



# IMISA EVENTS

## Wisdom Workshop Outline

### Ancient Wisdom, Modern World : The Practice of Emptiness and Awareness

#### Outline

Choden, a South African born Buddhist monk, will offer a three-day workshop exploring wisdom within the context of mindfulness practice. He resides in Edinburgh in Scotland and teaches on the University of Aberdeen Postgraduate Studies in Mindfulness MSc.

He will draw on the profound teachings of Advaita Vedanta and Tibetan Mahamudra and offer some teachings and practices for accessing that part of our being that is always at peace, free and complete in and of itself – called 'Buddha Nature'. This opens the door to the experience of nondual awareness. When we learn to abide in this awareness everything else in our lives is experienced as being ephemeral and fleeting. At first this is disconcerting but then it feels more and more liberating. This is the doorway to Emptiness – realising that none of the ideas we have about ourselves hold true in the light of direct experience. This allows us to deeply relax and come home to something stable and precious within ourselves that is entirely beyond words. But we don't stop there. We then reach out with compassion and respond skilfully to the struggles that abound in life all around us. This was the path of the mystics of old. They taught that it is important to have our feet in two realities at the same time: one foot in the timeless awareness of the Buddhas and another foot in the world as we know it with all its issues and struggles. The benefit of this approach is that we are always responding to what is difficult from a place of wholeness and peace and this helps us act with more effectiveness and clarity in the world.

The workshop will be strongly experiential and will include a combination of teachings, guided practices, mindful movement and inquiry. It will be a natural next step for people with experience of mindfulness practice.

#### Further details

In the tradition of Advaita Vedanta awareness develops in 3 stages:

1. Awareness witnesses the arising of thoughts and emotions – mindfulness
2. Awareness is the space within which thoughts and emotions arise – open awareness
3. All thoughts and emotions are the expression of awareness – nondual awareness

Many people practice the first stage of awareness which is mindfulness. Fewer people have access to stages 2 and 3 which will be the focus of this workshop. Choden will teach these stages in a step by step way together with sharing and inquiry so that they land in a deeply personal way.

Along with the practice of awareness we will also explore emptiness drawing on the Mahamudra path in Tibetan Buddhism. Put simply, emptiness means that whatever arises in our experience is not as solid and real as it seems – even our worst inner dramas and struggles. They are ephemeral and changing like clouds in the sky. When we touch emptiness directly in meditation practice it is liberating because we begin to see how none of our inner struggles and dramas are the big deal they seem to be. We recognise that we are under a spell and the practice of emptiness breaks this spell.

The practice of awareness goes together with the practice of emptiness. We learn to recognise and rest in awareness as the ground of our being. This feels like coming home to an innate sense of peace and wellbeing. Then whenever difficult thoughts, emotions and mind states arise we learn to recognise their emptiness. In the words of Shakespeare, "they are all sound and fury signifying nothing!" In Buddhism this is described as the path of wisdom that leads us back to the profound truth of who we are.

#### Choden Biography

A monk within the Karma Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, Choden (aka Sean Mc Govern) completed a three-year, three-month retreat in 1997 and has been a practicing Buddhist since 1985. He is originally from South Africa where he trained as a lawyer and learned meditation under the guidance of Rob Nairn, an internationally renowned Buddhist teacher. He is now involved in developing secular mindfulness and compassion programmes drawing upon the wisdom and methods of the Buddhist tradition, as well as contemporary insights from psychology and neuroscience. He is an honorary fellow of the University of Aberdeen and teaches on their Postgraduate Study Programme in Mindfulness (MSc) that is the first of its kind to include compassion in its curriculum. He co-wrote a book with Paul Gilbert in 2013, entitled Mindful Compassion that explores the interface between Buddhist and Evolutionary approaches to compassion training. He is also the co-author of two other books: Mindfulness Based Living Course (2018) and From Mindfulness to Insight (2019). In 2016 he completed a one-year retreat focused on the foundation practices of Tibetan Buddhism.

#### Books by Choden

Gilbert, P.: Choden. (2013) Mindful Compassion. Using the Power of Mindfulness and Compassion To Transform Our Lives. London: Robinson.

Choden and Regan-Addis, H. (2018) Mindfulness Based Living Course, Winchester: O Books

Nairn, R. Choden and Regan-Addis, H. (2019) From Mindfulness to Insight. Boulder: Shambala

#### Website

Choden is a director and lead teacher with the Mindfulness Association. See website below.

<https://www.mindfulnessassociation.net/>



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