

Meditation Advice from Khenchen Rinpoche

Training the mind is not easy. Even if we know many things, the afflicted mind is very stubborn. When we tell ourselves, “I should do this,” the mind doesn’t always follow. It seems that there is a paradox between the action mind and the intellectual mind. The action mind consists of our deeply rooted propensities and habits. The intellectual mind is our understanding about things. When we are habituated in the afflictions and disturbing emotions, the action mind is swayed by their powerful waves. Suffering is the inevitable result, no matter how much the intellectual mind wants something else. On the other hand, if we practice and habituate ourselves in wisdom and compassion, then a positive type of action mind becomes deeply rooted. The inevitable experience will be unafflicted happiness and peace. To ensure that our Dharma practice does not remain merely intellectual, but rather becomes a living presence, Vajrayana practice is indispensable.

Meditation is the principal method to train our mind in wisdom and compassion. There is no other way, so we need determination and dedication. If mind were a machine, you could push a button and it would do what you demand of it. But mind does not operate that way; it does not react instantly. Meditation is the only “button” we can push to effect mental transformation.

We are so habituated in this modern time to think that the whole world functions as a machine. Everywhere we go, in the office, on the road, in the house, we push a button and things work. Because of that conditioning, we mistakenly think that meditation should work the same way. If we don’t get results in one session, we get discouraged and say that it doesn’t work. So, we have to understand that meditation takes a long time. The mind is not a machine, so we must apply perseverance and patience.

There are two types of patience: useless patience and necessary patience. With useless patience, we just waste our time and energy while time is passing. We are not making any genuinely spiritual effort, but rather are being lazy. That’s useless patience, so there is no choice but to follow the other patience. To combat discouragement and giving up, we put patience together with perseverance. Necessary patience builds strength in the mind on a base of reason, wisdom, and compassion. It is not the submissive type of patience that comes from laziness; it is not a sign of weakness. With proper patience we can practice without resentment and hatred. We joyfully and fearlessly put in our time and energy—that is the true meaning of patience. Keep doing every day, no matter how long it takes to accustom yourself. This is not something to finish within a couple of years. It may take 10 years or a lifetime.

Meditation is more than just closing your eyes and sitting. It is like eating and drinking—we have to do them every day to sustain our body. Likewise, we do meditation practice consistently to sustain the mind. We have to understand how to meditate, how to build strength, and tame the stubbornness and arrogance of our mind. There are two essential meditation methods—analytical meditation and stabilizing meditation. For example, you can analyze cause and effect, the impermanence of phenomena, the suffering of samsara, and so forth, and on that basis train the mind in proper conduct with stabilizing meditation. Meditation is a method to learn how to use your mind, how familiarize yourself with it. There is a saying in Tibetan, “Gompa ma yin gompa yin,” which means “Meditation is not just meditating.” It is a method of

familiarizing your mind with the nature of wisdom and the nature of compassion. We can do that all the time. Then life becomes a meditation. Whether we are working, sitting, or eating, anytime can be a meditation state!

*Excerpt from a teaching given at TMC in 1991.
Transcription and editing by Khenmo Trinlay.*