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Letter from the Editors

Ways We Connect



Dear Friends,

In this issue's teaching excerpt, Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche addresses our 'addiction' to searching. And how the simple truth of our own natural perfection, just as it is, eludes us in our busy-ness of searching. One's distractions can be endless. So we continue to be grateful for all of the reminders – the teachings, teachers, the texts and practices – that can point the way back to ourselves, to our own self-discovery, our own realization of the luminous nature of mind and its qualities of love,

joy, compassion and equanimity.

We are excited to share two interviews in this issue – one with Pat Leavitt, who is retiring as kitchen manager/chef at Serenity Ridge, and the second with Alejandro Chaoul-Reich, on expanding the Ligmincha community.

Ligmincha is very happy to share the new details about two online retreats with Rinpoche on Zoom in October: "Serenity Ridge Dialogues: Body, Breath and Mind" with several new presenters is October 9–11, and the online Fall Retreat on "The Five Elements" will be held October 23–25.

In addition, enjoy the article with brief excerpts on the five elements from Rinpoche's book *Healing with Form, Energy and Light*, along with some images we chose, in light of two upcoming elements retreats (the second sponsored by Ligmincha Learning). You can also find elements-related items in Ligmincha's [online store](#).

More announcements to share from Ligmincha International:

- Mark your calendar for Sunday, October 4, 11 a.m. New York time, for a Facebook Live conversation on "The Power of Compassion" with Rinpoche hosting esteemed teachers from six spiritual traditions. And don't miss the next 24-hour Full Moon Practice on October 1; the focus will be resting deeply in silent contemplation. Find out more on [cybersangha.net](#).
- Ligmincha Learning has two upcoming online courses: "The Five Elements" beginning October 30 and "Treasures of Bon History, Lineage & Practices" beginning November 14.
- In November Serenity Ridge is offering two online Zoom retreats: "The Red Garuda: Powerful Wings of the Heart" with John Jackson November 6–8, and "Tibetan Yoga for Health and Well Being" with Alejandro Chaoul-Reich November 12–15.
- TEASER alert: On November 3 two new audio books of Rinpoche's books will be released by Hay House: *Awakening the Sacred Body* and *Awakening the Luminous Mind*. Both are read by Marcy Vaughn.
- We say thanks and goodbye to longtime Serenity Ridge resident Jana Kolarikova.
- This month's international sangha sharing features two poems, one by Sibylle Reuter-Beck in Germany and one by Scott Clearwater in California.
- In the Student and Teacher article, Rinpoche answers a question about how to gain confidence in our informal practice out in the world.
- View the translation of the August VOCL in Spanish.

In Bön,
Aline and Jeff Fisher

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Bookstore & Tibet Shop

Ligmincha's online store is **currently offline** because of staffing issues.

We hope it will return soon.

In the meantime, visit the Bookstore & Tibet Shop when you come to Serenity Ridge Retreat Center. Most books published through Sacred Sky Press, Ligmincha International's publishing arm which supports books on Bon teachings and translations of texts, are available through [lulu.com](#).

About Voice of Clear Light

Voice of Clear Light is a free email publication of Ligmincha International. Your suggestions and contributions to *Voice of Clear Light* are welcome. To contact us, send an email to: voiceofclearlight@ligmincha.org

For more information about Ligmincha International, the teachings of Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, or retreats at Serenity Ridge or our other regional centers, please contact us at:

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Searching and the Nature of Self-Discovery

An Edited Excerpt from Oral Teachings Given by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, June 2020

I have been teaching from The Seven Mirrors of Dzogchen text. These dzogchen teachings and meditations show us that what we are seeking, every enlightened quality, is perfected in us. Why are we saying that what we are seeking is perfected in us?

Look at your life, look around you. Have you noticed that people are searching all of the time? At one talk that I gave, I met an elderly lady, and she was telling the story of how she's come to know all of these different teachers because she's been following so many different ones since back in the 60's and 70's. It seemed as if one could name any teacher and she could say that she has studied with them and received teachings from them, and so on. In one way that is nice – having exposure to many teachers is wonderful and very enriching. However, if all of that effort had instead been geared toward one place and toward one journey and one development and one person and one search, then that place would be fulfilling her more, and she would be stabilizing more, and her search would be getting shorter and shorter, while her finding would be growing more and more. That would be wonderful.

This person was saying, though, that she is still continuing to search for her teacher. It's been that many years, with that many teachers, and she's still not found one? There must be something wrong with the way she's using her search engine. As if maybe one digit is missing from the zip code entered in her search engine, or as if there's maybe one wrong digit in the password she's using for this search. Something is missing, right? If you cannot find a teacher after so many years of searching, then something is missing in your approach.

So it's about you, not about the search engine itself.

In life, and on the spiritual path, it's the same thing. The moment that you cannot find what it is that you are searching for, you have to look at the one who's doing the searching. It's similar to checking to see possibly what digit is missing, or what password is missing. Because something is missing there.

We are good at searching, and many of us are good at not finding. We are addicted to the search. And our addiction to the search makes it a little harder to actually find our teacher.

I remember very clearly this sense of addiction to searching when we were searching for a property that would become the retreat center in Virginia. Our realtor was very kind, sweet and always open, not caring whether we would buy or not buy. She would bring lunch, and we all had so much fun exploring and driving around searching for the right property. Then one day after a few years of steady searching, we found Serenity Ridge. Suddenly the search stopped. And I remember I kind of missed the searching, you know? It was fun to do. I was very happy to have finally found a property, but I definitely noticed that I missed this process of looking.

So we search all of the time. If you look at yourself closely you can clearly see that you're searching for your worth, your wealth. Sometimes in this search for a sense of one's wealth, it gets reduced to that of a strictly monetary wealth, so the focus of the search turns outward. Or you are searching for love, and the love gets reduced to only a romantic attraction to someone, and then again your focus turns to looking outside yourself. We can all see the limitations of a sense of love that is focused only on someone's attractions rather than on fully embracing someone.

Basically we are searching all of the time. Searching and not finding; finding and then losing. And that is painful. Or when we are not losing, then there arises the fear of losing, or the fear of change. It's all so much work! That's why sometimes monasteries can be meaningful places for people to go and just be able to say, at least officially, "This is not part of my life anymore! It's over." But that doesn't mean that once you are in a monastery you are completely peaceful, either. You could still be searching and looking.

