

Lesson 4: Mindfulness Mantras

Learning Outcomes

- Foster appreciation and understanding of the art and cultures of the the greater Himalayan region.
- Cultivate a greater awareness of one's inner self.
- Develop a mantra, which can serve as a personal resource for overcoming afflictive emotions.

Primary Core Components

Attention and self-awareness

Recommended Materials

Slips of paper, pencils, pens, markers, disposable hot cups, scissors, balloons, dowels, colored masking tape, Wikki Stix, yarn/string, and beads

Length:
50 minutes

Grade Levels: Upper elementary
school through high school

1. Check-In Activity

Invite the students to sit comfortably. State that in order to cultivate greater awareness of our environment and more closely examine the world around us, it's helpful to practice grounding exercises such as breathing slowly and deeply. Invite the students to close their eyes for a few moments or gently gaze ahead. Breathe slowly and deeply. Become aware of each breath. Become aware of one's posture. Relax the head and shoulders.

After thirty seconds ask the students to slowly open their eyes. Now that they are in a state of relative stillness, what details are they able to take in from their environment that they didn't notice before? What feelings did breathing slowly and deeply elicit? Now that the group has achieved this calmer state of being, we are all better equipped to view works of art from the Rubin Museum collection and observe them closely.

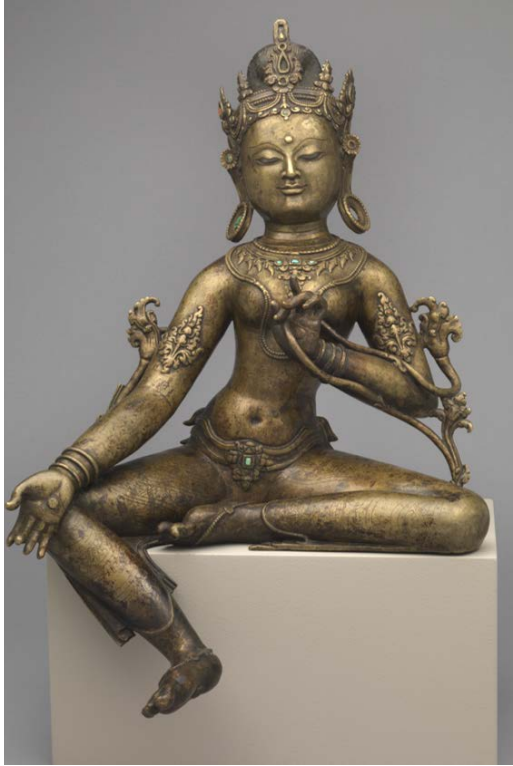
2. Presentation/Discussion

About Amoghasiddhi

Amoghasiddhi is one of the Buddhas of the Five Families. Each buddha is associated with a cardinal direction. You can learn more about the Buddhas of the Five Families as you explore the Mandala Lab. Amoghasiddhi presides over the northern direction. His female counterpart is Green Tara.

Project an image of Green Tara.

About Green Tara



Green Tara; Tibet; 13th century; brass with inlays of silver; Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art; C2005.16.30

Tara is a completely enlightened buddha, who has promised to appear in the form of a female bodhisattva for the benefit of all beings. Tara typically appears in the form of a radiant young woman. The green form of Tara is known for bestowing protection from the Eight Fears. According to Tibetan Buddhism, Tara is revered in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

This 13th-century work of art is a remarkable example of early Tibetan sculpture. Its distinguishing features include the proportionally large head, the distinctive hoop earrings, and the subtle sense of motion of the figure. Early Tibetan sculptures such as this one were strongly influenced by Indian art.

Green Tara embodies compassionate action and the willingness to embrace all beings without judgment. Her 10-syllable mantra *om tare tuttare ture svaha* is memorized and recited by Tibetans from early childhood. Tibetan Buddhist practitioners recite this mantra with devotion in order to strengthen their connection to Tara, receive protection, and accrue merit.

3. Insight Activity

Explain that today we are going to develop personal mantras, which we can incorporate into our individual mindfulness practice. The mantra can consist of a word, a sentence, or a phrase. It can be in English or another language of our choice. It can be as simple as repeating the word “love” or “compassion” to oneself, or it can be more complex.

Choose a word, sentence, or phrase that evokes a sense of calm or inner peace. This mantra can serve as a resource in challenging times. It can help to ground us in the present moment. Once you have chosen your mantra, write it down on a slip of paper.

4. Reflective Practice

Project an image of a Prayer Wheel from the Rubin Museum collection.



