

THE VOICE OF CLEAR LIGHT

News and Inspiration from Ligmincha Institute

Volume 8, Number 8 October 21, 2008

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

IN THIS ISSUE:

"Bringing Space and Light Back Into Your Life" – an edited excerpt from oral teachings given by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

"Heart to Heart" – Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche answers a student's question

Sangha Sharing

Upcoming Retreats at Ligmincha's Serenity Ridge Retreat Center

"BRINGING SPACE AND LIGHT BACK INTO YOUR LIFE" – an edited excerpt from oral teachings given by Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche during the 2006 summer retreat at Ligmincha Institute's Serenity Ridge retreat center.

If someone asks you at any given moment "How is life?" you will clearly have an answer. You may say, "Life is great!" Or you may feel that you're not quite where you want to be, so you say, "It's okay, I'm hanging in there." Or you may have been feeling low enough to sigh, "I'm dragging."

Think of all the different voices you have used over the years to respond to the question, "How is life?" What do those voices all have in common? For sure, they are all certain of the energetic reality of your life situation. Whether or not you are at a relatively good point in your life, that conditional reality you find yourself in at any given time has such weightiness to it. Energetically, it feels so solidly real that it seems it will take more than your sounding a couple of Tibetan seed syllables for it to dissolve within the space of your meditation practice, right?

But what is real, ultimately? Our conventional reality, which is very much external and material, seems to have the greatest impact on our lives. What we experience internally is less familiar. The deeper reality, though, is that all matter has a quality of space and light. Every body has a quality of space and light, every emotion has a quality of space and light, and every state of mind, too, has a quality of space and light. Basically, everything from the environment to the subtlest state of mind has this quality of space and light. And for many reasons you can lose your connection to this quality. For example, you may not see so much space and light in your home environment when you feel it is very messy, or if you have piles of laundry needing to be washed. Energetically you may not feel that spaciousness or light in your workplace.

The only way to be successful in your work is to bring space and light back into the workplace. The only way to have some sense of success and happiness in family relationships is to bring that space and light back into the family.

Basically, when we are on the path, practicing meditation, we are becoming more conscious and aware of our own obstacles, both externally and internally. We are trying to change our experience of our home, our workplace, our body and our self — the karmic conditioned self that feels incomplete, that stores a lot of things that we don't need to store. As we try to change our experience, we can clearly see what we want to change, but the process for actually getting that change to happen and to take root in our lives is not that clear. So, we try to clarify this process.

In the Sherap Chamma practice, for instance, we work to transform our ordinary limited perspective into a more spacious and luminous one through our connecting as deeply as possible to the enlightened qualities of the visualized form of the goddess. When you visualize Sherap Chamma, the Wisdom Loving Mother, don't think so much about, "Is she real? Does she exist?" Rather, begin with a focus on what qualities she represents, what ornaments she is adorned with and what they signify, and how many of these qualities are missing in your life. In other words, first simply try to connect. Then later you can wonder about whether she is real or not. You see, when you ask, "Is she real?" you are asking as if you are certain that you yourself are real, or that your problem is real. All the while, she must be doing her dakini laughter and thinking, "Look at this guy!"

Especially when you say, "Even my friends don't know how truly real my problem is. Even my therapist doesn't know." [Everyone laughs.] When we step back and take a good look at our finding so much reality in our problems, and at the same time finding so little reality in enlightened beings - that's a very good reason for anybody to laugh!

One way or another, then, we are trying to bring the qualities of spaciousness and light back into all these places within our lives. "Well yes, I really want to bring some space and light into my working life." We can all agree with that. So, how do we do this? For sure it is much easier than you think - as long as you approach it in the right way, in the right place, at the right time, and with the right means. For sure it is easier than you think. But often, without being aware of the proper skillful means, we just try to force things to change, applying too much effort, thinking more effort is good. This kind of forceful effort is not good.

Rather than continuing to apply more and more of this coarse kind of effort to what is not working in your life, try using your energy in a different, more skillful way. Try bringing space and light into the workplace, into your personal life, into your view, your experiences of what you see, your sense objects, the objects of your thoughts. Bring space and light to each moment of perception; bring space and light into how you take things in, how you process experience, so that your experience can benefit you and not limit you, condition you, or block you. If there is some sense of space and light in your life, you will be able to experience a sense of freedom and flow.

