a difficult task. The Tibetan Buddhist teacher Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoché has some good advice for this situation: “When the desire to communicate (the paramita of generosity) is strong, you need wisdom to discover what makes it impossible to communicate.

Susan Piver, a teacher in the Shambhala tradition says that the wisdom of this paramita is independent from our beliefs and our understandings. By giving up the idea that something is ‘my’ wisdom and making a connection with wisdom itself, we create space. From that space comes forth some kind of intelligence that is comprehensive and much bigger than the ‘I’. Piver says that if you are in a relationship and think that you already know and understand everything, it will be difficult to make a true connection with your partner, because your views and ideas will then stand, as a wall between you and your

partner. It makes no sense to analyse every situation, why you're arguing and why you making up again. 'The point,' Piver says, "is to let all concept about who you are, who someone else is and what it's supposed to mean to love, go. If you do that you will end up in that space outside of your comfort zone, which makes it possible to really communicate.'

MEDITATION ON COMMUNICATION

1. First breathe in and out completely for three times to silent your thoughts.
2. Think about how you communicate. Do you mention everything with a loving energy? Do you give someone else space? Do you let them finish talking? Do you ask open questions, do you ask someone else about his perspective? Are you able to let go of your opinion, so you can actively listen? Can you count to ten before you react?
3. What percentage of this quality have you developed?
4. What is needed to further develop this quality?
5. What actions will you take from now on in your daily life?
6. Go back to your breathing and bring your mind back to the state of equanimity.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

There was, so the story goes, a long, long time ago in a land far from here, an old, wise teacher. With the rising of the sun, he, according to a specified ritual, woke up his seven favourite students, who stayed in the surrounding cabins.

They washed themselves and enjoyed a cup of butter tea, that being virtually their only luxury. Then they went into the mountains together. While walking, the teacher taught them and ordained them in the secret laws of nature and the cosmic patterns. He tried to give them an understanding about themselves and their fellow man. This way he slowly prepared them for the inevitable moment of taking over his task.

On one of these trips a student asked him, "Teacher, what is the truth? Teach us to know the truth."

The Master replied with a question. He rallied them all seven surrounding a beautiful flowers bush. He pointed out to them a big drop of dew that sparkled in the early sun and asked, "Now all tell me truthfully: what colour is this drop of water?"

There was a moment of silence. Then it intertwined ... 'Red,' one said. 'Orange,' said a second. 'No, yellow!' yelled the third almost angry. 'Green, teacher,' said a fourth surprised. 'Blue! Purple! Violet! '...

And for the first time in a long time that they were together, they really got into a fight with each other. Each one of them convinced of being right.

The teacher smiled a little sadly "Look," he said, "now that's what always happens with the truth ... You have all spoken the truth, each from you own experience, from your own vision. Just remember that from whatever angle you look at it, you can see

it as truth. Therefore, you can only have an idea of the great universal truth when you are willing to listen to the views of others and at the same time add your own piece of information to it. Only then “The Truth” becomes: balanced and complete ‘.

EPILOGUE

The word enlightenment literally means, “to bring into the light”. Light is a symbol of the mind’s power. Light dispels darkness and brightens and clears up what is hidden. Lighting candles is part of rituals of almost all religions and symbolizes in a simple way transformation from darkness to light and from ignorance to ‘wisdom’. This is enlightenment.

BUDDHA AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Enlightenment, a basic understanding in Buddhism, might seem complicated but is essentially quite simple. After his effort for his quest to the truth, Buddha remembered the peace and quiet he had experienced underneath the rose apple tree in the garden of his parents’ house. That night, - more than 2500 years ago – he decided to sit under the tree for the entire night, until he understood why people create so much suffering to themselves and others. The next morning he experienced the world in a new way. He realized that people suffer because they don’t know the true nature of the spirit. The Buddha understood that if people could see their unity with the cosmos, they would stop resisting change and then there will come an end to their suffering. He saw that everyone carries the seed of enlightenment within and that meditation is the way to feed that seed. Through meditation, one can rediscover their unity with the cosmos. That is enlightenment: the understanding of the nature of our spirit, which is limitless and compassionate, and as a re-

sult, the layers of confusion will wear off. We won't reach enlightenment suddenly; it is more likely that we gradually get there.

