

The Journey Begins by Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche

When you're trained as a Buddhist, you don't think of Buddhism as a religion. You think of it as a type of science, a method of exploring your own experience through techniques that enable you to examine your actions and reaction in a nonjudgmental way, with the view toward recognizing, "Oh, this is how my mind works. This is what I need to do to experience happiness. This is what I should avoid to avoid unhappiness."

At its heart, Buddhism is very practical. It's about doing things that foster serenity, happiness, and confidence, and avoid things that provoke anxiety, hopelessness, and fear. The essence of Buddhist practice is not so much an effort at changing your thoughts or your behavior so that you can become a better person, but in realizing that no matter what you might think about the circumstances that define your life, you're already good, whole, and complete. It's about recognizing the inherent potential of your mind. In other words, Buddhism is not so much concerned with getting well as with recognizing that you are, right here, right now, as whole, as good, as essentially well as you could ever hope to be.

You don't believe that, do you? Well, for a long time, neither did I...

... But the best part of all is that no matter how long you meditate, or what technique you use, every technique of Buddhist meditation ultimately generates compassion, whether we're aware of it or not. Whenever you look at your mind, you can't help but recognize your similarity to those around you.

When you see your own desire to be happy, you can't avoid seeing the same desire in others, and when you look clearly at your own fear, anger, or aversion, you can't help but see that everyone around you feels the same fear, anger, and aversion. When you look at your own mind, all the imaginary differences between yourself and others automatically dissolve and the ancient prayer of the Four Immeasurables becomes as natural and persistent as your own heartbeat:

May all sentient beings have happiness and the causes of happiness.

May all sentient beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

May all sentient being have joy and the causes of joy.

May all sentient beings remain in great equanimity, free from attachment and aversion.

Finding Peace Clarity by Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche

Fundamentally, we could say that we have been inherently endowed with three qualities. The first of the three has three parts: clarity [or] peace and the openness of being ... The second of the three major qualities that are inherent in us is that of loving-kindness and compassion. The third factor is what we might call "inner strength," an inherent power or force within us that is part of our nature. So, we have these three major qualities, which ensure inner peace.

Let me explore the first of these three qualities. To start with, there is a basic quality of clarity that we experience as our nature. It exhibits or expresses itself in all kinds of ways. We have all kind of thoughts and concepts in our minds, all kinds of emotional responses, all kind of states of happiness and unhappiness, pleasure and pain, and so

forth. The fact that we have all these experiences is a sign of that clarity as one of the aspects of our nature. The fact that you can sit here and listen to the words I am speaking and understand them is an expression of that clarity and openness of mind to that kind of experience.

This kind of natural peace is something that is always with you. It's not something you lose at night or in the daytime when you wake up; or have more of in the morning than in the evening. This nature is always what it is. Do you think so? Even to sit there thinking I am not sure I have it or not, that's more of that clarity and openness of mind at work. But again it's so close to home that it's easy to miss.

Even when you are experiencing intense anger or our mind is flooded with all kinds of thoughts, or just completely turbulent – that's all on the surface. If you can tap deep down inside the mind what you discover is that the turmoil and the intensity is not its nature. This natural peace deep down inside is its nature; all that other stuff is just going on in the exterior level. So, as an exercise you can actually work with your thoughts and emotions in this way. Rather than projecting them outward, turn the attention and experiences of having those thoughts and emotions inward. This is not some deep penetrating forceful inner search; it's just turning the attention inward, and recognizing the actual nature inside. Some people, in their search for inner peace, wind themselves into an intense state that they absolutely have to find this thing called inner peace. Unfortunately, that becomes counterproductive. You don't have to be so tensed about it.

Now, all of us get a glimpse of this natural peace, from time to time depending on the circumstances. For example, when we finished doing a good job, we sit back and take a break. We all know what it feels like; we can sometimes hit on this feeling of being just completely at peace without having to try at it. The only reason we can feel it, is because [of] our nature being a state of peace in the first place.

The Buddha used a metaphor to illustrate this point. He said suppose you have a building in which you build a huge fire or have some other source of intense light, but you shut all the doors and windows tight. Still, some of the light can be seen through the cracks in the doors or around the windows - a little hint that there is that intense and brilliant light inside the building even though you can't see it directly. In the same way, even though we don't recognize it for what it is, or fully appreciate it all the time, we get glimpses of this natural state of peace that is inherent in us.

The fact that we are not able to experience our nature is because of a number of factors. There are thought patterns that take our attention and mind, and we get caught up in this coarser or more obvious emotions and senses of the world around us. All of these constitute a rather obvious level of obstructions that prevent us from recognizing what our nature is, and therefore prevent our nature from becoming fully evident to us at all time.