Realizing this sense of perfection that is already within us is very important. And you cannot realize it by trying to realize it. You can only realize it when you are absolutely resting in the natural state of mind. That's why I say, those of you who feel that you are not resting enough during the practice, then you will not be able to find or be aware of the four immeasurable qualities of love, joy, compassion and equanimity in you. You'll not see them.

In the dzogchen journey it clearly seems like a lot of clarification is necessary. I realize more and more that while there is a clarity here in the teachings, there is not so much clarity for twenty-first century people, for our modernized world. The instruction needs to be a little bit different; the approach needs to



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Search



be a little bit different; the language needs to be a little bit different in order to have a more immediate, deeper connection.

And that's what has gone on throughout the centuries. Otherwise, once the Buddha had given the original teaching, there would be no reason to have any other commentaries on it afterward. However, times change, and people's way of looking changes. So each commentary is adapting more to that particular century, but essentially it's the same message, the same teaching. As for the meaning of this particular teaching – I am amazed at how timely it is, how beautiful it is, and how exactly it speaks to what is necessary right now for us.

So when you become ready, allow these four qualities to have a presence in your life. Have some sense of spontaneous love, some sense of spontaneous gratitude, some sense of spontaneous kindness and compassion. If you have a sense of the presence of these, it is because of two reasons: the view and the meditation. You're more open; that's the view. Openness. And you are more aware of that openness; that's the meditation. Awareness. With the view and meditation, then these qualities will show more of a presence. When they arise enough in you, then they become activated. And when they are activated enough, they find a story.

When you feel so much love, then it will find a story. How does it find a story? Well, for instance your eyes are closed in meditation, and you feel so much love, right? Then the moment that you open your eyes, what do you see in front of you? In my case right now, I see a computer, and I see a screen, and I see all of you, and I see a little text appearing there below, and I see a cup of coffee sitting here. And so from this quality of love, the moment I open my eyes, I say, "Oh, so many beautiful people, I love them. Wow, this is a great teaching, I am so blessed. Wow, my special cup of morning coffee, mmm I love it." You see? Love finds a story.

But when I am not open enough, then instead I drag myself in front of the computer, I struggle with opening it up, and I sit here in front of it in a miserably effortful way. Then from there, if I'd try to practice love and open my eyes, I would see all of these people, these people who look like they are miserable, too. So here my aversion would find a story! "Oh, my cup of coffee wasn't warm enough, and now it's cold already – this is just horrible. Why don't they make a cup that could hold the heat a little bit longer, no? I hate those companies. They charge a lot of money." So in this way I look out and find my story of hate.

When we find a story of hate, unfortunately we don't look at ourselves to observe what's going on with us, who we are and why we are feeling like that, why we are relating like that. That's never a question. I just objectively say, this coffee is bad, this computer is bad, and this is bad, and this is bad. And I really only look outwardly at things – projecting out, projecting all of my hatred, which is arising from a disconnection in myself and the fear of not being able to protect my pain identity. I easily feel anger and easily project that anger toward the outside and toward other people. This is what's happening. In short – this is what our life is.

An important question that we probably all are feeling in these times is: in this world that is so divided, how do we survive? How do we not feel so depressed and so helpless? What should I do? Should I do anything?

I ask myself this question, as I'm sure many of you do. A good rule of thumb, though, is that when you have nothing good to say, then don't say! When you have nothing good to do, then don't do! Whenever you cannot think straight, then don't think! Is this complicated advice? No!

In situations like these it is helpful to meditate more. Do more personal retreats. During these times of lockdown in some ways it can definitely be a beautiful gift – a time for personal development. That's why I say it's not a lockdown, it's a global retreat; it's a family retreat. And sometimes when people in the family are all relaxed, and when they are open and when they are kind and engage in positive actions, then it's a wonderful family retreat.

However, when people in the family are not open, and when people are stressed out or frustrated, and they are saying the wrong things to each other and arguing, then it's not a good family retreat. Even if that's the case, you can make it into a good retreat: simply do less, talk less, think less, and just be more, and enjoy the silence more. Even though you may naturally be very talkative and love to talk, the problem is that in that particular situation, each time you talk you end up messing up, and you don't want to mess up.

These are the emotional stages of experience that happen on a daily basis. When it happens to you like that, then it's just a matter of making a simple choice – be quiet! Right? Be quiet. Put signs up everywhere in your house reminding you of being silent. And especially have them up for the moments of the day when you're feeling the most talkative. Whatever time of day you're most talkative, the silence signs should be there saying, "I know you want to talk. Just be quiet. Enjoy the silence. Because you are not going to say many fun things. You're going to start an argument here."

Again, I think it's beautiful to be able to really feel that all of the qualities are here in us. In short, it's having a deep sense in ourselves of trust that what I am searching for – it's really in me! And from this space, you can offer that to others.

"I am so sorry that I have been asking for love from you, my partner or sibling or parent, for such a long time. So sorry, but now I realize that love is really in me! I found it – a treasure of love! And I have some for you too! I found enough not only for myself, but for so many people. It's like water from a spring that is overflowing and just pouring out, and I have enough for you."

Because you've discovered so much more in you, now you can give to them what you have always been asking *from them* over all these years.

Just like that. You see?

Wonderful.



'Serenity Ridge Dialogues: Body, Breath & Mind'

Join Us on Zoom for Special October 9–11 Symposium



When we bring our attention to our body, our breath and our mind, what happens and why? How does our relationship to sensations, thoughts and perceptions change through spiritual or energetic practices? Can science and medicine inform what and how we practice?

Join Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche and special guest Deepak Chopra, along with leading scientists, physicians and practitioners, for a live online summit October 9–11, featuring deep conversations at the

intersection of scientific and spiritual knowledge about body, breath and mind.

We'll start the event with a special free pre-event webinar on September 25, featuring a dialogue between Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche and Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, moderated by Daniel Aitken, CEO of Wisdom Publications. They will share their views on the convergence of science and Buddhism. Registration for this free preview is open to all.