Meditation is the way to enlightenment and brings the spirit back to its true home. In the stillness and silence of meditation you can rediscover the deep inner peace that was lost in the strain and the distractions of your everyday life.

CORRELATION

In Buddhism we say that disturbed emotions in the spirit also lead to physical complaints.

For example, anger dwells in the liver and bile, fear in the kidneys and worry in the stomach. Working on enlightenment doesn't only make the spirit stronger but also the body.

In the suffering of people you can recognize a correlation between body and spirit.

Nowadays people suffer from stress symptoms, concentration problems, fatigue, addictions, pain, insomnia and heavy disturbed emotions like anger and fears.

There is a lot of stress in western society. For many of us stress and tensions have become such a part of our daily lives that we no longer recognize their consequences. The negative effects will grow over the course of weeks and months until they express themselves in poor health.

It's important to recognize stress before it manifests itself into a disease.

We often ignore the needs of our body, because we think that spirituality only concerns the spirit. With disciplines like yoga and meditation, we honour the physical body and this can change our relationship with life.

By honouring our body with loving attention, we are able to become aware of feelings and sensations, and to broaden our perspective on life.

When we practice the body scan relaxation meditation in the mindfulness training, we bring warm and loving attention to each part of the body and this can thoroughly cleanse your body and spirit.

WHY GUIDE PEOPLE TOWARDS ENLIGHTENMENT

All forms of meditation help you to reveal your physical pain, disturbed emotions and stress. When we take a step back and sit down quietly, we begin to inhabit our body appropriately and thereby get a better sense of where the tension has accumulated: tight muscles in the shoulders, clenched jaws or tension in the abdominals is painfully revealed.

Being stuck in your head or having too many thoughts is tough. Meditation allows you to have more peace in your mind and more contact with the world around you.

The mindfulness training, by focussing on the right attention and concentration trains you to come back to this moment and to live in the present moment. This is acquired through breathing- and meditation techniques like: hatha yoga, chi kong, body scan, sitting meditation, the mountain and lake meditation and other Buddhist methods.

We work towards having a complete awareness in the present moment on 3 levels: physically, emotionally and mentally.

In the present moment we are able to get more clarity and connection with the internal and external influences.

Learning to feel, think and then act is a wise sequence to follow. You become aware of your automatic thinking and behavioural patterns. With the insights from these lessons, you will be able to create a better life and expand your consciousness. That's the path I would like to take you on.

TEACHER AND STUDENT

According to my teacher lama Zeupa, there is no student without a teacher and without a teacher there is no student. In his lessons he advises his students to:

1. To firstly trust on the spirit and the intention of the teachings, not on the words;
2. Secondly, trust upon the teachings, not on the teacher's personality.
3. Thirdly, trust in true wisdom, not on a superficial interpretation.
4. Fourthly, trust on the being of your pure awareness of wisdom, not on observations filled with prejudgments.

Personally, I believe that we are each other's teacher. Life works like a mirror. It's a white screen and you're the slide projector. Whatever appears on the white screen is a projection of your own symptoms. If you send out negativity, you will meet negativity. I begin to recognize more and more some Dutch saying in the teachings of Buddhism, like: he who does good, will meet good. Those who play at bowls must look out for rubs.

And: As you make your bed, so must you lie in it. In these saying you will find an understanding about karma: cause and consequences or action and reaction. Every physical or mental activity has a consequence. When your physical actions and thoughts are appropriate, you

are developing a positive karma. If your physical actions and thoughts are inappropriate, then you are developing a negative karma. Even if you live in an extremely appropriate manner, that doesn't mean you won't face any problems. The build-up karma of your previous lives will also pull you off-course like the threads of a spider web.

However, through the projections of your individual being, there is a divine light shining, to make you recognize and experience your life lessons. This will lead you to insights and then wisdom will emerge. The more you let your individuality (ego) go, the clearer you will learn to see the relationship with yourself and others. Your connection will shift from I to we, from ego to the divine and from relative truth to absolute truth. These insights will diminish your suffering. A teacher helps you on the path of recognizing your life lessons. And you'll be a mirror for your teacher...

