

THE VOICE OF CLEAR LIGHT

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A CONVERSATION WITH TENZIN WANGYAL RINPOCHE ABOUT HIS TEACHER, YONGDZIN TENZIN NAMDAK RINPOCHE (LOPON).

This summer retreat seemed to me perfect in many ways. One such way was that during the third week everything suddenly fell into place for a conversation with Tenzin Rinpoche about his guide and master, Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche.

After hearing Rinpoche tell one of his great stories about Yongdzin Rinpoche (Lopon) during one afternoon teaching, I was inspired to try

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to meet with him to have him share with me for publication in the VOCL, more of his thoughts and recollections about Lopon. As it turned out, there was an opening in Rinpoche's schedule and he gladly welcomed my suggestion that we sit and talk for a bit about his great teacher who will be coming in the fall for a week-long retreat at Serenity Ridge.

When I arrived for our get-together, tape recorder in hand, Rinpoche glowed, and I was immediately drawn into his great space. He started the tape recorder and dove right in, his words flowing effortlessly and beautifully from his heart, about his teacher, Yongdzin Rinpoche. Not losing any time, I began by asking Rinpoche, "In your eyes, what are some of the qualities that Yongdzin Rinpoche embodies? How did he affect you as a young monk?"

Without hesitation, Rinpoche began, "The main quality that comes to my mind is his compassion - the quality of his being very open, very receptive, with a lot of love. It is especially clear how being around him, we all receive so much of his blessing and love.

"He's always had a strong combination of an open, compassionate attitude and a great strength. The way he sees things is unshakable, unchangeable. You can clearly feel that there are areas within him - his realization, his way of seeing things, who he is - that are unshakable. And what comes out of that strength is such a loving, warm, and compassionate caring. Lopon took care of us children in the monastery, sharing his time, food, clothes, knowledge, love - with no limits.

"It was quite clear what I saw in him, and I've always tried to be as open and loving, and at the same time, as strong as I could. In this way he has made a very strong impact on me. The way he teaches also has had a strong impact on me; it is thoughtful, planned, clear and systematic where it needs to be, and where it doesn't need to be, his teaching is very open, and flowing with momentum and humor."

I then asked Tenzin Rinpoche if he would share a recollection or two about his relationship with Lopon from back when he was growing up as a young monk at Menri Monastery.

Rinpoche thought for a moment and said, "Lopon was head teacher of the monastery. There is a whole curriculum that needs to be followed by monks. So as a student, I was required by Lopon to follow strictly the whole curriculum, to receive all the classes from Lopon as my teacher. But at the same time, Lopon was very much like a father to me. I lived with him in the same house, and for example, waking me up in the morning, he was always careful that I didn't fall back asleep. As a kid growing up, you know, sometimes you just don't want to wake up in the morning." Rinpoche smiled, "So, Lopon would gently make sure on those mornings to let me know first that he

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was up, then in a bit, that everyone else was now up, and then finally that maybe now it was time for me to be up too!

"In the evenings we'd sit together, sharing soup, sharing stories. We'd always spend time in the evening just sitting and sharing stories, anything from ghost stories, to local stories, to international stories.

"I used to love Indian movies and I would go to town to see them when I was a monk. Lopon did not necessarily like when I would go to the movies, though. So there were evenings when I would not let him know that one of the stories that I was telling him came from a movie I had just seen. Sometimes though, during our one day off each week, we would have long walks lasting a few hours, and I would tell him a story from a movie that I had seen without his knowing, and he would enjoy the story so much. But when the story was from a mystery movie, one where the ending left the audience not knowing what had happened to some of the characters, Lopon would keep asking me, 'What happened to this person, and to that person?' "And then

finally," Rinpoche laughed, "I would have to tell him, 'I'm sorry I don't know because that story was really from a movie I saw last week!'"

I wanted Rinpoche to speak about Lopon's leaving Tibet after the Chinese invasion in 1959. I asked him, "What were the conditions like for Lopon's escape over the Himalayas? And how did Lopon then help in establishing the new Menri Monastery in India? How was he chosen to be the Lopon, head teacher?"