The official summit will then run October 9–11, entirely online via live Zoom webinars. It will include:

- A Saturday evening conversation between Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche and Deepak Chopra.
- Three main discussions and a capstone discussion on Body, Breath and Mind with a panels of esteemed experts (see the program for details), featuring presentations of recent scientific or medical findings and a moderated discussion.
- Guided meditation sessions with Tenzin Wangyal and others throughout each day.
- Guided Tibetan yoga with Alejandro Chaoul-Reich.
- "Lunch with Rinpoche"—a special lunchtime event where we'll get to listen to Rinpoche and some of our presenters reflect on Buddhism and science in a more casual setting.
- Q&A session where the speakers will answer your questions.

[Click here to access our special webpage](#) filled with schedules, information about presenters and more.



'Fall Retreat: The Five Elements'

Online via Zoom October 21–25

According to the ancient Tibetan spiritual traditions, our planet is alive and sacred. The five natural elements – earth, water, fire, air and space – can be considered fundamental aspects of a living universe. All of our experiences, from the sensations of the physical body, to the emotions, to the most fleeting of thoughts, are said to be composed entirely of these five elements in interaction.

Join Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche for the Fall Retreat October 21–25 on the topic of "The Five Elements." Rinpoche will guide us in connecting with the elements to support us in internalizing their essential vital qualities. Through practices and meditation, we will be guided to retrieve and deeply connect with the elemental essences to nourish and restore health and vitality. This retreat is sponsored by Serenity Ridge Retreat Center and Ligmincha International.



Live simultaneous translation is available in French, German, Hungarian, Polish, Portuguese, Slovak, Spanish and Russian.

To register or for more information, [click here](#).

Please note: Ligmincha Learning is offering a six-week course, "The Five Elements: Healing with Form, Energy and Light" October 30–December 13 at a substantial discount for those who register for this online Fall Retreat.



Finding Support in the Elements

From *Healing with Form, Energy and Light* by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

Here are a few brief excerpts – heart advice from Rinpoche's book *Healing with Form, Energy and Light* – that give a glimpse into some of the wonderful connections we can have to the five elements of earth, water, fire, air and space. The sacred connections to the natural world offer us so much, and in that recognition we can offer so much back!

We also are pleased to share the news that two upcoming October retreats with Rinpoche will focus on the five elements, one on [Zoom](#) and one through [Ligmincha Learning](#). Read more about them in this issue.

We hope you enjoy the pictures, too, which are inspired by and connected to the elements!

Earth



The next time you are feeling ungrounded, scattered, insecure or weak, retrieve earth. If you are knocked off balance in your relationships or at work or in your internal processes, make the decision to immediately feel grounded, focused, solid and balanced by connecting to earth. Use the natural environment to develop these positive qualities. Visit places in which you feel grounded and internalize the quality.

Water



Feel the comfort of water, the relaxation, the ease as it flows around rocks, opens and accepts what falls in it, rests in whatever holds it.

Water is comforting. Like earth, it gives a feeling of stability. It is accepting of others, of events, of self. Water also has to do with elimination, purification and cleansing. It is associated with feelings of peace and comfort and gentle joy.

Fire



When you feel uninspired, dull or flat, connect with fire. When working with a negative habit or tendency in yourself, burn it in the fire of your practice. Use your mind to bring fire into areas of your body that are sick or wounded; use it to purify what is there and to invigorate the healing process. When you feel weak and uncertain, connect with fire for its strength and its creative vision. When you are weary or uninspired, draw on fire to give strength to the will.

Air



Air allows flow and movement. When a strong wind arises, let it blow away your negative karma. When a gentle breeze arises, let it carry away discomfort, fear and negative thoughts.

Air lifts the spirit, lifts the mood. When you're feeling down or depressed, connect to air. Air is light, unbound, pervasive. Internalize that.

Space



When you integrate with space, healing occurs. The tight, constricted knots of anger and fear, of desire and worry, dissolve. Tensions dissolve. Thoughts dissolve. Your many identities start to dissolve. The more you integrate with the space element, the clearer and more expansive your awareness becomes, unstained by whatever arises in it.

(*Healing with Form, Energy and Light* by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche is available at Ligincha's online store [here](#).)



'The Power of Compassion'

Next CyberSangha Broadcasts with Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche and Invited Guests

On October 4, Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche will host another special Facebook Live conversation with esteemed teachers from six spiritual traditions of Tibet. The next few months also offer wonderful opportunities to participate with fellow practitioners in silent contemplation and mantra recitation.

Thursday, October 1, 2020

24-Hour Full Moon Practice of 'The Fullness of Silence'

During the full moon of October 1, 2020, join Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, Ligincha International lamas and Ligincha's global community of practitioners for meditation followed by a 24-hour session of silent contemplation. It's a precious opportunity to rest deeply in the light of pure awareness – awareness that illuminates the source of positive qualities within us and all beings. The session begins with a guided meditation at 10 a.m. New York time on the day of the full moon and ends at 10 a.m. the following day. Long periods of silent contemplation will be marked by additional, periodic guided meditations.

[Learn more](#)

The final 24-Hour Full Moon Practices of 2020 will focus on the Three Heart Mantras of Bön:

Saturday, October 31: The Mantra of Clear Light

Monday, November 30: The Mantra of Liberation

Wednesday, December 30: The Mantra of Purification

Unlike Rinpoche's CyberSangha® Facebook Live broadcasts, the 24-hour full moon practices take place via Zoom, in an online meeting space. There is no cost to participate, but registration is required in advance of each 24-hour session.

[Learn more](#)

Sunday, October 4, 11 a.m. New York time

'The Power of Compassion'

In a live Internet broadcast, esteemed teachers of six spiritual traditions of Tibet discuss the power of compassion in one's life and one's spiritual practice. The conversation is in Tibetan with simultaneous translation into English and multiple other languages. Invited teachers include Yangten Rinpoche (Gelug), Gyalsab Rinpoche Choekyi Nangpa (Jonang), Khenpo Gyurmey Dorjee (Sakya), Khenpo Kunga (Kagyu), Sogan Rinpoche (Nyingma), and Pönlop Trinley Nyima Rinpoche (Bön). Hosted by Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche. You can view the broadcast on [Rinpoche's Facebook page](#) or at [cybersangha.net](#).