"HEART TO HEART" – Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche responds to a student's question

Q: Some people spend most of their lives avoiding negative situations. From the way we have been discussing practice, I was wondering: Are negative situations always supposed to be embraced as opportunities for us to transform ourselves?

TWR: The teachings present many ways to approach challenging situations, but you have to see which way is best for you at any given moment. One way is to embrace the situation; another way is to run away from it.

There is a joke in Tibet: A yogi was practicing patience, and someone comes in and asks, "What are you doing?"

"I'm practicing patience."

Bam – the man slaps the yogi, and then he asks him again: "What are you practicing?"

"Patience."

Bam – the person slaps the yogi again and then asks again.

This time, the yogi loses patience. You see, it is a question of whether you can keep on practicing patience in a particular situation, or whether at some point it is better to take action. Taking action can include simply leaving the situation.

There are different ways to deal with any negative situation, and any of those ways may be a good way as long as it is right for you at that very moment. Do not think one way is inherently proper and another way is inherently wrong. It depends on the circumstances.

The tantric view clearly says that every negative situation can be transformed into the path. Yes, that is true. But the question is, are you able to do that? When you are coming from a relatively strong place in yourself, you can transform. Let's say I am clearly feeling agitated and I feel strong enough, then I can turn this agitation into a humorous and productive experience through laughter. In this case it can be very easy to transform that agitation. If I am not feeling very strong, however, then that agitation may go on for a few hours longer without changing its shape and form at all. If I am in an even weaker position, the agitation might destroy my entire afternoon. So it depends on my own capacity, not on the emotion itself. It is not about what I need to do to deal with emotion; it is more about who is the one who is experiencing this emotion at that time, and what am I able to do with the emotion. That is really what counts.

Is it possible to transform a negative situation into the path? Absolutely. Taking things further, from the point of view of dzogchen you don't even need to transform. When you leave it as it is, it is self-transformed, it is self-liberated. You recognize that the experience has the ability to liberate by itself. In the dzogchen view no one is contributing to that negative situation and supporting it to stay.

Another way to think about it is this: When you are in a bad mood, how many things - informally and unconsciously and annoyingly and subtly and secretly - do you do to support that agitation? Think about it. Can you think of the things you think, feel or do? Now, imagine if you don't participate in those ways. That anger or that bad mood will not be able to survive. It just can't survive if you do not support it as much as you do.

Think about a simple blissful experience that's arisen in meditation. How long did it last? Then ask this question: Why was it so short? Or, why was it shorter than you wanted it to be? Simple: The experience did not have much support.

What kind of support are we talking about? In the practice we talked about giving attention to three things: our physical posture, our breathing, and our focus of mind. These three can be used to support either positive or negative experiences, but we most often use them to support our negative experiences. Our focus toward darkness tends to be much stronger than our focus toward luminosity. When something goes wrong, we have learned to focus right on it. We have learned that very well. But when something good happens, we have not learned to focus on that goodness.

Look at the news we see on television or in the newspaper. Look at the media's enthusiasm for negative events. Look at the excitement that is generated and the effort expended to try to find more interesting stories about a negative event that occurred in the world. So much intensity is focused there, but we don't have that kind of focus when something good happens. We tend to blame the media for that strong focus on the negative. Yes, it is true: They are actively pursuing negative news. On the other hand, though, who is watching? We are, along with the rest of the world, and our media simply follows after the stories that people want to watch. So both sides are responsible there.

If you find yourself feeling depressed by a negative situation, you perceive fewer choices for what to do about it than if you were in a more positive mood. And when you are angry, it feels like you have very few choices at all. We talked about criminals in a maximum-security prison who have murdered others as a result of a moment of anger. In their anger they committed their

crime as if they had no other choice. If there were other options available to them at that moment, then they needed more time to actually notice those options, and to reflect on the possible consequences of each option before deciding how to act. But there was no time. The power and intensity of their situation was so strong that they were driven forcefully in one direction with all other options cut off from them. We know that when no other options are there, you will do what you are driven to do. But the meditation practices that we have provide a model and method for you to train to be able to see other options.

So, rule number one, the simplest rule, for when you find yourself facing a negative situation is to do nothing. If you are going to learn one rule, then it would be don't do anything with your body, don't do anything with your speech, don't do anything with your mind.

