

~ *How Meditation Changes the Brain* ~

Mingyur Rinpoche

How meditation can change our body and mind. Traditionally, we say that “our body is like a horse, and our mind is like the rider.” The body can influence the mind, and the mind can influence the body.

What is the body? Normally, it has what we call *prana*, *bindu*, and *nadi*. Nadi are the nerves, the channels in the body. Bindu are the cells, which are moving inside the nerves, inside the channels. And the prana is the energy, which pushes things to move. Things are moving because of prana. Prana is energy. When we breathe in, our breath is the gross level of prana. Then it goes through the lungs and the entire body, and that helps blood circulation, and the pumping of the heart. All of this is connected together interdependently. And the blood goes into the nerves, or channels.

From the top of the head to the bottom of the feet, there are prana, bindu, and nadi. I have had a lot of discussions with neuroscientists about what they call “neurons.” Neurons are like trees. These are nerves — the nadi. And there are neurotransmitters. They are the bindu, or what we sometimes call “drops.” Drops are like cells. Then, also, there are waves, a rhythm, an electric charge. These are the prana. In the brain, there are all these things.

In the tradition, when we begin to meditate, all the prana, bindu, and nadi are working. Normally, we say there are three layers of the body. The gross level of the body is what we can see. [Mingyur Rinpoche cups his hand around his fist.] This is the gross body.

And there is the subtle body. In dreams, you have a body. That is called the “subtle body.” And in the body, that subtle body is like the storehouse. If people experience trauma, the trauma is stored in the subtle body. Or it could store whatever we do that is good. When we begin to meditate, that meditation builds a habitual tendency, or

habitual memory — a good habitual memory is stored in the subtle body, in our body.

Then, another one is the wisdom body, which is beyond time and matter. This is very difficult to understand. When we look in the mirror, we can see our reflection in the mirror, and that reflection is kind of like form, but it is beyond time and matter. That is the wisdom body or emptiness body.

First, when we begin to meditate, what happens is that the gross level body changes. That has a lot of impact on the subtle body — the unconscious body, subtle body, or the body that is the storehouse that stores memories and habitual tendencies. Therefore, through meditation, everything changes in our body. Everything transforms with awareness, love and compassion, and wisdom.

For many years, I have been working with scientists. I was a guinea pig — a test subject. During those times, I had a lot of discussions with many scientists. And what neuroscientists said was that first they discovered neuroplasticity. Maybe 20–25 years ago, neuroscientists did not believe that the brain was capable of change. So, if you were born unhappy, the rest of your life you would be unhappy. If you were born a little bit anxious, there would be no hope for you — the rest of your life you would be a little bit anxious. If you were born a little bit angry, the rest of your life you would be like that. But now, they say it can change. That is neuroplasticity.

Later, they discovered neuropathways. The change makes new “highways” in the brain — highways of happiness, highways of loving-kindness, highways of wisdom, highways of awareness. That can cause transformation in the brain. When there is transformation in the brain, it is also throughout the body.

Recently, they discovered neurogenesis. Even gene expression is changed by meditation. Therefore, if you are born with unhappiness, no problem — you can have hope, and you can change. Especially through meditation, you can easily change. When you meditate, the scientists told me, you can change your brain consciously, meaning

that you can change it according to your wishes. Normally, our brain is always changing, but out of control, because the environment forces us to change. The situation forces us to change. Different circumstances force us to change even if we do not want to change. But through meditation, you can ask your brain to change. You can ask your mind to change. That change has a lot of freedom.

Hopefully, through meditation you can change your mind, and at the same time you can change your body. The horse can help to change the rider, and the rider can change the horse. The best is when the horse and rider work together.