Rinpoche began by explaining what he had heard many times, "When Lopon was escaping, it was very, very difficult. There was quite a large group of people with him trying to escape, and many of them were killed on the way. They were attacked many times, and each attack killed many, many people. In one attack, Lopon was shot. The gun was so strong that the bullet penetrated through his leg and he was injured for a few months. He was left up in the mountains where some of the local people took care of him. One of the monks, Sherab Tsultin, went back to find him and took care of him there.

"When Lopon finally arrived in India, of course the one thing on his mind was the community of Bonpo refugees, primarily his teachers and those who were practicing Bon. His deep wish was to know that one day there would be some kind of home where at least the teachers could be and where the local people could connect to those teachers, where they could come gather together and be together.

"When Lopon left to go to England for three years, that wish was most on his mind. He began to ask different people there for help, and the Catholic Relief Service helped to establish the community in Dolanji. When Lopon returned to India, that became a big undertaking for him.

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Rinpoche pointed out, "I came to the monastery about seven years after that."

Regarding how Yongdzin Rinpoche was chosen to be the new Lopon, Rinpoche explained, "Choosing the Lopon is a very organic development in the monastery. There are hundreds of monks studying and whoever shows the highest qualities of intellectual capacity, of openness, kindness and the ability to be with others, as well as a high degree of development in their practice, is the one chosen to be the new Lopon. So there are many, many qualities on which the choice is based, and that I am sure they clearly saw in Yongdzin Rinpoche.

"I remember Lopon saying, though, that when he was chosen, he was a little terrified of that position and that he did not want to do it initially. It was a big responsibility, but somehow he could not say no because it was requested of him by his teacher. So he did say yes, and I'm very glad that he did."

With our short time together almost up, I concluded my visit by

asking Rinpoche a personal question, "Is it hard being away from Lopon, your teacher?"

Rinpoche thought for a moment and responded, "In the beginning when I left the monastery after finishing my Geshe degree, it was not hard for me to leave him. I was looking forward to exploring the world and trying to see the world through different eyes. Back then, my leaving was probably harder on him than it was on me. After a few years, it felt like I had seen enough of the world. So, the first time Lopon came to visit me in Italy and then had to leave, it was really hard for me to see him go. I don't remember ever in my life having that many tears or water existing in me, in my eyes; my tears were like pouring water after he left me. It was very hard for me then. But now it is different.

"I went at first from not feeling bad leaving him at the monastery, to feeling no good without his presence, to later feeling fine with our being apart. I always know now that he is there for me. Every day he is in my heart. Almost every night he is in my dreams. And every year I spend a few months visiting with him. I feel very fortunate that I am able to do that. And I am continuing to plan to do so."

Thank you Rinpoche from all of our hearts!

- Aline and Jeff Fisher

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WORDS FROM YONGDZIN TENZIN NAMDAK RINPOCHE

"Because you have been born with the ability to practice, this shows something of how you acted in your previous lives. But now you must consider how to use this precious opportunity. Otherwise it will be wasted; time is passing very quickly. We must practice the religious way, always aware of the value of time.

"We must also make sure that our virtuous action is not spoiled, which might happen if you don't know how to preserve its merit. But if you know how to preserve the merit of your actions, then even a small action, like saying a mantra once, is important. Its benefit will always be there. We have a proverb saying that if you put one drop of water in the ocean, then until the ocean is dry, that drop of water will not evaporate. In the same way, this small bit of virtue, whatever you do, is never spoiled.

"How do you preserve merit? Whatever virtuous action you perform, you must dedicate its merit for all sentient beings. This is very very important. Always consider that whatever you have done should be of benefit for all sentient beings, not only for yourself. Also, it's good to reflect on the Dzogchen or other Buddhist views about emptiness - that your action is really empty of self-nature, so

it cannot truly become corrupted. This contemplation should be done in conjunction with the accumulation of merit and the dedication. Then the merit certainly won't be spoiled or lost.

