

REPORT

MEDITATION AND THE MIND

An online workshop with
Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche

8th & 9th May 2021



CENTRE FOR
ESCALATION
OF PEACE | CEP



Pallavan
Learning
Systems

INDIA
INTERNATIONAL
CENTRE | IIC



CONTENTS

02	Introduction
04	Day 1
07	Q & A Session
08	Day 2
10	Q & A sessions
12	Conclusion
13	Summary

INTRODUCTION

Ritinjali and Centre for Escalation of Peace, in collaboration with Pallavan Learning Systems, India International Centre, and Vikramashila Foundation India held a two-day workshop on 8th & 9th May 2021 - 'Meditation and the Mind' with Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche. Over 800 participants joined in from 59 countries including India, USA, Bhutan, Singapore, Nepal, UK, Indonesia, Spain, Italy, Malaysia, France, Thailand, South Africa, Canada and Japan.

In Buddhist Philosophy and Psychology, the mind or 'Chitta' has been given the most profound importance in dealing with life. The view is that the Bodhicitta or the 'the Awakened Mind' is the only way to attain enlightenment or overcome the daily mental afflictions of the world. We have also observed that many times our mind is not in our control - like the 'Monkey Mind' as it is called in Tibetan Buddhism.

In our daily lives we must deal with myriad emotions and while responding to those emotions, we are confronted with a variety of consequences, some favourable and others not so much. How can we manage our thinking and decision-making processes to achieve mental stability and experience satisfaction at the end of the day? Since our mind plays a crucial part in decision-making, how can we ensure that our mind is sharp and alert enough to face any challenge? These are the questions that the workshop sought to address.

The workshop was led by Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, a world-renowned Buddhist teacher and practitioner who possesses a rare ability to present the ancient Indian and Tibetan wisdom in a fresh, engaging manner. Most uniquely, Rinpoche's teachings weave together his own personal experiences with modern scientific research. Due to his approach in presenting his teaching and his work with neuroplasticity, many have deemed him to be the 'happiest man in the world'.

Mingyur Rinpoche walked out of his monastery in Bodhgaya, India in early June 2011 and began a 'wandering retreat' through the Himalayas and the plains of India that lasted four-and-a-half years.

His best-selling book, *The Joy of Living: Unlocking the Secret and Science of Happiness*, debuted on the *New York Times* bestseller list and has been translated into over twenty languages. Rinpoche's other books include *Turning Confusion into Clarity: A Guide to the Foundation Practices of Tibetan Buddhism* and

Joyful Wisdom: Embracing Change and Finding Freedom. He has also authored an illustrated children's book entitled: *Ziji: The Puppy that Learned to Meditate.*

Rinpoche's teachings weave together his own personal experiences with modern scientific research. Due to his approach in presenting his teaching and his work with neuroplasticity, many have deemed him to be the 'happiest man in the world'.

DAY 1

Mr. Choki Wangchuk opened the 1st day of the workshop followed by a welcome address by Mr. Arun Kapur who emphasised Rinpoche's lifelong interest in Western science and psychology and his ability to integrate traditional Buddhist practices with neuroscience and mental health. Mr. Kapur highlighted the importance of Rinpoche's words, "The mind is the source of all experience and by changing the quality of the mind, one can change everything."

In his introductory note, Amb. Shyam Saran observed that Rinpoche's teachings show us the role meditation can play in orienting and reorienting the direction our mind takes. He reflected that meditation can contribute to stilling the mind. The raging pandemic has caused increased mental, physical and psychological strain. In this context, Rinpoche's message becomes very relevant and may help calm sweeping emotions within us.

Rinpoche began the first day of the workshop with a prayer for all the people affected by the pandemic. He explained that there are many different styles and techniques of meditation around the world. Since 2000, many scientists have also embarked on research about meditation and its effects on us. He reflected that through his workshop, he wished to address the question - how can meditation develop our inner strength and potential? Rinpoche noted that transforming our minds helps transform our lives and this may affect our physical body as well. He explained that he learned meditation as a young boy of nine to cope with panic attacks and that meditation helped him change his life. Meditation taught him how to befriend difficult emotions and make them his teacher. He advised the audience to accept difficult times as a learning process.

Rinpoche observed that we all have basic innate goodness and capacity within us but often we ignore and don't recognise this. The purpose of meditation is to gain awareness and recognise our basic innate goodness. Meditation helps us identify the fundamental qualities of our minds and to discover ourselves. As we are all a part of this world, if we individually transform, the world will transform. Dissatisfaction and chaos ensue when people don't want to change themselves but want to change the world.

