

An Interview with Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche and Acharya Adam Lobel

[0:00:08.0] Acharya Adam Lobel: So, hello and welcome everyone to our Science of Meditation Summit. I am speaking to you today from beautiful sunny Boulder, Colorado my name is Adam Lobel and I'd like to welcome all of the viewers around the world who are so interested in meditation and how it can make a difference in our world. And it is a great honour to introduce to you Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche and Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche is one of the global visionaries and leaders in bringing meditation out into our society and into our planet and for those of you who haven't had a chance to meet him, the Sakyong is a traditional Tibetan Lama and also one of the most important leaders of meditation communities outside of Asia in the modern world and his title means earth protector. Sakyong is the protector of the earth and this is a traditional Shambhala title that represents the leader of the Shambhala tradition and someone who emphasises the Shambhala teachings in our world. And his full title is Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche and Mipham is the predecessor of Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, a great Lama in Tibet who lived in the early twentieth century and brought forth a tremendous body of knowledge and teachings that is part of the Sakyong's lineage and Rinpoche means precious one or precious teacher. So you are indeed very precious to our world and we're very honoured to have you here with us today to speak with us about meditation and the science of meditation. So Rinpoche, this is the fifth day of our summit and we've explored many topics and themes, but today we are focusing on meditation for change and compassion and this is part of the teaching that you offer as you travel all around the world, you have been leading many events and workshops and teaching to very large audiences all around the planet and you seem to always emphasise the inherent compassion and goodness of people as important to meditation. So maybe a first question for you is if you could share a bit about what meditation is and how it works for human beings in terms of our nature as human beings.

[0:02:44.3] Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche: So delightful to be here, with this, I feel like a very important summit where we're exploring theme's I'm personally interested in myself, that of meditation and of the mind, of the heart. Also how it relates to society and I feel like we're really at a very interesting point because the science behind meditation is reeling a lot, it's reeling in terms of the effect of how we handle our mind has a tremendous effect on our physiology, naturally obviously, the brain, the sense faculties, the heart, cardiovascular, I think there's a lot of just sort of mind body sort of science that wasn't necessarily available before but it is now. And I feel like that brings a lot of you know questions to people and also a lot more curiosity, I feel like as we learn more, you know more questions arise. But one of the main I think things that is fascinating is that there's such an old tradition of meditation, which is obviously thousands of years old and in cultures that didn't necessarily have the technology that we do now to actually see into the hearts and mind of human beings, many many centuries ago there was a sense of that the way we handle our mind, which I believe is a fundamental principle of meditation, how we actually relate to ourselves, how we relate to our mind has a powerful effect on who we are as a person and how we perceive the world. And so I feel like now it's coming to light that meditation in many ways is the practice of how human being regards themselves, how they hold themselves, you could say how they feel about themselves, what they think about themselves, not necessarily at an immediate sort of ego level but rather at a deep level, how we actually regard ourselves as human beings. So to me one of the most important things of the year that we're in is that it's clear that as the world goes forward, that there is a tremendous I would say uncertainty about how human beings regard themselves and how are we? Who are we? And so I feel like we're at a very important crossroads in our history and I feel like the notion of meditation is really an investigation of who we are as people, and how we regard ourselves has a physiological effect, and not only, in the same way you could say that meditation and the mind has an

effect on our physical being, which is what really the science is investigating. But also in the same way you could say that how human beings regard themselves begins to actually have an effect on our planet and our society and the interconnectedness of <inaudible 0:06:02.9> and in this way you know I think traditionally meditation is in Tibetan a word meaning <inaudible 0:06:13.6> you know it's a word that means familiarity, getting used to, the mind focusses on something whether it be the breathing, the present moment, visualisation, mantra, that it's some way of focusing and through the process of focusing, stabilising, the mind begins to naturally heal itself, begins to also develop and discover parts of itself that it necessarily didn't know before. And so that deep familiarisation, in many ways you can say who are we? And meditation is getting used to and familiarising ourselves with who we are as people. And so even if we do it at a very kind of simple level, that we're meditating just for ten, twenty minutes, it still begins to have a profound effect. But I feel like if we go deeper how we hold ourselves and what we're getting familiar with is who are we and what is underneath and within, and what is the nature of that human being? So in many ways it's quickly, I think sort of <inaudible 0:07:25.7> migrates towards a deeper sense of philosophy and investigation and looking and there's an element that this is I feel like a very good time to be doing this.