"For example, sometime you might become angry, and even if you don't hit someone or express your anger in some other negative way, your angry thoughts might destroy the merit of your previous virtuous actions. Anger is particularly dangerous - it can burn up all your virtue very quickly. But if you've already dedicated the merit of your actions and also understood them as empty, there's no problem.

"These are basic points we should always remember as we practice.

Sometimes our situation is very pleasant and we feel happy, but we must remember that this state is not permanent. The consequences of our past actions will continue to manifest, and it's important to take advantage of our present opportunities to practice even more.

Even when it seems we are happy and fortunate, our happiness is still quite limited compared to that which comes from practicing the teaching. The higher bodhisattvas live in the pure realms and are much happier than we are. So our ordinary happiness is not final at all. It is only temporary, and we shouldn't trust it too much."

[An excerpt from the preliminary comments by Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak to "The Twenty One Nails,"; an edited transcript from Ligmincha

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Institute's 3rd Annual Summer Retreat, New Mexico, 1995; this book "The Twenty One Nails" is a volume of teachings from the "Oral Transmission of Zhang Zhung" with commentary by Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak and Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, edited by Anne Klein, Annette Jones and Steven Tainer, and published by Ligmincha Institute in 1996 (transmission is required to obtain a copy of it.)]

"KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE" an edited excerpt from oral teachings given by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, 2003.

There is a big difference between knowledge and experience. It is possible for one to have knowledge without any experience, or one might have experience without having knowledge. Knowledge here is referring to intellectual knowledge, not absolute knowledge.

One might observe, "Everything is happening to me," experientially, but then not have any knowledge about those experiences. For some lucky people, they have no problem with that. They would say, "Fantastic, it's all happening, and I don't care to know what it is." Others who have not gotten rid of the grasping mind want to know something conceptually about the experiences and they ask, "What is that experience?" And those who have even more grasping mind want to know more about their experience, asking questions like, "Why is it happening? Why is it happening to me? Why now?" And then those who have even more grasping than that want to know, "Why did it

NOT happen until now? Why did it take so long? How long will it stay?" You can get worse and worse and worse.

So it's always a question of how much grasping mind you have and then also how much space you have to contain these experiences without necessarily judging, analyzing, and putting them all into boxes and labeling them. If you can minimize the boxes and labels, that is wonderful. But when you maximize the boxes and labels, you are just giving yourself a hard time. It is especially true within the spiritual domain that we ask these kinds of questions too much. If, for example, you wanted to know conceptually about the function of your eye, it might take you 10 or 15 years to study it thoroughly enough to actually be able to know the way the eye functions and the way its one billion pieces or mechanisms work together as the eye. But I am happy not to know any of that so long as I can see things clearly, right? Or would you want to take issue with that and say, "I don't care if I see or not, I just want to know conceptually how the eye works to see when I see?" No, you wouldn't say that; it's enough just to be seeing clearly, to be able to see the light; it's not necessary to know everything.

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But when we do need to label, we have to have compassion for that part of ourselves, too. It's like there is someone inside you who wants to know all about something. You've heard the term "inner child?" This is more like our "inner professor" who wants to know about everything intellectually with all the labels and categories. So, one's knowledge and one's experience are both very important. In dzogchen teachings we always say: you listen, you hear, you reflect, you know, you experience, you let it go. This is a great cycle.

To begin with, if you don't hear, then it is hard to be able to reflect on things. And then when you reflect on something, do you reflect on it your whole life? No. At some point, you have to have some conclusion, right? Can you say that as a teenager you are reflecting on something and then in middle age you are still reflecting on it and then when you are dying you are still reflecting on the same issue? This would not be very good, right? As a result of reflecting, naturally there comes some kind of intellectual conclusion.

This intellectual conclusion is so important. You conclude a certain meaning from what you initially heard and then reflected upon. The metaphor for this intellectual understanding is one of lighting a candle in a dark room. Prior to your concluding, you may think, "I heard that in this room all these objects exist, but the room is still dark so even if I've been told of all that is in here, I haven't seen it yet." But then the moment you light the candle, you

finally see everything; you know where everything is compared to where you expected it all to be; that's called an intellectual discovery.

