



Conversations Between Student and Teacher

Complementarity of Traditional Teaching and The 3 Doors Approach



Santiago Villaveces-Izquierdo from Colombia, a longtime student of Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, interviewed Rinpoche several times over Skype last year. Their conversation focused primarily on the complementarity of a traditional approach to the teachings and The 3 Doors. The first half of the interview, condensed and edited by VOCL editors for the format of this newsletter, is presented below. Part 2 will be published in the June issue of the VOCL. Read the full article in the upcoming Spring issue of Ligmincha Europe Magazine.

Santiago Villaveces-Izquierdo: After more than two decades of following the Yungdrung Bon tradition and after recently completing a three-year training through The 3 Doors Academy designed by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, my teacher for more than 24 years, I have realized very deep shifts within myself. A different way of being in the midst of the ups and downs of daily life has emerged together with a deep feeling of freedom, expansiveness and connection. At the same time I have begun to realize that the teachings have come much more alive in myself, not as intellectual constructs but as embodied and experienced realizations. In sharing this wonderful adventure of discovery and healing, I found myself engaged in a series of heartfelt conversations with Rinpoche during 2015.

For the last several years Rinpoche has been engaged in creating a novel system that blends the strengths of an 18,000-year-old tradition with the openness and candidness of acknowledging our own personal obstacles and afflictions. Our conversation started off with a distinction between Ligmincha and The 3 Doors Academy that Rinpoche was keen on making. Ligmincha Institute (now Ligmincha International) was established in the mid-1990s for the

preservation of the ancient teachings and practices of the Yungdrung Bon tradition of Tibet and has since grown to a worldwide network of centers and sanghas. The 3 Doors is a secular training based on three of these ancient practices that allows participants to work through physical, energetic and mental obstacles that deter us from reaching self-realization.

We also touched upon two fundamental pillars of spiritual work: reconnecting to the inner refuge, that is, reconnecting through our conscious awareness with our own true nature; and developing the inner skills of hosting all our experiences by allowing them into our expansive nature rather than grasping and identifying ourselves with them.

Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche: It is important for people to understand the basic differences between Ligmincha and The 3 Doors Academy. First of all, the purpose of the latter is not preserving the tradition but allowing individuals who have no association with Buddhism, Bon or Tibetan culture to have access and benefit from some of these teachings. This of course does not mean that people who are following a traditional Buddhist path would not benefit from the methods and approaches used in The 3 Doors, as has already been proven by more than 100 practitioners who have graduated from the academy.

Another difference is in the way The 3 Doors is structured. People who enter the academy work as a group for a period of three consecutive years within a setup that provides more intimate support systems that are otherwise absent in a sangha or dharma center: closeness to the teacher or mentor, closeness among practitioners, a deep level of commitment toward each other and toward the practices, and a continuous communication among all as a basis for growth and support. For all these reasons The 3 Doors is also extremely beneficial for all those practitioners who are following the tradition of Yungdrung Bon and who are connected to any of our worldwide centers.

I feel it is also important to mention that all of us who are following a tradition such as the Yungdrung Bon have pledged a commitment to develop a meaningful sense of compassion. This means acting in practical ways to allow people who have no interest in following this tradition to benefit from the dharma. I care about all human beings, not only those who follow my tradition. If one has a sectarian view one does not truly understand *bodhicitta*, the spontaneous wish to attain enlightenment motivated by great compassion for all sentient beings. For sectarians *bodhicitta* is just a mental abstraction about helping other sentient beings.

For me The 3 Doors Academy is very important because it is a means to include people who otherwise would not have access to the teachings simply because Buddhism or Yungdrung Bon have no appeal to them. And I wanted to offer this opportunity within a strong system of support and commitment.

So you see, there is no conflict or contradiction between Ligmincha and The 3 Doors Academy. One might have preferences, people can choose one over the other, but you cannot judge based on what you like or dislike. You cannot say The 3 Doors is not right because it does not follow the tradition. This is not only a wrong judgment but also a lack of understanding of bodhicitta. I am encouraging all my students to follow the approaches of both Ligmincha and The 3 Doors. This is very important.

SVI: First, in terms of the audience, Ligmincha and The 3 Doors are conceived as distinct means to reach different audiences. Second, beyond the issue of distinct audiences lies a deeper difference: The 3 Doors provides a more integral support system to the person who is working with the practices. Third and deepest is that in the personal development of a practitioner both Ligmincha and The 3 Doors are complementary to each other. Can you elaborate more on this complementarity?

