

KHENPO'S
TALKS

YORK UNIVERSITY

MEDITATION

FINDING COMFORT AND EASE IN THE NATURE OF MIND



KHENPO
SODARGYE

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Meditation — Finding Comfort and Ease in the Nature of Mind

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Khenpo Sodargye

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If we carefully examine every part of the body, above and below, to the left and to the right, we still cannot find them. Nor can we find the mind when we search for its color, shape, or essential nature. In the end, we discover that we are unable to find them at all.

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PROFESSOR VÉRONIQUE TOMASZEWSKI

Dear colleagues, sangha, ladies, and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to announce that Khenpo Sodargye has arrived. Please stand to welcome our distinguished guest today.

Thank you, Khenpo, for joining us here at York University. I invite you to sit for a few moments while we introduce our acting dean, Professor and Dr. Kim Ian Michasiw, who will formally welcome you to York University for your very first visit as a scholar to Canada. Thank you.

PROFESSOR KIM IAN MICHASIW

On behalf of Dean Martin Singer, who is currently in Hong Kong, I would like to extend a welcome from the faculty to Khenpo Sodargye on his first visit to our campus. Dean Singer, a noted sinologist with a deep interest in Eastern traditions, would certainly regret missing this occasion.

Unfortunately, I cannot make the same claim. Indeed, I am perhaps the least spiritually involved person in this room and thus feel somewhat unqualified to offer this greeting. Earlier this year, I was asked about the presence of Buddhist studies at York. Given the breadth of our Faculty, I assumed we covered every field, but I was surprised—and admittedly a bit disappointed—to find that Buddhist studies are less prominent here than I had anticipated. I understand, however, that there are notable exceptions, which I am pleased to learn about.

Last night, I heard a Muslim cleric on the radio observe that, in Western universities, the study of spiritual practice often requires one to set aside personal belief or practice. Perhaps, then, the relative scarcity of Buddhist studies here is not entirely regrettable.

Finally, as I prepared these remarks, I found myself reflecting on the title of today's talk. The words—finding, comfort, ease, nature, mind—are all familiar, yet their combination suggests a perspective that feels almost foreign to me, as if the nature of mind itself could be a source of comfort and ease. I trust that our principal speaker will illuminate these connections far more eloquently than I could, and so I gladly yield the podium to those more qualified.

PROFESSOR VÉRONIQUE TOMASZEWSKI

Thank you very much, Dr. Michasiw. I am Professor Tomaszewski, a sociologist of culture, and I have the privilege introducing students to both religious studies and Buddhism. I would like to say that we are thrilled to have a scholar of this caliber here with us today.

Imagine, if you will, a scholar whose expertise spans the Sophists, Kant, Heidegger, the entire corpus of French existentialists, and British pragmatists. This breadth of knowledge, wisdom, logic, and debate gives you some sense of Khenpo Sodargye's intellectual range. Despite his humility, his nearly one hundred published works attest to his extraordinary scholarship. We are truly honored to welcome him.

His mind is capable of profound abstraction, yet he is also able to meditate for periods far longer than most of us could imagine. With humility, awe, and genuine joy, we note that the sunshine and blue sky outside seem to reflect our own state of mind and

the openness of our hearts as we welcome Khenpo Sodargye to York.

We are deeply grateful that he has accepted our invitation to speak on how meditation can help us find comfort and ease within the restless nature of our minds. This is a topic we frequently discuss with our students, particularly as they prepare for exams. Increasingly, we encourage students to cultivate mindfulness, adopting practices that we, as both scholars and practitioners, have found immensely beneficial.

To speak more thoroughly about this topic, I'd like to invite my colleague, Deborah Orr, to say a few words about the promise and the current state of contemplative education at York University. Deborah, please.

DEBORAH ORR

Thank you, Véronique. I would also like to welcome everyone to York University and to this exceptional opportunity to learn from such a distinguished teacher. We are truly honored and fortunate to have Khenpo Sodargye with us. This is a unique occasion for each of us, and for me personally. It also marks an important step for York as we increasingly incorporate the field of contemplative studies into our academic life.

