



Calming the Mind

The Joy of Living - Level One

A retreat with

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche

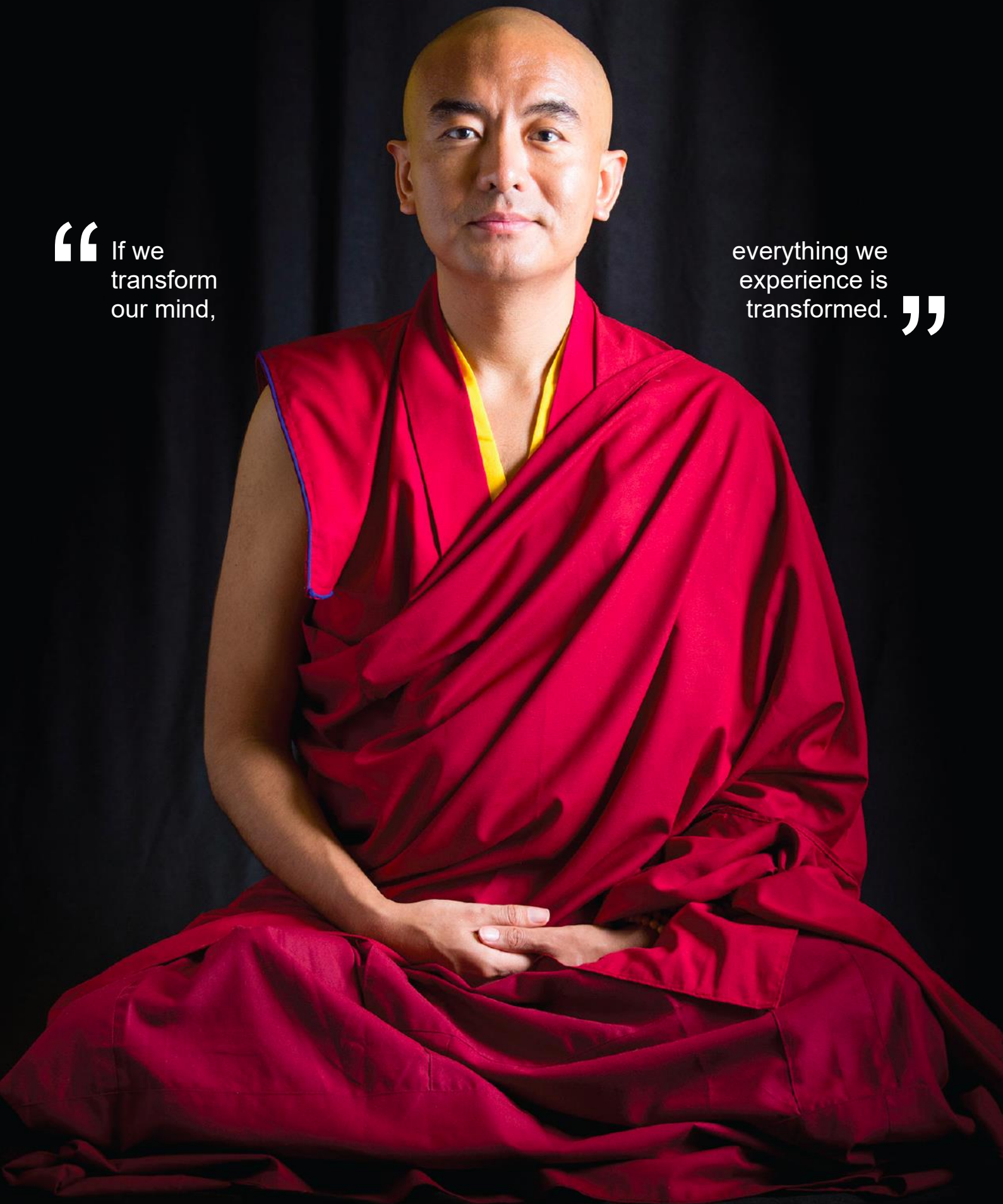
REPORT

16 & 17 March 2024

INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE, NEW DELHI, INDIA

“ If we
transform
our mind,

everything we
experience is
transformed. ”



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INTRODUCTION

On the 16th and 17th of March 2024, Ritinjali and the Centre for Escalation of Peace, in collaboration with the India International Centre, Nalanda Foundation, and Pallavan Learning Systems, came together to host a transformative retreat with Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche on CALMING THE MIND: THE JOY OF LIVING - Level One. As the event unfolded, attendees were privileged to immerse themselves in the profound teachings of Rinpoche, delving into the timeless wisdom of meditation and mindfulness.

Reflecting on the event, we are reminded of Rinpoche's poignant words, "If we transform our mind, everything we experience is transformed." Indeed, participants were guided on a journey of inner exploration, seeking solace amidst the chaos of daily life and discovering the tranquility that lies within.

The 4th annual retreat in Delhi provided a sacred space for individuals to embark on a universal journey toward inner peace and emotional balance. With Rinpoche's gentle guidance, attendees were introduced to the 'Calming the Mind' retreat, a transformative practice rooted in ancient teachings.

The meditation practice taught during the retreat transcends religious and cultural boundaries, offering a pathway to lasting contentment and profound wisdom. Throughout the retreat, participants were invited to delve into the foundational principles of mindfulness, nurturing a deep sense of awareness and compassion for themselves and others.

At the heart of the retreat lies Level One: Calming the Mind. Over the course of two days, attendees were immersed in practices aimed at cultivating a serene mind and a joyous heart. Through awareness meditation, participants learned to navigate the complexities of life with grace, transforming difficult emotions and physical pain into gateways to inner peace.

From resting in open awareness to mastering the art of meditation posture, participants gained invaluable insights into the transformative power of mindfulness. As they journeyed through the retreat, obstacles such as distractions and discouragement were met with resilience and determination, paving the way for a deeper connection to the present moment.

As we reflect on the profound teachings shared during the retreat, we are reminded that the journey toward inner peace is not merely a destination but a lifelong practice. With gratitude to Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche and all those who contributed to the success of the event, we look forward to continuing this journey of self-discovery and transformation.



THE RETREAT

Ever yearned to quiet the chaos within, to navigate the tumult of everyday stress and emotions with grace? Life's challenges may hold the key to discovering an inner sanctuary of calm and emotional equilibrium.

‘The Joy of Living’ is not just a meditation path; it's a universal journey open to all, regardless of religious or cultural affiliations. It's a transformative practice that unveils lasting contentment beyond the sway of external conditions, nurturing the innate qualities of wisdom and compassion. While rooted in the ancient Buddhist teachings of Tibet, the Joy of Living is not bound by religious constraints; it delves into the fundamental workings of the mind, fostering mindful awareness and steering us towards happiness while moving away from suffering. In embracing these aspects, we evolve our relationship with the present moment, approaching every thought, feeling, and sensory experience with unwavering warmth and acceptance.

