

THE VOICE OF CLEAR LIGHT

News and Inspiration from Ligmincha Institute

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For easy reading, we recommend that you print out "The Voice of Clear Light."

A printable PDF version of this month's edition of VOCL, in readerfriendly newsletter format complete with color photographs, will be available online later in the month. Please check the link for VOCL on Ligmincha Institute's home page at www.ligmincha.org. You can also access an archive of previous issues at:

<http://ligmincha.org/study/vocl.html>

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HOW TO ENTER INTO VOLUNTEERING

An interview with Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

In this interview conducted during a recent work retreat at Ligmincha's Serenity Ridge retreat center, Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche discusses the ideal approach to volunteering for a dharma center.

VOCL: In your experience Rinpoche, is there a certain attitude that helps a person to engage well with volunteering in a spiritual community such as Ligmincha?

TENZIN WANGYAL RINPOCHE: Particularly in a spiritual community, or sangha, volunteering not only has to do with what you're trying to accomplish for the organization, but it also has to do with what you're trying to accomplish internally for yourself. How you enter into this activity is important. An accountant from Mexico once told me that when he comes to a work retreat at Serenity Ridge, he pays other people to do his accounting work, flies in, and works for a week. When he sweats here through his physical labor, he says, he feels like he is purifying himself in a sweat lodge. He is coming from a clear place.

Whether you come to paint or clean or do gardening, you are coming with a different perspective. As you touch the dust, you are leaving your place of ego with a sense of openness and a full heart. From a dharma point of view, you are also coming with some sense of purification, some sense of meditation, some sense of focus, some sense of being

alone, of having an internal sense of reflection.

In a dharma center you have to have this sort of attitude. Working for the telephone company you may go in to do your job, focus on a good outcome and maybe on having fun, and that's it. Fun is important. But here, the work should really be a part of the spiritual practice. When you serve at the place of the dharma, at the place you consider a sacred space of your tradition, at the place where your master abides, it's a place of practice. You come to egolessly be available for any need.

Also, if you believe in the possibility of pervading some sort of vibe, some sort of spiritual energy, some of the ways to send out this spiritual light or quality are through form - through the physical organization by which the teachings, spiritual practices and enlightened qualities are transmitted. Some people are able to help with graphic design, some help with Internet work, some help with bookkeeping, or fund-raising, or retreat coordination. Some are stuffing envelopes, cleaning the meditation center or making furniture. By helping this organization in whatever ways you are able to help, you are contributing something to this spiritual energy. If the work you do has made a difference in your life, it will make a difference in many hundreds of thousands of lives just as it has in yours. Often the only way to successfully reach a goal is when there are enough people volunteering to accomplish that. But one small piece can be a great contribution.

VOCL: Is there a type of attitude that can make it less likely a person will succeed over time as a volunteer?

TWR: From a dharma or practice point of view, there is no attitude or trait in a volunteer that will not bring some kind of success. If someone comes to work with a lot of enthusiasm, a lot of promises they want to keep, and for whatever reason they are not able to come through, I always have said it's fine with me. It is completely and totally okay, as long as this person doesn't keep doing the same things in the same way. That is the learning part of volunteering in the dharma. In a way, generally it's most important to volunteer for something you are really open to regardless of the kind of job - something you will be joyful doing. It's also important to commit yourself only to what you are able to accomplish. Having that clarity is good. When you cannot meet your commitment, then you let other people know in advance this is how it's going to be so you are left with a proper conclusion and sense of respect.

VOCL: From your early days here in the West, how have you seen volunteering manifesting? What was your experience of it? Is there something or someone you feel particularly grateful for?

TWR: Of course I'm very grateful for people who have been volunteering since the beginning. These are people who have not been volunteering just from time to time - they have been consistently serving from the

start. They have never left me. Their attitude does not change with the seasons, it is like a single face; there is always the same sense of peacefulness, the same kind of enthusiasm, the same kind of support. In Tibet we have a saying: It is a sign of a good person when you see them every day in the same way - they are not changing their personality so fast. Some people are able to offer their help without needing anything back in return, such as acknowledgement, recognition or power. They come only with a pure heart connection, and do their specific tasks regardless of the presence of the watcher. If someone is helping me, it shouldn't make any difference if I am there or not.