Finding Peace Love and Compassion by Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche

Everything to do with our practice has to be seen from the perspective of balance. The Buddha spoke of the Middle Way, the view being in the Middle Way, meditation being Middle Way, our actions and conduct in the world being in the Middle way. That is to say, not falling into one extreme or the other, but being balanced. Similarly, compassion for others has to be brought into balance with wisdom. If we have compassion without wisdom, it's not particularly powerful, and not necessarily going

to accomplish very much at all. But where we have balance between practice and wisdom we have the most effective approach for benefiting others as well as ourselves. Now, what this means is that we all have to be able to evaluate our own strengths and weaknesses, and understand what we are capable of and not yet capable of.

Let me give you an example. There is an account in the previous lifetime of a Buddha who, as a prince, gave his body to a starving tiger and she ate his body. The Buddha himself in commenting on this story said no one who has not achieved the first of the 10 levels of a bodhisattva should ever attempt anything like that, because it would only harm them. They will only experience great fear and suffering, and it would not serve any purpose. The Buddha pointed out that what might be appropriate action for someone who is a highly realized being would not necessarily be appropriate for someone who is not that far along in the path, and might in fact, constitute a great obstacle to them.

However, we should not, of course, let go of that ideal of compassion. Why it is, after all, we are practicing the spiritual path is to benefit all beings in the first place. That should be our motivation and we never want to let go of that. This is the perspective of compassion that has the wisdom component. And with that kind of balanced approach we progress to a greater and greater degree of capability, (such as the first level of bodhisattva realization), in benefiting more beings than you can now, because you approach it in his methodical way. So, we should understand that compassion is an integral part of our practice, but we should also be wise and self-honest about our current limitation. The key is to do as much as possible at the present time, but work toward more and more capability.

I would like to talk about this second [of the three] major qualities further. It incorporates what we call love and compassion. They are factors that are inherent in us. There are no human beings, no matter how fierce, how cruel, how carnivorous, how aggressive, and how vicious, who in some circumstances don't have some shred of love and compassion; and the capacity to feel them to some degree, no matter how rudimentary. It is in human nature to feel love and compassion

And so everyone has a soft spot, somebody he cares about, a spouse, a friend, a child, or a family member. Just as there is some inkling of that natural peace in all of us, from time to time we get a glimpse of this love and compassion, which does emerge, to a greater or lesser degree in all of us. In particular, the fact that we have minds at all, that we are sentient life forms means that on a very rudimentary level we want to be happy and we want to avoid suffering. This is a sign of that innate quality of love and compassion. The fact that we have that strong sense of self-preservation, of wanting to avoid suffering and obtain happiness, is an expression of our capacity that we have of love and compassion as part of our nature.

Here the term love refers to that desire for happiness for oneself and any one else. In the same way the desire for oneself or others to be free of suffering is compassion. We already have that to some degree. The trick is to know how to use that love and compassion profitably so that we win and others win. If we are in a situation where we are too focused on our own welfare where we are too self-centered, then we have to arouse and nurture that energy of altruism towards others. The reason for that lies in the fact that we all want happiness and avoid suffering.

Actually the fundamental issue of wanting happiness and not wanting suffering is very subjective, because each person has individual wants and needs, and feelings of what their happiness consists of. Some people really love to live an extremely simple

life where they have nothing to wear, barely a roof over their heads just enough to keep their bodies and soul together and they are happy. Other people don't feel they are happy unless they have a big house, and all kinds of things around them. But that doesn't mean happiness lies in either of those extreme situations. It's in the subjective mind of the perceiver. All of this is a sign that we do have this natural peace, this inherent quality within us; it just expresses itself in different ways according to our different inclinations.

My friend, the rock climber, loves the rush of climbing on a dangerous cliff. But that doesn't mean that the experience of climbing the cliff is due to the cliff having some inherent quality of good, bad, happy, sad, or anything. It's his subjective experience. If it was the case that the rock's face by nature was something painful everybody would avoid it like the plague. If it were the case that it was inherently exciting and delightful everybody will be climbing the rock's face. It's very different for different people, because of how our subjectivity about this particular issue [of wanting happiness and not wanting suffering] expresses itself in different circumstances. Otherwise we would all feel the same way about every issue.

Because of our commonality in wanting happiness and avoiding suffering regardless of individual interpretation, we can begin to arouse and accentuate our altruism, our love, and compassion towards others. We start to be sensitive to the fact everyone just like us wants happiness and avoids suffering. We start to see the connection between others and us. As others feel less threatened, we are less likely to feel adverse toward them. We become more content and less reactive with people. So, it benefits all, which is a win-win situation.