Once you know that intellectually, then the next step is that you experience it. Experience is a deeper kind of connection; like when you taste chocolate. The moment you have a taste of chocolate, do you have a doubt about chocolate? No, you don't have a doubt about chocolate. So discovering something through your experience is like tasting chocolate. That's the metaphor.

When you taste the chocolate, how do you taste it? You taste it fully, enjoy it, be with it, feel it; you allow the experience to last. You live fully with that taste, rather than thinking that the experience is going to end, or where the next chocolate will come from, or if there is still any chocolate left, or whether someone else has it now, or how I am going to get it again. You don't have to go through all the samsaric reactions, right? You can just be fully with that chocolate.

So once the chocolate is finished, what do you do? Well, the chocolate is definitely free from you now so you should be free from

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the experience of the chocolate, too! The chocolate might say, "I have given myself fully to this person, even though he didn't really enjoy it so much because he was worrying and thinking about something. Now I'm happy to be out of here." This last step is the notion of letting go - letting go of experience. And for us that's very very very difficult here. Because when we first have the experience, we say, "Well, good! Finally. After all this time! I thought it would never happen!" Now when it happens, you jump and grasp. We even grasp non-grasping mind. The moment you do that then you are right back to your old habits.

In the Zhang Zhung Nyen Gyu, there is something called, "No action, no trace." What it means is that in this action you don't leave traces behind. Like drawing in the sky. You can draw something here in space, and what do you see? Nothing. Or, it's like a bird flying away from a rock or a bird flying through the sky. You see the bird flying, you see the bird moving, but you also see that behind the bird there is nothing there. What it leaves behind itself is just clear space. Where it moves through is just clear space.

Retreat Announcement:

"Part One, Ngondro" September 22-26, 2004,
with Geshe Lungrig Gyaltsen, at Serenity Ridge.

Part One, The Ngondro, from the Experiential Transmission of Zhang Zhung (Zhang Zhung Nyam Gyu), is the entrance to a cycle of Bon dzogchen, or "Great Perfection" teachings. This year we are very

fortunate to have Geshe Lunrig Gyaltsen teaching these beautiful and essential practices to us.

The Ngondro teachings, a complete set of practices in themselves, offer instructions for "taming" oneself, for purification, and for perfection. These are lifelong practices appropriate for people at all stages of training and are the prerequisite for further study of the Experiential Transmission of Zhang Zhung. The transmission for the practices will be given by Geshe Lunrig Gyaltsen at the conclusion of the retreat.

Geshe Lunrig decided to become a monk at the age of four. At the age of 12, he enrolled in the Bon Dialectic School and completed a rigorous course of traditional monastic studies including sutra, tantra, dzogchen, and astrology. In 1994, at the age of 26, he was awarded his geshe degree from Menri Monastery, Dolanji, India. The following year geshe-la made a pilgrimage to Tibet where he taught and gave empowerments. When he returned, he went to Kathmandu to study dzogchen under the guidance of Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche. Since 2000, Geshe Lunrig has been teaching tsa lung, Mon, Oct 3, 2005 12:03 PM

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dzogchen, powa, chod, and astrology in various countries in Europe. Register for this retreat by August 23 for the price of \$300 or after August 23 for \$350. Call Ligmincha at: (434) 977-6161 or e-mail: ligmincha@aol.com.

SANGHA SHARING

THE SUMMER RETREAT, JULY, 2004 - A STUDENT'S EXPERIENCE.

This summer I was asked to be the shrine attendant for Ligmincha's Summer Retreat where Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche would teach from "The Twenty-One Nails." By saying yes, I discovered the meaning of that text for me.

When I was asked to be shrine attendant, I said yes with pleasure. As the first day of retreat approached, I started to get nervous about the Yeshe Walmo offering. For those of you who are new to Bon like I am, the offering entails the sangha reading the Yeshe Walmo Invocation several times. During the reading, the shrine attendant has several duties that she performs for the whole sangha in front of the shrine.