When I go to Yongdzin Rinpoche's center in France, even for a few days of painting work, that's where I like to go from - with an open heart, to tame myself. I am only someone who is trying to get a job done for the service, trying to do this with one's own sweat, enthusiasm, hard work, warm heart. There is no sense of needing anything in return. It's easy to say these things - people usually have these qualities or they don't, or they can cultivate them through practice.

VOCL: What is the best way for a person to make volunteering a longterm part of their life and keep from burning out?

TWR: You have to keep enough openness and enthusiasm, enough fire within yourself. Sometimes physically I feel exhausted but I never feel burned out. Whatever the job is, just make sure you are able to perform it at a level you will be satisfied with. And if you have any kind of resistance, it is important to learn to say no.

VOCL: How much does Ligmincha depend on the help of volunteers?

TWR: How Ligmincha came to exist, of course it was one hundred percent from everybody's help. But are we dependent on it? No, I don't feel that way. The feeling of depending on volunteers should not be there. For example, until recently we raised money for all those years without any formal fund-raising. Volunteering is about enthusiasm, consistency, trust in hard work. If you keep on doing it in that way it comes to fruition. That lively, fresh spark should be there all the time. In a way, what we have done at Ligmincha over quite a short period of time is the outcome of that consistency, enthusiasm and energy.

A VOLUNTEER'S PERSPECTIVE

Donna Russo first met Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche four years ago at Omega Institute, and in the time since she has volunteered in a variety of ways for Ligmincha. A few months ago Donna agreed to take on a major volunteer responsibility as retreat coordinator for Ligmincha's Serenity Ridge retreat center in Nelson County, Va. Recently VOCL asked Donna if she might share with us her perspectives related to volunteering.

VOCL: How did you first become involved in volunteering at Ligmincha?

DONNA RUSSO: For me, the caretaking time at retreats at Serenity Ridge

was a first little glimpse of what it was like to be involved in volunteering. It was a gratitude practice for me. That whole sense of community involvement always resonated with me. It may not seem like it to others, but I'm really shy about making new connections. Caretaking was a built-in way to make me feel I was connecting, and a way to feel I was giving back.

I think it was two summers ago Kim asked me to do bathroom duty at the retreat. I had been working in the kitchen and had the expectation that cleaning bathrooms would be onerous. But something that should have been so mundane or even unpleasant actually turned out to be fun. I was working with two other people, so it felt like a communal effort. And it was instantly satisfying. In time I volunteered to help Ellen, and later Candace, with the fund-raising auctions at Serenity Ridge, and I also volunteered to help Candace look for grants.

During a retreat when you're receiving these beautiful teachings, immediately you think, What can I give here that in some little way can let me give back, and help me start to feel connected, energetically connected?

VOCL: As you've continued volunteering at Ligmincha, what kind of relationship or effect has it had on your view, your meditation practice, or your life?

DR: For me, like for anyone, the connection to spiritual practice grows over time. At one point I really started to feel like I wanted to be in a spiritual community, deepening my connection with Rinpoche and giving to the sangha. A little more than a year ago I decided to start working part time so I could have more time to develop my meditation practice and my connection.

One of the hardest things about volunteering for me was learning where I could be useful. There are so many people out there who want to contribute in some way, but they don't know who to ask or what to offer. Often, they don't realize they have a skill that can be of value.

When Gabriel asked me to serve as retreat coordinator I hesitated. I'm in school, I have a job, I just didn't know if I'd be able to give the kind of effort I'd want to give. But this is the kind of activity that, if your intention and heart are in the right place, it all works out. It's hard work, but instead of being draining it's energizing and inspiring. You actually end up having more time and energy for it than you thought you could. I just had to trust that that would happen. It's been a big leap of trust and faith.

I said to myself, If I really believe in these teachings I have to live them, I have to act them, otherwise it's just talk. So, have the space and go for it - that's kind of what I did. Once you volunteer and you realize you're connected to the teacher by doing it, it's such a gift.

VOCL: How does the way you approach volunteering differ from your approach to your usual day-to-day work?

