

Teaching Issue

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HOLDING ONE'S EXPERIENCE IN THE SPACIOUS EMBRACE OF AWARENESS an edited excerpt from oral teachings given by Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, April 2001

We've been focusing during this retreat on the six realms: the hell, hungry ghost, animal, human, demigod, and god realms. These are the different realms of existence in which beings can take rebirth. We've seen that we also experience each of these realms in our daily lives through the doorways of the negative emotions that are associated with each realm. Those negative emotions are hatred, greed, doubt, jealousy, pride, and lethargic pleasure.

You can clearly say, "I am in the human realm, I am a human being. Nevertheless, at various times in your life, or even at various times of day, you go through experiences that have characteristics of each of the six realms of existence. Different experiences in your life – in combination with conditions such as age, sickness, relationships and many other factors – can cause the qualities of each of these different realms to manifest in us. There are times when you might manifest strongly the greed of the hungry ghost realm, or other times when it's more the hatred and anger of the hell realm, or times when the doubt of the animal realm is dominant, or maybe it's the pride of the demigod realm, or at other times your experience is more the lethargic pleasure characteristic of the god realm.

Generally in Buddhism, these emotions are considered completely negative, but if you look at your life you'll see that from a conventional perspective we do need to be connected to these emotions. So, what is the best way for us to pass through these various realms of experience as they arise normally from day to day? The best way is when we're equipped with awareness. Without awareness, we so often get trapped by our experience, don't we?

We are born into samsara, and as part of that deal we go through different crises in our lives — that just comes with the territory. As each crisis arises, there is a certain degree to which we

have to go through that difficult experience. The only question is: How can we keep it from getting worse? It is through our ability to accept our experience, rather than making it worse by reproducing the karma that created it. And meditation practice improves our ability to simply accept our experience. Practice does this by helping us to develop a strong ground of awareness. A strong ground means that the particular experience does not shake you. You do not lose your awareness in the midst of the experience.

So for example, during a particular experience you may become aware of feeling sad. It can be a deep sadness, but there is a place in you that can hold that sadness, much like when a mother gently holds a crying baby in her arms. She creates a very safe place for the baby to cry. Your base, your essence, your awareness, that is like a mother, and your emotion is like a baby.

Regarding this sadness you are experiencing, there is a bigger space, a more open space of awareness, in which the sadness is contained. Simply holding the sadness in that space of awareness would have very much the same effect as a good session of psychotherapy, where the karma of that experience simply exhausts itself. But instead, we oftentimes reproduce the karma of that experience by reacting habitually to it and as a result, then set up the conditions for it to continue further into the future. However, when you don't reproduce the karma, then that karma simply finishes. It is similar to your having a no-interest bank account, and every time you spend from it the balance drops until one day it gets down to zero and then it's finished. It's good to have a no-interest karmic account. If you have a high-interest karmic account, no matter how much you purify you are still accumulating.

So, let's say you're having a session of meditation and suddenly, Bam! A thought jumps up and you remember a particular person, and then you remember something else as a result, and then maybe your greed arises, "I want this, I need that," and another story jumps up. You are still sitting there and the thoughts and emotions are going on, getting more and more detailed, to the point where you just cannot sit anymore. That is the bad way to relate to those experiences; that's how their karma gets reproduced, isn't it? And in real life you would then go out and act on that karma.

The good way, though, is when you are sitting and contemplating and suddenly you see a thought, and the experience of the thought is weaker than the space that contains it. So, the thought comes; the thought goes. You are very big and your thoughts are very small. The experience comes and goes. The space is very big. The awareness is very big. The emotion comes and goes. You are very big in the sense of awareness and can hold whatever arises. So, whether we're connected to the dharma or not, we all go through crises, don't we? And it's clear what kind of person does well in those crisis situations, isn't it? It's the ones who have a big space of awareness and are able to hang on and not drop everything in the midst of the crisis. They know that eventually time will heal. Their awareness is open and unshaken through it all.

SEVEN-CITY WINDHORSE PARTY RAISES NEARLY \$40,000

On Sunday, June 7, Ligmincha Institute experimented with a new way to boost energy and raise funds for its retreat center in central Virginia, with surprisingly positive results.

Students and friends of Ligmincha gathered in seven cities across the United States for parties in Los Angeles; Berkeley, Calif.; Charlottesville, Va.; Houston; Philadelphia; New York; and Boston. Although Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche could only attend one of these events in person — in his hometown of Charlottesville — a live Internet broadcast from Charlottesville gave all other parties a window into his presence and the larger national celebration.

