

Voice of Clear Light

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Soul Retrieval: Bringing Awareness to Life Through the Power of Commitment

An Edited Excerpt from Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche's Jan. 10, 2015, Webcast

What is the soul? The soul, of course, is very complex; there are many different cultures in the West, even in the East, with different understandings of the soul. From the perspective of the Tibetan Bon Buddhist tradition, the soul refers to the subtle balance of energies of the five essential elements: earth, water, fire, air, space. In the ancient Bon tradition, we believe that there is no way to survive as a human being unless the elements of our inner essence are all rich and alive and balanced in a very healthy way.



I want to talk about commitment. My hope is that many of you who are here with me today are serious and committed enough to follow these monthly webcast teachings, and that you will try to understand the practices and commit yourselves to practicing and to bringing about some real changes in your life for the better.

We know that without commitment nothing will work. We need to recognize that commitment is very important and that whether or not at first we fully understand a practice, we're not going to give up. We'll patiently apply ourselves to exploring how we can bring these practices into our everyday life in order to deepen our understanding.

We spoke this morning of awareness and of watching our habits. Awareness is in every teaching. It is the key. I knew I would be talking about awareness today and as I reflected on what I wanted to say, I realized how often I talk about it. Without talking about awareness, none of the practices make sense. So my question is, are you committed enough to be aware of your life, to be aware of the places you lose your soul or you become the cause of another person's soul loss, and aware of where you become a cause of collective loss? How much are you willing to be aware? Are you brave enough, honest enough? Are you direct enough? I think it's very important to reflect in this way. Commitment and awareness are very important here.

There is a saying in the Tibetan tradition that refers to a person who has been in the teachings for so long and yet their head is so hard. They are so stubborn, that even if you hit their head right on the "X marks the spot," you will not be able to penetrate it. The analogy is they are like a piece of rock that has been in the ocean for thousands of years and yet, when you break it open, it's still dry on the inside. Some people are not touched deeply enough by the teachings. Somehow, they continue staying connected to the teachings, but the connection is on the surface. They never go deep enough, or are aware enough or committed enough to make real changes. So, are you willing enough, are you brave enough, are you committed enough to connect deeply? This commitment is very important.

It is also important to be aware of where you lose your soul. Do you lose it mainly at work? How much energy do you lose at work? How much energy do you lose in your relationships? How much energy are you losing trying to be someone, or just trying to be yourself? Are you committed enough to be aware in this way?

In terms of practice, formal practice can mean anywhere from half an hour to an hour of practice every single day. Are you willing to do that? That's one aspect of practice. Then there is informal practice. Are you willing to be conscious five times a day during your daily life? Are you willing to remember five times every single day when you are draining yourself for no reason, like when you are putting so much effort into work that does not require effort? Because effort sometimes kills the spontaneity, kills creativity, and blocks the view; effort is not able to see the full potentiality of what can be done; effort loses something.

So are you willing to be conscious five times every single day, specifically at those times when you are becoming a cause of losing your own vital energy, life force, and soul? And are you willing to turn it around, so instead of losing your soul you at least stop losing it and just sustain it, or better yet, plug into the power source, the source of healing, and retrieve your life force every time you see that you're beginning to lose it? Every time you are in the process of losing it, are you willing to become aware of that fact and retrieve it? Are you willing to commit yourself to being aware of this five times every single day? I'm repeating this quite a few times now. Do you hear me? Do you hear me?

You need at least half an hour of formal practice every day combined with five times of informal practice every day, which means in addition to meditating you commit to being aware in those moments when you are losing your vital energies! That's a very important step, because without awareness you won't change anything.

When you're aware, can you sustain, maintain, and not lose more of your life force? Or better, can you remember to take the three precious pills: stillness of the body, silence of the speech, and spaciousness of the mind? Are you willing to be aware of these pills—the white pill, red pill and blue pill? Are you willing to remember to take them five times a day when you are losing energy? How do you take them? You take them by releasing effort and tension and resting long enough to find connection to the source. In connecting, you retrieve from the source whatever you are in the process of losing or have been losing, or even have lost for so long that you are almost dead, or dying. Are you willing to reverse that, or at least prolong whatever is left of the healing energies of the soul that you still have? And are you willing to maintain that for a longer period of time?

I know some of you might be thinking, *Well I've already heard about the three pills*. I'm sure you have heard about the three pills, and have had glimpses of experiences, but I'm quite sure that you don't apply them frequently enough. And I'm quite sure that many of you have been continuing to lose your vitality and life force and energy. That is exactly the reason I'm emphasizing this now. I know that many of you already know of these three pills and are familiar with these exercises. What I'm emphasizing is that you don't apply them when you personally need them the most. That's the emphasis here, and as I'm speaking, you can probably recognize for yourself that this is true.

When you need them to be applied in your own life, in a very specific situation, when you struggle with a pattern or habit and you keep on losing energy again and again, then you are not remembering to practice; you are not applying them at that specific time and therefore you keep on losing energy. How much soul have you lost? How much vitality, humor, or laughter

have you lost? How much playfulness have you lost and will keep losing unless you become aware in your daily life?

This is a very important point; I'm highlighting it again—it's not about your lack of familiarity with the practice, rather it's your lack of ability to apply the practice in the moment that you need it the most. That is the point for you to remember.

