



‘I Will Teach This Way for the Rest of My Life’

An Edited Excerpt From Oral Teachings Given by Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, Summer 2010

Over the past two decades, longtime students of Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche have noticed a gradual distillation of his approach to the teachings. Today, Rinpoche’s teachings consistently reveal a decided emphasis on simplicity, clarity, and practical relevance of instruction, with an intention to help students of all levels arrive at a potent experiential understanding of the essence of a given meditation practice through the doorway of their own individual conditions. Last summer Rinpoche explained the evolution of this teaching approach.

Each of the dzogchen masters of the *Zhang Zhung Nyen Gyu* practiced for a lifetime, and each came up with five lines as their pith teaching. In my own teachings I am emphasizing relating the teachings to your everyday lives and recognizing your own immediate conditions of body, speech, and mind. These are my five lines.

I am confident of the importance and validity of this approach. This is not an effort on my part to teach in a unique way. Rather, for me it is effortless. It comes from my own personal development and understanding of what I value in the teachings. This is the way I will teach for the rest of my life, and I will go farther in this direction and not away from it.

As I have been teaching for the last 20 years in the West I have met all kinds of people, from all kinds of backgrounds and all kinds of needs and expectations. I have found that many of my students seem to be attracted by complexity. They are focusing more on what is difficult to understand and difficult to attain and on trying to accumulate more and more new teachings; and are focusing less on their personal engagement with the practice.

If you are looking for complexity, it is very easy to find in the spiritual traditions of Tibet, including the Bon tradition. There are so many different teachings of sutra, tantra, dzogchen, and causal vehicles, and there are all the various monastic systems with their emphasis on both complex rituals and intellectual learning. A single dharma teaching in itself may draw from a long text containing many divisions and subdivisions, and be taught point by point, concept by concept, definition by definition, one after the other.

If you wish to seriously follow the spiritual path and have some realization, are teachings like these important? For sure. Without a doubt. Is following the traditional approach wonderful? Of course it is wonderful, and if someone is ready to do this, I encourage it. But is it important to enter the monastery, study in the traditional way, and finish with the geshe degree? Of course it is not. The traditional way, with all its rituals and intellectual learning, is beautiful and meaningful. But regardless of the form of the teaching, I feel it is most important that students understand the teachings on a personal level.

In my early teens as I was growing up under the care of my root teacher, [Yongdzin Rinpoche](#), the most important part of my practice was to sit with him in meditation. We sat twice a day, especially before going to sleep at night. Of course I received the monastic education, but the most important part was sitting. If you ask, 'What is the most important thing in Bon,' it comes to a simple place: Abiding in the nature of mind. That is the answer. That is the teaching.

The masters of the *Zhang Zhung Nyen Gyu*, each of whom had the sign of achieving realization, are good examples. What did they do? They really applied the teachings in their own practice and their own lives. They took it personally. In the story of the great master Tapihritsa, he visited Nangzher Lopo for one reason: to help Nangzher Lopo overcome his pride. Tapihritsa came not because Nangzher Lopo had missed five volumes of canon-text transmissions or three tantric initiations, or because he had forgotten to recite a certain mantra. No, Tapihritsa came to teach him only because he felt Nangzher Lopo had the obstacle of too much pride and needed to work on it.

In the *Zhang Zhung Nyen Gyu* teachings themselves, students are challenged to call up their own actions, thoughts, emotions, and senses, and through these experiences they are introduced to the nature of their own mind. In my teachings here I am suggesting that instead of calling up thoughts, you can recognize the thoughts you are having right in this moment. Instead of creating emotions, you can observe the emotion that already exists in you, whether or not you have been conscious of it. Rather than analyzing the pain and misery of samsara, I am encouraging you to be awake to the pain you have right now, the pain you identify with. That pain is more personal and concrete. It is you.

In the end we want to change something in ourselves. We are not just working with theories and intellectual concepts. When you engage on a personal level with the practice, that is the most exciting, fresh, and lively place to be. Anytime you can touch this place so that your tears flow, your heart opens, and your blockages clear, it is a sign of being completely alive and completely changed. When you can work with yourself in this way, your practice can become alive in you all the time.

It is possible to come to a teaching for the purpose of learning a new, complicated visualization, only to leave feeling that you not only still have the pain or conflict you had hoped to overcome, but that you also have a new pain of struggling with the complicated visualization or of not being able to follow through with a commitment you made to practice. Is that what you want?

In the end, if you imagine a dzogchen master — a committed yogi meditating in a cave — what is this master doing? Abiding in the nature of mind. Working with whatever is interfering with that place. That is the core, there is nothing more. The form through which you learn that essence can be elaborate or it can be simple. This is a personal choice.

You can learn through art, through ritual, through music, and all are good. What I am saying here is that it is important to understand the teaching on a personal level. For teachers in ancient times who were truly realized, that is how they engaged with the teachings and the practice. The elaborate teachings and rituals are beautiful and meaningful, and if you relate well to them, then engage with them. If you don't relate to the more traditional approach, you will not

miss anything by following a more simple and direct approach to abiding in the nature of mind. That is my message here.