Buddhism's presence in North America is a relatively recent phenomenon, gaining wider recognition only in the early twentieth century. Teachers such as D. T. Suzuki and others helped introduce the Dharma to a broader audience. Personally, my own interest was sparked in childhood by reading the poetry and literature of the Beat writers in the United States, who played a significant role in disseminating these teachings. Early pioneers, along with more recent figures like Thich Nhat Hanh—who visited Toronto not long ago—have fostered a growing and enthusiastic acceptance of Buddhism in the West. Interest in these teachings continues to expand.

For many in the West, mindfulness is primarily regarded as a means of calming the mind, relaxing, and cultivating focus and centeredness. This approach is widely adopted in educational settings and the broader community, and it is certainly valuable—especially for our students at York, who benefit from programs and presentations that introduce meditation and provide opportunities to center themselves.

Mindfulness is increasingly being studied across various departments at York, including religious studies, psychology, and the Department of Humanities, where I teach. I have been fortunate to teach an undergraduate course, “Embodied Understanding,” which integrates meditation and yoga with the study of foundational texts. I believe it is essential to ground practice in textual study. This winter, I will also be offering a graduate course, “Introduction to Mindfulness,” which similarly combines practice with close reading of texts.

I emphasize this point because mindfulness is, and will continue to be, vital for helping individuals become more centered, grounded, and self-aware. Yet its potential extends beyond personal well-being; it can profoundly enrich teaching and learning by fostering students’ growth, maturity, awareness, and compassion. Grounding these practices in textual study and

learning from teachers such as Khenpo Sodargye will further support this development.

Today promises to be an inspiring occasion and an opportunity for us to consider how we might further integrate mindfulness into our studies and work at York. Khenpo Sodargye, your presence is a true inspiration, and we are deeply grateful for your guidance as we strive toward these goals. Please join me in welcoming Khenpo Sodargye to York University.

KHENPO SODARGYE RINPOCHE

It is a pleasure to be here with you today, on the twenty-fourth. Over the next month, I will spend fifteen days in Canada and fifteen days in the United States, before returning to the Land of Tibet. My journey was arranged primarily at the request of my Chinese students. Accordingly, I will begin my remarks in Chinese, which will be translated into English. When I travel to the United States, I will speak mainly in Tibetan, with English translation provided. Now, I would like to introduce the topic of my lecture in Chinese.¹

Today, I would like to share some thoughts on meditation—specifically, how we can discover comfort and ease within the very nature of our own minds. In our modern era, many people are beginning to realize that, beyond the pursuit of material wealth, it is essential to turn our attention inward. This inward journey is at the heart of meditation. Let us explore this important topic together.

THE MEANING OF MEDITATION

What is meditation? In Tibetan, meditation is called *samten*, which means focusing the mind on a particular object and, in doing so, becoming aware of one's own emotional states. Human emotions can be both positive and negative, and it is only when the mind is in a state of calm that we are able to recognize them clearly. The essence of meditation lies in focus and concentration. Why is concentration necessary? Because many people today experience restless and agitated states of mind. It is this unsettled state that has contributed to much of the imbalance we see in humanity.

There is a saying that in the nineteenth century, tuberculosis threatened all of humanity; in the twentieth century, war and cancer were our greatest enemies; and in the twenty-first century, psychological afflictions such as anxiety, depression, and fear have swept across the world. Many of you may have witnessed this firsthand. The last century indeed witnessed numerous wars and various other forms of unrest, while in this century, people's minds are constantly churning with afflictions such as greed and hatred, giving rise to many psychological disorders—depression, autism, phobias, and so forth. Today, whether in educational communities such as universities and

schools or in various other social groups, the number of people suffering from mental illness continues to grow.

When our mental well-being is troubled, we may lose our sense of security within the family, and society can also become plagued by various forms of unrest. In extreme cases, many people, unable to cope with life's challenges, may even lose the will to live and choose suicide. In countries around the world, especially in this century, the rate of suicide has been steadily increasing year by year. While suicide is a tragic choice, when people cannot control their emotions, they may find themselves on this path.

In August of this year, the renowned American comedian Robin Williams died by suicide—a loss that shocked and saddened people around the world. In response, Dr. Thomas Insel, Director of the National Institute of Mental Health, expressed his condolences in a public blog post. He said that the suicide rate in the U.S. has remained stubbornly high for decades, with more than 39,000 deaths each year—now exceeding the annual number of deaths from homicides and car accidents.