TWR: Yes, I say they are complementary because in the tradition there is a very deep elaboration and understanding of the dark side or the shadow of our own personality: practices exist to tame your ego, cultivate compassion and purify afflictions. All these form the core essence of the teachings. But while this is the case, these teachings very seldom become personal in people's lives. Many teach about the need to tame the ego and purify afflictions, but this does not become something personal for a practitioner, teacher and dharma group.

SVI: Rinpoche, if you allow me I would like to talk through my experience as a 3 Doors Academy graduate and follower and practitioner of the Yungdrung Bon. When one does not integrate one's own personal issues and obstacles in one's own practice but rather engages in very deep and beautiful practices, one falls into delusion. I have felt this very strongly in my own growth throughout the years. After attending many summer retreats at Ligmincha, I recall the feelings that emerged when the three weeks of teachings and practices came to an end. I recall many of us recognizing these feelings, dreading them and even joking about them: the fall after the high. One loses those experiences and is once again back into the miseries and sufferings of normal daily life. The teachings are not embodied in oneself; they are not integrated with one's own suffering or with the challenges one is facing in daily existence. The beauty in the approach of the The 3 Doors is that it allows you the possibility of actually embodying the teachings and understanding, through your own transformation, that the three root poisons are

not this abstraction that makes sense within a very comprehensive philosophical canon, but are something that is actually inside yourself, alive and playing out and manifesting in multiple ways in your life all the time.

TWR: Yes absolutely!

SVI: So the way of breaking with this delusion is by integrating the teachings into your daily life by accessing the concrete possibilities that arise while working through your own obstacles.

TWR: What the dharma and the teachings say when making reference to our afflictions and three root poisons is that they are actually happening at every single moment: in the way you are viewing, responding and interacting with the world. All of one's own afflictions are right there, producing deeply rooted challenges, deeply rooted patterns in our relationships with each other and our surroundings. All of it is there! But often people who practice dharma seldom touch the concreteness of their own afflictions. They end up finding no relationship between the teachings and their own daily life. There is an immense gap. What The 3 Doors emphasizes is bridging that gap, actualizing that connection.

SVI: Would you say that embodying the teachings and truly understanding the nature of mind begins with the transformations in your daily life? In other words, if you do not work with your shadow systematically – using tools like the ones proposed by The 3 Doors, for example, it is quite impossible to embody the teachings and understand the nature of mind.

TWR: Absolutely! There is no doubt of this. That is why so many people that are practicing for so many years, even if they have higher and higher positions within any social structure (religious or otherwise), and are very knowledgeable and have read a lot, attended more retreats and do more practices, do not necessarily embody change and transformation. These qualifications do not necessarily mean that they have a clue about the nature of mind.

SVI: So if you want to embark on the path of discovering the nature of mind, you have to begin with what you have in your own life right now – with your own mud that is right there in front of you at that present moment.

TWR: That is the only place. The “I” (pain identity) that has been created by all the shadows, that is the place to begin. But the smart ego can totally dismiss this and do something in parallel for years and years (i.e. working with the teachings without engaging with the shadow). And that is the biggest damage that the smart ego can make. My concern is that there are people who follow me, who follow the dharma, that do not see any value in The 3 Doors. It is important for this people to hear what I am saying here. The 3 Doors is good for you as well as for others who do not follow the dharma, and you should be open enough to understand this. The ways teachings are taught traditionally and in The 3 Doors are complementary to one another; one is not the replacement of the other.

SVI: Would you say that they are not only complementary but actually the methods proposed by The 3 Doors in working through one's own afflictions are actually the starting point to engage with the teachings?

TWR: Yes. If you do not understand it that way, there is no genuine way of entering into the dharma. A true way of entering into the Dharma would be through methods like The 3 Doors.

SVI: So the key message here is highlighting the importance of The 3 Doors, in particular emphasizing that if you do not touch anything of your shadow there is no way you can actually understand and come to realizations of what the teachings are all about.

TWR: That's what I have been saying for years.

SVI: When one doesn't engage with the shadow, the teachings become experiences that are not embodied in yourself, or when you embodied them you do so when you have unique circumstances – as in a retreat – and in such cases they cannot be sustained or accessed in your daily life.

TWR: Yes, I have been emphasizing this all the time. Many people who have a deep knowledge of the teachings have a hard time hearing this. They are somehow closed to it despite the fact that all the texts have specifics lines emphasizing this approach.