[Learn more and access translations](#)



Head Chef Pat Leavitt on Cooking, Creativity and Life

Serenity Ridge Kitchen Manager & Much-Loved Chef Retires



Throughout 25 years at Serenity Ridge, the headquarters of Ligmincha International located in Shipman, Virginia, one woman has been spreading joy and bliss and nourishment at almost every retreat with her constant care and creativity in the retreat center's kitchens. That woman is kitchen manager and head chef Pat Leavitt.

Over all of those years an immense trust has developed in the nourishment she provided attendees to sustain them in their days of teachings and practice during retreats held at Serenity Ridge. Her wonderful meals, steadfast dedication, creative energy and flexible behavior throughout the many years of development of the retreat center were extraordinary. From her first cooking at one of Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche's pre-Serenity Ridge retreats held outdoors at a group campground, to operating from the small kitchen in the basement of the lama house for many years at Serenity Ridge, and through the much-needed upgrade to a full commercial kitchen in the new Kunzang Khang building, she's overseen it all, and with a big heart.

Pat Leavitt prepares to make an offering to His Holiness Dawa Dhargyal Rinpoche during his summer 2019 visit to Serenity Ridge

We had a chance to sit down with Pat for a beautiful conversation about her journey and about her recent decision to retire from her position at Serenity Ridge. Thank you, Pat, from all of us! We are looking forward to seeing you in the gompa.

VOCL: What sparked your interest in cooking, Pat? Can you tell us a little about your journey in becoming a chef?

PAT: Making food and sharing food, it's such a universal expression of love. I need to express this and share my creativity with people. Plus, I feel more secure when I'm physically near the food; it's primal!

I have to say a big breakthrough for me was back in 1985 when I went to West Virginia to participate in Guitar Craft, a unique series of residential guitar seminars led by musician Robert Fripp. The center hosting us prepared all of the food. And I had this wake-up experience that this is the best vegetarian food I've ever had. There was a quality to it. Robert is a vegetarian, too, so that's what was served at all of his seminars.

I joined Guitar Craft after that and it took off. There was a lot of touring and activity going on, including a number of other residential courses. I was offered the kitchen manager spot for one of these courses, and then I kind of hopped into doing a lot more of that. So that was a big leap for me in that direction.

VOCL: What were some of the biggest challenges in managing a professional kitchen at Serenity Ridge as opposed to simply being a great chef?

PAT: First, I want to acknowledge the chefs and kitchen people who have given inspiration, support and sheer hard work, Evie Safran, Sarah Lanzman, and Aubrey Wallace, to name just a few.

The number-one challenge for me over the years was finding the people to work with and having a stable number of staff helping in the kitchen, because it's not a full-time job. It's a transient job, so for every retreat you kind of have to re-create the staff.

Another big challenge is trying to match the dietary requirements that are coming at you during each retreat. There are a lot of subsets of people who don't eat certain things. They let me know, and I want to accommodate, to put something on their plate that they are going to enjoy eating and that supports their practice.

VOCL: What has it been like working with new volunteers from the sangha at every retreat? How did you bring new people into your creative space in the kitchen?

PAT: That's one of the fun things, matching them to tasks. Their help is crucial to getting many cases of vegetables prepped. The volunteers are coming straight from teachings or meditation in the gompa so they're all bright and shiny. The other cooks enjoy the volunteers' energy and freshness, too. But they have to be reminded that the kitchen is a dangerous place. No bare feet!

VOCL: You created a convivial atmosphere in the kitchen during each retreat where everyone gave their best for the team. How were you able to do that within such a challenging and fast-paced environment? Did you bring your practice into that space?

PAT: When I first come into the kitchen in the morning, I light the shrine that sets the tone. It's like saying hello to Rinpoche in the morning, and it feels like the deities are kind of watching over this space. In those moments I am making that connection on behalf of everybody who is working in the kitchen that day. We haven't ever taken that to a formal level in the kitchen, and I don't require it of anyone else

there. Instead, it's sort of like the conductor of an orchestra; the leader of the group has to have that orientation.

There's also the personal aspiration or dedication that the people who are preparing the food invoke when they come into the space of the kitchen. And there are the meal prayers that are said before eating the food.

VOCL: What went into the planning of the menus at retreats?

PAT: Designing the menu is something that I enjoy so much. I try to match it to the group, to the season, the weather, to make it fit the moment. Let me acknowledge the patience of every retreat coordinator, rental group manager and retreat center director that's ever had to work with me! (laughter)



Pat and volunteers in old kitchen during a service retreat



VOCL: When Rinpoche requested that all meals at Serenity Ridge be vegetarian, how challenging was that for you to adapt and switch to a plant-based cuisine? And how do you see the value of plant-based eating as a way of life?

PAT: Oh my gosh, it was so much easier! Now we don't have to cook meat, fish, chicken and provide a vegetarian and a vegan option. It just made it so much easier for us.

Plant-based eating is extremely important for the individual, and even more so for the planet and the health of the bigger environmental systems. So it's very important for more people to get on board with plant-based eating. If you are eating animal products, connect with gratitude for these lives, and see if you can inform yourself about what's involved there.

VOCL: Another change that Rinpoche instigated a few years ago was to designate a few days of each retreat to be in silence. How do you feel this focus on simply sitting and eating in silence affects our meals? And did the periods of silence affect the vibe that you naturally created in the kitchen?

PAT: When people are eating in silence, they bring so much more awareness to what they're eating. And they really taste the food. They deeply enjoy the food. This is true also for other retreats that I cook for here, such as the Insight Meditation group. Their retreats are totally silent.

In the kitchen, I generally always prefer that there be only necessary talking, keeping the topic to whatever it is that we are doing right now, so that it is always relevant to the task at hand.

VOCL: What are people's biggest misconceptions of vegetarian cooking? And what recipe would you recommend someone try who might still be on the fence about vegetarian cooking?

PAT: A common misconception is for people to feel like they're not going to feel satisfied. That it's going to be boring. Or that it's too strange and unfamiliar. That they're not going to like it. People bring all their preconceptions.

