

## Say "Hello!" To Crazy Monkey Mind

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In August, I attended a weekend workshop on meditation given by the young Tibetan Buddhist monk Mingyur Rinpoche. Mingyur Rinpoche is quickly making a name for himself as "one of the happiest people alive." And, although only in his early thirties, Mingyur Rinpoche was chosen as a study subject by Richard Davidson's Laboratory for Affective Neuroscience at the University of Wisconsin. They are engaged in a long-term to measure the brain activity of 18 long-time experienced meditators (between 10,000 and 50,000 lifetime hours of meditation) using fMRI machines.

When I came to Mingyur's workshop, I expected to be given some tools to help my own meditation practice. What I discovered was his teaching wasn't about how to meditate sitting on a cushion or a chair.

It was about bringing one's meditation practice into the every day world.

What an exciting (if not exactly new!) concept. Although I've been a meditator for years, I often noticed my meditation practice, and the peace that came with it, didn't seem to extend much beyond the time spent alone meditating.

So to spend a weekend exploring how to meditate when we are not in a meditation session was liberating.

We explored "object" and "non-object" meditation. Object meditation is simply noticing various aspects of our senses as you sit. Whether it is noticing what you feel or what you smell or what you hear. Or what you think. Non-object meditation is just noticing... whatever! And practicing object meditation while sitting also transfers to practicing object meditation in every day life.

Non-object meditation is something Mingyur says we can all do – but think we can't. He says it's that feeling when you've hiked a long mountain (there are a lot of mountains in Tibet!) – and you get to the top and you plop down. Phew. That's non-object meditation!

What was really powerful was Mingyur's simple and clear explanations about the classic Buddhist concept of "monkey mind" (that non-ceasing internal chatter that makes up our "self-talk").

Firstly, even the name he had for it was irreverent: "crazy monkey mind." Makes me smile just thinking about how he seemed to delight in saying that phrase over and over again – as if it was a new shiny toy he had found: crazy monkey mind!

Mingyur shared what he discovered through observing his own mind through a three year meditation retreat he went on when he was only 13 years old. He noticed that after about a year of daily, long-hours of meditating and watching how his mind worked, that his mind usually had only two responses to his own constant chatter - either: "Yes, sir" or "Hey, get out!"

Mingyur says "Yes, sir" in the way a sergeant would salute a higher-ranking officer. It's "Yes, sir!" "Yes, sir!" is when we believe wholeheartedly whatever story our "crazy monkey mind" is pumping out: This is TRULY a disastrous event, for example!

The second common response he noticed his mind turning to in those hours long meditations was to the "Hey, get out!" variety. Mingyur says "Hey, get out!" like he is indignant. How dare you! Get out! Like a bully. We respond with some variation of "Hey, get out!" when we refuse to accept "what is" – when we are fighting or resisting something that we can't change.

Mingyur invited us to be more aware that our crazy monkey minds are constantly doing one of those two things - either: "Yes, sir!" or "Hey, Get Out!" because the noticing makes us more aware - which then gives us freedom to choose another response.

For example, I almost lost this article a few moments ago! I noticed myself panicking. Yikes! Then, I also noticed my out loud self-talk was of the "Yes, Sir!" variety. Since I was just writing this article, I burst out laughing!

Once we can have the awareness that we've been choosing to either scare ourselves by believing our crazy monkey mind ("Yes, sir!") or scold ourselves and resist ("Hey, Get Out!"), we can then choose Mingyur's third option instead: to simply welcome it: "Hello!"

Again, you have to have the visuals/auditory on this. There is Mingyur Rinpoche, a revered spiritual teacher – sitting up there on his sacred podium (which he is not beneath making fun of, by the way!). And when he announces this third way or third choice, he goes to falsetto voice and makes his one hand into that of a dove flapping its wings as he looks at the bird and intones: "Hello!" with such child-like wonder it is awe-inspiring!

Saying "Hello!" to our monkey mind is like giving our monkeys a job, he says. When they have something to do, something to observe - they are distracted. Their job then becomes to be the witness of ourselves (what we are thinking, feeling and wanting) and of our outside world.

We are then literally training our thoughts, our crazy monkey minds, to take on the job of noticing. Of being in meditation during our waking life - not just on the cushion when we meditate.

To give our monkey mind the job of watching us as we... sip our tea (as Mingyur said as he sipped his tea so daintily on his Tibetan Lama podium). As we look at our watch (as he looks at the curiously modern watch on his wrist). As we look at others (as he peers at us with a mischievous look on his face).

That was my big lesson at this meditation workshop – that we meditate to practice for living our life from this witness perspective. That's where the liberation lies. That's where we are more free, and more joyful, and more present. When we are in the present moment – and giving our monkey mind the job of noticing our present moment, trains them to serve us in joy.

Now, Mingyur was nothing if not practical however. He brought me back down to earth when he added that we can't give crazy monkey mind a job forever! A monkey is just too distractable for us to expect that level of performance. We just can't expect our minds to be working on observing, observing, observing all the time. I realize I'm glad he's said this, as I would have set myself up to feel like a failure otherwise: expecting that my goal is to train my crazy monkey mind thoughts to be in observation mode all times!

Not at all, says Mingyur. You are only giving your crazy monkey mind a part-time job, he says. A part-time job!

What fun! Mingyur's whole teaching style and presence really was nothing if not fun! The two books he's written both have "joy" in the title: The Joy of Living and Joyful Wisdom. I don't think I laughed as much in a workshop (except the time I took a Laughter Yoga workshop!).

Here is an explanation of his take on crazy monkey mind directly from Mingyur Rinpoche, where he explains how to apply a "Hello" response with panic or anxiety – though this approach can be applied to any thoughts we find ourselves strongly attaching any of our emotions to:

"The meaning of 'Yes sir' means you believe whatever message comes from panic - you just follow that. The panic tells you "Oh there's a problem." You are thinking, "That's the problem, Yes Sir, whatever you say Sir" and that makes panic become your boss.

The second is 'Hey get out.' Hey get out means you don't like panic, you have a fear of panic, or a panic of panic, try to get rid of panic so you say "Hey get out, leave me alone, don't talk too much," but panic doesn't want to listen to you. The panic becomes worse - that's why panic becomes your enemy.

The third option is to make friends, you say 'Hello'.

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For more information on Mingyur Rinpoche, check out his organization's website at: <http://www.tergar.org/> or check out either of his books.

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