

**Keynote Address by the Hon'ble  
Prime Minister of Bhutan**

Science, Meditation, and  
Mindfulness Conference | June 3–6, 2025  
Zhichenkhar, Thimphu, Bhutan



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**Welcome Address at the Conference Inaugural  
Reception Dinner by Saldon Lhamu\***  
**June 2, 2025**  
**Science, Meditation, and Mindfulness Conference**  
**Zhichenkhar, Thimphu, Bhutan**  
**June 3 - 6, 2025**

Your Excellency, the Honourable Prime Minister of Bhutan, Dasho Tshering Tobgay, Honourable Ministers, Venerable Khenpos and High Lamas of the Dratshang Lhentshog, Venerable Professor Dr. Phra Medhivajrapundit, Bodhisattva Swami Anand Arun, Honourable Members of Parliament, Honourable Members of the Royal Privy Council, Gyalpoi Zimpon Dasho Ugyen Namgyel, Secretaries, Dashos, Your Excellencies, Ambassadors, Honorary Consul Generals, Heads of International Organizations, NGOs, and CSOs, Distinguished Speakers and Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Centre for Bhutan and GNH Studies and the Central Monastic Body, I am delighted to welcome you to Zhichenkhar. The inaugural dinner of the International Conference on Science, Mindfulness, and Meditation is graciously hosted by His Excellency, the Prime Minister.

We are honoured to have you all here. At the outset, on behalf of the people of Bhutan, well-wishers from around the world, and the international participants gathered here at Zhichenkhar, may we offer our deepest reverence and respect to His Majesty The King, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. We join the people of Bhutan, along with the faculty and students of Chiba

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\* Researcher, Centre for Bhutan & GNH Studies

Institute of Technology in Japan, in celebrating the conferral of the Honorary Doctorate upon His Majesty The King on 27th May 2025.

We take immense pride in this recognition, which honours His Majesty not only for his intellectual and technological foresight, but also for his immense social contributions. His Majesty's visionary leadership-guiding Bhutan's democratic transition, advancing the philosophy of Gross National Happiness, and spearheading transformative initiatives such as Gyalsung and the Gelephu Mindfulness City-is the foundation for this honour.

His Majesty has been a profound patron of science, research, and the arts, and has supported the flourishing of research and inquiry across disciplines. His Majesty's leadership and aspirations form the foundation of conferences such as ours and inspire us to higher ideals-to meet the world with clarity and mindfulness.

We offer heartfelt thanks to the Royal Government, especially the Honourable Prime Minister, Lyonchhen Tshering Tobgay, for his leadership in advancing this vision. We extend our deepest gratitude to the Central Monastic Body, our distinguished co-organizers, whose involvement brings a moral and spiritual foundation to this conference. We are especially grateful to Legtshog Dungchen Chorten Dorji, and we respectfully acknowledge the higher authorities of the Zhung Dratshang for their steadfast support and guidance.

To our international participants: We know it took time, effort, and considerable coordination for you to be here. Many have navigated complex logistics and tight schedules; others have even travelled under tourist visas to ensure their participation. Your presence is greatly valued-not only for the knowledge and insight you bring, but for your spirit of encouragement and exchange. In choosing to be here, you contribute meaningfully

to Bhutan's intellectual landscape, and also to its people and economy. We thank you deeply.

To all those within Bhutan who have joined us—Members of Parliament, esteemed civil servants, high monks of the Zhung Dratshang, diplomats, and Heads of NGOs and CSOs—your presence carries profound meaning. You embody the values that sustain and guide Bhutan's democratic journey: values that are both deeply rooted in tradition and boldly oriented toward the future. For your service and your unwavering commitment to building a resilient Bhutan—one that balances harmony with progress—we offer our deepest respect and gratitude.

We also acknowledge, with regret, that several invited speakers and participants were unable to join us due to delays in securing timely visas and the steep cost of air travel as the event approached. While the Department of Immigration has been deeply supportive, as always, the requirements of existing regulations meant visas could only be processed after many necessary clearances.

To those who could not be here, we extend our heartfelt apologies. In future, we will draw from these lessons—initiating preparations much earlier—and we hope to work more closely with visa authorities to ensure smoother pathways for participation. I kindly ask for your understanding as I take a moment to read the names of those who couldn't join us. This helps our session chairs stay informed and adjust their introductions with care.

The speakers who will unfortunately not be presenting during the upcoming sessions are:

Kaleang  
Joseph Loizzo  
Jeevani Herath

Anushka Akwaththage  
Adrian Nelson Baker  
Aniket Mahapatra  
Luis Barbosa  
Teerapon Suthinun  
Kali Cape  
Bret Carr  
Tanzin Tandup  
Tsewang Lamo  
Le Thanh Binh  
Tenzin Minkyi  
Chipamong Chowdhury  
Justin Brody  
Christopher Senn

Their presence and insights will be deeply missed.