A favorite dish to try? This may sound too easy, but I love the red lentil dal. I've made it a million times. It's the fall-back meal that I've made at practically every retreat. To me, it's like a real comfort food. I go to that. I still love it, you know?

Here is a link to Pat's [red lentil dal recipe](#).

VOCL: How would you suggest people channel their inner creativity in the kitchen during these challenging times when so many more people are at home?

PAT: If you feel comfortable doing it, go to the farmers market. Connect with your local food network, your local food sourcing. If you haven't already done that, try to find out who's near you who is growing stuff. Maybe you're growing something and could barter with others. My neighbor up the road from me just dropped off a jar of fig preserves; they have a fig tree. That was pretty awesome.

VOCL: What led to your decision to retire now?

PAT: It was so easy to recognize that this was the obvious thing to do at this juncture, with Serenity Ridge Retreat Center temporarily closed to onsite events during the covid-19 pandemic. I guess on some level I've been waiting for it to be the right moment. There are no retreats to cook for because of the pandemic. And the residency program at Serenity Ridge has naturally been put on hold until the center reopens.

I recently had a fabulous horoscope and astrological reading. And my eyes just went wide open – Oooh! It's like I've been given this whole new take on where I've been and where I'm going. It's really exciting. There's a fresh sense of true self, whatever that is, with this chapter of life.

In concrete terms it means I get to sit on my porch and watch the vultures, the sky. Put on music, dance. Cook to please myself and my friends. Keep rediscovering kindness, playfulness.

I've just exited a long period of serving a function within an organization: the apron has come off. Who's there? Identity may be an illusion, a learned habit, but we are who we are; we each have to respond to the human challenge in our own way. Be who's really there in the heart.

VOCL: Besides being a chef, you also are an accomplished artist, a singer/songwriter, craftsperson and activist. What's inspiring you now, and what might be up ahead on the horizon?

PAT: Rinpoche's way of communicating about how our creativity naturally arises from our open clear space just resonates with me so much. That's what I'm about. I've been doing some drawing and writing as a part of my daily process. Listening to music, rediscovering music. I'm reorganizing my household and taking ownership of my space again. So it's time to reinvent myself. I'm really happy about the change. It's been coming for a while, like a long birth tunnel.

The next piece is still unfolding. I would like to do more with all of this material that I have – the recipes and menus, and put that into some format to share. I sense that many more creative projects await.

VOCL: We loved seeing you at the online Summer Retreat on Zoom! How do you see your relationship to Rinpoche and the Bön teachings evolving at this point?

PAT: Yes, that was a great retreat! This is the time now for me to engage with Bön and with Buddhism in an individual relationship and not as a part of an organization. There is no longer the role; let all of that dissolve and I can just be purely a practitioner.

It's wonderful that we are having these worldwide online retreats and talks. The dharma is so available now. It's just an incredible time on the planet.

(For more on Pat Leavitt, read [Ton Bisscheroux's interview](#) in the Spring 2018 Issue of *Ligmincha Europe Magazine*.)



Ligmincha Learning Upcoming Online Courses

'The Five Elements' and 'Treasures of Bon History, Lineage & Practices'

Ligmincha Learning is pleased to offer upcoming online courses with Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche and Geshe Denma Gyaltzen, resident lama at Ligmincha Texas. Courses feature beautiful video teachings, guided meditations, readings, journal writing activities and the opportunity to interact with senior mentors and classmates from around the world.



October 30–December 13

The Five Elements, Healing with Form, Energy and Light with Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

In this course Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche explores how each of the five elements relates to our daily experiences, emotions and relationships. Rinpoche guides meditations for each of the elements, designed to help clear our obstacles and bring balance to our lives.

Each section of the course includes a video of Rinpoche's teaching, Rinpoche leading a guided meditation, readings from *Healing with Form, Energy and Light*, and assignments for journal writing, discussion, and formal and informal practice. The course is designed so that you may integrate study and practice into your everyday routine, learning at your own pace, yet enjoying the support of classmates and the course mentor.

A discount for this course is offered if you register for the live online Fall Retreat on the topic of "The Five Elements." (See article above.)

[Learn more/register](#)

November 14–December 20

Treasures of Bön History, Lineage & Practices with Geshe Denma Gyaltzen

Bön counts itself among the oldest spiritual traditions in the world. With origins steeped in an oral, shamanic tradition and yet deeply rooted in teachings of the buddha Tonpa Shenrap, the buddha who

preceded Shakyamuni Buddha, Bön offers practices for the challenges we face in our lives, and a complete path to enlightenment.

This course is ideal for anyone who would like to learn more about, or deepen their existing knowledge of, this ancient, profound tradition. This course is ideal for beginners who have recently connected with Bön teachings and want to know more about where it comes from and the many varied forms of practice in the tradition. It is also well suited for practitioners who have learned several practices and would like to know how all the practices fit together into a beautiful and complete system of philosophies and meditations.

[Learn more/register](#)



Ongoing and Free Courses: Ligmincha Learning offers several ongoing, free courses. They include "Starting a Meditation Practice, Parts 1 & 2"; "The True Source of Healing"; "Living with Joy, Dying in Peace"; and "Transforming Your World Through Service."



Two Online Retreats in November

'The Red Garuda' with John Jackson and 'Tibetan Yoga' with Alejandro Chaoul-Reich

Please join us in November for two special online retreats via Zoom. John Jackson will hold a weekend retreat from November 7–8 on "The Red Garuda: Powerful Wings of the Heart." Alejandro Chaoul-Reich will hold a four-day retreat on "Tibetan Yoga for Health and Well-Being" from November 12–15. All are welcome.

November 7–8, 2020

The Red Garuda: Powerful Wings of the Heart with John Jackson



Mythologies throughout the world recount the story of the eagle-man, the one who transcends and rises above mundane existence to connect with the wisdom of the spacious, luminous sky. The garuda represents this transcendent quality present in all humans, that which empowers and removes all obstacles to our spiritual development.

The Red Garuda is especially known as a healing practice for emotional and physical problems, both for ourselves and others, for the fiery strength of enlightened energy quickly burns away all obstacles. It also is known for its ability to resolve issues related to disturbances of the nagas, the beings of the waters.