Rinpoche emphasised that the essence of meditation is 'awareness' which is always present and always pure. To inculcate awareness, one needs to strive to be in a state of relaxation. However if one cannot relax, one needs to acknowledge that and simply be present, no matter what the state.

As he stated, 'Let it be and let it go.' He gently advised participants to feel gravity and to be with whatever they were experiencing.

Awareness, love, compassion and wisdom are the fundamental qualities of the mind. These innate qualities are, however, not easy to discover. Awareness-oriented meditation focuses on being present and channels our awareness through seeing, hearing, thinking and feeling. Using the metaphor of the sky for the mind, Rinpoche explained that just as the sky is vast and pure, so is our mind. All thoughts and emotions, negative as well as positive, float across the mind just as clouds float across the sky. Awareness allows us to become familiar with our own mind.

Then, Rinpoche led the participants through a Breathing Meditation, one of the techniques used in awareness-oriented meditation. He explained that in the Breathing Meditation technique, breath and mind connect with each other. In the beginning, a practitioner may only get a glimpse of the process of breathing in and out. Many will notice that our mind cannot be with our breath all the time. With time, one can learn to focus on the breath through a series of intentional practices - by feeling the sensation, by labelling the process, and by creating an image of breath. With constant attention, the mind will stay with the breath longer each time, and through this practice, the mind can be made pliable and workable.

Our mind needs to be pliable so that it is able to grasp the nature of reality. The inability to understand the nature of reality is the cause of suffering. Furthermore, when people are suffering, they tend to seek a solution through stimulation. Instead, we need to strive for an inner journey and inner transformation. Although the pandemic has disrupted our lives in many aspects, it has also granted us the opportunity and time for inner exploration. And we should take advantage of that. We should also use difficult times and situations as opportunities to grow, learn and transform.

Then, Rinpoche led the participants through Pizza Meditation, a technique to demonstrate the difficulty of trying to block our thoughts. During this practice, the audience was asked to follow one important rule - they were not allowed to think of pizza!

Rinpoche explained that this technique is useful because it exposes the futility of trying to block our thoughts, particularly negative thoughts. As soon as we tell our mind not to think of

something, our mind naturally veers towards that very subject. Ricocheting between our craving and our aversion, our mind gets cloudy and develops negative emotions that cause suffering.

Twenty years ago, scientists thought that the brain cannot change. However, research has shown that that assumption was incorrect. Rinpoche shared his personal experiences with the scientists and researchers at the University of Wisconsin with the audience. He observed that through meditation, it is possible to generate neuroplasticity by creating new neural pathways. Usually, the human brain changes from the 'outside in', as a result of unconscious response to environmental or external stimuli. Once the brain is connected with awareness, it begins changing consciously, from 'inside out.'

Our mind needs to be pliable so that it is able to grasp the nature of reality. The inability to understand the nature of reality is the cause of suffering.

Q & A SESSION:

Q. How do we cope with mental stress and strive for equanimity during the Pandemic?

A. We know that the Pandemic is real, so we need to accept that it is happening and make peace with it. Do not focus on stopping or blocking thoughts but instead, focus on not getting attached to them. Take this opportunity to explore within and meditate with awareness, imbibing the concept of 'Let it be. Let it go.' Also, we should engage with physical exercise because neuroplasticity is high during exercise.

Q. What do you think was the root cause of your panic attacks?

A. In my experience, oftentimes, the fear of panic attacks was worse than the panic attacks themselves. The root causes of most anxieties are craving (desire) and aversion (disgust). Both of these lead to negative emotions and suffering that manifest as panic attacks or other anxieties. Once you understand the real nature of reality, you can choose not to get attached to either of these feelings.

Q. Can I use meditation to regain my sense of smell and taste?

A. Due to neuroplasticity and effect of mental processes on bodily functions, it may be possible. One should definitely try it. However, you need to be prepared to accept that meditation may not be able to bring back your sense of smell and taste. It is the awareness and acceptance that will eventually bring peace to your mind.

Q. We all have people in our lives who are difficult to handle and disturb our peace of mind. Do we need to engage with them since they serve as our tests, or is it okay to stay away from them?

A. First of all, if it is within your power and control to avoid unpleasant situations, please do so. That is why, it is totally acceptable to stay away from such people. But, if you are unable to avoid them, then it is beyond your control so stop worrying. Secondly, and more importantly, whether you are able to avoid them or not, your mind needs to get to a place of ambivalence where such people cease to affect your peace of mind.