As I reflect on these realities, I am deeply concerned. In the United States, with a population of over 300 million, more than one hundred people take their own lives every single day on

average. This is not only a serious issue in America, but also a challenge faced by many countries around the world. I believe this is a matter that calls for our collective reflection.

Today, most people enjoy sufficient food and clothing and are spared the material deprivation experienced by earlier generations, except in certain regions where poverty remains a significant challenge. Yet, if we lack the ability to regulate our minds, even the best material conditions cannot protect us from falling into deep anxiety and suffering.

In recent years, I have observed that many university professors, educators, and individuals from diverse backgrounds are not only placing great importance on education, but are also paying increasing attention to the cultivation of the mind. There is a growing recognition that mental health and inner resilience are essential—not only for academic achievement but also for navigating daily life. Consequently, more people are seeking to understand mental well-being and are turning to practices such as meditation to nurture and strengthen the mind.

Meditation is no longer unfamiliar to Western audiences. Many universities and social organizations now regularly offer meditation programs, and such practices have become increasingly

widespread. Meditation has proven highly effective in regulating and purifying our emotions, as well as in helping us manage and overcome negative mental states such as greed, anger, ignorance, and excessive pride. In this way, meditation serves as a powerful tool for cultivating a healthy and balanced mind.



HOW TO PRACTICE MEDITATION?

1 Methods of Meditation

There are several essential techniques to observe when practicing meditation. First, position the body according to the seven-point posture of Vairochana, or simply sit quietly and comfortably. Then, focus the mind on a particular object—perhaps a flower or a bottle. If you have religious faith, you may focus on a buddha statue or a cross. In short, concentrate your mind on a specific object.

When practicing in this way, it is best not to close your eyes. If you normally wear glasses, it is advisable to remove them during meditation. However, if the external environment is too distracting and prevents your mind from settling, then closing your eyes is acceptable. Additionally, breathe slowly and gently, as this allows the restlessness of the mind to gradually subside.

Remain in this state for as long as you comfortably can. If you cannot sustain it for long initially, even three to five minutes is beneficial, and you can repeat the practice multiple times throughout the day. This is a relatively simple, introductory meditation technique that is currently quite popular.

2 Pitfalls in Meditation

During meditation practice, there are several pitfalls that practitioners should be aware of. Many people may have encountered these experiences themselves.

The first is related to the experience of luminosity. During meditation, the mind may rest in a state of luminosity—utterly clear, lucid, and free from any darkness. Yet, according to advanced Buddhist practices, simply abiding in such clarity without recognizing the nature of mind is actually not the most suitable state to be sought in meditation.

The second is the experience of bliss. You may feel completely free from suffering, immersed in a sense of happiness and comfort, to the point that you are reluctant to leave meditation and wish to remain in that state indefinitely. While it can be cultivated temporarily, it too is not the final goal.

The third is the experience of non-thought. In this state, gross discursive thoughts such as greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and jealousy may all disappear, along with the absence of any sense of luminosity or bliss. This state of non-thought, which, again, is not the ultimate meditation.

These three states—luminosity, bliss, and non-thought—though free from coarse discursive thoughts and suffering, are still considered ordinary meditative experiences. They remain within the realm of worldly meditation and do not represent the ultimate goal.

If one's practice deepens and these three experiences also dissolve, leaving only the state of emptiness, this is regarded as an intermediate level of meditation.

THE HIGHEST MEDITATION

1 Know Yourself

While the four meditative states—luminosity, bliss, non-thought, and emptiness—each have their own benefits, such as temporarily suppressing the deluded thoughts that arise in daily life, sustaining these states over the long term requires a more advanced practice known as vipashyana, or insight meditation. Simply abiding in a state free from discursive thought is called shamatha, or calm abiding, in Buddhism. To extend this calm abiding into all aspects of daily life—whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down—rather than confining it to formal meditation sessions, one must rely on the support of vipashyana.

Why do we need the wisdom of vipashyana? Although vipashyana is a Buddhist concept, the reasoning behind it can be easily understood and accepted by everyone. When our mind becomes calm, various disturbances naturally subside. However, we often find it difficult to maintain this state of tranquility. Why is that? The root cause lies within our own mind. Without the practice of vipashyana, we may fail to recognize the true nature of our mind, which prevents us from allowing the mind to settle

naturally and spontaneously. So, what is the true nature of the mind? This is a question that requires our careful observation and contemplation.