The Joy of Living retreat course contains three levels:

1. Calming the Mind
2. Opening the Heart
3. Awakening Wisdom

In this two-day retreat programme, Rinpoche took us through the first level concerning ‘Calming the Mind’.

Level One: Calming the Mind

Embark on a journey where awareness meditation becomes the alchemy for cultivating a serene mind and a joyous heart. Through this practice, any situation, even the crucible of difficult emotions and physical pain, can become a gateway to inner peace.

In this level, you will delve into:

- Resting in open awareness, a state of spacious and alert presence
- Using visual objects, sounds, tastes, and other sense stimuli as pillars for awareness in meditation



- Transforming your relationship with physical pain, challenging emotions, and disruptive thought patterns through the art of awareness meditation
- Navigating distractions and overcoming meditation obstacles, from excessive thought activity to sleepiness and discouragement
- Initiating a daily meditation practice, mastering the correct posture, and discerning the ideal duration for meditation sessions

This event was made possible by Nalanda Foundation which endeavours to bring Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche's Tergar vision to India by making his teachings accessible to all.



'The Joy of Living' is not just a meditation path; it's a universal journey open to all, regardless of religious or cultural affiliations.

YONGEY MINGYUR RINPOCHE

The retreat will be led by Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, who possesses a rare ability to present ancient Indian and Tibetan wisdom in a fresh, engaging manner. Mingyur Rinpoche is a world-renowned meditation teacher with personal experience of anxiety and panic attacks, which he suffered from throughout his childhood and into his teenage years when he learned to transform his panic through meditation. From childhood, he became interested in contemporary science through conversations with scientists on research projects that study the effects of meditation on the brain and the mind.

Mingyur Rinpoche's first book, *The Joy of Living: Unlocking the Secret and Science of Happiness*, debuted on the New York Times bestseller list and has been translated into over twenty languages. His second book, *Joyful Wisdom: Embracing Change and Finding Freedom*, explores how difficult emotions and challenging life situations can be used as stepping stones to discover joy and freedom. In his most recent book, *In Love with the World*, Mingyur Rinpoche shares how his meditation practice sustained him when he left his monastery to wander through India and the powerfully transformative insights he gained from the near-death experience he had at the beginning of his journey. Rinpoche's other books include *Turning Confusion into Clarity: A Guide to the Foundation Practices of Tibetan Buddhism* and an illustrated children's book entitled: *Ziji: The Puppy that Learned to Meditate*. Rinpoche has also appeared on TED Talk about *How to Tap into Your Awareness*, where he shares the three steps aimed at helping individuals to accept the ebb and flow of their emotions and learn to meditate anytime, anywhere.

MEDITATION FACILITATOR: GEORGE HUGHES

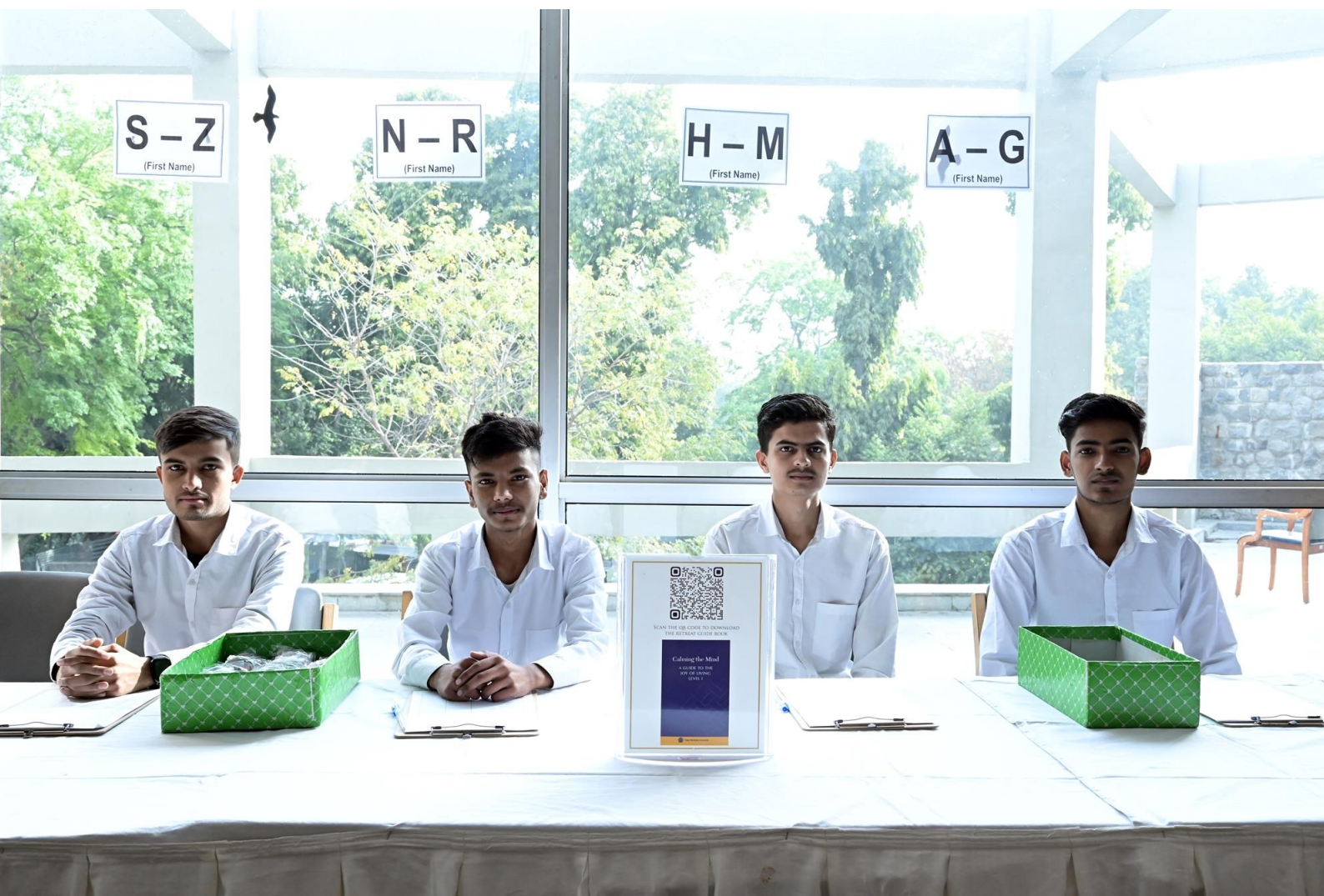
Beginning his journey into meditation and the wisdom traditions as a teenager, George Hughes has been a practitioner and teacher in several traditions. He found his spiritual home with his root teacher, Mingyur Rinpoche, and has dedicated his life to sharing



his profound teachings. In particular, George draws inspiration from the joy, levity, and simplicity of Rinpoche’s approach.