Even so, this conference stands as a remarkable success. We are proud to share that it has brought together the highest number of confirmed speakers and participants on record, with more speakers than we could fit into our four-day programme. Among them are some of the world's most distinguished spiritual and scholarly figures—luminaries whose profound contributions have shaped global discourse on spiritual wisdom, scientific curiosity, and policy vision.

We are pleased to share that a range of services will be available onsite throughout the conference here at Zhichenkhar. The Royal Monetary Authority and Bank of Bhutan will be providing currency exchange and cash services. The Pangrizampa School of Astrology will offer astrological consultations. Tarayana Foundation, Bhutan Post, Menjong Sorig, Zorig Chusum, DSB Bookstore, Rollpa Games, and Choki Traditional Art School will present beautiful displays and experiences. Should you feel unwell at any point, medical

services—both allopathic and traditional—will be available onsite, with doctors ready to offer attentive care. We give our heartfelt thanks to each of these partners.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Cabinet Secretary and Cabinet Director for their approval and support for the urgent blacktopping of our grounds. We also acknowledge the Department of Roads and the associated contractor for working at their utmost efficiency and completing the work very quickly.

Thank you as well to the Royal Bhutan Police, especially the Firefighting Unit, for helping us clean our buildings. Together, this has made our surroundings more beautiful and comfortable for all.

We express our deep gratitude to the Thimphu Dzongda, Dasho Phub Dorji, and the Thimphu Dzongkhag for facilitating the Chipdrel and Marchang ceremonies. These deeply rooted traditions are performed at the start of important occasions, invoking blessings and setting the tone for an auspicious and harmonious unfolding of events. A special thanks as well to Ms. Amy Chang, who helped coordinate the badges and banners that have added beauty and clarity to our gathering.

We warmly acknowledge international media—Thai PBS, Hong Kong-based China Daily, Hindustan Times, The Kathmandu Post, Buddhistdoor Global, and other respected outlets—along with our local media partners here in Bhutan. We thank BBS 2 for their live streaming of the proceedings, and BBS 3 for your partnership and coverage. Through your collective reporting, the ideas we share here extend far beyond this venue to audiences everywhere.

I would like to take a moment to offer heartfelt thanks to His Excellency, the Prime Minister, Dasho Tshering Tobgay. With



a rare blend of practical wisdom and deep compassion, he leads Bhutan with purpose and vision. His dedication to Gross National Happiness is not just policy—it is a lived commitment, visible in his work at home and his eloquent voice on the world stage. We are deeply grateful to His Excellency for graciously hosting tonight’s reception dinner, and also for making the time to speak to our gathering. It is with greatest respect and gratitude that I now invite His Excellency, the Prime Minister, DASHO TSHERING TOBGAY, to deliver the keynote address.

Thank you!

**Keynote Address by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bhutan  
(Lyongchen Dasho Tshering Tobgay),  
Science, Meditation, and Mindfulness Conference  
Zhichenkhar, Thimphu, Bhutan  
June 3 - 6, 2025**

Dasho Karma Ura, the President of the Centre for Bhutan and GNH Studies, and his team -

For our visitors, at this time of the year, we experience four seasons in one day, and to curate something as beautiful as this evening is not easy. So, I am deeply grateful to Dasho Karma Ura and his very efficient team, and the Zhung Dratshang, for organizing this sacred conference here, outdoors, in the splendour of the best of the four seasons that Bhutan has to offer today.

Honourable Spiritual Leaders,  
Esteemed Academicians,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Kuzuzangpo la.

It is a pleasure to welcome all of you - meditators, scientists, scholars, traditional healers, technologists - friends, to Bhutan, a place that has long valued the inner dimensions of human flourishing. This conference brings together 251 participants from across the globe, with 114 women and 137 men. It's encouraging to see the gender gap beginning to narrow. We are grateful for the presence of 73 international speakers who bring their knowledge and insight to this gathering. We are equally honoured to welcome 31 spiritual masters and distinguished academicians from 37 countries, united by a sacred commitment to science, mindfulness, and meditation. To each of you who has

travelled, whether from far across the world or from nearby, thank you for being here.

I want to especially acknowledge our closest neighbour and friend, India, with 50 participants, and warmly welcome friends from the United States, Thailand, and many other countries, including Latvia, South Africa, Ukraine, Mexico, Venezuela, Russia, and Hungary.

We live in a time of complex challenges. Climate disruptions, entrenched inequalities, and widespread mental strain are not separate problems. They signal a more profound imbalance. Addressing them calls for more than fresh policies and technologies; it demands a deeper understanding of ourselves, of our relationships, and of the world we inhabit.

