

different sorts of meditative states that are described in the tradition.

01:01.11

And, you know, both in terms of the possible scientific interests these have, as well as in the sorts of philosophical problems that claims about these experiences have, that there's still a great deal to be discussed. Thank you.

\*\*\*APPLAUSE\*\*\*

**ANNE KLEIN**

01:01.35

Thank you so much, Roger. And we continue with this investigation into knowledge with Thubten Jinpa, who received his geshe lama degree from Ganden Shartse and went on to get a PhD at Cambridge University and is now teaching at McGill and who will further refine this investigation by asking the question of whether meditation leads to knowledge of mental states.

**THUBTEN JINPA**

01:02.02

Thank you. I've actually written a text in response to the target essay that Mark Siderits has beautifully presented and I'm not going to

read the essay since it is already posted on the  
blog. Those who are interested in the details can  
download it and read it.

01:02.26

\*\*\*TAPE END\*\*\*

MIND & REALITY

DAY TWO - TAPE 4 of 7 - PANEL ON MEDITATION

\*\*\*TAPE START\*\*\*

**ANNE KLEIN**

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**\*\*\*START NEW MATERIAL\*\*\***

00:00.35                    What I wish to do is to summarize some of the  
points I've raised there. And Mark Siderits in  
his essay, which is provocatively titled, "Is  
Meditation a Means to Knowledge?" raises some  
very critical questions about meditation. And  
what I would like to do is to look at two

particular questions that he is raised. One is, what is the role in meditation in the Buddhist enlightenment project, as he calls it.

00:01.06

And the second is, is mediation- can meditation be in an epistemic partnership with science more than becoming an interesting object, albeit an important one, object of study by science. However, before I deal with that, I would like to ask the more salient question which Roger Jackson brought up, briefly, which is what is meditation.

00:01.37

And I think it is important to appreciate the context in which this kind of discussion is taking place. Sometimes we have a tendency to come up with our own understanding of a particular concept, which may have been, you know, derived from a tradition such as Buddhism, but somehow we have a modern understanding of that. And then we impose that understanding onto the tradition, which creates a lot of problems.

00:02.08                    So, I'm very happy that Roger in his- Roger Jackson in his opening really reminded us the context in which our interest in meditation has taken place. And also those of- who have followed some of the recent news coverage - there's been quite a popular interest in the whole kind of idea of scientific study of meditation.

00:02.33                    There's a- it's become a kind- almost like a kind of a bit of a fashion. So, everybody seems to be jumping on the bandwagon. So, what I would like to do is to take, you know, take us back to a kind of a more critical appreciation of the context in which what this kind of dialogue means.

00:02.54                    And here, although the panel is on meditation, and particularly the Buddhist meditation and the science- Sorry. I see this as representing part of a bigger picture, which is an encounter between Buddhism and science. And that bigger picture was presented beautifully in the opening

keynote address of Owen Flanagan, which, you know, which was entitled "Science for Monks."

00:03.20

And I think it is important to keep that in mind because otherwise, sometimes there is the tendency to reduce Buddhism into meditation and then furthermore, there is a danger of reducing meditation into some homogenous mental state, which could then be reduced to some observable bio-physical phenomenon or an event. And then, find out what are its benefits and then possibly, at some point you can create a pharmacology product, which can, you know, which can give us that state and then, you know, lo and behold, Buddhism is redundant.

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And there is that danger and I would like people to be aware of this. And I say so because in a sense, I'm in a rather peculiar position. On the one hand, I have one foot in the modern academia, but my other foot is still firmly planted in the Tibetan monastic tradition. Although I'm no

longer a monk. And being brought up as a traditional Buddhist in the traditional Buddhist culture, in some sense I have to constantly, you know, put on these two hats.

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So, in a sense, what is happening here is a kind of dialogue that is taking place internally in me, as well. And I would like to- So, in- So, in this respect, what I would like to appeal to all the participants in this dialogue is to really be more self-critically aware. So, for example, when we as scholars of Buddhism interpret certain Buddhist ideas, certain Buddhist traditions, we have to be more self-critically aware that, you know, there might be certain ideas that we are somehow imposing on the tradition.

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And in this respect, I think it is very important to have some kind of respect for the self-understanding of the traditions themselves. So, in the case of Tibetan Buddhism, which is what- a form of Buddhism that I'm familiar with, in the

academic jargon referred to as the Indo-Tibetan tradition -

00:05.26

those who are working from the Indo-Tibetan tradition in the scholarly world, I think the intellectual etiquette demands that we accord quite a high degree of respect to the voice of the tradition itself and the self-understanding of the tradition. This, I think is very important.

