

The Awakening Heart of Bodhicitta

Through Practicing the 4 Limitless Qualities

This retreat will focus on Bodhicitta, or the awakening heart. This is the cornerstone of the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism. It is concerned with opening our hearts and minds to all parts of ourselves and all of life with a sincere wish to awaken in the midst of the messiness and beauty of life, and to help others awaken too.

Bodhicitta is expressed through the Four Limitless Qualities (also called the Four *Brahmaviharas*) that expands the reach of our hearts so that all of life is held within our loving and compassionate awareness. Four Limitless Qualities are loving-kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity.

The way we practice them is by responding to the people and situations in our lives with friendliness and warmth. This is the meaning of loving-kindness. Where this friendly warmth encounters suffering it becomes compassion. Also, where this friendly warmth encounters the simple good things in life and the happiness of others it becomes sympathetic joy.

Normally these qualities are limited to those we like. However, when we practice equanimity this extends the reach of our hearts beyond our habitual likes and dislikes to include those we do not like and those who are strangers. In this context equanimity means an even minded and warm engagement with everyone we encounter; it is not cool and indifferent.

The retreat will include teachings, guided practices, times of sharing and periods of silence.

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. Originally from South Africa where he qualified as a lawyer, he learned meditation under the Tibetan master, Lama Yeshe Rinpoche. He is now involved in developing secular mindfulness, compassion and insight 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 three other books: *Mindfulness Based Living Course (2018)*, *From Mindfulness to Insight (2019)* and *Compassion Based Living Course (2025)*