George has worked with Mingyur Rinpoche for many years, teaching his Joy of Living and Path of Liberation curriculums around the world, including to groups in the US, Brazil, and Nepal. Additionally, George has taught yoga, massage, and other holistic healing modalities.

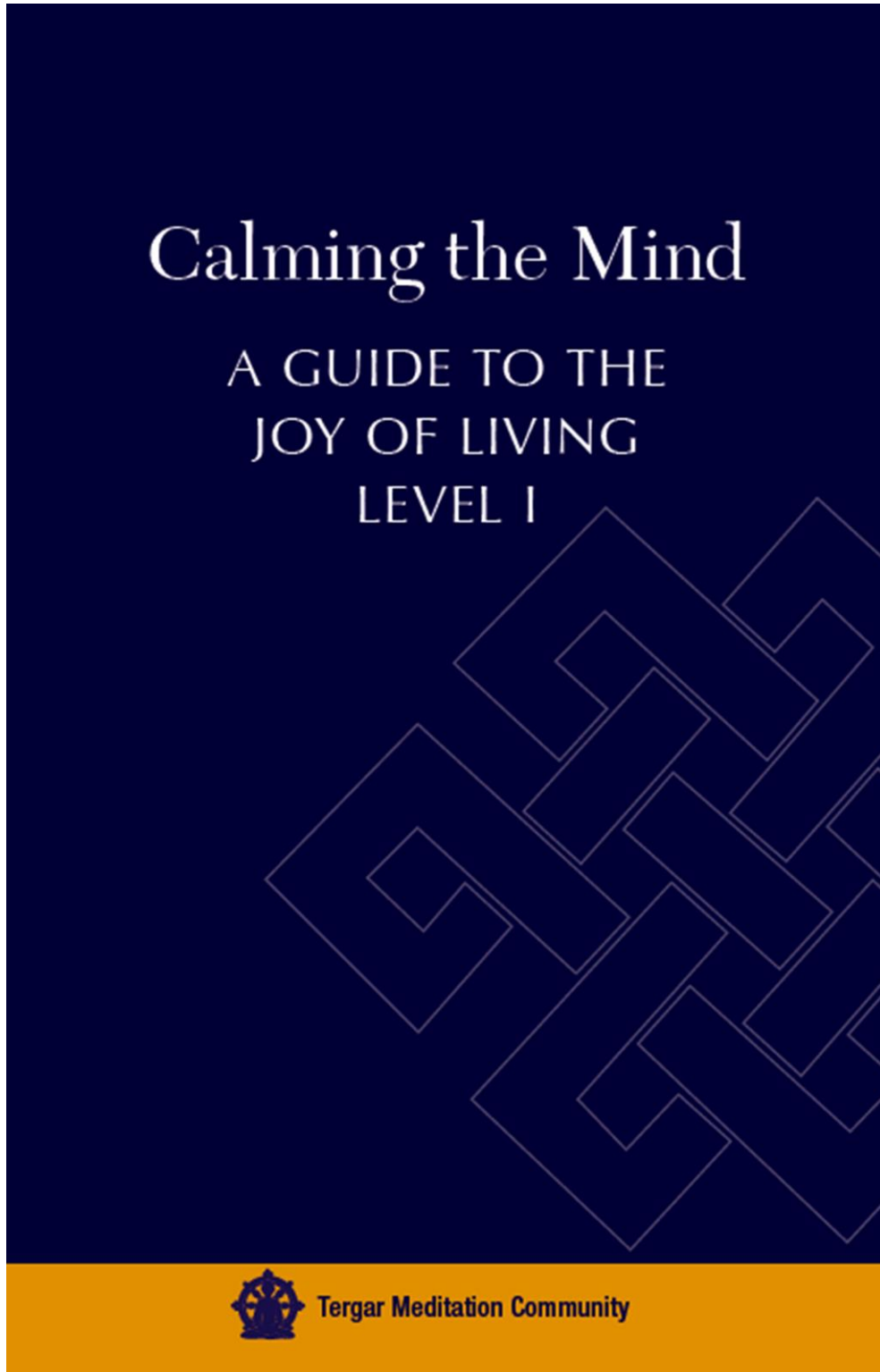
In addition to his current role on the faculty of Tergar Institute, George has worked with Mingyur Rinpoche on a variety of projects, including guiding a series of treks through the Himalayas to help support Rinpoche’s social engagement projects. George’s passion for the dharma and meditation extends to all aspects of his life.



Students of Second Chance School welcoming the participants



RETREAT GUIDE BOOK



Click here to [read/download](#) the retreat guide book.



DAY ONE

K.N. Shrivastava, Director of India International Centre, New Delhi, delivered the Opening Remarks and expressed deep gratitude to Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche for offering his valuable time to lead the retreat. He noted that the fourth annual edition of the retreat on Calming the Mind, initiated in 2019, was particularly significant in helping us to navigate the unpredictable predicaments of our times.

Choki Wangchuk representing Ritinjali, Centre for Escalation of Peace and Pallavan Learning Systems, introduced Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche and extended a warm welcome to the participants who had registered for the retreat, with 130 in physical attendance and around 200 connecting virtually from over 35 countries. He shared that the retreat on Calming the Mind was the first step in the Joy of Living course which encompasses three progressive levels and is designed for practitioners from all faiths and traditions.

Rinpoche initiated the retreat by foregrounding that the fundamental innate nature of all human beings is pure, grounded in goodness and bears the potential for enlightenment, regardless of life's many turbulences.



Opening remark by Mr. K.N. Shrivastava, Director of India International Centre

Aversion and Craving: Two Key Causes of Suffering

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche identified aversion and craving as fundamental sources of human suffering, drawing from his personal experience of severe panic attacks in childhood. Despite attempting various methods to combat these attacks, he found that resistance only exacerbated his condition. His father's wisdom, advising against fighting panic but rather acknowledging its presence, emphasised the futility of struggling against internal turmoil.

Rinpoche's analogy of the 'inner sky' highlighted the intrinsic purity of the mind, likening it to the vast expanse unaffected by-passing clouds or storms. Similarly, he likened his panic attacks to fleeting disturbances in this vast inner space, distinct from its unchanging essence.

Regarding craving, Rinpoche emphasised the elusive nature of peace and joy when pursued desperately. Instead, he advocated for recognising the innate nature of the mind and fostering acceptance of all thoughts and emotions. Through meditation, one can cultivate awareness, wisdom, and compassion, thereby transforming ignorance and aversion into opportunities for growth and understanding.

Central to this transformative process is the cultivation of awareness, characterised by clarity and inclusivity. Rinpoche highlighted five states of unconsciousness where awareness persists, emphasising the omnipresence of this fundamental quality. By embracing all experiences without judgment, individuals can embark on a journey of self-discovery and inner transformation.