Please join us for this weekend retreat via Zoom and connect with the power, strength and courageous wisdom that lie within your innermost being.

[Learn more](#)

November 12–15, 2020

Tibetan Yoga for Health and Well-Being with Alejandro Chaoul-Reich



Beginners and experienced students alike are invited to join us November 12–15, 2020 for instruction in the ancient practice of Tibetan yoga (trul khor), from the Bön A-tri Dzogchen tradition. This course can stand alone and also will be the first in a series of teachings to take place over the next three years.

Tibetan yoga can serve as a powerful support for all spiritual practitioners, not only those with an interest in physical yogas. In the Tibetan spiritual traditions, body, speech/breath and mind are known as the

three doors to enlightenment or the natural state. The contemplative physical movements of Tibetan yoga of the A-tri tradition enable us to enter all three doors through a single practice, offering a powerful, skillful means for clearing the obstacles and obscurations to openness and clarity in meditation

practice.

[Learn more](#)

Watch a Hay House podcast on Tibetan Yoga for Health and Well-Being done recently with Alejandro



Expanding the Community

An Interview with Alejandro Chaoul-Reich



In this interview Ton Bisscheroux explores with Alejandro Chaoul-Reich the possibilities to expand the worldwide Ligmincha International community, and bring the benefits of the Bön teachings to an expanded audience.

You teach for many different groups. Do you adjust your way of teaching depending on the group in front of you?

Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche and Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche have been great teachers for me in this way to reach out to different audiences. They teach according to the tradition, and they always ask themselves how to bring it out so people can understand. For example, you see that Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche talks a lot about his own experiences with his son, Senghe, and does it in a way that is related to the Bön text or teaching he is teaching from.

So, yes, I teach differently in different groups. In a Ligmincha group we always start with guru yoga. In The 3 Doors, MD Anderson or the Jung Center, I don't do that because those people are not always familiar with that prayer. Even when I teach Tibetan Yoga for a Ligmincha sangha there are always new people, so I start with something simple. I ask them to connect with their heart or heart-mind in a way that is inspired by the tradition. In fact, I started to do this with people with cancer, because I knew I had to bring it in a layperson's way. And I did this with the support of Rinpoche.

Some people relate to research and how there is evidence that meditation can help for stress and burnout. I bring this to many groups of healthcare providers (physicians, nurses, medical students, etc.). I recently spoke about burnout to a group of lawyers, a group of translators and interpreters, middle school teachers, and to community workers. In all these groups stress and burnout is a big issue. I reframe the issue and invite them to use meditation practices as a different kind of CPR – Compassionate Professional Renewal – and from there to flourish like a lotus. The lotus is a good example of having been born in the mud; it still flourishes. So whatever difficult or stressful situation can be like mud, and in that mud they can grow. From there, I feel that it is not just seeing oneself as a lotus, but the importance of seeing the community as a huge pond of lotuses.



Can you tell us about the new project, The Power of Community, that you started recently?

This started during the pandemic. At the Jung Center, we used to have monthly meditations from different traditions, which are open for everyone. The concept of sangha or community is important, but there is no sense of being Bönpo, Buddhist, Hindu or whatever. We invite people to participate in meditation – something that is for us a daily thing but for many is uncharted territory. The question is: how do we let people who are not within these traditions understand the differences that meditation can make in their lives? The other part is clarifying the intention. In a place like the Jung Center they do a lot of reflection, reading, listening and action. In the Buddhist traditions we talk about dharma. Recently I listened to H.H. the Dalai Lama, and he reminded me again of listening, reflecting and meditating. Meditators know that there is a sense of a deeper aspect of connection that intellectual mind does not get to.

I have been teaching at the Jung Center for 20 years now. Our monthly meditation attracted a lot of people and sometimes we had 70 to 90 participants. We felt we were giving something that people really needed. When Covid hit, we started to offer weekly online meditations of an hour, half an hour or 15 minutes. For me it was really weird to offer such a short meditation, but for a lot of people half an hour was too much. We also gave the meditations a topic, which provided space for people to do two things: they can unplug from work and drop in and to meet people on Zoom and say hello. And we let them know that what we are doing in meditation is not pushing away, but opening our hearts and giving space, e.g., when the theme was "hosting fear



and overcoming anxiety by cultivating openheartedness.” When the whole issue with George Floyd came up and the Black Lives Matter movement became important, we were a place of social responsibility and action, where everyone could talk freely in a safe space. We also added different instructors from Houston, to give the people of the community different flavors. This approach has proven to be very useful.

Do you offer the Bön teachings in a traditional way?

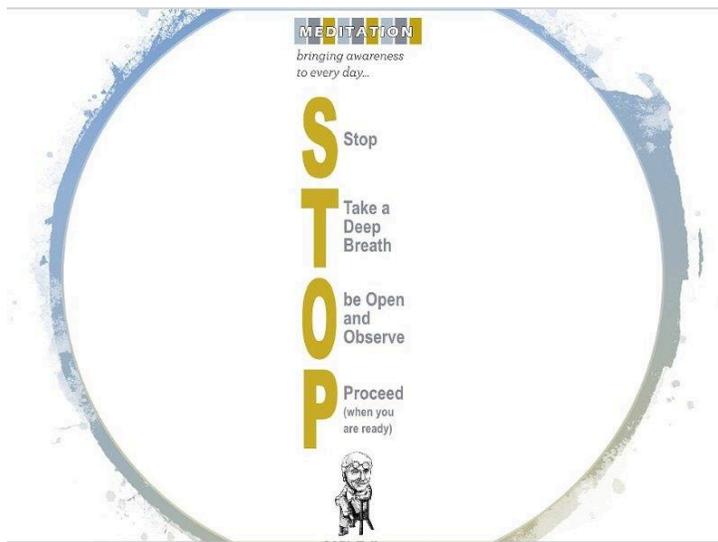
The resident lamas at Ligmincha tend to teach in a more traditional way; in The 3 Doors we are exploring a little more and every teacher brings in his or her own expertise; and at the Jung Center it is like a playground. I am always very clear what the source is of my meditations. I am very grateful that I have been able to teach in very different settings in my life, from a more traditional setting like Ligmincha, to The 3 Doors, to teaching from the podium. I’ve given lectures with a PowerPoint, shown research in conferences, and sat with participants on the cushion to meditate. The Jung center provides such a great space to bring all these different aspects, both from Jung’s inspiration as well as other traditions.