DR: When I'm volunteering at Serenity Ridge, I try to connect my heart to Rinpoche. I try to get out of the way, and to pick up on what I think would be my best connection to him and what he would want from me. I guess I pray that what's going to come out is going to support Rinpoche and the work, and try to be as clear and out of the way as possible. The blessing is to be able to notice when you're not in that place, and try to clear that, try to make your connection as clear as you can at the time.

VOCL: Is there something else you think would be helpful for other potential volunteers to know - people who may be thinking about becoming involved, but who see all these people already taking charge, and may wonder if there really is a need for more assistance?

DR: I actually felt that way myself when I first started. I felt connected to Rinpoche, but I was feeling isolated. That's why it means a lot to me personally to welcome people to retreats. People have been incredibly generous to me in offering opportunities to help, and that's what I want to offer back - to give other people opportunities.

People also don't realize that even the smallest thing - or what they conceive of as being small - that this one particular thing may be so needed and important at a given time. The right person for filling that need is like fitting the right key to a lock, the right tool to a task.

It is so important to have people around us who are different. Each person has their own special talent, their own special view of the world, their own special energy and way of being, which is really essential not only for the job at hand, but also to make everything work better.

Sometimes you may feel you have to be like somebody else. But actually, it's all about getting a better understanding of which role is meant for you - and there is clearly a place for you. The more people who become involved, the richer it is.

Ligmincha Institute

CURRENT VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

COPY EDITOR/PROOFREADER (posted 5/7/07)

Ligmincha has a current need for an experienced and qualified copy editor and/or proofreader. While the position is temporary, it has the possibility of becoming long-term. Work can be done from any location; Internet access is necessary.

Existing volunteer staff put out a steady stream of information in the form of print brochures, newsletter and magazine articles, Web pages, print advertisements, meditation and study supports, and more. The amount of material generated continues to increase, and we continually aim to adhere to professional quality standards. Therefore, this is an opportunity for a committed person with the right skill set to make a significant contribution to helping Ligmincha and Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche keep sangha members and the public informed about teachings

and other offerings/activities.

Current needs include ongoing proofreading of the pages of Ligmincha's Web site, and/or once-a-month proofreading of Ligmincha's monthly enewsletter, Voice of Clear Light. We ask for a commitment of at least three to four hours per month. Specifically, we are looking for someone who:

- * has at least two years' experience in copy editing/proofreading
- * is highly detail-oriented
- * is familiar with AP Style (preferred) or another mainstream stylebook
- * is dedicated to turning around work in a reasonably prompt, reliable manner
- * is open to a period of ongoing training and assessment.

If you are interested in the position and feel it's right for you, please contact Polly Turner, co-director of communications for Ligmincha, at pturner2@aol.com.

CLEANING ASSISTANT (posted 5/7/07)

Volunteer(s) are now needed for one-time or ongoing help in cleaning Ligmincha Institute's meditation center in downtown Charlottesville. There is an immediate need for washing windows and deep-cleaning the refrigerator and stove. Ongoing needs include vacuuming, dusting, polishing the shrine items, straightening up shelves of dharma materials, etc.

This work is indispensable for creating the right setting for group meditation practices, classes and other activities of the center, as well as in directly supporting Rinpoche's work at his Ligmincha office. For more information about this position, please contact Lee Hartline at ligmincha@aol.com or 434-977-6161.

GARDENING AND LANDSCAPING ASSISTANT (posted 5/7/07)

Volunteer(s) are needed on a one-time or ongoing basis to help at the Serenity Ridge Retreat Center in Nelson County, Va. Specific needs currently include:

- general planting of annuals and weeding and mulching of many gardens
- trimming and shaping some shrubs (loppers are available)
- small sumac tree cutting and removal to clear the view (chainsaw is necessary)
- cutting up small trees for firewood (chainsaw and splitter would be ideal). These trees have already been cleared of limbs and are stacked neatly and taking up space in our parking area.
- clearing paths and tenting spaces in the tenting areas.

This gardening/landscaping work supports our teachers and retreat participants by offering a beautiful, welcoming and serene setting for contemplation during retreats. Experience is required for any use of power tools, and work is performed at your own risk.