Finding Peace Power by Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche

Everything to do with our practice has to be seen from the perspective of balance. The Buddha spoke of the Middle Way, the view being in the Middle Way, meditation being Middle Way, our actions and conduct in the world being in the Middle way. That is to say, not falling into one extreme or the other, but being balanced. Similarly, compassion for others has to be brought into balance with wisdom. If we have compassion without wisdom, it's not particularly powerful, and not necessarily going to accomplish very much at all. But where we have balance between practice and wisdom we have the most effective approach for benefiting others as well as ourselves. Now, what this means is that we all have to be able to evaluate our own strengths and weaknesses, and understand what we are capable of and not yet capable of.

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Finding Peace Buddha Nature by Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche

Peace is something one sees as valuable. All form of life seeks peace to some degree. Now, I will do my best to explain what I see as the process of finding peace.

Surely we are talking about something that can be acquired in a natural way. It's not something that can be obtained, or contrived. Since peace is not something you can hold in your hand, where is this thing we call peace? What are we actually talking about? Is it in you? Yes, in actuality peace is inside you. When we talk about real peace we are not talking about something to be sought outside of ourselves. You might think, if peace is within me why do I have so many problems, so much difficulty, why do I feel so much turmoil and confusion?

Even though peace is inside all of us, most of the time we don't recognize it for what it is. Therefore, we can't take possession of that which is in our own nature. This natural peace that has been with us from birth, that is so much a part of us, is in a sense too close to home. Think of it this way: we have eyes, eyelids, and eyelashes. The eyes function perfectly normal in seeing things, but the eyelids and lashes are so close to our eyes that the eyes can't see them. It's not that they are not there. What the Buddha said about this issue was that, all of us unenlightened beings, have as our very essence a state of total clarity, a state we could term our buddha nature, our potential for that state of enlightenment called buddhahood.

Now, in calling it buddha nature, we give it a kind of fancy name. We could call it "any beings' nature," because we are talking about what is our nature. We do not suggest that the nature of a buddha is any better than the nature of any ordinary being, so it's not a question or a case of hierarchy. On the one hand, it is very flattering that I am addressed as the Rinpoche, the title of a Precious One. But it does not make my nature any better than any one else's.

So, in which context is there some kind of distinction to be made, between a fully enlightened Buddha and people such as us? In the case of Buddha, such as the Buddha Shakyamuni, we have someone who has been able to identify that buddha nature, and that potential; and through the methodical process of spiritual developments made that latent potential fully evident. Therefore, in attaining buddhahood, the Buddha did not get anything that he didn't already have. Gradually through the process of transformation of what was always the case, the inherent nature became more and more clearly evident until the accumulation of that process was reached, what we call "the attainment of Buddhahood," with all the wisdom, love and compassion, and spiritual power that implies.

For example, I am going to use my watch as a metaphor. I am going to pose you a question. What is the primary function or quality of a watch? Correct, it's to tell time. So I have this really good watch that I keep with me 24 hours a day and I own it. But

there is a problem. Even though I have it with me all the time, I don't know what it is, or what it's for. And because of that, I am always late for work and I am always running around asking people for the time. Now, if I happen to meet someone of a good disposition, he might take the time to tell me. Or I might meet some people who can't be bothered. Because of my ignorance about the function of my watch, I am at odds with everyone else. Maybe I manage to get a job, but because I can't show up for work at the right time, you can guess how long I keep the job! I will soon be out of work, have no place to stay, no food; my life will be a mess. So, I stay in this very difficult situation until one day I am fortunate enough to meet someone who turns out to be a real friend. I ask him my favorite question, "what time is it?" To which he replies "why are you asking me, you are wearing a watch!"

My first reaction was, "Don't make fun of me, please." There is a doubt, I really would like to believe that, but I am not sure. But because this person is such a good friend, he takes the time to tell me that since I am wearing a watch I don't have to worry. I might find it hard to believe that my watch can solve my problems, but this good friend takes the time to explain and train me with patience. Eventually, I am going to believe, yes, I have a watch and it tells time. That's the answer to my problem.

So, with this newly gained knowledge, I can go about using my watch. At first I am not proficient and take awhile, but eventually I get to a point where I can go to it and without much hesitation, figure out the time. Not only can I tell time. Now, I can show up for work on time, and someone is more likely to hire me. So, my life improves considerably at a practical level simply from having the information that I have a watch that tells time. I have another question. Think of the watch in the circumstances when you have the knowledge of its function, and the circumstances when you do not. What's the difference? In which situation does the watch have more quality than the other: when you were suffering so much or when things improved enormously? The same, exactly. The watch is the same watch; the quality is the same -- to tell time in both cases. The difference lies in my recognition or lack of recognition of the function of the watch. That's the distinction.