A TRUE TEACHER IS

A true teacher is someone who creates no followers around him

A true teacher isn't someone who still teaches someone else

A true teacher is someone who is at all times focused

On each and everyone's divine flame, on everyone's divine light

A true teacher teaches each and everyone to trust their selves

A true teacher shows you, that everything will un-

fold itself from within

A true teacher always directs each and everyone to
the way in

A true teacher knows, that all changes will begin
from within

A true teacher is someone who stands next to you
in compassion

A true teacher is someone who respects everyone
Who doesn't overwhelm you with their good advice
Without compulsion, without force, without any
form of power

A true teacher will only want to share his own expe-
riences with another

Because he knows that you can only heal yourself
from within

A true teacher knows that you can only stand by
someone's side through love

Because everyone will have to follow their internal
path

But where will you find a true master

In yourself dear people, by connecting yourself to
the source again

For all of you will be a true master

When you can accept and let go of your inner pain

When you become aware of your fears and why you
are still fighting

You will discover the power of neutrality

A new power will emerge within you, by letting go

By feeling in the silence of the moment, even more
doors will open up for you

Then you will be able to heal yourself from within
Because all answers are already available and you
will be able to reach them from your innermost be-
ing
Then through your wisdom, through your strength
and your obtained insights
You will be a true master, connected to the light

(Source unknown)

I HAVE IMAGINED MY LIFE FROM 50 TO 104 YEARS.

Writing this book has been enlightening for me, I've tried to formulate everything correctly and put my experiences in the right perspective.

Also, it now feels as if am halfway through my life and have really closed the chapter of the first fifty years of my life. I have set my mind and spirit on becoming 104 years old. Being healthy, free and serving, of course. 'Be careful what you wish for and send out into the cosmos,' my teacher said, 'And if you send it into the cosmos, formulate it very precisely.'

The new life goals I have set out for myself are:

- Going on tour with an eight-week mindfulness training for beginners and advanced students, including individuals and companies. I will be starting in The Hague, Rotterdam, Amsterdam and Wassenaar and will be looking for opportunities to expand in other cities.

- I will write my second book, which will be a mindfulness workbook for advanced students on how to transform each disturbed emotion.
- I will keep on giving mindfulness workshops and retreats, and will be expanding them in some places abroad.
- I'll continue giving single classes in the two gyms and one yoga studio for as long as I can.
- The study of Buddhism will be continuing, because that's something you might be doing for multiple lives.
- I have visualized a cottage in the woods and that's where I would like to start living this upcoming year.
- I am open to a new relationship now because I've completed my chastity vows of three years. So far, my heart hasn't opened up for the men who came across my path. My mission of "creating awareness", raising awareness is so strong that this is still the main goal of my life.
- I experience life as something meaningful and that's a blessing.
- I have found my calling and will remain committed to "creating awareness" and teaching mindfulness until I am 104 years old. I hope that people discover their value and the value they are able add to other people's lives and to society.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my friends who have encouraged me to write this book, who saw the path that I am walking is as unique and different: Intertwining an autobiography and a workbook; the relation between spirituality and commerciality; the comparison between Hinduism and Buddhism; the development of the I-focus to the WE-focus; from romantic relationships to becoming a monk; the relation between yoga techniques and meditation techniques. The purpose was to write a wide-ranging book, in which hopefully you can find some insights. My hope is that people will come closer to their life paths by reading and practicing this book.

I would like to thank several people who have helped publish this book:

- Angèle Steentjes, redactor
- Tiny Hielema, co-reader
- Jan Verberne, corrector owner of publisher Mastix Press
- Femque Schook, photographer
- Roland Huisman, graphic designer

And last but not least I would like to thank the ones who have inspired me with their knowledge and insights to find my own path and to write this book:

- Lama Tashi Nima, Lama Karta and Lama Zeupa
- The Dalai Lama
- Jon Kabat-Zinn
- Marisa Garau
- Traleg Kyabgon Rinpochee and Felicity
- Marian Palsgraaf
- Rianne Pelleboer

Here are a few comments of the team after reading the book:

Angèle Steentjes:

'The nice thing about this book is that Hans makes you see that you should always keep searching to find your life path, but that it's a celebrative quest.'