Half an hour a day of formal practice is one part of the commitment. So let's imagine that today you have a very busy day and can only do 15 minutes—okay, 15 minutes is fine, but it's not fine if you forget to do the informal practice five times that day. That is not fine. You've got to do the informal practice at least five times every day, because if you're not able to practice formally, then you may not be able to retrieve the lost soul energies as successfully, and it is in your everyday life situations that you are losing more vital energy without even knowing how much you are losing. That's a big problem. So I want to make sure that you make this commitment to remember your informal practice five times a day. On the second Saturday of every month we will come back together and help each other to reflect: *Did I really keep my commitment to remember to take the three precious pills five times a day?*

If you say,

Oh, I might have missed a few of the days, but most of the time I did remember,
then that would be wonderful for me to hear!

Through practice, you will clearly come to know that moment to moment you are able to change, that moment to moment your negative force, your karmic force, your addiction, your ignorance, your ego is not driving your life; instead, moment to moment your awareness is guiding your life; moment to moment your awareness is protecting you; moment to moment your awareness is showing the source of healing; moment to moment your awareness not only shows it, but you are then able to retrieve it, able to feel how much nourishment is available. You are already beginning to feel that you are taking great medicine, and that's what we call this informal practice the three *precious* pills. Soon you come to find that there is no way *not* to take them every day, and you might even find that five times a day is too infrequent, because applying the practice is so much fun and so effective, and you can see right in front of your eyes that things are shifting and changing and going in the right direction. As this happens, you will take the three precious pills more often. And I welcome you to take them as often as you wish as there are no ill side effects!

So the point I am emphasizing is the necessity of personalizing the practice. With any spiritual practice, any dharma practice, unless the practice is personalized, it is not going to work. The Buddha taught different vehicles, and there are many systems of doctrine. In the Bon tradition,

there are the nine ways of Bon. The Buddha taught the nine ways of Bon because people learn in different ways. Some people realize the truth one way, and others who do not get it that way have to approach the teaching differently. Realizing that, the Buddha taught in slightly different ways—slightly more open ways, or slightly more limited ways; some ways are more dualistic and some ways more non-dualistic—but he always taught according to whatever each person needed to hear in order to realize.

In the same way, all of these teachings are available to us, and rather than label them as *this one is good but this one is better*

or
this one is for me and this one is only for this group,
you must discern what teaching is for you at this moment in your life. And when you ask that question, you will get an answer to the question. That is the way of personalizing practice. At each moment in our life we are different. There are moments in life when we may be so fearful, where everyone seems to be attacking us and everything seems difficult. Then there are moments when we are so open and everyone seems to be contributing to our life, enriching our life, helping us. So there can be a degree of openness that we experience at one time in our life that's very different from another time.

So I'm strongly encouraging you to make the commitment to half an hour a day of formal practice and to five times a day of bringing awareness to the informal situations where you habitually lose your soul. And through bringing awareness, you will not lose your soul, but sustain it, or better yet, reconnect or charge it up. What better time to make this commitment than right now, at the beginning of this year, 2015? This can be your New Year's resolution. People make resolutions to go to the gym more, to find a meaningful relationship, to lose weight, to eat healthier. But, an important New Year's resolution could be about how you will not lose more of your soul than you have been losing, and how moment to moment you can guide your life and retrieve your soul and heal your soul. That's a very important resolution!



In the dharma and in Buddhism, people don't talk or think so much about health and wealth and love; these things are not particularly emphasized, even though personally everybody secretly emphasizes them! Collectively in the teachings we don't emphasize them enough, because somehow we think these are not that important, these are goals in samsara or something like that. Yes, they are in samsara, and yes, we are in samsara and yes, individually we do emphasize these in our life secretly or unknowingly. So it's important to acknowledge openly

here that your personal health is important. Do you pay attention to your health? Regarding wealth, maybe you don't care about money, but everybody needs money, so the question of wealth is, to some degree, important. What is your relationship to money? Do you have a good one? Does money keep coming toward you, or do you have a problem with money and money keeps running away from you? Well, make friends with money! And as for love, everyone seeks connection, different forms of connection. Whatever kind of connection you are seeking, have you found one?

These aspects of life are very personal; health, well-being, relationship—all are very important. Once these basics are quite good, then you move up to the second level of awareness, social awareness. I think that's very important for all of us. Consider how much emphasis you put on social awareness in your life. What is important for *you*? What is important for your country, for your neighbors, your family, or for your spiritual community? Many of us here in this cyber-sangha, or in any part of the Ligmincha International group and sangha, come together as part of a spiritual group, and it is also very much a social circle that we've formed for very specific purposes and very specific reasons. How is your social engagement with these people, and what does it mean to you? How does it enrich your life, and how can you enrich someone else's life? These are very important questions to ask.

As your soul is healing, as you feel increasingly well and you have something to give to others, then social awareness becomes increasingly important. Ultimately, the awareness of achieving buddhahood comes. But there is some sense of sequence here. You cannot say, *I am looking for final liberation, but I don't care about society; I don't care about family; I don't care about my friend; I just want to achieve rainbow body or realization!*

You can see that even the word realization itself doesn't work from that view. So acknowledge that you must take care of your health, your love, your wealth, your work—take care of those aspects of your life, too.

I hope that with these teachings and these messages that you are clearly able to personalize them in your life, using the medicine that's just right for you. And that your practice can be particularly geared for you personally in the most beneficial way. And when you gain health, your awareness not only stays with you—the sense of "I'm well"—but it expands to social awareness and ultimately to the liberation of yourself and all sentient beings, as we pray in our dedication.