If you feel you can help with any of these tasks at Serenity Ridge,

please contact Lee Hartline at ligmincha@aol.com or 434-977-6161 for more information.

PARTICIPATION FROM THE HEART – excerpts from the writings of several Buddhist teachers

From “Ruling Your World” by Sakyong Mipham:

There is a blue buddha known as Samantabhadra, the all-good. Blue represents the basic nature of all beings, like a cloudless sky. That blue we see when we look high up - that’s who we are. When we rest in the natural energy of our mind, doubt and hesitation evaporate, and we can experience that goodness. Like the sky, it’s empty; therefore it can accommodate everything. Hesitating about who we really are or hanging out with the wrong friends - whether they are people or the negativity in our mind - is like the clouds. We see clouds and take them to be real, but behind the clouds the sun is shining, illuminating the world. The Great Eastern Sun is our own wisdom. The more we choose to trust and nourish it, the less influenced we are by the clouds.

As we stabilize our certainty in basic goodness, we are able to extend ourselves to others with genuine purpose. One of the Tibetan words for friend means “helper.” In Tibet, the first thing we do upon meeting someone is to offer this intention in the form of a white scarf that symbolizes friendship. We greet everyone with the hope and wish of helping them first. The thought of helping others is compassion, knowing how we can do it is wisdom, and doing something about it is courage. The wish-fulfilling jewel of wisdom and compassion is the basis of true friendship.

From “How to See Yourself as You Really Are” by His Holiness the Dalai Lama:

When you practice expanding love and compassion keep in mind that love and compassion themselves and the persons who are their objects are like a magician’s illusions in that they appear to exist solidly in and of themselves but do not. If you see them as inherently existent, this view will keep you from fully developing love and compassion. Instead, view them as like illusions, existing one way but appearing another. This perspective will deepen both your insight into emptiness and the healthy emotions of love and compassion, so that within such understanding you can engage in effective compassionate activity.

From “Ethics for the New Millennium” by His Holiness the Dalai Lama:

There is thus an important distinction to be made between what we might call ethical and spiritual acts. An ethical act is one where we refrain from causing harm to others’ experience or expectation of happiness. Spiritual acts we can describe in terms of those qualities mentioned earlier of love, compassion, patience, forgiveness, humility,

tolerance, and so on which presume some level of concern for others' well-being. We find that the spiritual actions we undertake which are motivated not by narrow self-interest but out of our concern for others actually benefit ourselves. And not only that, but they make our lives meaningful. At least this is my experience. Looking back over my life, I can say with full confidence that such things as the office of Dalai Lama, the political power it confers, even the comparative wealth it puts at my disposal, contribute not even a fraction to my feelings of happiness compared with the happiness I have felt on those occasions when I have been able to benefit others.

From "A Heart as Wide as the World" by Sharon Salzberg:

In our own journey to remove the habitual tendencies of greed, hatred, and delusion, we often find power in solidarity. We can help each other do together what any one of us might feel that we cannot do alone. In Buddhist texts, "having good friends" is emphasized as a strong contributing force to sustaining positive qualities, such as love or wisdom. Having good friends, teachers, mentors, and community helps us by providing a sense of solidarity, shared values, supporting one another, of inspiring and reminding one another.

From "It's Up to You" by Dzigar Kongtrul:

From our true identity arises the true focus of our life: the aspiration to benefit others. Context doesn't matter here, because we are true to ourselves wherever we are. We are not searching for anything, and so we feel at home anywhere. We're not looking for companions, so we can enjoy the companionship of our mind, the lineage, and the Three Jewels. And we don't need a "special" relationship, because we feel a kinship with all beings. We have found the true focus for a meaningful life, which is the welfare of all living beings. By expanding our mind beyond the confines of ego, we find our place in the world. In this way, we bring our actions together with our deepest intention.

From "Awakening Loving-Kindness" by Pema Chodron:

Trungpa Rinpoche gave a definition of taking refuge that was pinned up on our bulletin board the other day. It begins with an absolute statement: "Since all things are naked, clear from obscurations, there is nothing to attain or realize." But then Rinpoche goes further and makes it very practical. "The everyday practice is simply to develop a complete acceptance and openness to all situations and emotions and all people. A complete acceptance and openness to all situations and emotions and to all people, experiencing everything totally without reservations or blockages, so that one never withdraws or centralizes into oneself." That is why we practice.

