

Your Mind is Your Religion

Lama Yeshe teaches the importance of regular mental check-ups.



WHEN I TALK ABOUT MIND, I'm not just talking about my mind, my trip. I'm talking about the mind of each and every universal living being. The way we live, the way we think—everything is dedicated to material pleasure. We consider sense objects to be of utmost importance and materialistically devote ourselves to whatever makes us happy, famous, or popular. Even though all this comes from our mind, we are so totally preoccupied by external objects that we never look within, we never question why we find them so interesting.

As long as we exist, our mind is an inseparable part of us. As a result, we are always up and down. It is not our body that goes up and down, it's our mind—this mind whose way of functioning we do not understand—not just our body, but our mind. Therefore, sometimes we have to examine ourselves—not just our body, but our mind. After all, it is our mind that is always telling us what to do. We have to know our own psychology, or, in religious terminology, perhaps, our inner nature. Anyway, no matter what we call it, we have to know our own mind.

Don't think that examining and knowing the nature of your mind is just an Eastern trip. That's a wrong conception. It's your trip. How can you separate your body, or your self-image, from your mind? It's impossible. You think you are an independent person, free to travel the world, enjoying everything. Despite what you think, you are not free. I'm not saying that you are under the control of someone else. It's your own uncontrolled mind, your own attachment that oppresses you. If you discover how you oppress yourself, your uncontrolled mind will disappear. Knowing your own mind is the solution to all your problems.

One day the world looks so beautiful; the next day it looks terrible. How can you say that? Scientifically, it's impossible that the world can change so radically. It's your mind that causes these appearances. This is not religious dogma; your up and down is not religious dogma. I'm not talking about religion; I'm talking about the way you lead your daily life, which is what sends you up and down. Other people and your environment don't change radically; it's your mind. I hope you understand that.

Similarly, one person thinks that the world is beautiful and people are wonderful and kind, while another thinks that everything and everyone is horrible. Who is right? How do you explain that scientifically? It's just their individual mind's projection on the sense world. You think, "Today is like this; tomorrow is like that; this man is like this; that woman is like that." But where is that absolutely fixed, forever-beautiful woman? Who is that absolutely forever-handsome man? They are nonexistent—they are simply creations of your own mind.



Do not expect material objects to satisfy you or to make your life perfect; it's impossible. How can you be satisfied by even vast amounts of material objects? How will sleeping with hundreds of different people satisfy you? It will never happen. Satisfaction comes from the mind.

If you don't know your own psychology, you might ignore what's going on in your mind until it breaks down and you go completely crazy. People go mad through lack of inner wisdom, through their inability to examine their own mind. They cannot explain themselves to themselves; they don't know how to talk to themselves. Thus they are constantly preoccupied with all these external objects, while within, their mind is running down until it finally cracks. They are ignorant of their internal world, and their minds are totally unified with ignorance instead of being awake and engaged in self-analysis. Examine your own mental attitudes. Become your own therapist.

You are intelligent; you know that material objects alone cannot bring you satisfaction, but you don't have to embark on some emotional, religious trip to examine your own mind. Some people think that they do; that this kind of self-analysis is something spiritual or religious. It's not necessary to classify yourself as a follower of this or that religion or philosophy, to put yourself into some religious category. But if you want to be happy, you have to check the way you lead your life. Your mind is your religion.

When you check your mind, do not rationalize or push. Relax. Do not be upset when problems arise. Just be aware of them and where they come from; know their root. Introduce the problem to yourself: "Here is this kind of problem. How has it become a problem? What kind of mind feels that it's a problem?" When you check thoroughly, the problem will automatically disappear. That's so simple, isn't it? You don't have to believe in something. Don't believe anything! All the same, you can't say, "I don't believe I have a mind." You can't reject your mind. You can say, "I reject Eastern things"-I agree. But can you reject yourself? Can you deny your head, your nose? You cannot deny your mind. Therefore, treat yourself wisely and try to discover the true source of satisfaction.

When you were a child you loved and craved ice cream, chocolate, and cake, and thought, "When I grow up, I'll have all the ice cream, chocolate, and cake I want; then I'll be happy." Now you have as much ice cream, chocolate, and cake as you want, but you're bored. You decide that since this doesn't make you happy you'll get a car, a house, television, a husband or wife-then you'll be happy. Now you have everything, but your car is a problem, your house is a problem, your husband or wife is a problem, your children are a problem. You realize, "Oh, this is not satisfaction."

What, then, is satisfaction? Go through all this mentally and check; it's very important. Examine your life from childhood to the present. This is analytical meditation: "At that time my mind was like that; now my mind is like this. It has changed this way, that way." Your mind has changed so many times but have you reached any conclusion as to what really makes you happy? My interpretation is that you are lost. You know your way around the city, how to get home, where to buy chocolate, but still you are lost-you can't find your goal. Check honestly-isn't this so?

Lord Buddha says that all you have to know is what you are, how you exist. You don't have to believe anything. Just understand your mind; how it works, how attachment and desire arise, how ignorance arises, and where emotions come from. It is sufficient to know the nature of all that; that alone can bring you happiness and peace. Thus, your life can change completely; everything turns upside down. What you once interpreted as horrible can become beautiful.

