

Lojong Point 5

The Fifth Point is called the Measure of Mind Training.

What is mind training? Mind training, all together, is the path— what we are doing; i.e., we are training this mind to be more compassionate, and also to discover its true nature by introspection, meditation, and discernment, all together wisdom.

So that's the general idea of the path, being more compassionate and helpful, and to serve that goal, that purpose, to be more insightful. And being insightful also brings benefits to oneself in terms of liberation; it's good for others, it's good for ourselves, sort of a win-win path. A question I get often comes with maybe a little anxiety about, "Am I progressing, where am I on the path, how can I gauge my progress?"

In a way it's an unnecessary concern because, you will know. Until this point, just keep doing what you're doing; that is, training your mind. Still we'd like to know how far we have to go, like when we were kids. The author of this text, Shamar Rinpoche, and the author of the Tibetan text is a commentary of, felt that we needed some yardsticks, so they gave us some. So this is important, because they are not really precise in terms of how far you have to go and how fast you will go to reach enlightenment, it's not this sort of yardstick. It's more a general idea you can use to notice if you are on the right track. And if you're not, you can address and change some things.

The first one is the belief that all of the Buddha's teachings have a single purpose. And I think it's really interesting for us because, you know, traditionally we say there's 84,000 teachings; that's a lot of books. And we have an average, as a human being, 30,000 days to live, and we've burned through a good half of it already, and the other half we will spend half the time sleeping. So that's not a lot of hours, and so that's a lot of books and not so much time. So what are the important books? And here this slogan says it's not about the important books, it's about the meaning that pervades all the teachings, the intention that pervades all the teachings. Whatever book you take, whatever teaching you listen to, whatever meditation you practice, it is, or should be, supported by one single intention. So it's like one key that opens every door. And that's very important for us because this is what we should try to really understand. Rather than get lost in the details, try to see the essence. Try to see the commonality between all the teachings, instead of seeing the differences.

The Buddha taught the Dharma for one purpose: to diminish self-clinging. That's the key. All the practices, whatever you read, whatever meditation you do, it's talking about diminishing self-clinging. When you're no longer absorbed by self-concern, that is the first measure of success in mind training. And that's a very important point, because even the meditation, the study, the contemplation, the leading of a spiritual life, can become an ego-trip, which defeats the purpose. So that's one thing we should notice, is whatever study or meditation or lifestyle, is it really making me more humble? Is it helping me to be less self-centered and preoccupied about my position or by the way people look at me and so on and so forth.

This is very important. Successful practitioners know differently than others in that sense. The knowing here is experience. And when you're a seasoned meditator you understand that it's not about knowing a lot or showing off, it's not about being successful, it's not even about you reaching enlightenment. Who cares? Really? Are you more insightful? Can you see this as all an illusion? Does this insight help you to be more compassionate because you're less self-centered? So that's the gauge that you can use to evaluate if you need it, as to where you're at, not as a meditator on his or her glorious way to enlightenment, but as a human being. Are you less self-centered? Are you more insightful? And therefore less attached to your own interests, are you more prone to be listening to other people? Can you hear them? As Thich Nhat Hanh puts it, can you practice deep listening?

Deep listening is impossible when you're not listening because you're already forging the answer. You know? Sometimes you talk with people and they catch the first word and then they're out because they're already preparing the answer, the retaliation. It's not a discussion. So you have to be a little bit free from this self-centered obsession of somehow being the winner. Listening and using your tender heart combined with discernment to be of help. So that's one gauge. The way the seasoned meditator knows differently is that they have an eye on their mind. They know if they are tripping out on stuff, or if they say something because it serves their interests. There's always a little distance, you're not stuck in this ego-centered position trying to deal with a situation to get the best out of it and whatnot, however the best is defined by you. But you have a little distance and you look at yourself somehow, you look at yourself doing things, you look at yourself contemplating, thinking, and so on, there's always an observer. At this point mind training has become no longer a practice, it's a way of being. This is how we are. The path has become our way of being. In a way we're not walking on the path, there's no such thing as a path, really; it's a mental construction to think we're on a road. No. It's more like how we are, we are different, the mind training works because we've been changed. We keep an eye on ourselves with tenderness also, it's not a judgment. We're not hard on ourselves, but we see what we do, what we've been doing for so long that has never worked, maybe over many lifetimes, and gently encourage ourselves to drop what hasn't ever worked.

It's kind of funny in a way to see how our little petty minds always try to grab a little something, a little crumb, out of anything we do, I call this ego-tease. It's the percentage the ego takes on any action, you know, "that's my cut." We have to be aware of these tendencies. When we are free of such self-clinging, the good thing for us is that we don't have any problems, we have less worries. When you don't care whether you win or lose, because you realize that what you win or lose is ridiculous, when you really don't care deeply, you are not troubled by what people may think of you or evaluate you. It seems like this is the age of evaluation, everyone gets evaluated. It used to be the teacher evaluating the student, but now it's the student evaluating the teachers. The teachers are afraid of their students because they might be poorly evaluated and then this affects their style of teaching because they have A+ in mind, just like the students have; that's really funny. So we're all

about this evaluation, oh, I have to do well, otherwise I might be fired, or many terrible things might happen.

