

~ Can Meditation Be Dangerous? ~

Mingyur Rinpoche

Is meditation dangerous? Many people ask if there are any side effects from meditation. Some people say there is “a dark side of meditation.” So people ask me a lot of questions about that.

If you learn about meditation only from books, or maybe nowadays from people who teach meditation but do not have a very deep understanding of meditation themselves, or others who write books based on meditation but might not be experts, there could sometimes be some side effects.

Especially if you look for meditation so that you can think of nothing, or block thoughts and emotions to have an empty mind or empty brain. That kind of meditation is impossible, actually. You cannot block your thoughts and emotions. You cannot have an empty mind or an empty brain — that is impossible. There are always thoughts. The mind is always moving. It is constantly changing. If you do not know how to embrace that, then the thoughts become your enemies, the emotions become your enemies, noise becomes your enemy, busy-ness becomes your enemy, stress becomes your enemy. In the end, through meditation, your mind does not become calm and peaceful but becomes more sensitive and agitated. It will develop agitation. Therefore, that is not the right instruction. Do not try to meditate in that way. That is one thing to avoid: trying to get rid of thoughts and emotions, or trying to block thoughts and emotions.

Some people, when they think about meditation, are looking for bliss, peace, calm, and joy. When they meditate, they think, “Peeeeeace . . .” [Mingyur Rinpoche mimics a tense meditation posture.] That is what we call “craving.” When your mind has too many expectations about meditation or it is attached to the experience of meditation, craving peace and all of that, then your meditation will not be so easy because

when you look for peace, the peaceful experience will say, “I am busy. You have to make an appointment.”

Normally, our mind does the opposite of what we want. You can try this out and tell yourself, “Do not think about pizza,” and what will happen is that you will think about pizza. And when you really need to think — “Oh, I am in an exam! I have to remember all these things” — your mind will become empty. That is what our mind does normally. Sometimes we say that our mind is “unpliable” or “unworkable.” So, our meditation is actually a way to develop our minds so that they can be more workable and pliable.

Actually, the real goal of meditation is to connect with our basic innate goodness. We have fundamental qualities of our mind that we call “awareness, love and compassion, and wisdom.” These three are there as the background of all our thoughts, emotions, ups and downs in our lives, and ups and downs of our feelings. They are the background for everything.

Normally we say that awareness is like the sky, and thoughts, emotions, feelings, and ups and downs are like clouds. Through meditation, we can connect with a deeper quality of ourselves. When we do that, there is more freedom and more liberation.

Now, our mind does the opposite, but when we connect with this on a deeper level, everything is okay. Real happiness happens when we are connected with awareness, love and compassion, and wisdom. Then we have real happiness.

Therefore, through the style of my lineage of meditation, the main focus is on awareness, not on the object. If there are thoughts, it is okay. If there are no thoughts, okay. If there are emotions, okay. If there are no emotions, okay. If there are mistakes, okay. If not, it is okay. Right is okay, wrong is okay. Happy is okay, unhappy is okay. Up is okay, down is okay. Why? Because all of those are like clouds. At the fundamental level, you cannot be wrong — there are no mistakes in awareness. There are no mistakes in our love and compassion and wisdom. So it is awareness-oriented. This is really important. It is not

object-oriented. It is not based on the clouds. It is based on the sky itself.

This is a very important message. Especially at the beginning, do not think that meditation is about stopping thoughts and emotions. Do not think that meditation is only to look for peace, calm, and joy. Meditation is to really connect with the deeper qualities within yourself, which are awareness, love and compassion, and wisdom.