To truly understand the nature of the mind, we must begin by knowing the self. Inscribed above the entrance to the Temple of Apollo at Delphi in ancient Greece is the maxim: “Know thyself.” Many people consider this too simplistic, thinking, “I am a doctor,” “I am a lawyer,” “I am a teacher,” “I am a pilot,” and so on, believing that such labels fulfill the meaning of this phrase. Others identify the self with the body, with their hair, or even with their possessions—their car, their house, their family. But this is a fundamental error. All of these are merely things associated with or belonging to the self; they are not the self itself.

Let each of us reflect: “Who am I, really? Do I know myself?”

Most people in the world believe in the existence of a self. Buddhism does not deny the conventional, nominal existence of the “I,” but it teaches that, when examined with wisdom, this “I” cannot be found anywhere.

Some may argue, “The combination of body and mind is the self.” But if, when examined separately, neither body nor mind

can be identified as the self, how could their combination suddenly give rise to a self? For example, if five people each have no money, would bringing them together somehow produce money? Of course not. Therefore, through careful observation, we find that the true self actually cannot be found.

The highest form of meditation is to know oneself. When we try to know ourselves, most people tend to believe that the self is the mind. However, the mind itself can also be investigated. The mind consists of the mental consciousness and the five sense consciousnesses. But where exactly do these consciousnesses exist within the body? If we carefully examine every part of the body, above and below, to the left and to the right, we still cannot find them. Nor can we find the mind when we search for its color, shape, or essential nature. In the end, we discover that we are unable to find them at all.

This method of investigation is extremely useful. For example, when you are overwhelmed by anger, it may feel as though there is a burning ball of rage in your chest. But if you truly examine it, where exactly is this mind of anger located? No matter how thoroughly you search, whether inside or outside the body, from top to bottom, you cannot find it. If the mind itself cannot be found, how could its suffering and hatred arise?

Even elementary school students can understand this point and recognize that the mind cannot be located.

If the mind is not something that truly exists, then is it something that does not exist? That, too, is impossible. Existence and nonexistence are mutually dependent, like east and west—if a truly existing mind cannot be found, then a truly nonexistent mind cannot be established either. Thus, the mind cannot be a mere void of nothingness.

The mind is neither existent nor non-existent. Could it be both existent and non-existent? This is also impossible. No phenomenon in the world can be both existent and non-existent, because existence and non-existence are mutually exclusive and cannot coexist.

If the mind is neither existent, nonexistent, nor both, could it be something other than these? This, too, is not possible.

After such analysis, some may ask, “Then what is the mind?” In truth, the mind cannot be expressed in words or grasped by conceptual thought; its true nature is beyond comprehension. If one realizes this inexpressible and inconceivable state, one attains the realization achieved by enlightened beings.

As we discussed earlier, shamatha refers to a state in which the mind is settled. However, this is not the mind's true nature. If, as the mind abides in calmness, we are able to recognize the inconceivable nature that is present within that state, then we have truly recognized the mind's true essence. This is known as the union of shamatha and vipashyana. When one attains this state, one's meditative stability will never decline.

Otherwise, if we have not reached this level and are simply resting in shamatha, we may feel very peaceful while meditating with our eyes closed in our room. However, when we go out into the world and encounter difficult people or face adversity at work, our afflictions will arise just as before. This is because we have not eliminated the seeds of these afflictions; we have only temporarily suppressed them. Therefore, there is a significant difference between merely achieving calm abiding and realizing the union of shamatha and vipashyana.

2 The Mind Is Key

When we truly realize the nature of the mind and are able to abide in that state, external circumstances—no matter how turbulent—cannot disturb the mind's innate, unaltered peace.

Some people today are extremely sensitive internally—even the smallest matters can plunge them into suffering. This is especially true for those with depression. A single word, expression, or gesture from another person can create tremendous turmoil in their hearts: “Why did they do that? They must be targeting me...” This demonstrates an inability to master one’s own mind. When someone remains constantly in such a state, their physical health will also suffer.

If we can realize that our mind is originally in a state of natural abiding—free from all conceptual elaborations—then even when unpleasant situations arise in our daily life, we can immediately transform them into a source of strength. Take, for example, those who have practiced meditation in the Buddhist tradition for many years: whenever they encounter negative experiences or imbalanced states in their lives, they can instantly turn these into sources of happiness.

