

~ Can We Meditate with Music? ~

Mingyur Rinpoche

Many people ask me questions about whether listening to music or singing becomes meditation or not. Also, if music is meditation, then will just listening and singing be enough for meditation or not? Or, can I join music and meditation together? There are a lot of questions.

Normally, for meditation, the first important thing is that we need to recognize awareness. We believe that everybody has innate qualities, and one of the innate qualities is awareness. Everybody has awareness 24 hours a day. Even when you are sleeping, it looks like you are unconscious, but if a mosquito comes, you automatically feel it and you may scratch, right? Awareness is detecting and perceiving.

The fundamental quality of our mind is cognizing. Lucidity is always there, and we need to recognize that. Once we recognize that, that is what we call the “view,” to recognize things that are with you all the time.

Then the second thing we need is an object. Objects can be anything. That is why we can meditate anytime, everywhere, with anything. Why not with music? Once you recognize the knowing quality of the mind, you can remember it, if you forget, through the music. You can listen to music, and just hearing the sound, just hearing the music, is the awareness. Awareness and hearing the music are not separate. When you recognize and you continue to listen, and *be* with the listening to music, as long as you hear the music, then you are in meditation. Music and meditation are together.

If you are singing, also feel the presence. Sometimes we sing like a robot machine. We have unconscious automatic activities. There is no sense of being, no sense of presence. But if you sing with a sense of presence, then that singing becomes meditation.

Therefore, yes, of course, music and meditation can be together. But whenever you listen to music or whenever you sing a song, does it become meditation or not? That is not for sure. If you do not have the view, if you do not recognize awareness and do not have the intention to maintain that recognition through the music and are just hearing it, that view does not come automatically together with it because of an intention of wanting to meditate, and it does not become meditation.

But if your mind becomes really calm when you listen to sounds, especially natural sounds, the sounds of birds, or the sounds of waterfalls, even though you never received any meditation instruction, then it is close to a state of meditation. It is kind of like the mind going into a different state. Of course, it really helps your mind become peaceful and calm, but it does not fully become meditation. Therefore, it is very important to recognize awareness. Then, consciously listening to music and consciously singing, music and meditation come together.

And not only music. You can listen to birds. You can listen to traffic sounds. Those traffic sounds become support for your meditation. Sometimes, at a certain level, listening to music is nice, but when you listen to traffic sounds, that becomes like music. If you meditate together with the traffic sounds and maybe construction sounds, or your neighbors making noise, then slowly, slowly, maybe you can meditate with a baby crying. That, I think, is very difficult. [Mingyur Rinpoche laughs.] Do not try to make everything your friend. You do it step by step.

First, listen to music, something that you like, and especially nature sounds, like birds, rivers, waterfalls, or music that is kind of peaceful. Begin with that. That might be really good. Thank you.