Q. What is the purpose of practising mindfulness?

A. The purpose of practising mindfulness is to understand the true nature of reality and foundational qualities of the mind, which is awareness, love, compassion and wisdom. Mindfulness helps us recognise awareness to become the master of our own minds.

DAY 2

On the second day of the workshop, Rinpoche reiterated that we are all innately good and have awareness, love, compassion and wisdom within us already, but we need to recognise that nature in us. Awareness is the purpose of meditation and wisdom is the recognition of awareness. After being aware, we need to make a conscious effort to deal with aversion and craving. With ultimate awareness, aversion and craving will not affect our minds.

We all have in us unlimited capacity, talent and potential. But without awareness, our mind does not realise or recognise it. The pandemic has made things more difficult and further confused and disturbed the minds of many. But we need to ensure that we do not give up and instead focus on the technique of 'let it come, let it go'. Rinpoche explained that in life, we need to find the right balance and understand that letting go doesn't mean giving up.

When we truly understand our minds, 'ups and downs' in the outside world do not affect the mind. When we recognise our minds, we realise that actual 'ups and downs' in life are not only inevitable but can also be good. Everything in life is like waves and we need to know how to ride the waves. Rinpoche explained that our minds have 3 parts - the sensation/experiential mind; the grasping/conceptual mind; and the habitual/unconscious mind. Emotions such as stress, depression, anger and jealousy manifest as sensations in our body and reside in the experiential mind. These sensations over time become habits or beliefs. While reasoning and intellectualising can help to an extent, we need to delve deeper in order to deal with these sensations in an effective manner. Meditation with awareness can be the solution. Meditation helps to disseminate the understanding from the conceptual mind to the sensation mind and the unconscious mind. At the same time, if we want to inculcate a certain habit, we need to ensure that it features in the habitual mind naturally, which takes effort and practice. Meditation can help with that process as well.

When we meditate, our mind traverses through all these 3 parts of our minds. Regarding the sensation mind, it is important to understand that there is no need to get rid of the sensations; we simply need to observe. Our approach should be, 'I will not try to chase the sensations away but learn how to live with them'. Over time, the symptoms may still be there, but we will be able to befriend the sensations – as a result, aversion and craving will subside. Also, in time, we will be able to make our sensations the object of our meditation.

Rinpoche mentioned that besides ricocheting between craving and aversion, we also tend to move back and forth between the past and the future; in the process, we forget to live in the present. Meditation with awareness helps us be in the present and gives us clarity of vision.

Rinpoche led the participants through the technique of Mental Recitation Meditation. He explained that in this technique, we use any mantra and recite the words or phrase silently in the mind. When we recite silently in our minds, we connect with awareness.

Then, Rinpoche conducted a Sound Meditation with a singing bowl. Rinpoche suggested that we should try various forms and techniques of meditation to find the one that suits us best. He also recommended constantly changing the techniques in order to avoid boredom and keep ourselves constantly engaged.

Rinpoche explained that Breathing Meditation, Mental Recitation Meditation and Sound Meditation are all various techniques of Shamatha Meditation, focused on raising awareness and being present. Shamatha Meditation is non-judgmental and does not seek to find the true nature of the mind. However, it is important because it guides us towards awareness and effectively controlling aversion and craving.

Vipassana Meditation is focused on inquiring and understanding the nature of reality. Rinpoche briefly introduced one of the techniques of Vipassana Meditation - Meditation on Impermanence. He said that life is constantly changing. While we understand this at an intellectual level, meditation helps bring this understanding into the experiential and habitual level. Rinpoche observed that once we accept impermanence, our minds open up to endless possibilities and opportunities.

Our approach should be, 'I will not try to chase the sensations away but learn how to live with them'.

Q & A SESSION:

Q. My mother cannot fall asleep and is becoming weaker. What meditation technique do you recommend?

A. Sleep is very important for a balanced life. We need to rest in order to rejuvenate. Try the technique of scanning the body and feeling the gravity during meditation. Also, employ the technique of 'letting go' and just resting; sleep will eventually come. Do not try to chase sleep because that will simply keep you awake.

Q. Is concentration the same as awareness? What techniques can we use to improve our concentration?

A. Concentration, awareness and 'samadhi' refer to the same thing. While meditating, we need to be aware and concentrate but ensure that we are simply observing and not putting too much pressure on ourselves. If we keep on saying 'concentrate, concentrate', our minds will wander and our awareness will elude us. The act of repetition and a strict adherence to the technique builds our capacity to increase our concentration and train our minds.