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Second is a degree of humility is also very important on a- in people who are participating in the dialogue. And also, because- and mutual respect. Because if there is mutual respect, then we will not fall into the temptation of trying to reduce one set of explanation and frame of working into another set of explanation and framework.

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We will respect the integrity of the two cultures that are being brought together here. Similarly,

if there is a greater self-critical awareness, then also one will be more- let's say, for example, on the part of the traditional Buddhists - and I would perhaps include myself in that camp - if there is a greater self-critical awareness then on the part of the traditional Buddhist scholars who are interested in engaging in this kind of dialogue, then there will be a greater sensitivity to be able to distinguish what part, aspects of the Buddhist thought and practice - or particularly Buddhist thought - are normative ideas.

00:06.55

What part of the Buddhist thought may be in some sense operative assumptions? Which- So, and what part may have more, at least in the self-understanding of the tradition, claims for greater empirical, you know, factuality. So, on the part of the traditional Buddhist scholars, there will be greater appreciation of these distinctions, although traditionally we may not make such distinctions.

00:07.22

But by using- by being exposed to a kind of a critical scholarship of, you know, modern Buddhist scholarship, one will be able to then appreciate these distinctions. So that the traditional Buddhist will be in a better position to really talk more articulately and confidently about the ideas that they will bring onto the table. So that the danger will be avoided of this kind of imperialistic portrayal of Buddhism as being some kind of perfect science.

00:07.58

The- some of the more strong claims that were made by the early- in the early stages of, you know, Buddhist modernism - these could be avoided. Similarly, on the part of the, you know, philosophers and scientists, if they are more self-critically aware, then they will be also in a better position to appreciate what part of their theories are operative, you know, assumptions.

00:08.23

What part of their theories can have a greater weight for the Buddhists? Anything that would have an empirical evidence would carry a tremendous weight for the Buddhists because at least in an ideal understanding of the tradition as, you know, Owen presented and also Alan beautifully presented in his keynote address this morning, that at least in principle, in the Buddhist thought between experience, reason and scripture, there is a hierarchy of authority - experience, in some sense, trumps both reason and scripture.

00:09.00

So, therefore, in this kind of dialogue if the scientists are more- and philosophers are more critically self-aware, then they will be able to distinguish what part of their presentation is speculative, theoretical and how- you know, based upon certain operative assumptions. And what part will have more empirical evidence. For example, like in Susan's presentation, there were very

clear suggestions that some of these core knowledge, you know, abilities were innate.

00:09.33

And if the evidence is very strong, this is something that will carry tremendous weight on the- to the Buddhists. Which would then- The Buddhists would then be, in some sense, compelled by their commitment to reason and experience, somehow find a way of incorporating these kind of, you know, data into their worldview.

00:09.55

So, with the respect to the- Sorry, I have only five minutes. What I've done in my paper is to raise the question - what is meditation? And one thing that we always- I wouldn't say always, but quite often forget is that meditation is an English term. And that somehow, we assume that we're using this term by referring to some phenomenon that comes from traditionally from ancient classical traditions, like, you know, Indian Buddhists or whatever.

00:10.30

So, we tend to forget that here we're using an English term to describe a phenomenon that is more dominant in the Eastern spiritual tradition and then we forget about what complications this might raise. Secondly, also in the Tibetan tradition, the term for meditation in Sanskrit is bhavana, which has the notion of cultivation of something. So, whether it is a cultivation of a habit or way of being or way of seeing things. The Tibetan term is gom. Which has an etymological connotation of cultivating familiarity.

00:11.09

So, built in the term itself, there is a understanding of some kind of repetitive process of, you know, conditioning your mind or familiarizing your mind in a particular way. So, because of this, the- when I'm in my own professional work as a translator of classical Tibetan texts, so when I translate classical texts into English whenever the term gom or gompā

- gom as a noun or gompa as a verb - appears, I cannot just throw in meditation or meditate.

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Because that would produce a text that is, you know, in many instances will be totally, you know, meaningless. So, which suggests that the term has a much wider application and different English terms will have to be used in different contexts. So, sometimes we use cultivate, develop, visualize, meditate, espy, contemplate and so on. So, I just want to, you know, bring this linguistic point.

