

Voice of Clear Light

Volume 13, Number 5 / October 2013



Three Doors and Three Refuges

An Excerpt from the Edited Transcript of Oral Teachings Given by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche on the ‘Tibetan Yogas of Body, Speech, and Mind,’ February 2012



We speak of the three doors and three refuges. The stillness of the body is the door; it is not the place of refuge. We say the silence of speech is the door, not the refuge, and the spaciousness of the mind or the heart is the door, but not the refuge. The refuge is the unbounded space, infinite awareness and genuine warmth, or the body of emptiness, body of light, body of great bliss. Does that make sense, that distinction? The expression “the door” means it’s gross, it’s approachable, it’s easier, and then through that door is the refuge itself. Sometimes we might not feel a deep sense of that space. When you really feel that deep sense of the space, then everything changes. Maybe we don’t feel the depth of the space, but by trying to connect with the stillness, we feel closer. So that’s why it’s referred to as a door.

For example, in the second refuge we say, “I take refuge in this body of light, in the infinite awareness.” Awareness is a state of mind, a state of consciousness, and it’s not just awareness, it’s awareness of that unbounded space. It’s not awareness of a flower, awareness of food, awareness of, I don’t know, a cup, awareness of evil, awareness of pain. It’s none of that. It’s awareness of only one thing—unbounded space. That makes a big difference.

In order to have that state of mind, mind has to be clear. Mind has to be clear in order to be

aware of unbounded space. The silence helps to achieve that depth of connection. So silence becomes the door for that. "Silence" is the sense of inner silence, where there is not so much chattering. If there is a lot of chattering, then forget about infinite awareness. When I try to enter through the door, it means I'm trying to listen to this inner silence, but what I'm doing is I'm listening to the chattering voice and saying, "I hate this voice, I hate this thought. When am I going to stop thinking!"

When you speak to yourself like that, then you're still thinking. This constant thought is about not thinking, but it's still thought. If this chain goes on, then there is no way of having that infinite awareness, that light, or knowing the sacred space. You cannot know the sacred space when you are completely caught up with those voices. There's no way. So in order to know, it's through the door of the silence. I say to people that the door of silence is listening to the silence. They never think about listening to the silence; they always think about listening to the voice. If you listen to the silence, you hear silence. If you listen to the voice, you hear the voice. If you listen to the noise, you hear noise.

When was the last time you had a problem with the noise? What? Today? Okay. And did you notice that you were really listening to that? How many people did not have a problem with the noise today? Okay. Did you notice that you were not listening to the noise? When you listen to it, you hear it. If you listen to the silence inside, you'll hear the silence. So not only do you hear the silence, the most beautiful thing is that the moment you hear the silence, the noise stops. The moment the noise stops, you feel more connection to that awareness, because our awareness can only emerge when the noise is not there, and therefore it becomes a door. Does that make sense?

These are some technical things, but there is a particular logic here. I think in some sense it's wonderful, it's so rich in tradition, so there is depth for this. Of course, sometimes it takes a little energy to learn these things, to make some connection, some understanding—this is connected there, that is connected here, this makes sense because of that; that makes sense because of this. It's always in the same territory, which is the absolutely necessary territory. It's not about long stories. It's not a long story, it's a short story, but it's a necessary story. So that's why it is called a door.

And the third door is where we talk about how the spaciousness of the heart and mind brings the feeling of that warmth. You can never feel the warmth unless you feel the space. The warmth always comes with the space. When you don't feel the warmth, try to feel the space. There's the example of the sky. When you look at the sky, it immediately helps you feel some space.

So three doors, three refuges. When you don't find the refuge, pay attention to the door. In the place of the term "door" sometimes we say three pills.

One way to say it is that a door is an easier way into where you are trying to get. There's the destination, and the door. The door is supposed to be an easier way to enter where you are trying to get. The inner refuge is a much higher quality, a higher place. A higher place means unbounded space. There are no conditions there. The moment you get closer to that, everything dissolves. That kind of place is the inner refuge. When you don't have access to that, what disallows us from that is the old movement, like the pain body or pain speech. These are activities that interfere with being in that space. So mind is trying to find a way to it, trying to find a way to that inner refuge.

One way to find it is in keeping our body still. "The stillness of the body is the door" means it's easy to do if you remember to do it. Be still. When you're very shaky, just be still, sit down. If they are shaky, immediately you try to hold somebody, make somebody sit down in a more stable place. We try to do that, right? That's all it is. That is like zhi-ne practice, when that stillness helps you to calm down, calm down, calm down, and gradually opens like a door to that space. During the meditation, that's what happens.

So that's the meaning of the door. The stillness of the body is very easy to do, easy to feel. But the stillness of unbounded space is not that easy to feel. It's completely different. It is the unshakable stillness. The body is shakable stillness. Unbounded space is unshakable stillness. That's the difference. That's why one becomes the door and the other becomes the destination. Does that make sense?

The word "unbounded" means everything here—unbounded and unconditioned. Every condition dissolves here. To feel this inner stillness, if you don't have access to this inner stillness, trying to be still in the body helps you. That is why it's a door; it helps you to enter into the unbounded space. That's the understanding of door. It's the same thing when I refer to "silence." Chattering thoughts are the obscuration of being aware, of being conscious. Silence helps to enter into the awareness of the unbounded spaciousness. That's why when you have obstacles, you listen to the silence and you hear the silence, and it helps you to enter into that clarity of mind. That's why silence is called a door.

(This excerpt is taken from the transcript "The Tibetan Yogas of Body, Speech, and Mind," oral teachings given by Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche in Pacific Palisades, Calif., Feb. 10–12, 2012. The transcript is available at [Ligmincha's Bookstore & Tibet Shop](#) .