As is often stated in Buddhist teachings: when we recognize the nature of mind, it manifests as wisdom; when we fail to recognize it—or worse, misunderstand it—it gives rise to afflictive emotions.

Many things in this world are like this. Our understanding and attitude toward them determine whether they become

beneficial or harmful. Through extensive research, Stanford University health psychologists have discovered that our beliefs about stress fundamentally shape its impact on our health. The research reveals that when we experience any form of pressure or stress, and if we perceive it as harmful—thinking “I’m working too hard,” “This pressure is damaging my health,” or “I can’t handle this”—these very thoughts transform the stress response into a genuine threat to our wellbeing. Conversely, when we view stress as a helpful response that prepares us for challenges rather than something harmful to our health, it transforms into a source of strength and resilience, becoming allies in our health and performance.

In my own experience, whether in teaching or administrative work at our Buddhist academy, I strive not to view demanding tasks as sources of suffering. Instead, I choose to see them as positive opportunities—things I am willing and even happy to do. If I were to perceive myself as being under tremendous pressure, it would only have a negative impact on my state of mind. However, if I regard each task as meaningful and enriching, it becomes a source of enjoyment. In daily life, if we treat everything we encounter—whether pleasant or unpleasant—as the best possible medicine, it can bring great benefit to our lives.

I often feel this way: our understanding of ourselves is extremely important. If we are able to truly know ourselves, we can attain genuine happiness. In the past, there were many Tibetan practitioners who had gained deep insight into themselves through meditative absorption. Even when they were later imprisoned for various reasons, they regarded their prison cells as paradise and were genuinely happy. By contrast, there are many people today who possess great wealth and live in luxury, yet their minds are in a state of deep suffering, as if they are living in hell. This demonstrates that while external conditions matter to some extent, it is our inner understanding of the mind that truly shapes our experience of happiness or suffering.

3 Levels of Understanding the Mind

There are two levels of understanding the mind:

The Intermediate Level

This level can be reached through consistent meditation practice. When you attain this state of realization, a natural confidence arises. You interact with others without fear, regardless of whom you encounter, and you find genuine interest in whatever activities you pursue. Conversely, without a proper understanding of

the mind, it can be difficult to fully enjoy the ease and happiness that come from a fulfilling career or a harmonious family life.

The Higher Level

The higher level refers to recognizing the true nature of mind—a realization that requires sustained effort and many years of dedicated practice.

Some of you may be familiar with the biography of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, who spent approximately thirteen years in retreat in a remote location. His contributions to humanity are widely recognized. Similarly, my own teacher, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, devoted nearly every day during the entire Cultural Revolution to continuous practice in forests, caves, or tents. When I met him in 1985 and became his student, I observed that each morning he would meditate in a small wooden hut, undisturbed and without interruption. These examples illustrate that to attain a high level of realization and to recognize the nature of mind, short-term practice is not sufficient; it requires years of unwavering dedication.

These two great masters, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, made indelible contributions to humanity's spiritual development in the twentieth century. While we may

not reach the same heights, if we can realize the nature of mind or cultivate sustained meditative equipoise, we will be able to navigate many of life's challenges with greater skill and live more harmoniously with family, colleagues, and others.

In essence, when a person truly develops their inner state of mind, it not only resolves personal challenges but also radiates wisdom and compassion outward. This inner transformation gradually extends to the surrounding environment, creating a subtle yet profound influence on society—and, ultimately, the world.



THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION FOR THE MIND

Education has always held paramount importance—past, present, and future. It possesses the power not only to transform individuals but also to shape the world. Depending on their education and environment, some people radiate positive energy, while others may project negativity. Consider, for example, two seventeen-year-olds: one might go on to win the Nobel Peace Prize, while another, influenced by harmful companions, might join a terrorist organization and take countless lives.

Many of you here are distinguished educators. Whether your research lies in sociology, psychology, or other disciplines, your scholarly contributions are both valuable and highly respected. Yet, beyond academic achievement, I believe that as teachers, we bear an inescapable responsibility: to guide our students not only intellectually, but also in the cultivation of the mind.

Universities can be seen as factories for nurturing talent. However, if their output is limited to technical skills and knowledge, they address only part of what life requires. Guidance and nourishment of the mind are equally essential. Whether the

individuals we educate become compassionate or harbor harmful intentions depends not only on the education they receive, but even more so on the teachers who guide them.