View, Meditation Techniques and Application

To nurture awareness, wisdom and loving compassion, Rinpoche delineated the following steps:

View

View, or the perspective that recognises our true nature, is akin to nurturing awareness and understanding. During a reflective session, Rinpoche prompted participants to ponder the necessity of attending a meditation retreat when awareness is ever-present. Responses varied, with some noting the pervasive nature of awareness but acknowledging the need to train the mind to focus on it, while others highlighted the importance of meditation for developing mindfulness and emotional detachment.

Acknowledging these perspectives, Rinpoche emphasised that while awareness is inherent in all moments, meditation serves to deepen our recognition and sustainment of it. Through meditation, individuals not only cultivate awareness but also come to understand the innate quality of their minds, transcending the realm of thought, emotion, and suffering.

Rinpoche further engaged participants with probing questions about their awareness recognition, fostering introspection and self-awareness. Ultimately, he concluded that anyone responding to these questions, regardless of their certainty, is inherently connected to their awareness, underscoring its omnipresence in human experience.

Meditation Techniques

As Rinpoche elucidated, meditation is the art of embracing awareness and presence, a practice that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries. He addressed common misconceptions, noting that while some view it as a blissful escape in Western cultures, others perceive it as a solemn and solitary endeavour in many Asian traditions.

To delve deeper, Rinpoche introduced two fundamental categories of meditation:



- Object-oriented meditation encompasses a wide array of focal points, such as the sound of a bell, the sight of a flower, or the rhythm of one's breath.
- Subject-oriented meditation, where thoughts and emotions serve as gateways to mindfulness and self-discovery.

In demonstrating object-oriented meditation using sound, Rinpoche rang a bell, directing participants to anchor their awareness to its resonance. He emphasised that meditation is fundamentally about cultivating awareness, where every thought is acknowledged without resistance, guiding practitioners back to the focal point—the sound in this instance.

Transitioning to visual object meditation, Rinpoche encouraged participants to engage with external sensations before turning inward to explore bodily sensations. Acknowledging the interconnectedness of emotions and physical experiences, he stressed on the importance of embracing sensations without judgment, fostering a sense of openness and acceptance.

Rinpoche outlined the physical requirements for effective meditation practice by highlighting key bodily pathways for sensations and emphasising the significance of posture. By grounding oneself in a balanced posture and directing attention to various bodily sensations, practitioners can deepen their connection to awareness.

Rinpoche concluded with insights from his involvement in extensive meditation studies in the USA, emphasising the remarkable plasticity of the meditating brain. Through advanced imaging techniques, researchers observed the ‘unstickiness’ of long-term meditators' brains, illustrating their ability to navigate internal and external stimuli with resilience and clarity—a testament to the transformative power of meditation.

Application

Rinpoche stressed on the significance of integrating meditation into daily life, likening it to mental hygiene—a practice essential for nurturing the mind's well-being. He



encouraged participants to embark on their meditation journey gradually, suggesting practical steps and manageable timelines to ensure sustainability. For instance, starting with a few minutes of meditation each day for a month can help establish a habit.

In addition to formal meditation sessions, Rinpoche highlighted the value of informal meditation, urging individuals to infuse mindfulness into routine activities like walking, cooking, and exercising. He recommended periodically changing the focal point to enrich visual object meditation, promoting continued growth in practice. Demonstrating the principle of ‘everything is meditation’, he prompted participants to engage in smell and taste meditation during lunch break, fostering awareness of sensory experiences and gratitude for nourishment.

Introducing the concept of sleeping meditation, Rinpoche encouraged embracing sensations of drowsiness and fatigue, emphasising the importance of fully experiencing these states without grasping or resisting. By surrendering to non-conceptual awareness, practitioners can deepen their connection to the present moment, transcending thoughts and feelings.

Rinpoche elucidated the boundless nature of awareness by expounding on wisdom as perceiving reality truthfully, likening it to light illuminating surfaces. He introduced open-awareness meditation as a means of resting in the innate quality of the mind, devoid of attachment to sensory phenomena.

Rinpoche concluded by advocating for service to others as a pathway to self-discovery and fulfillment. By nurturing innate qualities and cultivating self-compassion, individuals can extend forgiveness and compassion to others, fostering deeper connections and genuine happiness.





Group Discussion



Guided Meditation Practice with George Hughes

George Hughes from Tergar Institute led several meditation practices on sound meditation, form meditation, and open awareness meditation, followed by reflections and Q&A. He invited the participants into a comfortable physical posture for meditation and urged everyone to look at awareness from different angles like sound and sight. He noted that it is natural to get lost in thoughts, but as long as we are observing that we are lost, we are in awareness.

Q&A with George Hughes

Q. How do you ensure your focus is gentle and you are not grasping the need to focus?

A. We need to pay attention to our physical posture and ensure it is not too tight. Similarly, our mind and thoughts often wander into the past, and we must ensure they are not too loose. Adopting the middle path is key.

Q. During meditation I noticed that I had occasional moments of awareness. Can you explain the goal of this process?

A. As we touch into awareness within ourselves, we become familiar with our own minds and start to discover our innate fundamental qualities. It is an opportunity to be in tune with our own awareness.

Q. Do other sentient beings like plants and animals also have awareness?

A. All sentient beings have awareness. They exhibit features of moving towards the light, responding to music etc.

Q. When I was meditating, I heard my own sound and instructions on how to focus and be present in the moment. Is that also awareness?

A. Yes, and there are different personality types because of which our experiences with the same meditation will vary. Rinpoche will elaborate further on this.



Q. If out of 10 minutes of meditation, for 9 minutes, my mind was wandering, where was the meditation?

A. That awareness is an important starting point. Next time, we may be more present for a longer period of time. For example, next time, we may notice that we are in deep awareness for 2 minutes, and then our mind wanders for 8 minutes. In our subsequent attempt, we may be in awareness for 5 minutes, our mind wanders for 5 minutes, and so on. Just the intention to meditate, for our own benefit or other reasons, is very important regardless of our experience of meditation.

Q. When sound itself has intonations and highs and lows, how can we expect our meditation to be stable?

A. Noticing the sound as it comes in and goes is important. Being in that awareness is the key and central to our meditation practice on sound.

Q. Is it okay to focus on a flame which is a moving object as the object of our meditation?

A. Yes, it is okay.

Q. While meditating, my mind started to analyse the form itself. Is it okay?

A. The point is just to notice and not analyse. We are not attempting to block the thoughts; they will flow naturally. The attempt is to place the majority of our attention on the form and a small percentage on thoughts and analysis.

Q. How do I practice full presence during meditation when I can simultaneously hear my own thoughts?

A. The essence of meditation is awareness. The essence of awareness is knowing. Simply that recognition is important. We are not developing awareness since it is innate. We are simply trying to recognise it and become more present in the experiences. Thoughts will continue to come and go; thoughts and emotions are like flags in constant movement. But we are not trying to chase them; we can observe them and try to stay present to the form.