In each city local donors who contributed \$500 or more to a matching fund became eligible for a drawing of a precious gift: a soul stone blessed by a great master of the Bon tradition, Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche. A few parties held their own private auction events to raise additional funds. In all cities, a minimum donation of \$108 (a number considered auspicious in the Tibetan spiritual traditions) made the donor eligible for a drawing for an original signed work of calligraphy by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche. All these donations were matched by the matching fund for that locale. A video camera was trained on Charlottesville's party from the start, then on Tenzin Rinpoche as he spoke to the party-goers nationwide. Participants used a chat screen to share details about their parties and engage in a Q&A with Rinpoche. Nearly 170 people participated nationwide, and a total of \$38,694 was raised from the evening's events toward the Serenity Ridge land fund.

So it's true that while we couldn't all be together physically on this Sunday in June, we were joined on many other levels: visually, in words, and in spirit. Congratulations to everyone for a successful and rewarding event!

REPORTS FROM THE SEVEN CITIES

Charlottesville held its event in the Harlowe Powell auction house, co-owned by Ligmincha's director of finance Norman Dill. Joining Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche at the party were Ponlop Thinley Nyima Rinpoche, Geshe Chapur, Geshe Tenzin Yeshe, and Lharila Kalsang Nyima. Candace Byers, director of fundraising for Ligmincha Institute and coordinator of the seven-city windhorse party as well as the local Charlottesville event, introduced Rinpoche as he spoke.

New York held its event, coordinated by Antonieta and Mary Ellen, at Antonieta's Manhattan loft. Gifted performance artists demonstrated singing masks and sound healing. A silent auction helped bring total

New York donations to nearly \$8,900 among 19 participants.

The Los Angeles event was coordinated by sangha member Raven and held at the home of Sue and Ken. Many participants drove an hour or more to attend. The Philadelphia event was coordinated by Reggie and held at the home of Dean. Houston held its event at Path of Tea, an all-organic tea shop owned by Thia McKann. After one Houston participant proposed that a photograph of Yongdzin Rinpoche be auctioned off, the party was able to surpass matching donations toward the location's matching fund of \$4,200 ... and by the time donating finished, more than \$9,000 had been raised. Also auctioned in Houston were tea bowls, prayer beads, other dharma items and artworks.

The Boston party was coordinated by sangha member Carol and held at the home of Carol and her husband, Tony. Berkeley held its event, coordinated by sangha member Susan, at the home of Kurt, another local sangha member. Participants gathered around the Webcast sitting on the floor and on a large futon.

□ It was a fantastic evening,□ said Candace. □ People in Charlottesville lingered until almost 8:30 p.m. We had several musicians, including sangha members and a member of the local Charlottesville band Trees on Fire. As Rinpoche pulled the winning soul-stone ticket from the Tibetan hat, he seemed very moved by all of the effort and heart that were clearly present.

From Alejandro, Houston party coordinator: □ Thia was a great host. After the wonderful lung-ta raising by Rinpoche (via the Webcast), our lovely Marlyse was shocked to know the winning number for the signed calligraphy was hers. Her joyful tears brought an ovation.

From Scott in Berkeley: □ We applauded whenever the Charlottesville people applauded. Joyce made a last-minute donation for the soul stone and ended up winning it. After the drawing we went outside and hung prayer flags, which happily flapped in the wind. Finally, we sat down to eat.□

Mary Ellen of New York wrote: "Thank you to everyone who participated in making this evening a success for Ligmincha Institute and for our NYC Bon sangha. Your heartfelt enthusiasm, creativity, and generosity were evident in all that you did."

LIVE WEBCASTS WITH TENZIN WANGYAL RINPOCHE

On Oct. 14 and Dec. 9, 2009, Ligmincha Institute plans to broadcast two Charlottesville public talks by Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, viewable on our Web site. Visit Ligmincha.org and click on □ Retreats□ to confirm as these dates come closer.

UPCOMING RETREATS AT LIGMINCHA'S SERENITY RIDGE RETREAT CENTER

The retreats described below will take place at Serenity Ridge, Ligmincha Institute's retreat center in Nelson County, Va. To register or for more information, please visit www.ligmincha.org and click on □ Retreats□ ; or contact us at Ligmincha@aol.com or our new telephone number, 434-263-6304.

June 21 – June 27

Summer Work Retreat

Free of charge; join us for a few hours or a few days. Free tenting and meals provided.

June 28 – July 18, 2009

Summer Retreat 2009: A-Tri Dzogchen

With Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

Registrations accepted for one, two, or all three weeks.

Oct. 7 – 11, 2009

Powa: the Transference of Consciousness

Annual Fall Retreat at Serenity Ridge

With Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

Nov. 12 - 15, 2009

Tibetan Yoga

With Alejandro Chaoul-Reich

Dec. 27, 2009 – Jan. 1, 2010

The Experiential Transmission of Zhang Zhung, Part 2

Annual Winter Retreat with Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

To register for any of the above retreats or for more information, please visit www.ligmincha.org and click on □ Retreats; or contact us at Ligmincha@aol.com or 434-263-6304.