Tiny Hielema:

'So it's possible! You can choose your own direction for your life path. The ship can be turned around. You have shown it, you are living it! In your book, you reach out a hand to encourage others to try it as well. The directions and exercises are there to help us to go and walk the path which brings us to ourselves.'

Jan Verberne:

'May I become a richer person by it.'

APPENDIX 1. INSPIRATIONAL QUOTES

Gautama Buddha

In this world, hate will never be ended by hatred but by love, overcome evil with good. Conquer the penny pincher with generosity; overcome the liar with the truth. You, yourself, as much as anybody else in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.

The thought manifests as the word; the word manifests as the deed; the deed develops into habit; And habit hardens into character.

So watch the thought and its ways with care, And let it spring from love born out of concern for all beings.
As the shadow follows the body, as we think, so we become.

Everything that has a beginning has an ending. Make your peace with that and all will be well.

Carpenters bend wood, fletchers straighten arrows, the wise master themselves.

Pursue having an unbound spirit, from under, up and right through it. The way we react to situations is often determined by our habitual thinking patterns. As long as these patterns exist, we will react in the same automatic way, over and over again. Recognizing our conditioned mind is the first step to break the cycle and break through our self-applied boundaries. From there on, we can open the path toward imagination, emotional freedom, personal satisfaction and enlightenment of the spirit.

In our lives, change is inevitable and loss is inevitable. Underneath, our power of adapting and the ease in which we undergo changes, lies our happiness and freedom. The secret of staying healthy physically and mentally is not to mourn about the past, worry about the future or to anticipate future problems, but to live wisely and honestly in this moment.

In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few . . .

Provide every moment and you'll take care of the whole time.

Sandalwood, Aloes wood, blue lotus, big flowered Jasmine, even between these incenses, the smell of virtuous behaviour is the best of them all.

Everything is extremely bright. I can see the landscape in front of me, I see my hands, my feet, my toes and smell the rich mud lying in the river. I feel an incredible strangeness and wonder at being alive.

Wonder of wonders.

No one outside ourselves can rule us inwardly. When we know this, we become free.

In the end it's these things that matter the most: how well did you love? How much did you love? How completely did you learn to let go?

As you walk and eat and travel, be where you are. Otherwise you will miss most of your life.

Speak and act with a pure mind.
And happiness will follow you as your shadow, unshakable.

I am the owner of my karma, heir of my deeds, born out of my deeds, related to my deeds and have my deeds as a referee. Whatever I do, good or bad, I will be its heir.

Master, how can I make a perfect painting? Be perfect and just paint.

Don't chase after the past.
Don't long for the future. What has past is left behind.
The future is yet to come.

WORDS OF WISDOM

Do not wait on special moments, but make the regular moments special.

If you would like to discover the meaning of life, do what makes you happy.

To be happy, you should do something that makes you happy.

Becoming happy, begins with the question: What is stopping me?

The best way to predict your future is to create her.

Besides the noble art of getting things done, there is the noble art of leaving things undone.

The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of non-essentials.

The happiest people do not have the best of all. But they make the best of all.

Every problem has a present for you in its hands.

You can be whatever you like, you just need to believe in it completely and act in alignment with your belief, because everything the mind can make up and believe, it can achieve.

Nature is not counting any hours. Only humans want to know the time.

Growing is not becoming bigger, it's being aware of your greatness.

The Ego always seeks to divide and separate, the Holy Spirit always seeks to unify and heal, so stop telling god how big your storm is, instead tell your storm how big your god is!

Don't ask what the world wants, but what makes your heart sing. Because, what the world wants, is people with a singing heart.

Who would you be without the thought that your happiness depends on someone else?