Q. Are meditation practices on form or sound a way of training our mind, so we can stay with our true nature?



A. It is a way of connecting with our true nature. The awareness is always there, we are trying to strengthen our recognition of awareness.

Q. When we fall asleep during meditation, what does that indicate?

A. Perhaps that indicates that you need sleep. There are two obstacles to meditation that include agitation/excitement and dullness, which Rinpoche will elaborate further upon.



In-person & online participants in the meditation session



Q&A with Rinpoche

Q. What does a mirror see when two mirrors are facing each other?

A. 'I don't know' is awareness, and also knowing is awareness. Once we learn about awakening wisdom in the Joy of Living level three, you will gain insights on several questions: What is awareness? Where does it come from?

Q. When there is pain in the body, how do we go beyond that to be in awareness?

A. I will teach pain meditation after lunch.

Q. How is being with an object of awareness different from Vipassana?

A. Vipassana has many diverse interpretations. In Buddhism, we have three main schools - Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. In Theravada, to be aware of body and sensation is considered Vipassana. In others, it is considered Shamata. So the terminology varies depending on the tradition that one is following.

Q. When I am looking intently with the mind and the eye during object meditation, and I focus on the object, it becomes blurry and I lose attention. What is the value in and instruction on object meditation, with respect to the eyes moving and focusing on different aspects of the object?

A. There is no one focus. We assume and believe that we see the whole object at any given time. When you see anyone, you are merely scanning them and not necessarily focusing on their whole being. For example, when you see someone's face, you may be observing their eyes closely, but not their chin. We create singular meaning, assuming that we are witnessing the whole phenomenon. The mind and eyes may also be in different directions. When eyes and mind both focus on the flower, it is true meditation. Slowly, the awareness becomes clear and the mind pliable.

Q. Do we share awareness as a collective or do we have individual awareness?

A. The detailed answer to this question can be found in level three of the Joy of Living training. One traditional answer is that we hold an empty bottle in one hand and an empty glass cup in the other and look at the space in the bottle and the space in the cup – are they the same or different? They appear different because of the container.



The space itself in the bottle and cup is not one but is not different either. Similarly, your and my awareness is not one, but also not different.

Q. When you meditate, is there a change in the chemical composition of the brain? Is it similar to consuming medicines as is conventional in pharmacology?

A. In 1998, I went to the USA. I was told that if I have panic attacks, only some symptoms can be altered but the baseline cannot be changed. If you win the lottery, the scientist said that you will be happy only for a short period of a few months and then return to the baseline. Our baseline is not impacted by factors such as fame, money etc. However, breathing meditation can change the baseline. Later, Neuroplasticity was discovered. Subsequently, Neural Pathways were discovered, and it was realised that new connections are possible in the brain. Later, Neurogenesis was discovered, affirming that even genes can change. Therefore, transformation from unhappiness to happiness is possible. The medication versus meditation debate is popular. While meditation has long-term effects, medicines help in short-term treatment of symptoms, but the chances of relapse are high. In case of acute clinical depression and severe panic attacks, support of medicines is important when prescribed and meditation is the longer-term solution.



DAY TWO

On the second day of the retreat, Mingyur Rinpoche led a series of meditation practices as shared below:

Pain Meditation

Having pain is a prerequisite to practising pain meditation. He urged participants to begin by setting an intention, aligning self-transformation with broader social change. Through the meditation on pain, followed by open awareness meditation, Rinpoche illuminated the transformative potential inherent in pain. Pain, he noted, possesses a magnetic quality capable of deepening awareness and supporting meditation practice. Remarkably, as pain transforms into a familiar companion, so does suffering, fostering a profound shift in perspective.

Delving into the four possible experiences when focusing on pain, Rinpoche offered insights into the intricate dynamics:

- **Transient Relief:** When attention is directed towards pain, it momentarily dissolves, offering glimpses into a non-conceptual experience where pain dissipates.
- **Dynamic Transformation:** By observing pain, its nature changes and may migrate to different parts of the body, providing a pathway for further exploration in meditation.
- **Steadfast Observation:** Directing attention to pain reveals its presence as an observable phenomenon, serving as a supportive anchor for meditation practice.
- **Amplified Awareness:** In some instances, focusing on pain amplifies its intensity, offering access to deeper layers of awareness. However, if the intensity becomes overwhelming, practitioners can shift their focus to alternative meditation practices, returning to pain meditation at a later time.



Rinpoche's guidance illuminated the multifaceted nature of pain meditation, empowering practitioners to navigate discomfort with mindful awareness and fostering profound insights into the interconnectedness of mind, body, and consciousness.

Thought Meditation

In this meditation practice, we engage with our conceptual mind, often referred to as the sixth consciousness or the 'monkey mind'. This aspect of consciousness encompasses images, words, and sensations, perpetually seeking stimulation and activity. When the monkey mind becomes our adversary, it haunts us incessantly, manifesting as anxiety, panic attacks, or the fear of depression. It relentlessly pursues tasks, always restless and eager to occupy itself.

An intriguing study conducted in the United States unveiled a startling revelation: individuals preferred administering mild electric shocks to themselves rather than enduring 15 minutes of solitude with their own thoughts. This peculiar preference highlights the restless nature of the monkey mind, constantly seeking distraction and activity. The goal of meditation, then, is to cultivate a harmonious relationship with this restless mind. By identifying common interests, such as the pursuit of happiness, we can offer the monkey mind a sense of purpose, gaining mastery over its incessant chatter. Through meditation, we gradually shape our minds into resilient, pliable entities capable of navigating life's challenges with grace and clarity.

Central to this practice is the observation of thoughts without identification or attachment. By maintaining awareness of our thoughts, we harness their power as tools for meditation. Rinpoche encourages participants to welcome all thoughts without judgment, recognising them as valuable support for the practice. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of the mind's workings and facilitates the development of concentration, samadhi, and awareness.





As we engage in thought meditation, we become attuned to the gaps between thoughts, experiencing moments of non-conceptual awareness. Alternatively, when thoughts arise, they serve as focal points for concentration and mindfulness. With consistent practice, our awareness and compassion expand, leading to profound insights and the gradual deepening of wisdom.

Emotion Meditation

Emotions, intricate tapestries woven from sensations, images, and sounds, form the canvas of our inner landscape. Rinpoche guided participants to embark on the journey of emotion meditation by immersing themselves in the rich tapestry of feelings,



observing their emergence, feeling their nuances, and gently labeling them. This practice invites us to embrace the full spectrum of our emotional experience, extending a hand of friendship to every emotion that arises.

Within the realm of emotions, Rinpoche illuminated three distinct personalities that reside within us: the body personality, drawn to images and colours; the speech personality, inclined towards words and articulation; and the mind personality, attuned to feelings and sensations. As participants delved deeper into the meditation practice, Rinpoche encouraged them to assume the role of a detached observer, allowing every aspect of their experience to serve as a beacon of awareness. By cultivating an ‘inner safe place’ and ‘inner source of refuge’, we pave the way for transforming all experiences into catalysts for happiness and spiritual growth. Even negative emotions, when approached with mindful awareness, can become potent agents of liberation, unraveling their own knots and paving the path towards inner peace.