When you can become familiar with one simple rule that you can apply in difficult situations, it just might change your entire life. Make that rule very important to you. For a very high yogi in a negative situation, action would be unnecessary. He would simply connect with the root of the negativity. That level of focus might not be possible for the person in a maximum-security prison. But in either case negative action itself can be stopped by giving space for reflection, right? That is what many disciplines are concerned with.

The simple rule about no physical action would be good training for those who ended up in prison because of their actions. Most of us don't have to worry about physically hurting someone, but it can be beneficial for us to focus on our actions of speech. Rule number one for me when I am angry is to shut up; simply engage in silence, in deep meditation – maybe not even deep meditation, just go like this: [Rinpoche places his hand over his mouth].

And our speech is easier to control than our thoughts, which are very hard to control. It is a good thing that people don't know your mind! [Laughter] At least you have some protection there! We can see how often speech creates a problem, but if others knew what you were thinking, then that could lead to a big mess. The world is protected by the condition that we do not know each other's thoughts! We only know what we've agreed on, written up, and signed, but not what we've each been thinking. Just imagine if that boundary were not there; it would be a big mess, wouldn't it?

So we practitioners can exercise our ability to control our speech. As you develop in your practice you will find many places where you can focus your awareness. Whatever stage you are at, you will find easier, more manageable areas of focus to help you transform your life.

SANGHA SHARING

A Student's Experience

Many Tibetan lamas are excellent at teaching from a scholarly point of view, but are not as skillful in helping the Western student bring the Dharma actively into their lives. Rinpoche has a clear understanding of the Western mind. As a result, without diluting the Dharma in any way he is able to draw the Western student deeply into the teachings. Rinpoche's teachings involve three elements that make the Dharma an active force: a strong intellectual framework from historical texts and the lineage of great teachers, a deep immersion in formal practices, and a consistent emphasis on how to manifest the teachings and practices in one's daily life. With this balanced approach, the Dharma has a much greater chance of coming alive and nurturing the preciousness of daily experience. Another exciting aspect of my personal experience as a student of Rinpoche has been the introduction of dynamic practices that I had never seen before in my 25 years of studying in the Tibetan traditions. Tsa Lung, the Five Warrior Syllables and dark retreats, among others, have all energized my practice and have

helped me to cultivate a more stable awareness. At the 2007 winter retreat, our group completed the cycle of Zhang Zhung Nyam Gyu teachings. The cumulative effect of this series of teachings, over six years of winter retreats, was especially powerful for me. The cycle strengthened my connection to all aspects of the Three Jewels: The Teacher, the Dharma and the Sangha. Returning every winter to end my year at the winter retreat nurtured my devotion to Rinpoche and the whole lineage of teachers he represents. Absorbing the richness of the teachings, as interpreted and clearly elaborated by Rinpoche, increasingly cultivated an active presence of the Dharma in my moment-to-moment experience as I entered each new year. Sharing the experience with a Sangha of dedicated practitioners enriched the teachings as their beauty and truth radiated through the group. One of the many wonderful aspects of each retreat was the felt sense of hearts opening to each other as the teachings and practice drew us more fully into the warmth and spaciousness of the experience.

Although I have much more work to do, the blessings of the Zhang Zhung Nyam Gyu have profoundly nourished this practice as an active force in my life with the riches of clarity, joy and love the teachings and the practices offer to all of us.

- Terry Fralich (Maine)

UPCOMING RETREATS AT LIGMINCHA'S SERENITY RIDGE RETREAT CENTER Nov. 5-9, 2008

The Seven Mirrors of Dzogchen

With Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche

For information or to register:

https://www.ligmincha.org/component/option,com_retreat/Itemid,131/retr eat_id,31/

Dec. 27, 2008-Jan. 1, 2009

Experiential Transmission of Zhang Zhung, Part I: Ngondro, the Foundation of Dzogchen Practice

With Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

***Our Winter Retreat with Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche is now full and registration is closed.

However, we invite you to add your name to our waiting list. Please email ligmincha@aol.com

April 15-19, 2009

Riding the Wind Horse of Good Fortune: Increasing Your Inner Strength and Prosperity Through the Wind Horse Practices of Tibet

With Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

For information or to register:

https://www.ligmincha.org/component/option,com_retreat/Itemid,131/

ONLINE TEACHING Jan. 4, 2009 The Sherap Chamma practice Live Internet Teaching With Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche 3-4:30 p.m. Eastern Time U.S. More information about this online teaching will be posted in coming weeks at www.ligmincha.org