Q. While performing Mental Recitation Meditation, after some time, I am chanting the mantra in my mind, but my mind is also thinking about various things. How do I deal with this?

A. It is perfectly okay to have thoughts come in and go while reciting the mantra. The key is not to get attached to these thoughts and keep on bringing your focus back to the mantra.

Q. Rinpoche has advised that the mantra should be recited in the minds instead of chanting out loud. But, doesn't the sound 'OM' have its own vibration and benefits?

A. 'OM' and mantras have more vibrations when they are recited in our minds than chanting them out loud.

Q. How can I make meditation and Dharma an important part of my life?

A. You can do that by incorporating both formal meditation (5 minutes every day) and informal meditation (whenever you can) in your daily routine.

In formal meditation, the posture is important along with the need to be still. During informal meditation, we do not worry about the posture. Both types are important because formal meditation teaches technique while informal meditation allows us to apply or

transform that technique according to the situation. Informal meditation allows one to meditate anywhere and anytime. In order to develop a habit for informal meditation, it is useful to pair it with an existing habit, such as performing it every time you open the door or look at the phone.

Q. How can I use meditation to deal with childhood trauma?

A. Meditation can help by raising awareness regarding the trauma and its underlying causes. Also, the acceptance of the trauma will help in the healing process. With time, meditation will help in viewing the trauma without getting attached to it, slowly 'letting it go'.

Meditation with awareness helps us be in the present and gives us clarity of vision.

CONCLUSION:

After the Q & A session, Mr Amitabh Mathur delivered his words of appreciation. He expressed his gratitude to Rinpoche for agreeing to share his wisdom during these tumultuous times. He observed the importance of awareness and practice in Rinpoche's teachings. Then, Mr. Hukum Chand Negi gave the Thank You note. He reflected on how Rinpoche's teachings show us a way to make negative emotions our friend, an essential skill needed to cope with the challenges posed by the pandemic. Mr Choki Wangchuk closed the webinar by thanking the organisers, speakers, audience members and Rinpoche for a memorable and beneficial two-day workshop on the 'Meditation and the Mind'.

Rinpoche's teachings show us a way to make negative emotions our friend, an essential skill needed to cope with the challenges posed by the pandemic.

SUMMARY

Ritinjali and Centre for Escalation of Peace in collaboration with Pallavan Learning Systems, India International Centre and Vikramashila Foundation held a two-day workshop on 8th & 9th May 2021 - 'Meditation and the Mind' with Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche. Over 800 participants joined in from 59 countries including India, USA, Bhutan, Singapore, Nepal, UK, Indonesia, Spain, Italy, Malaysia, Hong Kong, France, Thailand, South Africa, Canada and Japan.

How can we manage our thinking and decision-making processes to achieve mental stability and experience satisfaction at the end of the day? Since our mind plays a crucial part in decision-making, how can we ensure that our mind is sharp and alert enough to face any challenge? These were the questions that the workshop sought to address.

The workshop began with a prayer for all the people affected by the pandemic. Rinpoche noted that transforming our minds helps transform our lives and this may affect our physical body also. He explained that he learned meditation as a young boy of nine to cope with panic attacks.