Today, Western societies are highly advanced in science and technology. Yet, when it comes to cultivating the inner state of mind, it is often within the ancient cultures of the East that we find many invaluable treasures.

In closing, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the dean, the faculty, and all the students for so graciously inviting me here today. This precious opportunity has allowed us to gather and form auspicious connections. To create such meaningful bonds and to share the dharma with you all brings me the deepest fulfillment. Thank you.



QUESTION AND ANSWER

PROFESSOR VÉRONIQUE TOMASZEWSKI Thank you very much, Khenpo, for your clear and gracious exposition of such a challenging topic—the nature of mind. This week, in particular, we are reminded of the importance of your message by the recent attack in Ottawa, carried out by a young man struggling with mental health issues and drawn to extremist ideology. This tragic event underscores the vital role that educators play at every level—whether it is Jack Miller training teachers at OISE, or those of us here at York working with young adults—in ensuring that everyone has access to practices that foster mental clarity and inner peace, as you have so eloquently described.

It is important to remember that Canada has one of the highest adolescent suicide rates in the world. Even in a prosperous country such as ours, there remains much work to be done.

QUESTION 1 My question is, as per my understanding, it has been mentioned that I am neither a hand, nor a leg, nor any of my body part, nor the combination of all of them. So can we say that I am a soul? Is soul an appropriate word for that?

KHENPO SODARGYE When we have not examined the question deeply, we might provisionally say that the soul or mind is the self. According to Buddhist teachings, in this lifetime I am born as a human being; in the next, I may be reborn as an animal or another form of life, and then return to human form again—such is the cycle of rebirth. However, if we analyze this from the most subtle perspective of emptiness in Buddhism, even the so-called mind that undergoes continuous rebirth does not truly exist in an inherent or independent way.

This is a relatively advanced analysis within Buddhist philosophy. On a conventional level, matter and self appear to exist. Upon closer examination, mind and soul also seem to exist. Yet, when we investigate even further, we discover that the true nature of all phenomena is that they do not inherently or substantially exist. This method of analysis is highly effective for understanding the nature of reality.

That is an excellent question. I do not usually provide additional commentary, but I would like to elaborate further here. When one genuinely realizes—beyond mere intellectual understanding—that the essence of mind is ultimately empty, this direct realization marks the attainment of a noble state in Buddhism: the fruition of an arhat, a bodhisattva, or even buddhahood. At

this highest level of recognition, one is no longer subject to the cycle of rebirth.

QUESTION 2 Though this may diverge slightly from today's topic, I'd like to ask about meditation. For those seeking clarity and direction in life, how can meditation help achieve this? And what would be the proper method of practice to attain such clarity?

KHENPO SODARGYE The extent to which meditation can provide clarity and direction in life depends largely on the depth of your meditative realization. For those with a very advanced level of realization, meditation may bring extraordinary clarity—not only regarding major life decisions, but even in perceiving minor details, such as whether there will be a traffic jam ahead. However, for most people whose realization is not yet at such a high level, it can be difficult to rely solely on meditation to plan one's life.

Once you have made a decision using your own discernment, it is beneficial to engage in spiritual practices—such as making aspirations or prayers to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, if you have faith. You may also choose to perform virtuous deeds. These practices can help remove external obstacles and create

favorable conditions, allowing your work and other aspects of life to proceed more smoothly.

Therefore, to truly find the right direction in life through spiritual practice, a certain level of realization is often necessary. At the very least, one should cultivate enough clarity to approach everyday decisions with stability and confidence. Only then can one begin to perceive the deeper and more subtle dimensions of life. For those whose practice is not yet mature, developing this kind of discernment may present certain challenges.

QUESTION 3 Could you speak a little bit about how we can have compassion for someone even if they're not kind to us?

KHENPO SODARGYE Ultimately, it depends on our own state of mind. If we are able to maintain a positive and stable mental attitude, then no matter how others treat us, their actions cannot disturb our inner peace. As Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala has said: "I do not even hate the Talib who shot me. Even if there is a gun in my hand and he stands in front of me. I would not shoot him. This is the compassion that I have learnt from Muhammad—the prophet of mercy, Jesus Christ and Lord Buddha."

In the end, everything depends on the depth of our spiritual cultivation. Without well-developed compassion, we may even respond with anger to those who are kind to us.