Prayer Wheel; Tibet; wood, metal, and pigments;
Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art; SC2010.32a-h

The practice of rotating a prayer wheel is believed to originate with the Indian master Nagarjuna. In Tibetan Buddhist culture, those who are unable to read are instructed to spin a “wheel” filled with thousands of inscribed mantras, or *mani*, written on paper. It is believed that turning the wheel in a clockwise direction is the same as reciting the prayers and mantras, leading to the accumulation of merit and wisdom while purifying negative karma. Turning the wheel also releases the mantras into the world, benefitting countless beings.

This stationary prayer wheel would have been placed outside of a temple or shrine so visitors could turn the wheel on their way in and out of the temple and while circumambulating it. The rectangular panels that house the wheel are painted in the traditional central Tibetan style and display teachers and deities of the Sakya Tibetan Buddhist tradition. The mantra of the deity of compassion Avalokiteshvara, *om mani padme hum*, decorates the posts of the structure in ornamental script.

Explain that prayer wheels are an important aspect of Tibetan Buddhist practice. The objective of rotating a prayer wheel is to increase good karma for the individual and all beings. Prayer wheels can be massive in size or small enough to fit in the palm of your hand. They often contain the mantra *om mani padme hum*, the most popular Buddhist mantra.

Tell students that we will create our own handheld prayer wheels containing the mantras that we wrote down. To begin, distribute pens and the disposable hot cups to students. Instruct the students to poke a hole in the bottom of the disposable cup. Then insert the slip of paper containing the mantra into the cup. Next, give the students balloons and scissors. Instruct the students to cut off the end of each balloon, and stretch the balloon over the cup, sealing the mantra inside. (For students with an allergy to latex, nitrile gloves can be used as an alternative.) Next, the students secure the balloons to the cups with colored masking tape.

Afterwards, direct the students to poke a hole in the center of the balloon with a pen. Then, run the wooden dowels through both ends of the cup. Use Wikki Stix to secure the dowels to the cups. Following this, fasten a piece of yarn or string to the top of the cup and attach beads to it. Lastly, embellish the cups with additional mantras and images that evoke a sense of peace.

5. Debrief

Amoghasiddhi is associated with the color green, the element of air, and overcoming the afflictive emotion of envy/jealousy. Mindfulness practices such as mindful breathing, mindful looking, and mindful eating can help us to surmount our afflictive emotions, so that we can reach our full potential. Invite the students to turn to page 22 of the SEE Learning® Playbook and engage in the SEE Learning® Practice: Mindfulness on the Breath.

6. Follow-Up and Extension Activity

Project an image of a different Green Tara from the Rubin Museum collection.



Green Tara; Tibet; Tenth Karmapa, Choying Dorje (1604–1674); 17th century; brass with pigments; Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art; C2005.16.3a-b

This work of art was created by Choying Dorje (1604–1674), the Tenth Karmapa, head of the Karma Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Not only was the Tenth Karmapa a revered spiritual leader, he was also a remarkable artist. The Karmapa's love of animals is often subtly incorporated into his works. Here, a pair of birds can be found nestled in a leafy bower above Tara's head.

From a young age the Karmapa demonstrated a proclivity for both painting and sculpting. He was particularly drawn to metalwork from Kashmir and Swat. These stylistic influences are evident in this sculpture of the goddess Tara.

Tara is known for bestowing protection from the Eight Fears: the fear of snakes, the fear of ghosts, the fear of brigandry, the fear of drowning, the fear of being mauled by wild lions, the fear of being trampled by wild elephants, the fear of being falsely imprisoned, and the fear of being consumed by fire.

Although many of these fears are not a part of our modern world, take some time to reflect on fears that we do have that prevent us from being the best that we can be. Make a list of fears as a class. Then direct the students to take a few moments to concentrate on their breath. Repeat the mindful breathing exercise. When we focus our awareness on the present moment, notice how many of our fears that are rooted in projecting into the future start to dissipate.

The Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art Core Values of Teaching

Social and Emotional Learning	Social, Emotional, and Ethical (SEE) Learning® values and skills play an integral role in our educational offerings.
Dynamic / Differentiated	We aim to meet our program participants at every education, knowledge, language, and creative skill level by dynamically differentiating our program lessons and activities for a variety of levels of learners.
Inquiry-Based	We follow an inquiry-based learning methodology that employs question posing and problem solving as primary ways to engage students in active and empowered learning.
Relevant / Relatable	As a global museum dedicated to the arts and cultures of the Himalayas, we strive to make our unique content relevant and relatable to the contemporary lives of our visitors and program participants.
Exploration-Focused	We challenge students to find their creative voices and visions through process-based art making that allows them to explore new types of material techniques, artistic processes, and creative ways of thinking and making.
Culturally Attuned	We actively collaborate with members of the Himalayan and Himalayan-American communities to ensure the most accurate and just representations of the Himalayan people, arts, cultures, religions, and histories in our programs.
Teamwork	We strive to create programs, activities, and a supportive learning environment that cultivates creative collaboration between peers and across all generations of visitors.

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