



Q&A With Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

Refuge Vows This Summer

Voice of Clear Light recently asked Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche about his plans to offer the Refuge Vows during the first week of the 2012 Summer Retreat, which will take place from June 24 through July 14. His answers are below.

Voice of Clear Light: Why are you choosing to offer Refuge Vows at this time?



Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche: Traditionally, taking refuge and being fully committed to one's spiritual path are what defines whether or not a person is a Buddhist or Bön practitioner. In the West I have seen some teachers taking a very light attitude toward refuge ceremonies and prayers, offering them to students who are having their very first encounter with the spiritual tradition. Many students, too, approach it lightly. For example, I often meet students who say, "I have taken refuge with this teacher and that teacher." I don't approach it so lightly. This summer will be only the second time I have offered the Refuge Vows in the United States in my more than 20 years of living here.

There are many people who have followed the Bon teachings and traditions for a long time and who feel very much at home with them, and have made this the path of their life. So I'm giving these students an opportunity to commit more deeply to the tradition and to their teacher.

Of course, there will be those attending the retreat who will not feel ready or inclined to take

these vows. So during the ceremony there will be a session of practice in Garuda House where people will be comfortable to practice separately. The refuge ceremony is only for those who feel they are ready and will benefit from making this commitment.

VOCL: What state of mind should a student have when entering the teaching hall to take refuge?

TWR: The best state of mind is a deep sense of inner refuge—feeling open and connected with oneself, with a quality of warmth—while also generating devotion to the four objects of outer refuge. In the Bon tradition, these four are the teacher, the buddha, the dharma and the sangha.

VOCL: What kind of commitment does taking refuge involve?

TWR: Generally, the commitment involves having more awareness of and connection to the enlightened beings, with a sense of honoring their presence in this world. It also involves having the same sense of connection and honor toward the sacred art, symbols and other images that represent those beings. More specifically, I feel it is important to surrender to a state of total trust in and loyalty to the buddha, dharma and sangha and to the lama, yidam and khandro. These are the main aspects of the commitment that comes with taking refuge.