If I told you that all you were living for was chocolate and ice cream, you'd think I was crazy. "No! no!" your arrogant mind would say. But look deeper into your life's purpose. Why are you here? To be well liked? To become famous? To accumulate possessions? To be attractive to others? I'm not exaggerating- check yourself, then you'll see. Through thorough examination you can realize that dedicating your entire life to seeking happiness through chocolate and ice cream completely nullifies the significance of your having been born human. Birds and dogs have similar aims. Shouldn't your goals in life be higher than those of dogs and chickens?

I'm not trying to decide your life for you, but you check up. It's better to have an integrated life than to live in mental disorder. A disorderly life is not worthwhile, beneficial to neither yourself nor others. What are you living for-chocolate? Steak? Perhaps you think, "Of course I don't live for food. I'm an educated person." But education also comes from the mind. Without the mind, what is education, what is philosophy? Philosophy is just the creation of someone's mind, a few thoughts strung together in a certain way. Without the mind there's no philosophy, no doctrine, no university subjects. All these things are mind-made.



How do you check your mind? Just watch how it perceives or interprets any object that it encounters. Observe what feelings-comfortable or uncomfortable-arise. Then check, "When I perceive this kind of view, this feeling arises, that emotion comes; I discriminate in such a way. Why?" This is how to check your mind; that's all. It's very simple.

When you check your own mind properly, you stop blaming others for your problems. You recognize that your mistaken actions come from your own defiled, deluded mind. When you are preoccupied with external, material objects, you blame them and other people for your problems. Projecting that deluded view onto external phenomena makes you miserable. When you begin to realize your wrong-conception view, you begin to realize the nature of your own mind and to put an end to your problems forever.

Is all this very new for you? It's not. Whenever you are going to do anything, you first check it out and then make your decision. You already do this; I'm not suggesting anything new. The difference is that you don't do it enough. You have to do more checking. This doesn't mean sitting alone in some corner contemplating your navel-you can be checking your mind all the time, even while talking or working with other people. Do you think that examining the mind is only for those who are on an Eastern trip? Don't think that way. Realize that the nature of your mind is different from that of the flesh and bone of your physical body. Your mind is like a mirror, reflecting everything without discrimination. If you have understanding-wisdom, you can control the kind of reflection that you allow into the mirror of

your mind. If you totally ignore what is happening in your mind, it will reflect whatever garbage it encounters-things that make you psychologically sick. Your checking-wisdom should distinguish between reflections that are beneficial and those that bring psychological problems. Eventually, when you realize the true nature of subject and object, all your problems will vanish.

Some people think they are religious, but what is religious? If you do not examine your own nature, do not gain knowledge-wisdom, how are you religious? Just the idea that you are religious-"I am Buddhist, Jewish, whatever"-does not help at all. It does not help you; it does not help others. In order to really help others, you need to gain knowledge-wisdom.

The greatest problems of humanity are psychological, not material. From birth to death, people are continuously under the control of their mental sufferings. Some people never keep watch on their minds when things are going well, but when something goes wrong-an accident or some other terrible experience-they immediately say, "God, please help me." They call themselves religious but it's a joke. In happiness or sorrow, a serious practitioner maintains constant awareness of God and one's own nature. You're not being realistic or even remotely religious if, when you are having a good time, surrounded by chocolate and preoccupied by worldly sense pleasures, you forget yourself, and turn to God only when something awful happens.

No matter which of the many world religions we consider, their interpretation of God or Buddha and so forth is simply words and mind; these two alone. Therefore, words don't matter so much. What you have to realize is that everything-good and bad, every philosophy and doctrine-comes from mind. The mind is very powerful. Therefore, it requires firm guidance. A powerful jet plane needs a good pilot; the pilot of your mind should be the wisdom that understands its nature. In that way, you can direct your powerful mental energy to benefit your life instead of letting it run about uncontrollably like a mad elephant, destroying yourself and others.

I think you understand what I'm talking about. What I want is for you to check up. A simple way of checking up on your own mind is to investigate how you perceive things, how you interpret your experiences. Why do you have so many different feelings about your boyfriend even during the course of one day? In the morning you feel good about him, in the afternoon, kind of foggy; why is that? Has your boyfriend changed that radically from morning to afternoon? No, there's been no radical change, so why do you feel so differently about him? That's the way to check.

[Also] before you do anything, you should ask yourself why you are doing it, what is your purpose; what course of action are you embarking on. If the path ahead seems troublesome, perhaps you shouldn't take it; if it looks worthwhile, you can probably proceed. First, check up. Don't act without knowing what's in store for you.

Lama Thubten Yeshe (1935-84) was educated at Sera Monastic University in Lhasa, Tibet. After fleeing Tibet in 1959, he began teaching Buddhism to Westerners at Kopan Monastery in Kathmandu and in 1974 began teaching around the world. He was co-founder of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition. This is an excerpt from *Make Your Mind an Ocean: Aspects of Buddhist Psychology* (1999). Used with permission of Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, Boston.

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