QUESTION 4 During my meditation practice, for example, I might focus on visualizing a sun. While I am concentrating on this image, I notice that my mind still gets caught up in thoughts. I find myself repeatedly telling myself not to be distracted, insisting, “I must focus on the sun, I must focus on the sun.”

This seems similar to how, in daily life, we might tell ourselves, “I have no desires, I have no desires,” but in the process of suppressing desire, that very act becomes a form of desire itself.

Sometimes I find it difficult to truly understand or resolve this issue. Could you please offer some guidance on how to approach this situation in meditation and in daily life?

KHENPO SODARGYE While this can temporarily suppress afflictive emotions, it’s not the ultimate solution—it’s like taking painkillers for temporary relief. To resolve the problem at its root, you must recognize the nature of mind.

QUESTION 5 I understand that we choose a deity or a symbol that has some significance and this interrupted stream of concentration then would be your first level of meditation. How then do we move on to the next stage? Or is it just a matter of more meditation for longer periods of time?

KHENPO SODARGYE In meditation, the longer you can remain in a state of concentration, the better. However, if you experience distraction or dullness, it becomes difficult to progress. To improve your meditation, begin by seeking out a quiet environment and practicing diligently and consistently. At first, it is perfectly fine to keep each session short, gradually increasing the duration over time. Ultimately, sustained and dedicated effort is the only way to make genuine progress.

QUESTION 6 Buddhism teaches that greed, anger, and ignorance are the sources of suffering. However, someone like Steve Jobs was also driven by a kind of “greed” for his career. Is greed a driving force for social development, or is it an obstacle?

KHENPO SODARGYE It is important to understand that having rightful aspirations is not something to be rejected. The

normal and healthy pursuit of a career or livelihood is not considered serious greed.

In Buddhist teachings, greed refers to an excessive state of attachment and craving, while hatred refers to an excessive state of rejection or aversion. When examined with wisdom, it becomes clear that Buddhism does not oppose positive and wholesome efforts to seek a proper and meaningful life.

However, in most cases, greed involves a kind of exaggeration—perceiving something as extremely desirable when it is not, in fact, so attractive. Similarly, aversion arises when we feel compelled to reject something that does not truly warrant such avoidance. These mental states go beyond the true nature of their objects and do not accord with reality. This is why Buddhism teaches us to gradually eliminate them; otherwise, they will negatively impact our lives.

FOLLOW-UP So, it's really a matter of degree? If it's at a moderate or lower level, then it's not necessarily something bad?

KHENPO SODARGYE Yes.

QUESTION 7 Thank you very much, Khenpo Rinpoche—it is a great honor to meet you here in Canada.

Earlier, you spoke about emptiness leading to clear discernment. May I ask, the “emptiness” you referred to—is it the same as shunyata or tongpanyi? Were you speaking about that specific understanding of emptiness?

KHENPO SODARGYE Yes, the emptiness I referred to is shunyata, or tongpanyi in Tibetan. The nature of mind is the inseparability of clarity and emptiness. On one hand, it is emptiness; on the other, it is a luminous, vivid, and inconceivable clarity. Emptiness and clarity are not separate. This state can only be comprehended through analytical reasoning or directly realized through practice with pith instructions, but it is very difficult to describe accurately in words.

FOLLOW-UP Is it possible to realize emptiness through simply resting in calm abiding?

KHENPO SODARGYE Yes, that is possible for some practitioners.

QUESTION 8 Rinpoche, I have a question that I think many others may share. When we haven’t yet achieved certain levels of realization—when we haven’t reached the states of emptiness or meditative absorption—how should we work with afflictions in our daily lives? What is the

simplest method, or what pith instructions can we apply to counter the afflictions we encounter in everyday life? For practitioners like us who haven't achieved realization, how can we transform afflictions into enlightenment? Thank you.

KHENPO SODARGYE Can you earn a doctorate without studying? That would be difficult, wouldn't it? In the same way, transforming afflictions into enlightenment without actual practice is extremely challenging.

When we encounter difficult situations in daily life that provoke anger or other strong emotions, the best immediate remedy is simply to calm the mind. In Buddhist practice, it is often recommended to remain still—like a tree—for two or three minutes. During this pause, many afflictive emotions will naturally subside from their initial intensity. For most situations, this temporary pause is the simplest and most effective technique.