Since you alone are responsible for you thoughts, only you can change them. You will want to change them when you realize that each thought it created according to its own nature. Remember that this law works at all times

and that you are always acting according to the kind of thoughts you habitually entertain. Therefore, start now to think only those thoughts that will bring you health and happiness. Paramahansa Yogananda

When you realize that every stressful moment you experience is a gift that points you to your own freedom, life becomes very kind and unlimitedly rich.

Byron Katie

Never limit your view of life by any past experience.

You don't need to do anything to be yourself. Being something else but yourself costs a lot of effort.

Krishnamurti

Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth, because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult—once we truly understand and accept it—then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.

M.Scott Peck

A miracle worker is not geared toward fighting the world that is, but toward creating the world that could be.

Marianne Williamson

At any moment you have a choice, that either leads you closer to your spirit or further away from it.

Thich Nhat Hanh

Don't discover yourself; create yourself.

Neale Donald Walsch

Each morning when I open my eyes I say to myself; I, not events, have the power to make me happy or unhappy today. I can choose which it shall be. Yesterday has passed, tomorrow hasn't arrived yet. I have just one day, today, and I'm going to be happy in it.

Groucho Marx

Happiness does not depend on outward things, but on the way we see them.

Leo Tolstoy

Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step.

Martin Luther King

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.

Pierre Teilhard De Chardin

Anything you fight will grow.

Willem de Ridder

Write the bad things that are done to you in sand, but write the good things that happen to you on a piece of marble.

Khalil Gibran

A great man has two hearts; one bleeds and the other forebears.

Khalil Gibran

You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

Khalil Gibran

Denial doesn't work. It can never lead to forgiveness and reconciliation. Realize what has happened in the past to come to terms with the past. Take the responsibility for your actions, otherwise they will not heal your wounds.

Desmond Tutu

We are not being loved because we are good. We are good because we are being loved.

I believe that goodness is the basic condition and badness the digression.

We are made for joy and goodness. Desmond Tutu

Where people feel happy, they should stay. Happiness is an article that's very sensitive for transportation.

W. Somerset Maugham

Smile, Smile, Smile! :-)

Your creditors will wait patiently because they think that you aren't doing badly. Your enemies will leave you alone because they think that you are their boss. Your doctor will not send you a high bill because he thinks that you haven't really been that extremely sick.

A saying in Korea

With a smile, but even more by a generous smile, the short time span that life grants us will be extended.

Would you like your life to truly "begin"? Then change your thoughts about life. About you.

Think, speak and act as the God you truly are.

Only music and love are universal languages and they don't need to be translated: with these, one soul speaks to the other.

Berthold Auerbach + Ernest Keijzers

Even if the clouds threaten to float above our heads and the sky becomes grey, whoever enters the world with trust, will already look forward to the moment when the sky clears.

Willem Bush

A striking difference between human beings is that fools continue to make the same mistakes; the wise however continuously commit new stupidities.

It's important to have good thoughts, because we become what we think.

Buddha

To send light into the darkness of men's hearts - such is the duty of the artist.

Schumann

My heart is full of gratitude for the music, which so often refreshed me and saved me from great distress.

One's character can be known by the jokes he is offended by.

Christian Morgenstern

The poet hears in every word, the birth of literature.

Whoever has ears to hear, can hear the music in nature.

Martinus Nijhoff

Nothing is a waste of time when you enjoy the day.

The truth is kind every single time. While the lie keeps reminding you of it.

Boomdokter Ruerd Visser

In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out, it is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. Albert Schweitzer

Don't live your life as it is, but as you dream it.

Miguel de Cervantes in "Don Quichote"

Everyone is striving for an improved society, but no one is improving it.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Here I stand; I can do no other.

This is me and this is what I am.

Maarten Luther

A political victory, a salary increase, recovery from illness, the return of a close friend or any other favourable events improves your mood and you might think that more of these good things are lying ahead of you. Don't believe that. Nothing can give you real peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you real peace but the triumph of principles.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 - 1882)

To live is a pleasure. To know how to, is an art.

Toon Hermans

The horses of hope gallop, but the asses of experience go slowly.

Russian saying

If your principles are making you sad, than you can be sure that they are wrong.

