

THE VOICE OF CLEAR LIGHT

News and Inspiration from Ligmincha Institute

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For easy reading, we recommend that you print out "The Voice of Clear Light."

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"CARRYING AWARENESS INTO YOUR DAILY LIFE"- an edited excerpt from oral teachings given by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

As you know, I often try to explain the teachings in relation to everyday life. I know some other teachers do not do this. I do so because I feel it is very important. In fact, I feel it is the only way. Sometimes as a result of stress you may not feel well; you may feel tired, exhausted or annoyed, and during those moments you are less conscious about your speech and behavior. At those times, a lot of unnecessary negative things can happen: You can damage your relationships with your family and others, you can damage your business.

If there were more awareness in daily life, there could be a great deal of improvement in your personal life. This improvement can support a big shift in your personality and your practice. We often know after the fact that it didn't help to get angry or to say sharp words, but somehow we're not aware until someone reacts to our bad mood. Then we might say, "Oh, I am so sorry how I made you feel. I am so sorry about what happened as a result of what I said." After the fact seems like the wrong time to come to know something.

When you spend much of your day without awareness and feeling annoyed, then being aware in meditation practice can be more difficult as well. When you are sitting in practice and imagining all these solid things around you as having the qualities of space and light, your experience is less likely to rise above the level of mere concept or theory.

Occasionally I go to the post office to mail a package to India or Nepal, and I often encounter there a slow-moving line of people ahead of me. This is a perfect setting to see how well your practice is working. You might think that your body and mind cannot be as relaxed and spacious in the post office as they are in meditation practice, but I'm not so sure about that. It is the same body standing in line in the post office that sits in meditation. But somehow the body must be prepared a little bit better in order to relax in the post office.

It seems like with a little more effort we could bring so much more awareness into everyday life. We can all see that having more awareness is a fantastic idea, so let's do it. But where do we start? We just need a step-by-step process we can follow that can help us effect a real change. There are four important points that affect our attitude and behavior on and off the cushion. These four points – the position of the body, the breath, the focus, and the environment – are helpful to pay attention to in developing this greater awareness in our lives.

With regard to the first point, the position of the body, let's look at our experience in line at the post office. Remember back when you were last in the post office? Go back to that Monday morning standing in line; you can feel it, right? You can feel the contracted way you are holding

your body. So what should you do at this level of the physical body? Simply be aware that you can relax your body. Just bring your attention to your body at that moment, perhaps make a small adjustment, and relax your body. That seems like something that you can do, doesn't it? Then what is the next point? The breath, right? First the body, then the breath. So, you notice your breathing, and you can see immediately that it is contracted. "Ugh, so many people in line..." Hahhh. [Rinpoche breathes out]. "I cannot imagine ever getting up to the counter..." Hahhh. [Rinpoche breathes out]. The "I cannot imagine" part is associated with a prana that you have to breathe out. So breathe it out.

Then the third important point is focus. One's focus is an interesting thing. See where you are putting your focus. When you feel bad, it is easier to change your focus than it is to change something at the level of experience itself. You can pretend to feel okay, but that is not really affecting the bad mood itself. Generally, what contributes to your feeling bad is the kind of focus you are holding, and that focus can be changed.

So, what is your usual focus in the post office? It is on the slowest part of the process, which could be either over on that side of the counter or on this side, couldn't it? We know that. It is very clear. The moment you walk in, you immediately evaluate how many people are in front of you and how slowly they're moving. It is amazing. At that point you have a choice either to leave and come back later, or else go get in line. And once you decide to get in line, then you have the choice to either relax or not to relax. Being tense will not change the actual time it will take to mail your package. Even if it could, relaxing is probably better overall.

I always remember the fun time I had coming back here by train from New York. I could not believe it. There were so many people trying to get on our train, pushing and pushing. It was worse than the trains in India. You had to squeeze so tightly to get in, and still there were a few people left on the platform when the doors closed.

Of course, it doesn't sound very fun. But before boarding we had gotten some food from a great Tibetan restaurant that we planned to eat on the trip. As we boarded we had to hold it up in the air because we

were so squeezed for space. Once we got moving, a woman standing on the other side of this overcrowded train car asked, "What's that?" I explained, "This is Tibetan food." "Can I try it?" she responded. To have the courage to ask for a taste of someone else's food shows you the kind of closeness we were all feeling then. We were feeling that closeness physically, of course, and because of that closeness she felt it was okay to ask. I said, "Of course!" As the food was being passed to her on the other side of the car, it began to disappear along its way. Now, it seemed, others wanted to try it too. It was amazing. We all had so much fun.