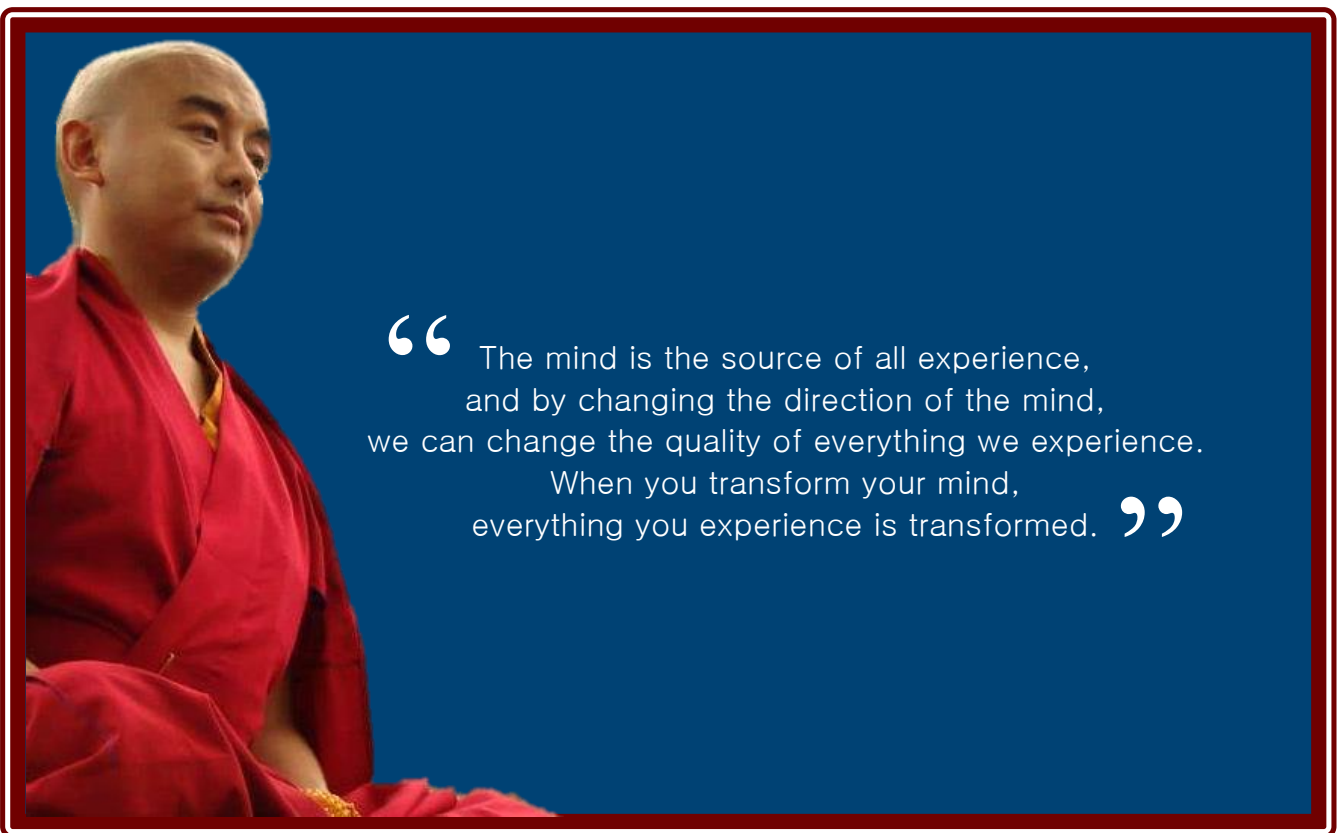
Rinpoche said that we all have basic innate goodness and capacity within us but often we ignore and don't recognise this. The purpose of meditation is to gain awareness and recognise our basic innate goodness. Meditation helps us recognise the fundamental qualities of our minds and to discover ourselves. Awareness, love and compassion and wisdom - these are the fundamental qualities of the mind. As we are all a part of this world, if we individually transform, the world will transform.

The audience were taught three techniques of awareness-oriented meditation over the two-day workshop. The first was Breathing Meditation, in which breath and mind connect with each other. With constant attention, the mind stays with the breath and through this practice, the mind is made pliable and workable. If the mind is not pliable, it cannot grasp the nature of reality. A second technique was Mental Recitation Meditation. In this technique, we can use any mantra and recite the word or phrase silently in the mind. When we recite silently in our minds, we connect with awareness. The third technique was Sound Meditation, a practice in which the ear and the mind hear together. He emphasised that one can switch between techniques and find one that best suits the practitioner. Through meditation, it is possible to generate neuroplasticity by creating new neural pathways.

Rinpoche explained that our minds have three parts - the sensation/experiential mind; the grasping/conceptual mind; and the habitual/unconscious mind. When we meditate, our mind traverses through all three. Most of the time, we ricochet between craving and aversion, between the past and the future, and we forget to live in the present. Meditation helps us be in the present and gives us clarity of vision.

On Day two, Rinpoche briefly introduced one technique of Vipassana Meditation - Meditation on Impermanence. He said that life is constantly changing. While we understand this at an intellectual level, meditation helps bring this understanding into the experiential and habitual level. Rinpoche observed that once we accept impermanence, our minds open to a lot of new opportunities.

On both days, at the end of the workshop Rinpoche answered questions collected from the audience. Many questions focused on the challenges posed by the pandemic. Through his answers, Rinpoche emphasised that meditation is a life skill.



“ The mind is the source of all experience,
and by changing the direction of the mind,
we can change the quality of everything we experience.
When you transform your mind,
everything you experience is transformed. ”



Organising Teams

Ritinjali
Centre for Escalation of Peace
Pallavan Learning Systems
India International Centre
Vikramashila Foundation India