SOURCES:

Sakyong Mipham. "Ruling Your World." New York: Morgan Head Books, 2005.

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His Holiness the Dalai Lama. "Ethics for the New Millennium." New York: Riverhead Books, 1999.

Sharon Salzberg. "A Heart as Wide as the World." Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1997.

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Pema Chodron. "Awakening Loving-Kindness." Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1996.

SANGHA SHARING

Inspired

The recent ngondro practice retreat led by Marcy Vaughn surpassed my expectations. I am inspired to write to our sangha members who have had previous ngondro transmission to encourage attendance at the next great opportunity for group practice on May 18-20.

As I have returned to my work this week, my body feels softer and more alive, my mind is clearer and more relaxed, and my spirit is light and open. External events seem to be moving with ease, and even the rough moments - of which there have been a few these past four days since the retreat - arise and dissolve more easily, and I feel calmer and more balanced than I have at many other times.

During the three-day retreat, mornings were devoted to practicing the entire ngondro from start to finish, with Marcy guiding each section. Sometimes she added a pertinent reading or a lengthened prayer. For instance she shared with us a page-long teaching on the "ten devils," a teaching Khen Rinpoche had offered at the most recent ngondro teaching at Serenity Ridge this past November. Next we practiced the cho section to cut and offer our own "ten devils" (i.e., obstacles to purity).

Since Marcy has been the umdze for Khen Rinpoche at the last three ngondro retreats, she is able to pass on the jewels of Khenpo's autumn teachings to those of us who could not attend every year.

The afternoons were structured more freely, with the focus being more on accumulations of the prayers, mantras, prostrations and mandala offerings. We kept a running tally of our accumulations as well as our offering of Tenzin Rinpoche's long-life prayer and long-life mantra, and adding our tallies together, we offered them to our teacher, Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, in a card.

The Zhang Zhung Ngondro as taught by Ligmincha Institute has been evolving since I learned it in the fall of 2003, due or related to visits and teachings by Geshe Lungrig Gyaltzen from Menri Monastery in

India and by Khenpo Rinpoche of Triten Norbutse Monastery in Nepal, as well as Marcy's continuing efforts to work with Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche to improve the written translation of the text and clarify the instructions used with the practice. I think the practice retreat is a great opportunity to fill oneself in on the changes and additions to the practice.

For me, my continued practice of the ngondro has taught me about places I can go (for example, into the prayers, into the energy of a meditation as well as how to set up and maintain a shrine and go there to practice) and practices I can return to for support and stability. This has allowed me the foundation to be able to progress rapidly on the dzogchen path. It gives me a root and invisible tethers so I can explore the more expansive practices being taught at the winter retreats at Serenity Ridge. When I practice the ngondro, be it in a group or alone, I cultivate and feel the protection and guidance of the lineage.

Another fruit of this recent retreat was the ripening of bonds among my fellow sangha members – simply by sitting around the breakfast table sharing food and talking about our families. I grow to know and love my spiritual family more and more as I hear about something that happened to them when they were younger, or married, or single; about how they slept last night, or about what they dreamed.

I hope many of you will gather to practice the ngondro together in May. I would gladly do it again if not for work obligations. For me, group practice generates a stronger vibration than my practice alone. I imagine that this kind of ngondro practice strengthens our sangha as a whole, even if we are not dedicating our practice specifically to our teachers or our fellow practitioners. For it is through this practice that we grow in compassion and deepen our experience and awareness of impermanence and of true refuge. Through this support we become increasingly tamed and purified, with clearer energy to share our light with others.

For me this recent ngondro practice retreat was both a boost and a deepening, a gentle kick and a safe, soft cushion for my lonely soul.

- Jennie Makihara

The May 18-20 ngondro retreat will take place in Charlottesville, Va. For more information or to register, contact Lee Hartline at ligmincha@aol.com, call 434-977-6161, or visit www.ligmincha.org. Retreat cost (includes meals) is \$150.