[0:07:37.9] Speaker1: So if meditation is connected with who we really are as human beings, that seems to bring up the question that many of us who try to meditate experience, which is a feeling that maybe there is something incomplete about us, that something is wrong with how we approach our life and there is a pretty common attitude in our culture of feeling that we need to always improve yourself and somehow reach a different state of mind or get better and that seems very common in our world, and if that is so common, many of us bring that attitude into our meditation practice, where we feel like we're always trying to become something else. And as you've encountered that with your students, in terms of how they feel about themselves, what do you advise for them as meditators, starting out on this path?

[0:08:41.1] Speaker 2: To me I think one of the most important aspects of meditation, teaching meditation is what is our general view of ourselves, what's our general view of humanity, so I feel like in some ways it is a question of human nature and I think the tradition of meditation you know by and large is a tradition that is respecting the human being. The meditation posture itself is a very dignified, there's this sense of sitting or settling, there's a lot of dignity and strength in it. There's a quality that meditation brings a sense of wholeness, completeness, so it takes all of us, it takes our mind and body, so there's a totality to the practice of meditation and I feel like that when we approach ourselves in this way that there is a health, there's this sense of goodness and strength. So for myself I've seen the pattern where it can turn into where meditation is used as a tool or there's some sense of at some deep level not being content with who we are or not happy with who we are or there's some guilt and there's some incongruity happening and then meditation now could be used as a tool where we self-analyse and try to be hard on ourselves and try to work to kind of perfect ourselves, but that perfecting ourselves is due to some kind of deep feeling of inadequacy or something. And so you know I think it can go that way and like anything else in the modern world I think there's a sense of, there is an element of how can we get ahead? Will this help me become more precise and have a better memory and all these things and I feel like <inaudible 0:10:31.9> all that is helpful, but I also feel like there's an aspect of meditation which is very deep and very profound, that's why it survived. And you know it is looking at the human being in some fundamental way. And you know within the Shambhala tradition we talk about this notion and this question of that who are we and that's where really the notion of basic goodness as some kind of human beings and humanity is complete, it's like a circle and we're not at fault. There's some kind of totality. And I think if we approach meditation in that we possess some kind of goodness, then naturally as we become more mindful, as we become more

relaxed and more kind of strong, we sink into that sense of deep strength. Then naturally obviously if we feel like we're not inherently worthy and good, then there's always going to be a sort of a tendency and a fear of relaxing deeply, because we're afraid of what we might find and we might sink into some kind of feeling of that ultimately we aren't worthwhile and so I feel like right now there's this very interesting journey going on because it's very personal in this way. And so for myself, teaching meditation and practicing meditation, I did a retreat many years ago, five, six years ago, and really you know looking at how in the modern culture there is a tendency of being hard on ourselves and some kind of tightness and I felt like it's important to look at that and investigate and so I really reflected on the intuition of basic goodness, human worthiness you know which I encourage everyone to do. And I feel like it's already kind of a subliminal contemplation we're all doing because there's so many intense things going on in the world. But at a meditation level I feel like that looking at ourselves in this way is something that's important and what inspired me is that I reflected on my personal journey with meditation in that I received instruction and encouragement from my father, the venerable Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, a great meditation master you know who was responsible for really bringing a lot of the profound Buddhist teachings to the west and introducing meditation at many levels, so he was really one of the pioneers to bringing meditation to you know part of what's happening now really and I realised that for me the transition to meditation was a very human experience, that it was to do with warmth, there's some kind of human to human trust in who we are. And so I remember him, we would be sitting sometimes outside and he would gently reach over and hold my hand, and just touch it and say you know relax and good and I could feel that there was some human element coming through. And I realised that you know that's how it survived, it survived because there were these powerful warm people, and that's how it's kind of made its way to where we are now. And so there's a lot of things going on inside, but it's the human element which I really reflected on and felt myself. And so I really try to teach that and try to express that and I feel like if meditation is to continue it has to have a quality of warm heartedness and human kind of quality, you know and I think all the elements of maybe why it's good for you is at all important at the same time it's a very kind of you know personal experience that we're going through, and I feel like right now that that notion of humanities is, you know it's a big question.

[0:15:03.2] Acharya Adam Lobel: Thank you Rinpoche, it feels like such a relief to know that our nature is basically good and that we could meditate with that kind of warmth. I think for a lot of us however when we meditate there's emotions and feelings that we're challenging, or the mind feels very wild and difficult to work with and so how do we work with emotions and the challenge of our human minds if it doesn't always feel good?