Acknowledging the occasional overwhelming nature of emotions, Rinpoche offered gentle guidance on navigating such tumultuous waters. When faced with the intensity of emotions like panic, he suggested diversifying the focus of meditation to gentler sensations or emotions. Alternatively, delving into the emotion behind the emotion provides insight and a pathway to understanding. In moments of profound aversion or exhaustion, he advocated taking a step back, offering oneself respite through physical exercise or restful sleep, nurturing the body and mind back to equilibrium. These moments of pause not only provide relief but also serve as essential practices of self-care and compassion on the journey of self-discovery and transformation.

Choiceless Meditation

Choiceless Meditation, a harmonious fusion of mindful awareness across diverse sensory experiences, invites practitioners to cultivate a focused yet expansive state of consciousness. As the objects of meditation shift – from the tantalising flavours of taste to the evocative scents of smell, from the ephemeral dance of thoughts to the



tangible forms of the external world – our awareness remains steadfast and unwavering.

Initiating this meditation journey with positive intentions sets the tone for a transformative inner exploration. With each sensory encounter, we navigate the labyrinth of our consciousness, guided by the beacon of intentionality. Through this practice, we transcend the limitations of choice, embracing the fluidity of experience and the boundless potential of our awareness.

Getting Lost Meditation

This is the opposite of awareness and invites you to get lost in the past or the present, or daydream without awareness as a form of meditation. Unlike the focused awareness cultivated in meditation, this technique encourages participants to relinquish the reins of consciousness and surrender to the currents of memory, imagination, and daydreams.

In this meditative state, one deliberately wanders off the beaten path of present-moment awareness, allowing the mind to roam freely through the landscapes of the past, present, or even realms of fantasy. Rather than anchoring attention to the here and now, practitioners immerse themselves in the ebb and flow of thought, unbound by the constraints of linear time or external stimuli.

By embracing the art of getting lost, individuals embark on a journey of self-discovery, unveiling hidden facets of the psyche and exploring the labyrinthine corridors of the subconscious mind. In this boundless expanse of inner exploration, every detour becomes a doorway to deeper understanding and profound insight.



Mental Recitation Meditation

In the practice of Mental Recitation Meditation, practitioners engage in the rhythmic repetition of a chosen mantra or self-created affirmations within the confines of their own consciousness. By immersing oneself in this deliberate recitation, individuals harness the transformative power of sound and intention to cultivate inner peace and clarity.

Whether utilising a traditional mantra passed down through generations or crafting personalised phrases tailored to individual needs, the essence of this meditation lies in the harmonious alignment of verbal recitation with heightened awareness. Through the seamless integration of mantra repetition and mindful presence, participants unlock a dual benefit: the profound resonance of the chosen words and the enriching experience of meditative absorption.

As the chosen phrases echo softly within the recesses of the mind, each repetition serves as a beacon of focus, guiding practitioners into deeper states of tranquility and introspection. With each iteration, the mantra becomes a potent vehicle for transcending the chatter of the restless mind and attuning to the subtle rhythms of the inner self.

In essence, Mental Recitation Meditation offers a sacred space where the spoken word converges with mindful awareness, creating a sacred symphony that resonates throughout the depths of consciousness. Through this harmonious fusion of sound and mindfulness, practitioners embark on a transformative journey of self-discovery and inner illumination.



Guided Meditation Practice with George Hughes

Pain Meditation

George Hughes from Tergar Institute took the audience through a profound session of Pain Meditation, guiding them on a journey of self-discovery and inner exploration. Beginning with a foundation of open awareness, participants were encouraged to ground themselves in the present moment.

With George's guidance, attendees embarked on a mindful exploration of their bodily sensations, attentively observing any areas of discomfort or pain. Through this process, George skillfully facilitated an environment of compassion and non-judgment, allowing participants to embrace their experiences with kindness and curiosity.

Throughout the session, George provided gentle prompts and encouragement, supporting participants as they navigated the nuances of their physical sensations. If the intensity of pain became overwhelming, George offered alternative techniques to anchor awareness, ensuring a safe and supportive practice environment.

As the session unfolded, attendees were invited to rest in the spaciousness of open awareness, allowing moments of respite and relaxation amidst the discomfort. George's expert guidance and compassionate presence created a space for profound insight and growth, empowering participants to cultivate resilience and presence in the face of pain.

With each mindful breath and attentive observation, George led the audience on a transformative journey of self-discovery and healing, reminding them of the innate wisdom and resilience within.



Thought Meditation

Participants were guided to focus their attention on the spine, creating a sense of groundedness and relaxation within the body. With George's guidance, attendees were encouraged to envision themselves returning home to a tranquil setting where they could rest comfortably in a chair.

As thoughts naturally arose, George emphasised the importance of observing them without becoming entangled or carried away. Participants were encouraged to step back from the stream of their thoughts, recognising them as fleeting phenomena passing through the landscape of awareness.

George navigated participants through moments of distraction or overwhelm, offering the refuge of open awareness as a respite. By gently returning to the practice of observing thoughts, attendees deepened their connection to the present moment and reinforced their recognition of awareness.



George Hughes

With each return to awareness, participants strengthened their capacity to remain grounded and centred amidst the ebb and flow of mental activity. As the session drew to a close, George invited attendees to release their thoughts and rest in the profound stillness of mind and body, nurturing a sense of inner peace and tranquillity.

Q&A with George Hughes

Q. In terms of application of thought meditation in everyday life, should we try to change our thoughts or just observe them? What is a practical suggestion that you can offer?

A. In this tradition of Joy of Living, we are simply deepening our awareness. Very often, we have so many thoughts that we don't even recognise. To change something, we first need to recognise it as it is. A deep awareness of our thoughts lends us deeper discernment of what we seek to do with them.

Q. Does a sleeping body posture, also known as savasana in yoga, work during meditation?

A. Find a way to stay awake and stay alert to make your meditation practice sustainable. Rinpoche says that there are four meditation postures: sitting, standing, walking and lying down. Find a posture that is comfortable, where you are alert, and one that you can hold for some time.

Q. I find it easier to tune into bodily sensations but with Thought Meditation, I usually spiral into repetitive thoughts which are unclear and are only present as a faint constant hum in the background. What should I do?

A. The idea is simply to be with what is. We don't have to either chase or block our thoughts. To be patient and sit in awareness of our thoughts as they rise and fall, is the essence of the practice.

Q. How do I use my deepened awareness within to connect better with the world outside?

A. In this first level of the Joy of Living training, we are becoming familiar with awareness in formal meditation practice and our daily lives. The aim of this level is to



recognise awareness and realise that everything is meditation. When we proceed to level two of the training, we discover that loving kindness and compassion are also our innate qualities. So, by connecting to them, we are able to shine these qualities deeper into our everyday lives and open our hearts to the world around us.