The night before, nervous that I would fail, I just let go, thinking, all I can do is make the offering with an open heart. If I fail in the form, I will have that openness to fall back on. I will always have it, so I never need to stop expressing myself just because I am afraid that I will fail. I made a decision, a commitment to my heart. Each morning Rinpoche would go over one Nail by weaving between the text and samsara, defining a path to apply the teachings to our lives. Each afternoon, he asked us to work on one of four qualities:

love, compassion, joy or equanimity during a sacred sound practice using different seed syllables. I had picked love as my quality.

One day he asked us what we thought the text was about and how the practice related to it. With the confidence I got from making the Yeshe Walmo offering each day, I raised my hand. "For me, the simplest way to think about The Twenty-One Nails is that they are instructions on how to live with an open heart. The ideal is to get to the stage where we are stable in the nature of mind, then we should be able to live with an open heart in everything we do spontaneously. The practice is a gradual way to show us how."

Somehow, after saying that out loud, I knew what the practice had done for me. Working with love had shown me who I was. When I was
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practicing, I was seeking love outside myself, but love and my heart knew better. The result was that I gave myself to my own heart with my whole body, speech, mind, heart and soul. I gave myself the openness to love myself for just being the way I am being at any moment, good or bad, happy or sad. Years of indefensible masks that have grown very heavy to carry around are beginning to drop from my face. When I look at myself, I see something I recognize.

To me, "The Twenty-One Nails" isn't about my heart; it is about THE heart, the heart of space and light. But in Bon, transmission is experiential. Can we experience the heart of space and light without first experiencing our own hearts? Can we experience our own hearts without first taking off the masks and feeling our heart, hearing it, surrendering to it? I can't. I need to experience this in my body, speech, mind, heart and soul. This is a continuous knee-buckling experience for me. I am completely awed by the power of my heart. Every moment that my heart is open, I feel more alive than the moments when it is closed.

At the beginning of week three, Rinpoche gave all of us who had been at the retreat for the first two weeks permission to change qualities. Throughout the first two weeks many practitioners grew frustrated trying to define an action plan to express the quality in their lives. Now, given the opportunity, I changed my quality to compassion.

Around this time someone who was in a tent, asked me if she could share my single room. Normally, being masked by pretense, I would have said yes and just dealt with the inconvenience. But I decided to let one mask go and be true to who I was being at the time, someone conditioned by liking her own room. I answered her directly by saying, 'I am going to be very honest and say no.' By doing that I saw that I am not very compassionate when it comes to my condition of wanting some privacy.

Through the help of our teacher and this practice, I have made a

decision to live with an open heart for the rest of my life. By making this decision I am connecting more with people. Is this compassion or love? Are they the same thing? Does having compassion for your open heart compassionately connect you with others? I think love and compassion can be the same. If when you open your heart and give space for love to flow, can that love become any quality that's needed at the time?

Sometimes my body feels very light and filled with energy when my heart is open to the other people in my life. But it's hard.

Sometimes it hurts to face who you are being, like being a person who won't share her room. And it hurts a lot to change or face how you used to be. When I came back from the retreat, I had expected to spend the month of August in Africa with my new partner. But when we tried to connect, he couldn't open to the new spaciousness in me. I

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hit a wall. I couldn't respond to his resistance to that openness. So I decided to let us both be free to find someone who could love us for being just the way we are. It hurts to change. But my heart is surprising me by opening unexpectedly to people I never would have seen before or reconsidered. My partner just called. He didn't ask me for anything; he was just opening too. I asked him if he wanted to see me. He said yes. Living with a heart that's open means you never stop opening. And you never know what you're going to do next because you keep changing because you keep opening, over and over and over again.

With deep gratitude to our Teacher, Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche for teaching us this most beautiful text, "The Twenty-One Nails," and to my Dharma sisters Raven Wood, Kim Cary, and Aline Fisher for giving me this opportunity to serve the sangha.

- Candace Byers

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