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ALEXANDER BERZIN is an author and translator of Tibetan Buddhist works. He is the Director of Berzin Archives e.V. and international lecturer on Buddhist philosophy. He received his Ph.D. in 1972 from Harvard University, in the Departments of Far Eastern Languages and Sanskrit and Indian Studies. He worked for 29 years in Dharamsala, India, as a founding member of the Translation Bureau of the Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, and has served as occasional interpreter for the Dalai Lama. He currently lives in Berlin and nowadays prepares his collected works for online publication at the Berzin Archives. He has published 17 books (mostly on Tibetan Buddhism) and his works have been translated into 18 languages.

Overview of Exercises for Developing Balanced Sensitivity Based on Buddhist Practices

[Handout download] Sensitivity is a function of two variables - attentiveness and responsiveness - each or both of which may be weak, out of proportion, or balanced. With attentiveness, one notes the condition of someone, the consequences of one's behavior toward him or her, or both. Attentiveness also regards one's own condition and the effect of one's behavior on oneself. Responsiveness allows a spontaneous or considered reply to what one notices. One responds with an emotion, a thought, words, actions, or some combination of the four. Certain people seem naturally more sensitive than others. Sometimes this is an admirable quality. Partners are sensitive to each other's moods and do not make demands when the other has had a difficult day. Let us call this ability "balanced sensitivity." In other cases, being sensitive is a disability. Insecure people are sensitive to the point that their feelings are hurt at the slightest remark. This syndrome is known as hypersensitivity. At the other end of the spectrum lies insensitivity. Self-centered persons are insensitive to the effect of their words on others and say whatever comes to their heads. The Buddhist teachings suggest various methods for developing or enhancing the positive variety and for reducing or eliminating the negative ones. In *Developing Balanced Sensitivity* (Snow Lion 1998, revised edition available, together with *The Sensitivity Handbook*, as e-books on www.berzinarchives.com), Dr. Berzin presents a program of twenty exercises for overcoming sensitivity imbalances. Ideally practiced in group sessions, although adaptable for individual practice, each exercise contains many parts and builds upon the previous exercises. The program does not require any Buddhist background and is suitable as supplementary training for workers in social, educational, medical, and other service areas. A Buddhist Approach to Integrating the Various Aspects of One's Life Many people have difficulty integrating, in a healthy manner, the diverse factors that have influenced their development and that currently affect their lives. These factors include family, friends, culture, religion, education, employment, and so on. When such persons suffer from low self-esteem, they may be identifying with either actual or imagined shortcomings or negative influences that have arisen from these sources. Unawareness of these negative influences may lead to what the Hungarian psychiatrist, Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, has called "invisible loyalties." These are patterns of behavior through which a person remains loyal to destructive aspects from his or her past. In Tibetan Buddhist training, certain aspects of "Guru-yoga" are reminiscent of the therapeutic strategy used in Contextual Therapy for such syndromes. To build a healthy relationship with a spiritual teacher, a student first identifies and acknowledges the shortcomings of the teacher. Realizing that little benefit derives from dwelling on these shortcomings, the student puts aside further consideration of them. The student then focuses exclusively on the actual good qualities of the teacher, with appreciation for the benefit he or she has gained from them. Using visualization methods, the student then feels inspired to develop these qualities himself or herself and to integrate them into daily life. "Integrating the various aspects of one's life" is a practice developed by Dr. Berzin, based on the above-mentioned Buddhist and therapeutic methods. Trainees focus on their childhood and present family members, their native cultural and religious backgrounds, the major fields they have studied, their past and present teachers, friends, and romantic partners, the jobs they have held, and so on. Acknowledging the negative aspects, putting them aside, and then identifying the constructive influences they have received helps the trainees to integrate these positive qualities into a healthier self-image.