Given that we, as human beings, have this nature or to give it a fancy name, the "buddha nature"-- given that we are not different from all the Buddhas on that level, then on what basis do we make the distinction between Buddha versus a human being? On the basis of recognition or lack thereof. A human being, by definition, is one who fails to recognize that nature, and therefore wanders in the cyclic of existence, whereas a Buddha is someone who has recognized that nature. Now, am I saying that the moment you recognize you have that buddha nature you become Buddha? No, it is not that straightforward. It is a little more complicated than that.

Now let's go back to our earlier metaphor of a good friend who parallels someone who is like a spiritual friend, a mentor who guides you. Or someone who is a Buddha, who embodies the teaching that you follow. Just as a good friend, who comes up to you and says you have a watch, a spiritual companion tells you, you have the buddha nature, and will introduce you to that fact. It doesn't mean you believe it right away, any more than the friend who said you got a watch, and you have been wearing it all the time. Realization of this fact comes through a process of training and practice. You have to gain more and more confidence in your buddha nature. But even when you believe you have the buddha nature, does it instantly make you a Buddha? No, it doesn't. Again, like the person with the watch, he knows he has the watch, but he has to learn how to use it. So, the knowledge that you have the watch does not instantly confer you the ability to tell time perfectly. In the same way the knowledge that you have the buddha nature does not instantly bring you to enlightenment, but it does

allow you to proceed on that path of practice through all the different levels. In the usual Buddha framework some 10 levels are discussed culminating beyond the 10th level in attaining the buddhahood of full and complete enlightenment.

This “human beings nature” which I’ve been discussing, ties in very much with the idea of natural peace. It is in our nature to experience that peace. And what I am attempting to make clearer is that we can draw it out so as to make it more evident through spiritual practices.

Now, in the time limit that we have here, I have to confine myself to just a basic overview. But I will cover the main points. Obviously, when you go through the whole system of training step by step, its implications will become increasingly more and more profound - something that I can not do in just a short space of time.

Finding Peace Breathing Meditation by Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche

What I am going to talk about now is a method that you can use as a spiritual practice to allow our nature to become more evident.

First point of importance is the physical posture. For this method to be effective, the posture should be erect, dignified, sitting up straight, but not too straight as to cause discomfort. You can either sit as I am in a chair, having your feet flat on the floor, or if you want to sit cross-legged on the floor that’s fine. However, trying to force yourselves into a cross-legged posture that’s painful for you is counterproductive, and so that’s not recommended unless you find it comfortable.

There is a relax feeling to this posture. It’s important to just relax! As the body relaxes, so is the mind at rest. As you allow your mind to relax, there is a sense of being in the present moment of nowness and openness. So, in this relaxed state, let your mind be aware of your breathing, not focusing too strongly, just barely aware of it. If other thoughts crop up don’t block them, but don’t indulge them or follow them, either. Keep your primary intent of being merely aware of the breathing. You don’t have to do this for a long time, particularly in the beginning, try just short periods.

The next step is to allow your mind to actually begin to follow the breath instead of just being aware of it. Your mind follows the breath as you breathe in and then as you breathe out. You should do it in a very relaxed even manner, so that there is no jerkiness or irregularity. As you breathe in, your mind follows the breath in. And then you breathe out and the mind follows the breath out into the open space in front of you. And just kind of rest there for maybe two or three seconds as you relax on the out breath before you breathe in again. Obviously, more than two or three seconds is going to be difficult if you don’t breathe in again; and therefore, don’t force it. Do this over and over again.

The point is, initially, we are not able to experience that space and openness for a period longer than a second or two; it’s difficult to maintain the experience. When we tie meditation in this way with breathing, for short periods of time, many times over, we become increasingly familiar with the experience. Then we will be able to have that experience for longer periods of time.

Do not get caught up in the small details, such as "this breath is longer than the last breath," etc. Even if you have a bad meditation, it is perfectly fine. The key lies in not becoming too fixated in the experiences. Of course, a certain amount of interest and recognition is necessary; but getting too engrossed can be problematic. The important point is to keep pursuing the practice. Nothing ever comes without diligence, but diligence does not mean becoming obsessive, either. It's more a case of pursuing the practice, and allowing those insights that do come up to be what they are without getting too caught up in them. That, by far, is the best approach.