R.L.Stevenson

You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving.

When the heart weeps for what it has lost, the spirit laughs for what it has found.

It is only shallow people who require years to get rid of an emotion. A man who is master of himself can end a sorrow as easily as he can invent a pleasure.

Oscar Wilde

A vine makes more grapes when he is young, but better ones when he is old.

In order to see clearly, it is often enough to change one's perspective.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Make life an eternal spring.

Ernest Keijzers

Our spirit looks for complexity to make the achievement of enlightenment easier.

APPENDIX 2.

MEDITATION POSTURE AND THE SEVEN RULES OF MEDITATION

1. Posture

If possible, sit with your legs crossed in the full lotus position. In this position, each foot is placed high on the thigh of the other leg. This position is difficult to achieve, but one can train the body to do it. This position gives the best support to the body and mind. However, it is not essential.

An alternative is the half-lotus position with one foot on the ground below the other leg and the other foot on the opposite thigh.

A third alternative is the feet down on the ground in front of each other. This is called the Burman posture.

Sit down on a firm cushion, this will balance the buttocks and automatically lower your knees to help you straighten your back. This may also help you to sit down for a greater amount of time without feeling uncomfortable, and avoid tingling or sleepy sensations in the feet and legs.

If it is not possible for you to sit down on a pillow or the ground, then you can use a low stool.

It is also perfectly acceptable to meditate while sitting on a chair. The most important thing is to find a proper sitting position in which you feel comfortable.

Make sure you are properly grounded and bring your attention to your seat and the contact with the ground. Sitting grounded reduces the number of thoughts and increases your concentration. When the knees do not touch the ground then there will be a small interface with the ground and the meditation will be more difficult.

2. Arms

Keep your hands loosely in your lap, with the right hand resting in the palm of your left hand, palms up, thumbs slightly touching each other, you will get the shape of a tear, or flame.

Your hands should rest about 4 to 6 inches below the navel. Shoulders and arms are relaxed. Your shoulders should be slightly bent towards each other first before you put your hands down in your lap or on the thighs. Keep your arms slightly away from the body, leaving a little space between your arms and your body to allow the air to circulate. This helps to prevent sleepiness during meditation.

3. The back

The back is the most important. The back is straight and relaxed, as if the vertebrae are a stack of blocks resting on each other effortlessly. This will help the flow of energy to run freely and enhances the clarity and alertness of the mind during meditation. The position of your legs contributes to the position of the back.

The higher your pillow under you buttocks, the lower the knees are and the easier it is keep your back straight for a long time.

In the beginning, it's not easy to keep your spine straight. You have to experiment to see what works for you. It takes some time to make your back, muscles, bones en legs used to this new position.

4. Eyes

In the beginning, it is often easier to concentrate with your eyes completely closed. When you start to get some experience with meditation, it is better to let your eyes

a little bit open to let some light in. Your gaze is pointed downwards at an angle of 90 degrees, but it is not really focused on anything in particular. Closing the eyes completely might lead to inertia, sleepiness or daydreaming.

5. Cheek and mouth

Your jaw and mouth are relaxed, the teeth slightly apart, lips slightly touching.

6. Tongue

Your tongue is resting against your palate. The tip of the tongue hits the back of the upper teeth. This reduces the flow of saliva, and the need to swallow. These automatic physical actions can distract you and then form an obstacle to deepen the concentration.

7. Head

Your head is looking at the floor in front of you. The angle is 90 degrees. Your crown is pulled to the sky and the chin inward. If your chin is held too high, you may have too many distractions. If you let your head drop too far forward, you can suffer from mental drowsiness or sleepiness.

APPENDIX 3.

THE EIGHTFOLD PATH

Buddha described the Eightfold Path as following:

This, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering. It is simply the Noble Eightfold Path, namely:

1. **Right viewpoint (pali: samma ditthi)**

- Understanding what suffering is (dukkhe ñana).
- Understanding the cause of suffering (dukkhasamudaya ñana).
- Understanding the path that leads to the cessation of suffering. (dukkhanirodhagamini patipadaya ñana). The eightfold path.