Q. What if my pain becomes too intense while doing Pain Meditation?

A. If your pain becomes too intense, you can stop meditating altogether. You can also rest in open awareness, or you can focus on another milder pain if you have one. You also have the choice of engaging with sound or another form of meditation.

Q. Should one view pain meditation as a way of healing and a substitute for consulting a doctor?

A. The suggestion is not to perceive pain meditation as a way of healing pain. The idea is to bring your awareness to the pain. If healing is occurring, we notice it. If the pain is amplifying, we also notice that. Please consult a doctor if that is needed to address the pain.

Q. How does the Joy of Living training relate with the phenomenon of ‘surrender’?

A. Rinpoche talks about the monkey mind being our boss or our enemy. With what we have learned so far, ‘surrender’ can be understood as making the monkey mind our friend.

Q. Why is open awareness so abstract and difficult to understand?

A. Open awareness is difficult because we are used to always doing something. What could be more spectacular than keeping focus on what is already with us? We are trying to remain present in our current experience with open awareness meditation.

Q. There are multiple stimuli around us and sensations within. How do we know where to rest our awareness in open awareness practice?

A. When we are more speech personality-oriented, we have a tendency to come up with labels and words. The body personality type will notice forms, shapes, and colours more. The mind personality connects more with sensations. The purpose is to strengthen our recognition of awareness and try to remain present in our current experience.



Q. While meditating, a part of being present is that I am wandering and my awareness is resting on that. Is it okay to be lost in meditation and then come back?

A. When we are unaware that we are wandering, we are lost. However, if we are in awareness of our mind wandering, we are resting in awareness of our mind wandering. All the thoughts, sounds, smells, visuals, emotions that we experience fall within the realm of our awareness.



Q&A Session



Q&A with Rinpoche

Q. How do we explain the sensorial experiences of meditation which manifest in different forms such as vibration from the spine, light in the forehead etc.?

A. These are energy movements which have four elements:

- Physical bodily signs: experience of pain, heat, pressure, shaking, vibrations, tears etc.
- Sensory perception: viewing light, visions of enlightened beings or ancestors, hearing mantras and music, etc.
- Sense of energy: Experiencing energy that is negative or positive in spaces, people, etc.
- Emotional fluctuations: The ups and downs of feeling angry, happy, agitated, peaceful etc.

When we meditate, there are energy movements and transformations that happen. In particular, don't attach yourself to sensory perceptions and sense of energy, because they are not true. Allow them to come and then let go; otherwise we will begin to harbour false beliefs about our potential for supernatural powers or our ability to receive messages from enlightened beings. It is important to recognise them as energy movements and not get attached to them.

Q. When we meditate, how do we explain out-of-body experiences?

A. During our meditation, when we experience joyful, clear, and non-conceptual experiences, it is important to appreciate them but also realise that they will not last long, so don't get attached to them. The down experiences are where learning happens, and they help us significantly improve our practice. Two states in this experience include:

- Agitation – where the mind becomes restless, we are inundated with thoughts, and many negative emotions emerge. For example, experience of anxiety or depression.
- Dullness – where we feel sleepy, foggy and unclear.

Slowly with practice, we understand that the ups and downs of the experience are threaded together by the delicate thread of awareness.



Q. When we meditate on an intention for someone, does it work?

A. If the person is unwell due to his/her own karma, your prayers or meditation will not work. However, if they are unwell due to temporary obstacles, and if you meditate with a pure intention for them, it may work. How much it will help truly varies.

Q. Sometimes, we feel too lazy to meditate, and we get distracted easily or procrastinate in our practice. What practical advice do you have for such people?

A. You can do meditation on laziness, and gradually become aware of your tiredness, fatigue and laziness. Meditation is possible anywhere and at any time. The most important thing is to work on cultivating a habit. We must remember that ‘view’ is at the cognitive level, ‘meditation’ is at the experiential and feeling level, while ‘application’ is at the level of habit and behaviour, where our consciousness is gradually being shaped. Constant repetitions can alter habits. Try to build a habit and set a practical achievable target for your meditation practice. For example, start a practice for a short period, such as a few minutes every day for the next 30 days, instead of making a commitment for the rest of your life. In 30 days, you will notice that a habit will begin to form.

Q. In meditation practice, we may have emotions that are buried deep within. Won’t it be overwhelming to get in touch with them?

A. In our practice, first we need to work with the five sensory meditations for several hours, and then segue gradually into emotion meditation so we don’t get overwhelmed.

Q. Can meditation be a substitute for therapy?

A. Many meditation teachings are happening these days which don’t follow the traditional principles of meditation and its true essence. Incorrect meditation practice can become support for craving and aversion. If you are desperately looking for peace and joy through meditation, it may increase craving for these emotions and become counter-productive. If emotions become overwhelming, please use your individual discretion and discernment to seek therapy or medication, as may be required.



Q. What is merit?

A. Merit means mental state – connecting with loving compassion, wisdom and awareness and bringing these into action through ethical conduct, patience, nonviolence, discipline and generosity. Then, we accumulate merit. These positive imprints generated through cultivation of awareness that reaches our subconscious is merit. These imprints slowly grow within us.

Q. Is mindfulness the same as consciousness?

A. Mindfulness is a part of consciousness and not the entire consciousness. Awareness means the knowing quality of the mind and we have awareness all the time. So, it is almost inseparable from consciousness.

Q. What is the soul?

A. There are three layers of the mind and body. Besides the gross level, we have the subtle mind which can also be considered the soul depending on which tradition we are coming from.

Q. If awareness is always present, are we in constant meditation?

A. We need to go back to our learning of the view, meditation and application. Meditation requires us to connect with awareness, which is ever-present. If we don't recognise our awareness, it will not manifest in meditation for us.

Q. If we are meditating for a longer time, is there a standard to assess our improvement and progress?

A. In the beginning, don't meditate too long. Repeat your meditation practice and assess how frequently to meditate, contingent on how you are feeling and depending on the sensations in your body. Resistance can become an imprint and make it challenging to meditate sustainably. So take incremental steps, and you will notice the progress.

Q. What is awareness?

A. Awareness is the lucidity of the mind, and manifests in our ability to see, think, sense, feel, etc. If we think about it, sleeping and dying are similar; the only difference is that sleeping is short and dying is long. When we first sleep, the sensation is of



falling, then melting, then there is a burning or shock sensation which is a fire element manifesting. Wind element – blown away which is a subtle experience. And the last is the space element of darkness. Then resulting in pure awareness without thought and emotion in deep sleep. Then the subtle body in our dreams.

Q. How can we let go of the ‘victim role’ when we face someone who has hurt us in the past?

A. We recommend that whatever habits and patterns that we have in our lives, we try to work with them while meditating. If we continue to hate, we are harming ourselves and going deeper into our patterns of victimhood. As we deepen our practice of meditation, the union of wisdom and compassion is crucial.

