

THE VOICE OF CLEAR LIGHT

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Happy Losar! Year of the Earth Ox, 2136. Feb. 25, 2009 is the 1st day of the Tibetan New Year!

"INTEGRATING REAL-LIFE ISSUES INTO MEDITATION PRACTICE" – an edited excerpt from oral teachings given by Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, July 2007

Many times I see that practitioners of the dharma are not touching their day-to-day lives with their meditation practice. That's a problem. Great benefit can come from working with the situations in your life during practice. Without closely examining yourself and your specific life issues while meditating, your practice will only be of partial benefit.

Keeping separate one's worldly life and one's practice life is a weakness in the way the dharma is often approached, particularly in the West. As a result, when people come to a retreat and engage with the teachings and practices, they feel very good, but then afterward when they go back into their lives, they feel completely disconnected; it's as if they experience extra pain when going back into normal life because of the degree of disconnectedness between their practice and their life. One important reason for this disconnectedness is that those real issues they face in their daily life are totally denied while they are at the teachings and while doing the practices here on retreat. They have the idea while they are here that they have no problems.

"Just feel the energy." But you see, this idea is created in the mind. And, one creates such ideas so skillfully here on retreat that it becomes easy to shut down or shut out one's ordinary day-to-day problems. But in actuality, the problems are not totally shut down; they are still there, and when you go back into your life it can be very intense to face them all again in full.

I think that it's a real blessing for us to be able to bring our worldly life with us when we enter a retreat. The retreat provides

support for internal reflection and for looking closely with real clarity at yourself and at the conflicts in your life. When you look closely within yourself, at first you'll feel that it is unpleasant to think about or feel these real issues. You may in fact say, "One reason that I came to retreat is to not think about that." But, like I said, that is not really smart. There are a lot of supports here. I am not talking about the support you might feel from discussing your problems with others. I am suggesting another kind of support that comes from internal reflection and working directly with the purifying and transformative practices that we are learning, along with feeling the support of the blessings that we all have here. It is a much more powerful and effective approach than simply talking about your issues. For the most part, we know we've talked enough about our problems, haven't we? We have exhausted many people talking about our problems.

So, for a moment let's not talk about a problem, and instead internally reflect on that conflict, reflecting closely, and feeling it. The idea is to bring the conflict up into consciousness, bringing

it into your body, into your breath, and into your mind. Bringing it up in this way on the cushion, you can experience it most coarsely in the body, can't you? And then, you experience it more subtly as a sense of breath, a sense of prana. From there, you can then work with that prana through the practices of tsa lung and the nine breathings of purification and with the practices of tummo and actually release that prana through your practice. And, if you work in that very direct and concrete way, then you will feel that something is shifting and changing.

You see, you relate to the everyday world around and within you as being you, as being who you are, as being your self. This mistaken view, this mistaken sense of identity, is the creator of that relative world of yours. Reflecting on this, the idea is to change qualities of that experience by going closer to its source, working with it more at the level of prana. You are feeling and connecting with it on an energetic level without judging it; and then, using the proper techniques, clearing that energy or prana. Each time you practice clearing that prana, your practice takes you closer to a space that is naturally clear and open. [Rinpoche exhales fully.] At that moment, you experience a custom-designed, unique medicine only for you. You never want to miss out on that experience. Everything in the practice that you did before that moment is simply for the purpose of getting you to that point. So, at that point in practice, don't then think: [Rinpoche exhales] "Okay, finished! Now, dedication..." That's not what you want to do.

Instead, with the help of these practices, once you get to that opening in what seemed so solidly an issue, recognize that space as clearly as possible, and then familiarize yourself with it as much as possible so that the state becomes very familiar. If you continuously cultivate these kinds of experiences through bringing real issues to practice, I guarantee that you will react differently upon returning to the world from your retreat. It will be a much different experience for you than the one that I often joke about, where one finds that when the retreat ends and one gets into one's car to return home, simply inhaling the familiar smell of the car's interior brings all of their samsara back in full. That is called the experience of "samsaric car prana." [Laughter] You open your car door and that prana immediately brings your whole samsaric existence to you in exactly the same form that you had left it.