2. **Right thoughts / right intentions/ directing the mind towards righteousness (pali: samma sankappa)**

- The intention of renunciation (nekkhamma sankappa).
- The intention of non-aversion or loving kindness (avyapada sankappa).
- The intention of non-injury or compassion (avihimsa sankappa). (These first two truths together, form the division of wisdom. Pali: paññakkhandha)

3. **Right speech (pali: samma vaca).**

- Abstinance from false speech, that is, from lying (musavada veramani).
- Abstinance from slanderous speech (pisunaya vacaya veramani).
- Abstinance from harsh speech (pharusaya vacaya veramani)
- Abstinance from idle chatter (samphappalapa veramani).

4. Right action (pali: samma kammanta)

- Abstinence from killing (panatipata veramani).
- Abstinence from taking what is not given (adinnadana veramani).
- Abstinence from sexual misconduct (kamesu micchacara veramani).

5. Right livelihood (pali: samma ajiva), 5 specific occupations that one should avoid:

- Dealing in weapons.
- Dealing in slave trade and prostitution.
- Dealing in flesh, eg. As a butcher.
- Dealing in poisons.
- Dealing in intoxicants or liquors and drugs.

(The truths number three, four and five together, form the division of moral discipline Pali: Silakkhandha)

6. Right effort (pali: samma vayama)

- The effort to prevent unwholesome states (akusala) from arising (samvara padhana).
- The effort to abandon the arisen unwholesome states (pahana padhana).
- Develop the undeveloped wholesome (kusala) states (bhavana padhana).
- Strengthen and cultivate the existing wholesome states (anurakkana padhana).

7. Right mindfulness, developing the right attention / right concentration by meditation, awareness and concentration (pali: samma sati).

- Being mindful of the body (kaya nupassana).
- Being mindful of feelings (vedana nupassana).
- Being mindful of mental states (citta nupassana).
- Being mindful of mental contents (dhamma nupassana) namely:

- The five hindrances (pañca nivarana).
- The five aggregates of attachment (pañca upadana kkhanda).
- The six internal lands, six external sense-media (sallayatana).
- The seven factors of enlightenment (bojjhanga).
- The four Noble Truths (cattari ariya sacca).

8. Right insight and wisdom (pali: samma samadhi)

- Suta mayā pañña, received wisdom, 1st transformation.
- Cintā-mayā pañña, wisdom gained, 2nd transformation.
- Bhāvanā-mayā pañña, wisdom gained through self-insight, 3rd transformation.

(The truths number six, seven and eight together, form the division of concentration. Pali: Samadhikkhandha).

APPENDIX 4

FILL IN YOUR COMPETENCIES

Competencies	Rate	Rate	Actions
Personal qualities	Who are you now?	Who would you like to become?	Which action do you need to take to improve this competence by ten per cent?
Action orientation			
Determination			
Involvement			
Creativity			
Discipline			
Persistence			
Dare			
Energy			
Flexibility			
Helicopter view			
Patience			
Coping capacity			

Personal qualities	Who are you now?	Who would you like to become?	Which action do you need to take to improve this competence by ten per cent?
Initiative			
Effort			
Quality orientation			
Naturally friendly			
Handling details			
Ordering			
Organising own tasks			
Achievement motivation			
Result driven			
Taking risks			
Stability			
Immunity to stress			
Generosity			
Self-development			
Self-confidence			

Personal qualities	Who are you now?	Who would you like to become?	Which action do you need to take to improve this competence by ten per cent?
Interpersonal Qualities			
Adapting abilities			
Acquiring			
Influencing of surrounding			
Commerciality			
Managing conflicts			
Empathy			
Customer orientation			
Listening			
People-oriented leadership			
Networking			
Interaction with managers			
Independence			
Entrepreneurship			
Being open to critiques			

Personal qualities	Who are you now?	Who would you like to become?	Which action do you need to take to improve this competence by ten per cent?
Persuasiveness			
Personal contact			
Collaborating			
Sensitivity			
Sociability			
Tact			
Tolerance			
Persistence			
Management Qualities			
Coaching			
Delegating			
Planning en organising			
Task-oriented leadership			
Progress control			

APPENDIX 5. LITERATURE LIST

Here is a list of several books, cd's and websites in case you want to learn more.