CONCLUSION

Marking the end of the retreat, Rinpoche encouraged the participants to nurture a community that is supportive of meditation and carry out their practice within the community to make it sustainable. He foregrounded the value of both formal meditations, with time dedicated especially to meditation, and informal meditation, which is possible at any time of the day while cooking, driving, in the office, etc. Assimilating meditation practice into our everyday lives and gradually cultivating a habit has the potential to transform our perspective and thoughts.

The closing remarks were delivered by Suruchi Choksi, Trustee of the Nalanda Foundation, who expressed gratitude to Rinpoche for setting up the Tergar Nalanda Foundation to make the teachings accessible to the Indian community and expressed hope that the participants will take their meditation practice forward.

Thupten Tsewang and Choki Wangchuk, on behalf of Ritinjali, Centre for Escalation of Peace and Pallavan Learning Systems, expressed gratitude to Rinpoche and to all the collaborating partners, particularly India International Centre, and the team of volunteers who helped to make the retreat both a possibility and a success.



SUMMARY

On the 16th and 17th of March 2024, Ritinjali and the Centre for Escalation of Peace, in collaboration with the India International Centre, Nalanda Foundation, and Pallavan Learning Systems, came together to host a transformative retreat with Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche on CALMING THE MIND: THE JOY OF LIVING - Level One.

Key Themes and Insights

Fundamental Nature of the Mind: Rinpoche emphasised the innate purity of the human mind and identified aversion and craving as primary causes of suffering.

Path to Inner Peace: Participants embarked on a journey of inner exploration, seeking tranquillity amidst life's chaos and discovering the peace within.

Universal Wisdom: The Joy of Living course transcends religious and cultural boundaries, offering a pathway to lasting contentment and profound wisdom.

Meditation Techniques: Rinpoche introduced various meditation styles, including object-oriented and subject-oriented practices, to cultivate awareness and compassion.

Scientific Insights: Discussions included the transformative effects of meditation on brain plasticity and mental resilience, supported by neuroscientific studies.

Day One

Attendees were privileged to immerse themselves in Rinpoche's teachings, exploring the transformative power of meditation and mindfulness. Rinpoche shared personal experiences to elucidate the detrimental effects of aversion and craving on mental well-being. Practical meditation techniques were introduced, emphasising the importance of daily practice and integration into everyday life.



Day Two

Rinpoche led attendees through a series of meditation practices, including pain meditation, thought meditation, and emotion meditation. Practical exercises were conducted, encouraging participants to observe their thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations with awareness.

Rinpoche concluded by urging participants to cultivate a supportive meditation community and integrate formal and informal meditation practices into their daily lives. Gratitude was expressed to Rinpoche and collaborating partners for facilitating a transformative retreat experience.

The retreat offered invaluable teachings on meditation, mindfulness, and inner peace, empowering attendees to embark on a lifelong journey of self-discovery and transformation.



RETREAT ORGANISERS

Ritinjali

www.ritinjali.org



Ritinjali strongly adheres to the values of respect for life, work, and dignity; empowerment through wholistic education and skilling; building community capacity and collective processes towards an inclusive society. Through its various initiatives and myriad areas of focus, Ritinjali takes a multi-pronged approach to achieve its goal - enabling conditions and empowering people to bring hope and peace in the world. Ritinjali inspires youth by its many community-based activities including the Second Chance School which gives literally a second chance to school dropouts and youth from disadvantaged backgrounds to develop their skills and find meaningful employment.

Centre for Escalation of Peace

www.cepeace.org



Centre for Escalation of Peace (CEP) takes the view that peace is not just the absence of war. Peace cannot be taken for granted; constant effort is required to enhance it as an anchor in a sea of rapid and far-reaching strategic socio-economic change. As such, peace must not be merely sustained, but escalated through various strategies and tactics akin to the pursuit of victory during war.

With that in mind, the CEP has continuously sought to create platforms and establish programmes that encourage the free exchange of ideas across borders, with the distinct focus on empowering young minds. The various Initiative of the Centre for Escalation of Peace include the India-Bhutan Dialogue, Philosophers' Retreat, Asia Pacific Schools Initiative, School Leaders' Retreat, India-Bhutan Youth Summit, India-Bhutan Cultural Exchange Art Camp, Conference on Guru Padmasambhava, and regular public sessions.



Nalanda Foundation



Nalanda Foundation is committed to advancing meditation and contemplative practices in alignment with the vision of the Tergar Meditation Community in India. The mission is to support individuals, practice groups, and meditation communities, laying the groundwork for a life imbued with mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom. Nalanda Foundation invites all to embark on a transformative journey of self-discovery and growth.

India International Centre

www.iicdelhi.in



Considered one of the country's premier cultural institutions, the India International Centre is a non-government institution widely regarded as a place where statesmen, diplomats, policymakers, intellectuals, scientists, jurists, writers, artists and members of civil society meet to initiate the exchange of new ideas and knowledge in the spirit of international cooperation. Its purpose, stated in its charter, is 'to promote understanding and amity between the different communities of the world'. In short, the Centre stands for a vision that looks at India as a place where it is possible to initiate dialogues in an atmosphere of amity and understanding.

The Centre's dedication to the values of liberal humanism is best reflected in its activities and calendar of events. These cover a wide range, from lectures, seminars, panel discussions, international and national conferences to a variety of cultural events of music, cinema, performing and visual arts, both classical and folk. Entry to these is not restricted to members as all its programmes are open to the wider public of the city. Three core departments provide fitting platforms for its activities: the Programmes Division, the Library and the Publications Division.

The activities of each of these departments complement the work done by others. Moreover, none of these activities are commercial in nature but are carried out in the spirit of public service. The Centre is equally famous for its gracious hospitality, and



its hostel rooms are in great demand as they provide comfortable and personalised service with modestly priced meals. Beautiful gardens, with shady trees and fountains, a bar, a tea lounge and several refreshment areas are popular venues for members to meet or entertain guests.

Pallavan Learning Systems

www.pallavanlearningsystems.com



Pallavan Learning Systems (PLS) is an educational research organisation that promotes the philosophy of wholistic development, focusing on five areas: Cerebral, Emotional, Physical, Social and Spiritual. The Five Areas of Development emphasises the interconnectedness of all areas and focuses on learning how to learn so that all learners are able to actualise their potential. Since 2016, every year, the Five Areas of Development has been recognised by HundrED, Finland as one of the most influential ideas in education in the world.

Pallavan Learning Systems has numerous years of experience working with schools and institutes operating in various settings – public and private, urban and rural, local and international – and catering to diverse groups of learners – 1.5 to 25-year-olds, learners with special needs, and disadvantaged youth. With the deep understanding of learners and conviction that education is the best route to self-actualisation, PLS continues to strive to make meaningful contributions to the global field of education.



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