What have you done to help broaden the sangha?

First of all, you have to realize that Ligmincha is not for everyone, The 3 Doors or Lishu Institute is not for everyone; nothing is for everyone. Having different containers allows people to say, this is where I feel at home. And they don’t exclude each other; many people from Ligmincha also participate in The 3 Doors.

When new people participate, sometimes I adjust my language. I always try to understand what is important for people in the sangha or community. At Ligmincha it is important to start with guru yoga, but for some people guru yoga is weird. Instead we could ask, “What is your intention when you sit on your cushion?” Giving a class at the Jung Center, when I talked about the lineage, somebody from the Native American community said that they do the same with their ancestors. So we can invite participants to connect to the lineage or to the ancestors. Broadening the community is a matter of finding the language that people understand and can connect to. For me the Refuge Tree is important, but many are not familiar with that. At the Jung Center and The 3 Doors and less at Ligmincha, when we are in the position of teachers, we bring in our own stuff, and we do that in a safe space, a confidential space. I value those possibilities.

In order to fully integrate we need to invite more people of different religions, of different traditions, so we can knit together, rather than say, “I think this will be good for you.” We are creating more diversity in The 3 Doors and in Ligmincha, because for a long time we attracted mostly white, middle-class audiences. So we needed to extend to other socioeconomic classes as well as people of different ethnicities, and giving things to them that are relevant for them. And it is also important to get young people engaged. They do things differently from people from our generation. At the Jung Center many young people started coming to the meditations after a young staff person joined and got involved and reached out to his friends.



When people are working so much that they barely have time to sit and meditate, we have to ask ourselves what can we offer to them that is helpful. Can they use the **STOP** formula? Following the acronym, *Stop* whatever you are doing in that moment, then *Take* a deep breath, *Observe* how you feel. Then, only when you are ready, *Proceed* to what you need to do next. These short meditations can serve as an oasis in a long day, a way to connect and breathe into a sense of inner space in our inner home. The challenge is finding ways that are appropriate.

A way to make meditation more accessible is to have participants pay what they can afford to pay, because most young people don't have much to spend. At the same time, people who can pay more do so and support so we can sustain our programs. We do that at the Jung Center, and it is really, pay what the heart wants.

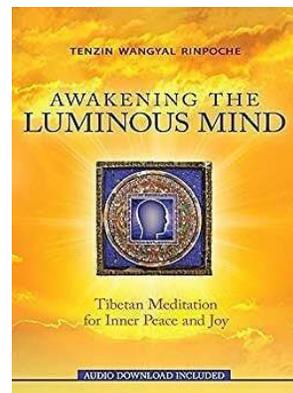
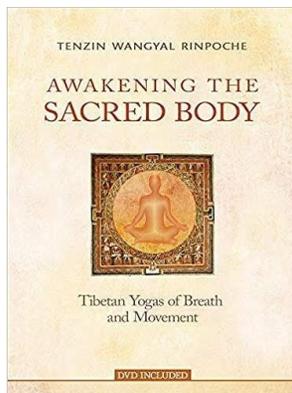
Alejandro Chaoul-Reich, PhD, a senior student of Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, has been teaching Tibetan yoga (trul khor) retreats for more than 20 years and is a senior teacher with The 3 Doors. He is currently the director of the Jung Center's Mind Body Spirit Institute and is an adjunct professor and at the University of Texas (UT) MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston and in UT's Medical School. He teaches meditation to cancer patients and their supporters and is involved in research using tsa lung trul khor with cancer patients and their caregivers. He also is a contemplative Fellow of the Mind & Life Institute.



Teaser Alert!

Two New Audiobooks of Rinpoche's Available Soon

We are happy to let you know that new audio versions of two of Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche's books will be released by Hay House on November 3, 2020. *Awakening the Sacred Body* and *Awakening the Luminous Mind* are both read by senior teacher Marcy Vaughn, who also edited both books.



The audiobooks will be available for purchase directly through the [Hay House website](#) and also via Audible (Amazon), Apple and various other audiobook sellers.

Two other audiobooks by Rinpoche, also read by Marcy, are available: *The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep* and *Spontaneous Creativity*.



Serenity Ridge Will Miss You!

Special Thanks to Longtime Resident Jana Kolarikova



Jana with Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche in the Bön Jour Café

At the end of July, Serenity Ridge paused its residency program and said good-bye to our residents, including longtime resident Jana Kolarikova. Serenity Ridge and Ligmincha International extend our deepest gratitude to Jana for her enthusiastic service.

As a resident, Jana dedicated herself to practice and deepening her knowledge of Bön as well as providing five hours of service each day. Jana is best known as the person working in the Ligmincha bookstore. Jana also was instrumental in managing and facilitating the Serenity Ridge and Ligmincha International live and online auctions and an online store. Most recently, she helped create and worked in the Serenity Ridge Bön Jour Café, a comfortable gathering place for retreatants.

We miss her presence but look forward to seeing her back at the center for our onsite retreats once the center is open again.

Jana shared these sentiments before leaving. "When I came to Serenity Ridge I thought it was for three months. I even tried to leave but always found myself pulled back to the center by some kind of karmic boomerang. My heart and soul received a 'callback' every time.

"I knew little about Bön when I came to Serenity Ridge. I only knew of Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche from his books and online teachings. From my first online encounter, I was struck by his warmth. Not long afterward, I was filled with joy by discovering and experiencing an indescribable feeling — the existence of dzogchen.

"To sit in the gumpa at my first summer retreat and watch Rinpoche live was like having a superstar in front of my eyes since I knew him just from the screen. Three years later and many retreats, months of study, dozens of books read and countless new connections (human and divine as well), I am a very different person. I had found my precious Bön home, both literally and metaphorically. I live Bön, like indestructible truth. And Rinpoche is still a superstar for me but, first of all, he became my precious spiritual father. I feel blessed.