After some people left the train in Philadelphia, our car was a bit less crowded. By the time we passed Washington and were on our way to Charlottesville, the car was only partially full, everyone was back to their normal state of mind, occupying individual territory, and thinking, "Why are you looking at me?" Forget about wanting to share anyone else's food! [Rinpoche laughs]

The point here is that where we focus can make an enormous impact on our experience in the moment. Some things are easier to change than other things, and very often we focus on the wrong place and work so hard trying to change something that we are not able to change. Then we blame ourselves and others when, in fact, the problem is just that we are focused on the wrong thing. There's a saying that "working harder is not better, working smarter is better." That's pointing to the same principle: your focus. It is not simply the amount of effort you put in that makes the difference; it is the skillful means that you put forth in the effort that really counts.

It is good to spend some time reflecting on exactly what skillful means are.

Finally, the fourth point is the environment. Here, we are talking about whether in a given situation there might be some element you can modify to make the environment in which it's taking place a little lighter. For example, when you go back to your busy office perhaps you can do something to that space to make it more delightful. Maybe you can hang a beautifully colored shawl somewhere, or bring in some fresh flowers, or a beautiful picture. Do you see? You can do something to make that stressful environment a little lighter. Change your focus in a situation, and then also change certain elements of the situation to make it a little better, rather than trying to change the people involved.

If the environment is changed, you change, and other people change, but trying to directly force yourself or others to change is harder to do.

The environment has so much to do with shaping the character of the people in it. In Tibet there is a place called Na Rong. Being in that environment is the opposite experience of being in Texas, where there is vastness of land and sky. The landscape in Texas promotes a common sense of expansion in the minds of everyone there. Sitting in the restaurant at the Houston airport, you will be asked, "Do you want a Texas-sized margarita for an extra dollar?" You can imagine what the size of that margarita will be!

When you go to Na Rong, you have a completely different experience. It is like this [Rinpoche brings his hands closely together]. Because it's down in such a steep and narrow valley, you're only able to see the sky by looking straight up. And the people there are known to be a really rough and dangerous people - warriors! When I was traveling in Tibet and other Tibetans heard where we were going, they were astonished: "You are going to Na Rong?" People were afraid for us.

The external environment has so much to do with the character of the people. But sometimes certain aspects of the environment can be changed. In photos, Tibet looks like a fantastic place to go, but it is not the kind of environment the average Westerner would really want to live in. Even New Mexico is not a place where you would normally want to live without the modern conveniences of air conditioning, electricity, or running water. If you take all those things away and spend a month there, your daily life experiences would be completely different, wouldn't they? You can see how changing just a few simple things in your environment can lead to a big shift in how you relate in that setting.

When you create a nicer environment, a positive change in your feelings may manifest that you wouldn't know how to bring about otherwise.

When I explain how to become more aware in this way, it immediately makes sense to us - we know it, right? But somehow we haven't become familiar enough with these points so they end up becoming an active part of our life. Our knowledge about awareness stays dormant as we keep on living in our ordinary ways.

As we take a few moments each day to pay attention to each of these four simple elements of our posture, our breath, our focus and our environment, we can nurture the subtler awareness developed in our meditation practice, integrating it further and further into the space of our everyday lives.

"HEART TO HEART" – Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche answers students' questions

Q: I feel a balanced, heightened energy very clearly during the tsa lung exercises here on retreat, and I am wondering how I can work to stabilize the experience and extend it into my daily life.

TWR: When you are trying to stabilize the experience of any practice, the progression moves in this way: from one's initial recognition; to familiarity; then to prolonging that familiarity; and then to extending that familiarity to outside the teaching hall or the meditation session and into simple tasks, such as cooking or cleaning, and so on. The development progresses sequentially.

Expressed another way: It is just being conscious of that experience and then expanding on it. That's the only way.

The one thing I would add is that normally when you have a good energetic experience, similar to how you might feel after working out at the gym, usually that goodness is perceived very objectively. You feel great after working out; your sense of sight might be more vivid and you may be more engaged with images and other external stimulation. However, with practices like the tsa lung, what you are trying to be familiar with is not what you are seeing outwardly but what you are experiencing internally. You are feeling that, being with that, becoming familiar with that, rather than engaging with external phenomena. The reason we don't connect more with these internal experiences is because we are more familiar with the things and places outside us than with this space inside. But as a practitioner, the real practice begins when we experience this space. Ngondro practice, tsa lung practice, are all preparation so that when you have these experiences beyond the meditation cushion, you can recognize and cultivate them. It's good to remember when you have the result of the practice, to try to stay longer in that experience internally rather than immediately engaging externally. Engaging too much externally interferes with that inner experience. In the Zhang Zhung Nyen Gyu it is said that the object obscures the base. If I am feeling so much space internally, there is a good chance that upon opening my eyes and simply seeing the host of things around me, it is enough to cause me to lose the sense of that space inside. So sometimes when I am feeling that internal space, I may prefer to close my eyes for protection. When I am feeling strong enough, then I can leave my eyes open, and I realize it is not affecting me; I am exercising my power, my ability to face the appearances within the experience of the base. "Appearance does not affect me!" That is a "Yes!", an affirmation.