It is wonderful to integrate practice in this way where you actually have two things going on simultaneously in your practice: One, you are working with the real issues in your life; and two, you are doing so within the space of a beautiful dharma practice. If you don't bring the practice to your life as we are doing here, in the end you are the one suffering by pretending to have no problems while you are here in the gumpa. Because in reality, the same problematic person that lives in the world is also right here in the gumpa; it's simply that he or she is just not active. Some people have told me that when they have been practicing as we have been doing here on retreat, integrating the self who has real life issues with the practitioner who's doing the practice, they've seen how much this integration has helped them in going back into their life because they clearly feel the connection. So, it takes some mindfulness, but be sure not to fall into the trap of disconnecting your practice from your life.

"TENDING CAREFULLY INTO BLOOM THE SEEDS OF PRACTICE" – an edited excerpt from oral teachings given by Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, July 2007

Let's say you want to plant a flower. Perhaps you go to the store and you buy a nice pot, soil mixture, and seeds. You read a garden book about how much sun and water and protection the plant will need, and you also study what minerals and other nutrients it needs. So you do your very best to get everything in order like you should for a successful outcome: a beautiful flower. Once you've done all of that at the start, though, do you then just forget about the seeds you

have planted? No, you would want to check regularly the spot where you planted them to see whether any seedlings had sprouted up from the soil. And once they had, then you would keep checking back to see if stronger stems and leaves were growing from those. You would also wonder occasionally, "Do they need water?" You'd continue to give them your attention until the plants matured and produced their beautiful flowers in full bloom. You would pay continuous attention to those plants from the beginning, wouldn't you? It is important to do that. But you see, many times in relation to our practice we don't do that. We learn the practice, then simply do it mechanically, and forget about tending that seed of practice along to its full maturity. That is not the right thing to do.

When you are trying to see whether or not a plant is growing from the seed that was planted, the first question you have to ask is, "Where do I look?" When we are focused on doing exercises like tsa lung and nine breathings or many other practices, the most immediate effect is that we feel physiologically and energetically clearer and more open right afterward, don't we? Many people say, "I just love tsa lung practice!" What they are saying is, "I feel great afterward!" That period right after practice is where they are checking for the seeds of those practices to sprout. They are not saying, "I love tsa lung practice and how it is changing the way that I work in my profession. Every month it is getting better and better. I love my work now. I love people. I'm very productive. I'm able to do so much and help so much." No, we just say, "I feel great after practice," in the same way that we talk about how we feel after a good workout at the gym. If we only notice the immediate effects, then we are not really focusing on the area where the plant of our practice is going to be growing, and we will miss attending to it properly enough for it to really flower. In

real terms, the full measure of these practices should be the way that you are living your life. If the practices are not affecting your life in positive ways, then more attention is needed. Plan for the flower to bloom completely out in one's life, not just to have a great feeling after meditation practice.

Focusing in the right direction, then, with regard to practice, is important for developing fully: "Illumination? Sure, I'm pointed in that direction, but meanwhile the practices should affect my life through my being clearer, happier, kinder, and more open and free." That can be a clear goal. Where do I look for this kind of manifestation, this flower blooming, in my life? I will see the flower blooming in the places where it previously had not. Just like looking into our pot to see if the first shoots are emerging from the seeds we had planted. If nothing is coming up there, then I add the right amount of water, give it sunlight, and keep on checking there until the first seedling comes up through the soil. "Oh wow! Something is coming up! I need to continuously take care of this plant as it is growing." One day it blooms into full color.

So, keep this metaphor in mind. Practice in this way and try to do the best you can. Sometimes you might get a little lazy; nevertheless, just refocus and then continue. Of course, you'll feel the immediate beneficial effects of the practices, but you'll also want to see whether the practices are truly affecting your life in a real sense. I know we all know about this in a general way, but we haven't really approached it from this more substantial point of view because we normally don't pay attention in this way; we don't look at whether practice is affecting our development in the sense of real-life issues. It's just not an emphasized aspect of reflection or conversation. However, I feel that it is very important. It is the approach I take with my own practice in my own life. Is it clear?