Especially when you feel the urge to lose your temper or criticize someone, do not speak immediately. Take a moment to pause and reflect. If you wait three minutes before responding, you will often find that many harsh words simply no longer arise.

QUESTION 9 Hi, I'm a life science student from the University of Toronto. There's a joke at our university that they teach you A and B but test you on Y and Z. Everyone is so stressed about their grades because we're not taught how to improve our study methods—we have to figure it out ourselves. Since not every university student practices meditation, how can students manage their stress and emotions when faced with excessive academic work?

KHENPO SODARGYE This is not unique to your university; in fact, schools around the world tend to focus primarily on grades, often prioritizing academic achievement over the cultivation of the mind.

While it is important for schools to pay attention to students' academic performance, it is equally important to nurture qualities such as compassion and emotional well-being. If educational institutions can adopt this more holistic approach, the problem of grade-related stress will be alleviated. As a student, you might consider requesting that your teachers offer more teachings on compassion, or even write a letter to the principal suggesting such initiatives. These efforts may help address the issue and support students in managing academic stress.

QUESTION 10 If I want to attain a high level of meditative concentration, do I have to become a Buddhist?

KHENPO SODARGYE To achieve a higher and more stable level of meditative concentration, it is most effective to rely on Buddhist methods—especially the wisdom of insight, or vipashyana. This form of wisdom is particularly relevant in today’s world.

I have observed that many schools and monasteries, both in the East and the West, now offer meditation programs. However, most of these are relatively basic, focusing primarily on adjusting and balancing the mind. While such practices are certainly beneficial and can temporarily alleviate afflictive emotions, maintaining a calm and stable mind over the long term requires deeper methods. For this, Buddhist pith instructions are truly indispensable.

Of course, everyone’s level and needs are different. For those who wish to pursue a higher and more stable state of meditation, it is essential to apply these methods and engage in deeper practice.

It is also important to note that one does not need to be a Buddhist to benefit from these practices. Even without Buddhist

faith, anyone can use these methods to seek truth and improve the mind.

QUESTION 11 Hello, Rinpoche. In the process of working with my mind, I frequently encounter my own habitual patterns. When I notice these habits, I often feel discouraged, which then adds pressure to my practice. May I ask: When we become aware of our habitual patterns during practice and feel discouraged, what should we do? Thank you.

KHENPO SODARGYE A student striving to complete their studies will encounter various difficulties; an entrepreneur starting a business will face many obstacles. Similarly, the path of spiritual practice is rarely smooth and may involve many challenges.

This is not unique to us—even someone like Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, as I mentioned earlier, spent more than ten years in retreat, dedicating extraordinarily long hours to meditation every day. This is simply the natural law: when we pursue the highest realization, everyone must walk this path.

It is good to recognize your own shortcomings, but it is important not to give up because of them. If you do not abandon

your efforts and continue to persevere—even if you sometimes feel disappointed or frustrated—know that this is a common experience, not only in spiritual practice but in any process of learning and growth.

My advice is to maintain your efforts over the long term, no matter what difficulties you encounter. To reach your goal, try to create and sustain favorable conditions for continuous practice. If you persist in this way, there will come a time when your path naturally becomes smoother and your practice bears fruit. Even if others try to discourage you, you will still feel inspired to continue.

In short, continuous effort is the most crucial factor.

PROFESSOR VÉRONIQUE

TOMASZEWSKI

I think that is a perfect note on which to conclude: we will persevere. We must continue to move forward, and I would like to thank Khenpo Sodargye once again for traveling all the way from China to Canada and the United States to share his wisdom with us. On behalf of York University and everyone present today, thank you very much for your generous sharing of wisdom.

NOTES

1. These remarks were delivered in Tibetan by Khenpo Sodargye to the Tibetan attendees present at the beginning of the lecture.

Dedication

May the merit resulting from this piece of work contribute
in the greatest possible measure to the long life of all great
masters, to the flourishing of the Buddhadharma,
and to the welfare of all sentient beings.

It is always our wish to present a work of the highest quality to the readers so that anyone who reads this text would find inspiration. So we would very much appreciate your comments, feedback or suggestions for how this text might be improved and made more valuable. You are also greatly welcomed if you want to make a contribution to any of our other projects of translation. Please email us at: *translation@khenposodargye.org*



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