Q: I can see my practice is developing, but how do I bring it to situations that seem overwhelming in my life?

TWR: One great thing about having a practice is that when a problem arises in your life, you can see it as an opportunity, not simply as a problem. What is it an opportunity for? It is an opportunity to find out if your practice, and what you have learned, works. The only time you can really put it to the test is during those troubled situations. Do you see how at any other time you are not really going to have that kind of opportunity? Having another beautiful practice of meditation is not necessarily of benefit in itself. The only time it really helps is when you are in trouble, and that will be when you find out whether your practice has developed or not.

When something is hurting and you bring your practice into that place, that's when you see clearly that the practice is actually changing your experience. That is a very powerful moment, and it is a blessing. Those may be the most powerful moments of impact in your practice, because when you realize that positive conditions are there even at that difficult moment, you will be conditioned to remember these practices in the bardo. Even though there is a big difference between life and death, when you are in the bardo you will remember, because the impact was very strong while you were alive.

***** Don't Miss the Latest on Ligmincha's Web sites

If you haven't recently visited the Web sites of Ligmincha Institute (www.ligmincha.org) and

Ligmincha's Bookstore and Tibet Shop (www.ligmincha.org/store), this might be a good time to stop by. You'll see these sites have really come alive in recent months. Because the new site redesign permits such easy updates to the information, new postings are now added on nearly a daily basis.

The sites also are quite user friendly when it comes to purchasing books, retreat transcripts or meditation supplies; registering online for a retreat; volunteering your time and energy to benefit Ligmincha; submitting your questions; or making a donation, for example.

At Ligmincha's site, www.ligmincha.org, some of the areas you might want to check regularly include:

- * Recently posted news items. Just in the past few weeks, new postings include just-released online audio interviews with Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, informative videos you can watch from the site,

invitations to newly announced retreats and workshops, recently published magazine articles by teachers, and news about Lishu Institute and other developments of interest to students of Bon Buddhism. On the home page, click on a "Headlines" item to see one of the newest postings, or on "News" in the left-hand menu to see a complete listing.

- * The Retreats section. By clicking on "Retreats" in the left-hand menu, you'll have quick access to the most recent information about upcoming retreats at Ligmincha's Serenity Ridge retreat center; about Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche's full schedule of teachings throughout North America, Europe and Asia; as well as helpful details about the teachings themselves.

- * Charlottesville Events. This section is particularly of interest to people within comfortable driving distance of Ligmincha's meditation center in downtown Charlottesville, Va. It's often the first place to learn about events such as free public talks by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche; workshops and classes taught by other visiting teachers; free weekly guided meditation sessions; free Sunday movie evenings; and more.

At the site of the Bookstore and Tibet Shop, www.ligmincha.org/store: * If you haven't visited the site in a while, be aware that international orders can now be placed directly online; and new payment options are available, including Visa, MasterCard and PayPal. * Visit often to see the new books and other items that are posted regularly - for example, the new book "Bon: The Magic Word" by Samten G. Karmay and Jeff Watt, Editors. Click on "New Items" in the left-hand menu to see all our latest items.

UPCOMING RETREATS AT LIGMINCHA'S SERENITY RIDGE RETREAT CENTER Sept.
10-14, 2008

Heart Drops of Dharmakhaya

With Ponlob Trinley Nyima Rinpoche

For information or to register:

https://www.ligmincha.org/component/option,com_retreat/Itemid,131/retr eat_id,30/

Oct. 8-12, 2008

Dream Yoga: The Practice of Lucid Dreaming as a Path to Enlightenment

With Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

For information or to register visit:

https://www.ligmincha.org/component/option,com_retreat/Itemid,131/retr eat_id,22/

Nov. 5-9, 2008

The Seven Mirrors of Dzogchen

With Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche

For information or to register:

https://www.ligmincha.org/component/option,com_retreat/Itemid,131/retr eat_id,31/

Dec. 27, 2008-Jan. 1, 2009

Experiential Transmission of Zhang Zhung, Part I: Ngondro, the Foundation of Dzogchen Practice

With Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

For information or to register:

https://www.ligmincha.org/component/option,com_retreat/Itemid,131/retr eat_id,23/