This is the purpose that brings us together, a meeting beyond the boundaries of discipline, culture, and time. Over the next four days, we seek to understand how science, meditation, and mindfulness can illuminate the path towards healing and wisdom, and inspire compassionate transformation.

The outer world and the inner world are connected. If the mind is restless, relationships suffer. If the heart is heavy, even the best technology can't bring peace. So, this gathering, where science meets meditation, where research meets ancient wisdom, is not just timely. It is absolutely necessary.

For centuries, meditation has been practiced both in monasteries and in everyday life, held in sacred lineages and practiced by people seeking liberation. Today, we're exploring these practices in new ways, using science in laboratories, clinics, classrooms, and digital platforms. Meditation is no longer confined to spiritual traditions alone; it is being studied, measured, and used to support mental health, education, leadership, and even artificial intelligence. This shift is exciting,

but it also calls for careful thought. As we bring together ancient wisdom and modern science, it is important to keep the deep meaning of meditation alive while welcoming the new insights science can offer. This conference is the perfect place for that kind of conversation, reminding us to focus not just on our fields of study but on what we all share: the need for meaning, connection, healing, and understanding. The growing global interest in meditation and mindfulness is not merely a passing trend. It reflects a deeper yearning. In a world marked by constant change and uncertainty, many are seeking a sense of balance and clarity. People from all walks of life are turning inward, not to retreat from the world, but to engage with it more deeply and meaningfully.

Science is now affirming what contemplative traditions have long taught: that training the mind in awareness, compassion, and stillness can foster wellbeing and transform perception. Patterns once thought unchangeable, like anxiety, reactivity, or rumination, can be gently transformed through intentional practice. What was once a radical idea, that the brain can change throughout life, is now widely accepted as fact. Neuroplasticity has shown us that the mind is malleable, which means we can train our minds at any age. That is good news for everyone here, including myself.

Mindfulness, while deeply personal in its practice, holds far-reaching significance for our shared wellbeing. Research has shown that it can ease loneliness, strengthen social bonds, and nurture cooperation within communities. What began as a path toward individual awakening is now being thoughtfully adapted to serve the greater good in public health, education, and social resilience. During times of crisis, including the recent global pandemic, mindfulness-based approaches offered vital support to frontline workers, teachers, students, and families. In the face of fear and uncertainty, these practices provided a steady anchor,

helping people remain grounded amidst upheaval and disruption.

Such developments reveal an important truth: that inner transformation and collective change are not separate. The quality of our attention influences not just how we experience the world, but how we shape it, through our relationships, our institutions, and the choices we make as societies. As we recognize the healing potential of mindfulness, it is equally important to think about how it can be thoughtfully integrated into our systems and policies. Education is one such area, where the impact can be truly transformative. Around the world, schools are exploring contemplative practices as tools for cultivating focus, emotional regulation, and ethical reflection.

Here in Bhutan, Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen's longstanding advocacy has played a pivotal role in advancing mental health within our education system. Guided by Her Majesty's vision, the PEMA Secretariat and the Ministry of Education and Skills Development have introduced age-appropriate mindfulness tools for classrooms. The National Education Policy of Bhutan includes strengthening counsellors and teachers to ensure good mental health and ethical behaviour among the students. By empowering educators with these techniques, students learn to observe their thoughts, manage stress, relate kindly to others, and to truly thrive as learners.

Healthcare is another field undergoing transformation. In clinical settings, mindfulness-based therapies are now used to treat depression, anxiety, trauma, chronic pain, and addiction. These approaches do not replace medication or psychotherapy, but complement them by empowering patients to engage with their own minds and bodies more skilfully. For caregivers and health professionals, mindfulness is also a practice of self-care, helping them remain present with patients while looking after

their own mental and emotional wellbeing. This kind of mutual care is essential in a healing relationship, and more broadly, in any relationship rooted in dignity and empathy.

Emerging research is also exploring the physiological effects of meditation on brain waves, heart rate, hormonal balance, and immune function. These findings deepen our understanding of how body and mind interact, and how practices like breath awareness, visualization, and compassion meditation can influence our overall health. Such studies echo the teachings of traditional medicine, which have long emphasized the unity of body, mind, and spirit. In Bhutan, Sowa Rigpa, our traditional medical system, still thrives alongside modern medicine. However, when it comes to scientific trials and experiments, Sowa Rigpa has not advanced as far as it could. This is an opportunity for collaboration and integration with modern medical practices.

Another profound dimension of contemplative practice is its deep connection with the natural world. At a time when ecological collapse threatens the foundations of progress, meditation offers not only solace but a complete reawakening.