[0:15:45.7] Speaker 2: I think that emotion is an interesting word because I think in many cultures, and certainly in the sort of more modern cultures it can be seen as a weakness, it can be seen as a sign of our imperfections and a symbol of us not really able to control ourselves, and obviously there's an element to emotion that can be very you know self-destructive and harmful to others, but at the same time there's an element that you know emotions at some deep level you know I'm talking about like love and compassion, even altruism and a sense of wanting to connect, you know I think there's a lot of frustration when we have emotion coming up, in some ways we are trying to connect and we are trying to communicate and you know it's hard. And I think from the Shambhala point of view and also myself personally, it's really the notion that as a person, as a human being we're made out of both kind of tough resilient things which is on one hand I could say is the intelligent and we refer to as <inaudible 0:17:06.3> and insight and you know analysis, reality and there's also another aspect which has to do with what I would regard as gentleness a sense of softness, vulnerability, sadness, that these are equal is important that as a totality of a human being and especially in terms of how we experience reality.

So in many ways you know emotions I think are something that we need to be able to you know really embrace in a certain way, that they are expressions of some kind of wisdom or wishing to communicate and that right now we're in this culture where I feel like we're trying to find a way, and I feel like that's what we're trying to do here, just trying to realise the value of these emotions. Kindness is so important, a simple kindness and I feel like there's a lot that can be learned by just sort of this quality that we are as human beings really connect. So from one point of view you know there's an element of just calming down and stabilising which I think is obviously, depend on what state of mind we're in, it's important. But on a deep level these emotions don't necessarily go away, you know they remain there and in many ways they are, there's a quality of just to be moved, you know I think the word emotion kind of indicates that we're to be moved, to be stirred, to connect, something affects us and so from that point of view it's connecting with life, so emotion's connecting with life. And we can't you know, sort of nullify that I mean life is, we meditate to be alive and to be in the moment, to experience things and part of that is emotion and kind of part of that is cultivating and creating a culture where the gentleness aspect is important to the health of the person and the society. And you know many very deep traditions of meditation, they talk about how emotions don't necessarily need to be you know suppressed or eliminated, but really that you find wisdom and you find a lot there, and I think really it depends where we are in our journey, some days we need to just kind of calm down, relax and stay focused and that's very helpful, but I think if you look at the totality of the human being and what's happening, it seems like that part of this happening now is there's a lot of, you know we're all being moved and stirred in terms of what's happening to us personally and also where our world is going.

[0:19:56.6] Acharya Adam Lobel: You seem to suggest as you were speaking that emotions like sadness or vulnerability help us understand reality. How does that work? How could sadness possibly help us understand reality?

[0:20:12.0] Speaker 2: I think with sadness you know it's really the notion of connecting with our aloneness, you know I think in many ways meditation is a very lonely practice you can say, we're just by ourselves and quietly being there. And I think we are alone, I mean we're all connected, but there is some sort of... so there is some kind of sadness, not necessarily in a depressed way but more sadness in terms of softness and we slow down and we appreciate things and I think in this way when we are in a state of I would say genuine sadness, we connect with beauty, we connect with our sense perceptions, you know the world becomes in a way more full, and I think there's a lot of power there as opposed to we're leading a very superficial life and just trying to get by, there's some deepness. In order to do that it takes bravery, it takes strength, there's some strength and yeah it takes some strength to meditate, being there moment after moment, it's as simple as not fidgeting and being there and working with our thoughts and emotions, so it's a lot of strength. And right now you know I think people are connecting with their sadness and it happens, so that's a very important element.

[0:21:33.4] Acharya Adam Lobel: Thank you. And if we as human beings in our society are able to become more familiar with our basic goodness and this genuine tenderness and work with our emotions, does that have an impact on our society? How does a practice that seems to be very individualistic, you know I'm sitting on a meditation cushion or I'm on a mindfulness retreat. How does that actually make a difference in the world? And why is calming down not actually escapism or a way to withdraw? How does meditation actually help?

[0:22:15.1] Speaker 2: I think meditation can be seen as a very you know kind of personal and almost sort of reclusive activity where we're not really engaged in connecting with others, but I feel like at the heart meditation is a very socially engaged practice and there's a lot of power, and I always say when you sit down, society's sitting down, you