So when you're free of such self-clinging, then you're pretty free. You're not free just to freak people out and be kind of weird, but you're free to do what your insight is pointing out as really important. And your insight is also letting you know there is a way to push this agenda, that is the agenda of enlightened mind attitude to be of benefit to everyone. If you ask in a rushed way, if you don't pay attention to the details, if you don't listen, then you're like an elephant in the china shop; there's more damage than benefit. So that's what the insight result that developed in your practice is going to help you to achieve.

So that's a good sign of progress, when you can understand what is at the core of all the Buddha's teachings; freeing the mind from self-clinging. And self-clinging is a very interesting word, because of course it is self-centered, being self-centered, and that could evolve into being egotistical. And this could also evolve and transform and lead you to being very harmful, in your quest to protect yourself. But at the very core of self-clinging there is self, right? And clinging. And clinging means to hold. In Tibetan the word for clinging is *dak dzin*, *dak* is self, *dzin* is squeezing, holding tight. You hold it tight, this idea of me; when actually the idea of me is just a mental construct, it's a super imposition of a mental construct onto the natural awareness of mind, the natural cognizance of mind. Mind knows; it's actually its definition. *Sem* in Tibetan, is that which cognizes. The noetic quality. But in our mind it has to be somebody, so we superimpose this mental construct of a doer, a thinker, a self; it's just a label that we try to stick on something that we cannot find, because when you look for the self, you can't find it. You've got traces, like you can say, "I feel," so okay, you are your feelings, but the feelings are changing so you can't really pinpoint something that's as we picture it; unique, autonomous, somewhat substantial and permanent.

When we look for it we can't find it, so we don't look for it. Traces are enough for us i.e. I feel; that's the justification. I'm afraid, that's a justification. I'm hungry, that's a justification. And we don't try to take this apart, such as "I am afraid." We never do that. But meditators do that, and when they're experienced they realize that the self is a rumor. I call it the invisible dictator. Never seen this thing, him, her, it, they, never seen it, but I do whatever it asks me to do. So I follow the dictates of the self, because that's the invisible dictator. When you realize that this is just a misconception, that it's just a mental construct, and then in your meditation you realize that mind can be cognizant but it doesn't entail the necessity of having a knower, a thinker. We don't have to add on to it something that is just a mental construction, because the problem is that we forget that it's a mental construction, and so there is a reification; the label somewhat becomes the object. Like we had CD players, cassette players, and then a company called it a Walkman. So now everybody's from a certain generation says Walkman. For another example, you call something a phone. For a lot of people that means an Apple, and iPhone. When you say phone it equals iPhone. The label becomes the object, in our mind. It's gliding on the surface and not really trying to know more about what's really happening. A seasoned meditator says, like, "Yes, it appears." It appears that the

moon is in the water, but it's just a reflection due to different causes and conditions coming together. So we are negating what we perceive, but we are not solidifying or reifying that which is just an appearance into an entity. We don't do that.

But when you really apply this awareness, that you have discovered thanks to your practice of meditation, to yourself in every daily circumstance, you think more in terms of function than existence. So yes, there is a self, it's a functional self. I am here. Okay, just to facilitate the communication, I am here and you are there. Okay. But I'm totally aware that this is just a figure of speech. This is just a nominal convention. But what matters is, "I think you are stuck in yourself. Can I help?"

Of course we never do that or say that because that's kind of rude. But that's the reality, so you notice it? So your concern is shifting from self-centered to others, you become more altruistic. And as you become more altruistic you discover more about yourself by observing other selves, and how they function. You see "Oh, I used to function like this." So it's a twofer. It's beneficial for others, but at the same time it liberates you more and more from old habits by seeing them in other people. And you try to help them to free themselves from these old habits as you're trying to free yourself from these old habits. So when this is your modus operandi you really sync with the heart of all the Buddhist teachings. That's a very good indicator of spiritual maturity.

So nothing is a problem, everything becomes an opportunity to learn more about yourself and to liberate more of these old tendencies. And to use the newly acquired or discovered energy that was hijacked by self-centered concern to help others.

If you stop listening to yourself you can hear other people. If you can stop worrying about your future and how you're going to be this and that and so on, you have more space and time for other people. It's like retirement, you retire from self-clinging. You may receive a pension, and the benefits from your practice, and you have free time to volunteer. As my teacher Gendun Rinpoche, I told him that in France when people are 65 they're entitled to retirement and they receive money every month to live, and he was so amazed, he said, "Your government is so kind."

I did tell him, it's more of a community thing—when you're working you pay for those who aren't, it's not like you capitalize, it's more like a flow.

After that, anytime he would meet somebody who looked old enough to be a retiree, he would say, "This is the best time of your life!" The kids are grown up, they have their life, all your worries, all ambitions about career, it's all behind you. Your mind is free. You still have energy. You have money. That's the best time of your life. Then you can give. You can volunteer, you can help", and so on.

So let's do it right now, especially in this country where you never retire before 85. Let's do it right now, by retiring from self-clinging and cashing in on the benefits of practice. That's a solid sign of

accomplishment. Whenever you have a doubt that maybe you're not on the right track, maybe you're not doing enough, these old
Judeo-Christian viruses we carry in our mind, like "not good enough", etc; look at your life. What is at the heart of it all?

The heart of mind training is to be less attached to:

1. the solidity of the self. That's very deep and takes time to discover.
2. And question, am I self-centered? Am I listening deeply, am I self-effacing, putting myself in the background? Being more available for others?

If I see that is generally your tendency, your sincere wish and you're trying; then I'd say you're on the right track. You can relax. Don't panic, just keep meditating.