00:12.10

It may be a simple point, but in this simplicity, I mean, there is some important points in this. So, and also, with respect to the role of meditation here in my presen- in my paper, I have brought up some of the classical formulations of the traditional Buddhist understanding of how the development process is supposed to occur in meditation.

00:12.40

And in Bob Thurman's presentation and in Gary Tubb yesterday, there were references made to a notion of an education where it proceeds from listening and learning and memorization, then going on to critical reflection and reasoning, culminating in some deep meditative concentration. So, this formal- formulation is very well known in the classical Indian Buddhist tradition - referred to as the three stages of understanding.

00:13.11

Understanding derived through learning or hearing. Understanding derived from reflection, critical reflection. Understanding derived from meditation. So, and within the Tibetan tradition and then the third level of understanding is really characterized by spontaneity, effortlessness and so on.

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And the idea is that there can be an instance of knowledge, but knowledge alone cannot immediately translate into a behavioral expression. So, what

is required is an internalization or integration of that knowledge into the very being of the person. And this would be the Buddhist response to the question, the problem that the Greek philosophers had - how is it that the knowledge does not translate into action. If you know that smoking is bad for your health, but you still keep smoking.

00:14.02

And the Greek philosophers' solution to this was to come up with a notion of *acrasia*, a problem of will. Whereas the Buddhist solution would be to meditate and internalize and integrate the knowledge into your being, which will then translate into a transformed- transformation in your behavior. So- and in the Tibetan tradition, these three levels of understanding is further subsumed into another triad, where we talk about the view or the outlook, philosophical outlook; meditation; and action.

- 00:14.37                    So, the idea here is that philosophical outlook will provide the content for your meditative concentration, which will then translate into action.
- 00:14.49                    And this triad is further subsumed into another triad - Tibetans love these numbers. And outlines and so on. So, those who work in the Tibetan texts, they are familiar with this. Into what is the Tibetan tradition refers to as the ground, meditation and result. Sorry- ground, path and result.
- 00:15.11                    So, the ground here is the philosophical understanding of the nature of reality. Path is the way of inner meditation and action based upon that and the result is the enlightenment that one is aspiring for. So, there is a much more complex understanding of the process of development and transformation in the classical tradition.

00:15.32

And I think it is important to take seriously the traditions' voice and the self-understanding. Now, finally, with response- One minute? Ok. On the final point, I think I don't- I do not share the skepticism that Mark Siderits has raised. Mainly for a pragmatic reason, which is that, for example, the cognitive science have to get their vocabulary of the mental reality from somewhere.

00:16.08

Ok? The brain science cannot provide the vocabulary for the mental reality. Now, what are the sources? They are, of course, candidates for this in the West's own tradition. You have a rich spiritual tradition. The West has tremendously creative literature, particularly those writings of existential, existentialist philosophers, you know, who have a deep insight into the human psyche and there is, of course, psychology and so on.

00:16.35

But this is one area where the Buddhist Abhidharma tradition can really make an important

contribution. Because Buddhist Abhidharma taxonomy of mental factors represent probably one of the most sustained attempts to create a map of the mental world.

00:16.54

Although the tradition- There is not a suggestion that it represents the complete map. But there is an attempt to map out and define each of these mental states, that relationship with the other mental factors, the causal, cause and effect dynamics between them. And so on. Now, whether this taxonomy of mental reality constitutes the finding, empirical findings, you know, through meditation or whether it is based upon the Buddha's statements that were compiled together.

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Or whether they are based upon speculative philosoph- you know, philosophical analysis of the mental terminology. This is, of course, open to question. My own personal feeling is probably it's a combination of all three. So, and this is

one area I feel that Buddhism can make a significant contribution.

00:17.44

And Evan, in his presentation, made a wonderful suggestion of three points if I can just remind- It's basically, I'll just read them. Evan Thompson suggested that by incorporating the first person methodology, it can potentially generate new data on mental reality. It can create techniques for reproducing the mental states reliably and robustly. And the third one was that it can refine the first person descriptions of subjective experiences, so that it's not just totally untrained. Thank you.

**ANNE KLEIN**

00:18.24

Thank you.

\*\*\*APPLAUSE\*\*\*

**ANNE KLEIN**

00:18.36

Thank you so much. Thank you among other things for reminding us that meditation is a process in which the mind itself is changed. It does not remain, in the vocabulary Alan introduced this