know where we're our memories and our thoughts to ourselves and how we're relating to others, it's all there. So to me, meditation is socially active and engaged in that a very important moment happens in meditation at a deep level and that is the moment where what we feel about ourselves, how we regard ourselves at a deep human level, I would say it's almost a very subtle moment but it's a moment of how we actually relate to who we are and on the one hand it can be seen as a very insular kind of situation, but that moment of how we regard ourselves, I think if we are regarding ourselves as humanity is basically good, if we feel and contact that, and that feeling of our human nature and almost like trust on our inherent strength, that has a powerful effect on our world view and societal view and I would say it's that relationship between ourselves and our being and then that begins to shift how we begin to think about others in our society. And to a certain level if we have decided, and I feel like this is a question, is like is humanity basically good, and we're not being simplistic, obviously there are very sort of savage things have occurred but at some deep level, what is that human nature? Is it so be individualistic and selfish or is it more a sense of compassion and connectivity? And you know I think people have to kind of look at it themselves, but it is that sense of feeling, how we feel about ourselves. Not in some kind of sort of escapism but rather that deep feeling. And I think if you do feel that sense of strength about ourselves personally that gives us the motivation and gives us the inspiration to really not give up on others and not give up on the world. And so meditation I think I feel can be a very powerful tool in that way but it is it's surrounded by how we regard ourselves in our thoughts and ideas. And right now I feel like we're at a very important crossroads. Have we given up on ourselves and if we have then meditation can be some form of it's really overwhelming out there so I'm going to escape in here, and then it can be a way of just hoping things get better. At the same time meditation can be used as a powerful way of strengthening and deepening that gives us the fortitude to not only handle what's happening in the world and our life, but also to begin to actually affect change and participate. And because meditation allows us to raise our gaze and <inaudible 0:26:13.7> look out, there's some sense of you know strength and I would say even cheerfulness and humour and you know some kind of levity and strength that allows us to engage.

[0:26:29.4] Acharya Adam Lobel: In some of your writings you speak about this image of a meditator as a warrior, someone who is brave. Could you say more about that image of warriorship and meditation and Shambhala teachings?

[0:26:45.3] Speaker 2: I think the element of warriorship within the Shambhala teachings is that there's some deep seeded bravery or some deep seeded courage that I think we all possess, just to live life there takes a kind of strength. And when things become difficult and when things become challenging, we either kind of collapse or there is some kind of element where we rise up, there's sort of a sense of being brave and daring in that way. So the image of the warrior's used because it's a sense of just really being in that moment, moment of not knowing, but being able to hold that space and allowing possibility to occur. And I think when we allow possibility to occur, then ideas and strength, imagination comes, so really it's a notion of bravery and that sort of strength and you know I think we're living in a world where there's a lot of fear, there's a lot of overwhelmed, and so you know I think through meditation there's ability to tap into something that is very brave and strong and I certainly hope people can discover that.

[0:28:08.6] Acharya Adam Lobel: Thank you. And you've also written about the way that society is basically good, that individuals are basically good but somehow society itself could also be basically good or even compassionate or awake. What does that mean in Shambhala teachings that society is also basically good?

[0:28:36.5] Speaker 2: I think that society I feel like is really a simple relationship between, we like to say just you and me, the connection of just one person to another,

and this is symbolised by when we were children, our parents, it's a very immediate relationship and we develop many elements. So as we grow up I think there's an element of that we're all connected in many ways. So what is the basis of that connectivity? How we regard ourselves, how we regard others, and within society there's a, you know as complicated as it is, there's kind of an inherent culture or an inherent sort of, almost like a being. So in a sense society itself like a giant person, so there's an element of that you know our society has feelings and thoughts and what is the nature of it? You know and what I want to say is that there's a sense that each society in their own way is trying to you know recognise itself and have dignity and each society has its own way of creating this sense of you know existing and manifesting and so one of the main elements I feel like right now is as we begin to relate with other people and other communities and everything, that we're creating a culture and you know you can call this compassion, you can call it kindness, but there's a, I would say an invisible connectivity that we're now through meditation we're tapping into that sort of inexpressible experience of humanity and that we're connecting in that way. And that creates a culture I think that starts to weave a culture. And right now you know we're looking at what is the nature of society and how can we participate in it so it moves in a way that you know more uplifted and strong and has a lot of possibility, and I feel it does.

[0:30:44.9] Acharya Adam Lobel: And do you think it's possible that we could move in a culture that supported our basic goodness and was compassionate and kind, is that possible for our future?

[0:30:58.7] Speaker 2: I think it is, I feel like it's more about that notion of willing to try, you know willing to <inaudible 0:31:12.2>, and almost not even be either too hopeful or too fatalistic about the future but really like how do we engage in what's happening now? And I feel if we do it, it does begin to affect the future in terms of interdependent and you karma and what the future's holding like if we don't do anything obviously it has a natural flow and people are influencing it, and so how can we <inaudible 0:31:44.8>. So I feel like one doesn't have to have necessarily all the answers but at least I feel like right now we're trying to participate and kind of meditation culture participate in terms of what's happening and be another source of inspiration and wisdom that begins to affect human destiny.

[0:32:07.4] Acharya Adam Lobel: So, Sakyong-Mipham Rinpoche, it's been an honour to have you with us as part of this Science of Meditation Summit, and a pleasure to hear your teachings and your guidance for humanity. So thank you and thank you too all of you for joining us here today.