



Remedy for Pain: Three ‘Pills’ of Inner Refuge

An Excerpt From Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche’s New Book *Awakening the Luminous Mind*

When fear or anxiety dominates your mind, you don’t know where to go. By turning toward stillness, silence, and spaciousness, you will feel some protection. Even if you cannot fully connect, trusting that space is there is a form of protection from fear. You will begin to taste the confidence that becomes increasingly available the more direct personal experience you have with the inner refuge. The reason the inner refuge overcomes fear is that the natural state is beyond fear. It is beyond fear because the unbounded space of being is unchanging. So if you are aware of a deeper state in yourself that is unchanging, and become familiar with that deeper state, you naturally become less fearful.



The natural state of mind is beyond birth and death. At death, it is only ego that loses. We will explore this more fully later in the book, but for now we can say that being in that space is the experience of openness that is deathless, changeless. Nothing changes. So when I become more familiar with that particular aspect, when I taste this sense of changelessness, a deep confidence and peace become available. This is not a confidence produced by thinking or having a philosophical point of view. Rather, it is a direct experience that is possible by recognizing what is already here.

So with the pain body or identity, we “take the white pill” and turn toward stillness; with pain speech, we “take the red pill” and turn toward silence; and with pain mind, we “take the blue pill” and turn toward spaciousness. As we enter the experiences of stillness, silence, and spaciousness, our pain becomes the path to liberation. Each condition transforms into a path that leads to our final liberation—connection with the changeless essence.

You may think this is an oversimplification or a watered-down instruction. Does it seem too simple to be true? The dzogchen masters explain that the true nature of mind is so close we cannot see it. We all know how much we love complicated things. Whatever is harder to get we think is better. For some people, the biggest problem is always wanting something they can't get, and because of that desire they cannot see what they already have. The simple but profound truth is that the greatest thing we have is this present moment. Therein lies the greatest richness possible. But we don't see or experience ourselves fully in the present moment.

So whenever you feel pain, just be with it. Be a good support to your pain. Have a warm presence that is completely open and most important, nonjudgmental. Just be there hosting your pain. People in the West often have a problem with stillness, silence, and spaciousness. When you are still, then you start looking for a problem. When you are silent, others get suspicious and think there is a problem. When you are spacious, others may think you're not very bright. A cultural shock that I experienced when I first came to the United States was the mantra “I'm busy.” Everybody says this. If you say, “I'm not busy,” then something must be wrong with you. If someone asks, “What do you do?” and you reply, “Nothing much,” that person will think, “Something has got to be wrong here. This is not normal.”

Perhaps in your first moments of turning toward stillness, silence, and spaciousness you might feel a little relief. Then you think, “I don't know if this is really going to help.” If you continue following that voice, definitely it will not help. It is very difficult to become free of that voice. You may reason, “Sure, I can do this. I can just sit with this. But what is this going to change in my life? How is this going to take care of a real problem like my broken car?” As you listen to the silence, you may become aware of some active voices within you. The truth is, the moment you begin listening to the silence, you will feel a connection to the space. But we simply have no good sense of how space nourishes us and how open awareness supports us. We have no clue about the nourishing power of awareness itself, and so we identify with the commentary that arises, identifying with the “smart ego” that we feel is so necessary to manage and make sense of our experience.

Some of the most beautiful experiences I have with people are the moments when someone

deeply connects to the silence. Within a very short time, tears come, forgiveness emerges, and strength, clarity, joy—amazing qualities—manifest. Where do these qualities come from? They freely and spontaneously emerge from recognizing the open space of being. This recognition gives birth to everything. Perhaps you are wondering why that didn't happen before. We don't recognize the space of being because the space was occupied; the space was obscured with your ego. If you have so many thoughts and so many voices, you have lost connection to the silence. If you experience so much agitation and movement, you have no connection to the stillness. How is something going to emerge from that space? The connection to space only comes when you acknowledge and care about the pain, which just means being open to it and hosting your experience. It is as simple as that.

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