"Being in service at Serenity Ridge was a beautiful and adventurous journey. I never imagined that I had a capacity for and would get an opportunity to manifest what I did during my three years there. And my deep appreciation belongs to Sue, Shelly and Rob, who made it all possible. I look forward to seeing all of you who I have met at Serenity Ridge in one form or another again soon. My spiritual Serenity home and all its family left the Ridge with me in my heart."

Serenity Ridge offers a residency program for those wanting to deepen their practice through living in community at the center and engaging in service as spiritual practice. At this time of the pandemic, the center is not open for residencies or to the public. Residencies will resume when the center reopens. You can learn more on the [Serenity Ridge website](#).



International Sangha Sharing

Poetry from the Heart

This issue features two poems. The first is by Sybille Reuter-Beck, presented both in German and then in English with help from Birrell Walsh on the English translation. The second is by Scott Clearwater in California. VOCL invites you to share a short poem of yours that has arisen through your connection to Bön. Please limit your writing to 40 lines or less. Just send it to our [email](#).

Hier bist Du, mein Geliebter.

Tief in mir
 umhüllt Du mich mit Deiner Freude
 und tief in Dir
 eröffnet sich der Sternenhimmel mir.
 Staunend betrete ich den Raum,
 den Du mir schenkst
 und weite mich mit jedem Atemzug,
 mit dem Du mich erfüllst.
 Das Außen, das Du einst warst,
 wird mein Leben nun,
 mein Innen, das ich vermeinte einst zu kennen,
 das wirst nun Du.
 Und sanft wie Deine Hand auf meiner Haut
 zerreißt ein Schleier,
 den zuvor ich niemals sah:
 Kein Innen,
 kein Außen –
 unendliche Weite.
 Ekstase auf leisen Schwingen.
 Ruhige Glückseligkeit,
 endlose Heimat,
 jetzt, da Du Dich zeigst, mein Geliebter,
 darf ich wieder und wieder
 mich zu Dir wenden
 und lass uns wieder und wieder
 eröffnen den Raum lebendiger Unendlichkeit.



Here you are, my beloved.

Deep inside me you envelop me with your joy
And deep inside you
The starry sky opens to me.

Wondering I enter the space you offer me
And grow wider with each breath
you suffuse through me.

The outside that once you were
Becomes my life.
My inside that I thought I knew
becomes you.

And soft as your hand on my skin
A veil tears apart
I have never seen before:

No inside,
no outside—
endless wideness.
Ecstasy on silent wings.

Quiet bliss,
infinite home,

now that you appear, my beloved,
again and again may I turn to you
and again and again
let us open the space
of vivid infinity.

– **Sybille Reuter-Beck**

Because

Just rest because everything is possible.
Because everything is possible it is unobstructed.
Because it is unobstructed it is unasserted.
Because it is unasserted it is unbiased.
Because it is unbiased there is a buddha.
Because there is a buddha there is no cyclic existence.
Because there is no cyclic existence there is no causality.
Because there is no causality there is no duality.
Because there is no duality there is no suffering.
Because there is no suffering there is no subject.
Because there is no subject there is no doing.
Because there is no doing it is perfect.

Because it is perfect there is no doing.
Because there is no doing there is no subject.
Because there is no subject there is no suffering.
Because there is no suffering there is no duality.
Because there is no duality there is no causality.
Because there is no causality there is no cyclic existence.
Because there is no cyclic existence there is a buddha.
Because there is a buddha it is unbiased.
Because it is unbiased it is unasserted.
Because it is unasserted it is unobstructed.
Because it is unobstructed everything is possible.
Because everything is possible just rest.

– **Scott Clearwater, July 2020**



Student and Teacher

Together on the Path

As students on the Tibetan Bön Buddhist path, we offer our teachers a range of questions from the simple to the complex. Here is a question regarding gaining confidence in our practice and bringing it into the world.

Student: I've been meditating every day since last October and I have been able to get into deep refuge, feeling luminous and nonbiased. I feel like anything can arise in my meditation and I don't have to go toward it and I don't have to pull back. What is the best way of bringing that out into the world, into informal practice, and how can I develop confidence in this?



Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche: First, whenever we are going inward and resting in our inner refuge, we feel protected from all the movement, being in the stillness. We feel protected from all the news and talking and noises, because we are deeply protected in the power of silence. We feel protected from all the thoughts and emotions when we are deeply protected in that indestructible sacred space. So we feel more protected being in that refuge.

The moment you come out of that, the moment you come out in the world, the moment you have interactions with someone, the moment you face your famous person, the moment you face noise, traffic, your boss, your deadlines – then the story changes a little and that protective mood is no longer there. The moment we are facing these things in our ordinary life and we feel threat or challenge, that shakes our confidence.

The number-one reason why outer circumstances shake your confidence and stability is that we do not have a right relationship with them. We see them as the enemy and destroyer. We don't see them as ourselves or our friend, as our support, as our resource; we don't see that. That's where, many times, things go wrong, when we go out and we think *enemy*. Right?

During a retreat, people are having a wonderful time, feeling great, and then the retreat is over. They go to the parking lot, and when they open the door, they smell their car. Just one single smell of their samsara in their car triggers the whole world of samsara out there. Right? That's a powerful smell. Why does that smell have so much power? That smell reminds us of all of samsara. It reminds us of pain, of conflict, maybe of those moments of loneliness, or of aggression in traffic. Whatever it's reminding you of, it is not reminding you of your true nature, it's reminding you of pain and samsara. But it can remind you of your nature. It can remind you.

In short then, your informal practice is that every time anything triggers your pain, don't look at it as an enemy. Look at each experience as a reminder: *Thank you so much for reminding me! Thank you so much for exercising my strength. Thank you so much for testing me; I want to make sure I got it right or wrong. I want to make sure to test my confidence.*

In each case, somebody is testing you. Somebody is supporting you. Somebody is opening a door for you. Somebody is showing you a way. If you look at those situations as a friend, they will not take away your confidence. Rather, they will support your confidence. So just have a little extra awareness there, all right?



Spanish Translation of VOCL

Link to August Issue Now Available

Look for the [translations of Voice of Clear Light newsletters](#) at the top of the [VOCL website](#).

[Read VOCL in Spanish](#)

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