Our food consumption rate is increasing every year. As per the National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan, the monthly mean per capita household food consumption has almost doubled (from USD 40.59 to USD 80.40) in just five years. This trend will only increase with growing populations and development activities. If we are not mindful of the planetary boundary, we will face more adverse natural disasters. Bhutan, due to our enlightened monarchs, has been exemplary in the conservation of the natural environment. As of 2017, we have about 5,000 species of animals, which include 736 species of birds, 158 species of amphibians and reptiles, 129 species of mammals, and 125 species of fish. This indicates our emphasis not only on human

flourishing but also on wildlife flourishing, which I believe is the foundation of collective wellbeing.

Bhutan is now taking a bold step forward in this direction with the Royal vision of Gelephu Mindfulness City, envisioned by His Majesty The King. This new development is not simply a city in physical terms, but a blueprint for how human settlement can honour both the spiritual and ecological dimensions of life. The Gelephu Mindfulness City - GMC is more than a physical space. It is a new way of thinking about growth. Conceived as a gateway to deeper harmony, Gelephu Mindfulness City is built around the principles of sacred geometry, sustainable architecture, and contemplative design. It integrates spaces for meditation, education, healing, and dialogue within the natural landscape. Rivers, forests, and mountains are not obstacles to growth. They are its very foundation. In Gelephu, economic innovation is not separate from spiritual practice. Rather, entrepreneurship and ethics flow together in a shared vision of an enlightened society. This city aspires to be a living mandala, a space where technology and tradition meet, where policy and compassion align, and where development is defined not by speed, but by mindful human interventions.

And yet, for these practices to be sustainable, they must be rooted in cultural continuity and adapted with care. Bhutan's traditional Bon lineage and practices remind us that mindfulness is not a modern invention but an ancient inheritance. Bon tradition, in a broader sense, offers us two types of meditation: simple and complex. While complex meditation is performed by learned masters, simple meditation, such as calm abiding meditation, is suitable for lay practitioners. I am pleased to share that the 2022 GNH report shows an increase of about 5 percent over the last six years in the number of people practicing meditation, this is excluding those in long-term retreats. As

meditation becomes global, we must honour its roots while nurturing its growth.

In an increasingly pluralistic world, meditation also becomes a meeting ground for interfaith dialogue. While techniques may differ, the intention to quiet the mind, open the heart, and connect with the sacred is shared across traditions. Whether one sits in zazen, prays the Jesus Prayer, dances in Sufi circles, or contemplates emptiness, there is a common gesture of turning inward. Recognizing this shared intention fosters respect and solidarity. It allows us to learn from one another without losing our roots. In this way, meditation becomes not only a personal refuge but a public good.

As we move forward, we must also consider how contemplative practice relates to death and dying. In many traditions, meditation is preparation for death, a way to meet the unknown with courage, clarity, and grace. Practices such as phowa, dream yoga, and thukdam offer not only metaphysical teachings but practical methods to support transition. These practices remind us that death is not an end but a passage. When approached with mindfulness, dying can be an awakening. For caregivers and families, this offers solace and structure. For societies, they invite a re-evaluation of how we treat the final stages of life. In Bhutan, we still practice complete funeral rites as per the ancient procedures.

All of these dimensions, personal, social, ecological, technological, spiritual, are interconnected.

They call for a new vision of development, one that includes but transcends material metrics. In Bhutan, we have long pursued such a vision through our policy of Gross National Happiness. This holistic framework integrates sustainable development, cultural preservation, environmental conservation, and good governance with psychological well-being and spiritual depth. It



recognises that happiness is not a fleeting emotion but a deep alignment between values, actions, and aspirations. As mindfulness becomes a global movement, we hope that more societies will consider such integrated approaches, approaches that center the mind as both the source and the solution of many of our challenges. This conference reflects that vision. It brings together people from different walks of life: scientists, monks, teachers, engineers, and artists. We are different in our disciplines, but united in our goals.

This conference is a seedbed for that transformation. It brings together voices from around the world, each contributing insight, research, and their lived practice. From neuroscientists mapping the brain to monks refining awareness, from educators training children to elders transmitting lineage, from artists invoking the sacred to engineers designing ethical systems, all are part of a greater whole. This unity in diversity is our strength. It reflects the very nature of reality: interdependent, multifaceted, and luminous.

As we open these days of dialogue, let us do so with reverence and resolve. Let us listen deeply, not just with our intellect but with our hearts. Let us speak not only to share, but to serve. Let us practice, not only for ourselves but for the benefit of all beings. In a world that often confuses speed with progress and noise with knowledge, meditation offers stillness, clarity, and truth. May this gathering deepen our understanding, renew our shared commitment, and help illuminate the path forward.

Thank you  
Tashi Delek!