Books

Yoga

- *De Veda's*, Librero,
ISBN 90-5764-353-7
- *Boeddhisme*, Tom Lowenstein,
ISBN 90-5764-202-6
- *Praktische Yoga*, Het Spectrum,
ISBN 90-274-7176-2
- *K-Osmose*, scriptie Bernadette Fretz
- *Hatha Yoga werkboek*, Joghum Dijkstra,
ISBN 90-6020-246-5
- *Openbaringen van het Karma*, Rudolf Steiner,
ISBN 90-6038-096-7
- *Yoga anders benaderd*, Rita Beintema,
ISBN 90-202-5245-3

Meditation

- *Meditatie – 12 maanden inspiratie en praktijk*, Jane Hope,
ISBN 90-4390-387-6
- *Meditatiegids*, Margit en Ruediger Dahlke,
ISBN 90-5513-401-5

Lifestyle

- *Yama en Niyama's*, Ajata Stam, te bestellen bij
Levensschool Govinda-dhama,
tel. (0229) 26 27 05 in Zwaag

- *Niet morgen maar nu*, Wayne Dyer,
ISBN 90-229-5329-7
- *Leven zonder grenzen*, Deepak Chopra,
ISBN 90-6325-422-9
- *Bhagavad Gita*, Mansukh Patel,
ISBN 90-805999-5-6
- *De alchemist*, Paulo Coelho,
ISBN 90-295-0898-1
- *Scientology*, L. Ron Hubbard,
ISBN 87-7816-714-0
- *De Zeven Eigenschappen van Effectief Leiderschap*,
Stephen R. Covey,
ISBN 90-4705-464-4
- *De Dharma*, Kaloe Rinpochee,
ISBN 90-7481-504-9
- *Haal Meer Uit Je Leven Met Mindfulness*,
Marisa Garau,
ISBN 90-2097-382-7
- *Mind at Ease*, Traleg Kyabgon,
ISBN 15-9030-156-0
- *De Sleutel tot Zelf-Bevrijding*, Christiane Beerlandt,
ISBN 90-7584-932-X

Psychology

- *Ontmoeting met je schaduw*, Connie Zweig/
Jeremiah Abrams,
ISBN 90-215-8567-7

Chakra's

- *Kleuren heelkunde*, Waltraud-Maria Hulke,
ISBN 90-6378-262-4

Alternative medicine

- *Bach-Bloesem Therapie*, Jeremy Harwood,
ISBN 90-5764-257-3

Cd's

- Indiase zang: Sheila Chandra, *Weaving my ancestor's voices*, Real World, 0777-7-8672227
- Fluitmuziek: Guo Yye, *Touching the water*, WOMAD Music, 8-711255-206124
- Instrumentaal: Coen Bais, *Bais 7*, Nova, 8-711799 550721
- Instrumentaal: James Redfield, *De Celestijnse belofte*, Priority Records, 7 24384 23022 7
- Instrumentaal: Deuter, *Sands of time*, Kuckuck Schallplatten München, 13711-20902
- Mantra's: *Om Namah Shivaya*, Esmese & Paul, Auflage 1993, Best.nr. 11747
- Mantra's: *Magical Songs of Power*, Henry Marschall, Oreade Music, 8-711913 294272

Dvd's

- *Bhagavad Gita*, Mansukh Patel, ISBN 90-805999-0-5

Websites

- www.yogajournal.com
- www.lifefoundation.nl
- www.bos.nl
- www.maytreya.nl
- www.shambala.nl
- www.authentiekleiderschap.nl
(theme page self-awareness)
- www.vipassana-meditatie.nl
- www.nl.dhamma.org
- www.surya.org/ (Lama Surya Das)

For sponsors kinds of the English boarding school:

- www.demazongacademy.com
- www.lujong4life.com (Monique van den Brink)

- www.watdhammapateep.be
- www.vaal-counselling.nl (Francoise Vaal)

