

# The Light Is Always There

A Tibetan Bon practice for finding refuge  
within

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There is no better protection than the refuge of unbounded sacred space, infinite awareness, and genuine warmth. Any external source of refuge is ultimately unreliable. Looking for refuge in money or

material possessions cannot protect you from the pain of loss, because everything you have will be lost to you someday. No matter how good your health insurance is or how healthy your lifestyle, sooner or later you will suffer from injury or sickness; eventually you will die. Finding your perfect soul mate cannot protect you from someday losing your beloved through separation, divorce, or death.

With the inner refuge, you are not depending on someone or something outside you to make you feel secure. The first refuge, unbounded sacred space, is a true support because it is unchanging, indestructible, beyond birth and death, and eternal. Whatever difficulties you face, the first refuge supports you in allowing your experiences and hosting them fully. The second inner refuge, the light of awareness, can never be diminished or extinguished by any cause or condition. Inner light is unceasing—forever luminous and clear. Even in the darkest of circumstances, you can trust that it is always there. You can also trust that the warmth of the third refuge is within you. It spontaneously arises from the union of openness and awareness. There may be moments when you feel emotionally cold and dark, when it seems that all the light has gone from your life. But your experience and inner truth are not in sync—the light is always there. At these moments, access to the inner refuge may seem distant, but a sense of trust may bring you a glimmer of the inner refuge that can lead to a shift in the darkness of your experience. Trust is a necessary companion on the path. There is no situation so bad that you can't turn toward the three doors. As you become

more familiar with entering and abiding in the inner refuge, you will begin to trust in its healing presence. We all long for that inner connection, just as a lost child longs to reunite with his or her mother. When you connect with the inner refuge, you can rest in that space just as a child rests in his or her mother's loving arms, feeling protected, safe, secure, complete.

#### BEYOND THE EGO

There is a Tibetan joke about a yogi who leaves his hermitage to get supplies. Afraid of getting lost in a crowded marketplace, he ties a red ribbon around his leg. As long as the ribbon is there, he feels secure. But at one point he looks down and notices that the ribbon has fallen off. He frantically runs back and forth through the market, yelling, "I'm lost! I'm lost! Did anyone see me? I'm the one wearing the red ribbon around his leg." His reaction may seem quite silly to us, but most of us react in a similar way. We lose our job, or an important relationship comes to an end, and we feel lost. *Who am I?* We forget where we put our cell phone, and we panic and feel disoriented. *Where am I?* We have all experienced losing the red ribbon. But the truth is, we are never lost.

Drawing attention to stillness, silence, and spaciousness shifts your focus from feeding the insecurity of the ego to connecting with pure being. Anytime you identify with a sense of "I"—"I feel something"; "I have lost some thing"; "I am lost"—you are identifying with the wrong person. You are identifying with the ego, with your pain body, not with your true nature.

Being aware of the three doors is not work. In fact, the more effort you put into connecting with stillness, silence, and spaciousness, the more elusive the inner refuge seems. Connecting with the inner refuge is simply a matter of shifting your attention. If you are already still, be aware of stillness. When you are silent, hear the silence that is already there. Notice the spaciousness at the very centre of your being. As you rest in awareness, you connect with your authentic self. The effort of seeking dissipates, and you *are* unbounded sacred space, infinite awareness, and genuine warmth—you *are* the inner refuge. The inner sacred space is so simple and close that if we search for it, we cannot find it. But it is always there for you, the source of all the elemental qualities you need. As the inner refuge, you are whole and complete in each moment.

## **Self-Guided Meditations: Retrieving from the Inner Refuge**

To begin, sit comfortably with legs crossed, spine straight, and chest open. If your physical condition does not permit such a posture, choose any upright position that is comfortable, open, and uplifting. Settle into your posture. Take a deep breath, hold it for a moment, and then exhale fully. Repeat several times. Then let your breath find a natural rhythm. Reflect on the element you need most at this time.

### **THE FIRST INNER REFUGE:**

Gradually bring your attention inward. Be aware of the stillness of your body from the crown of your head to the soles of your feet. Give your physical body loving

attention. As your body rests in the warmth of awareness, every cell responds. Feel a sense of well-being from this caring attention.

Rest in stillness. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back. It is one thing to be physically still, another thing to be aware of that stillness. When you are aware of stillness, it will support you.

Through the doorway of stillness, gradually become aware of simply being open. This is a glimpse of the unbounded sacred space of the inner refuge. Trust this. Rest in that refuge for as long as the experience remains fresh.

THE SECOND INNER REFUGE:

Listen and hear the silence in and around you. Listen with your entire body. Feel the silence throughout your whole being.

Gradually, through the door of silence, allow yourself to experience a deep sense of peace. As you rest here, awareness of unbounded space dawns, fresh, clear, and lively, and you connect with authentic presence.

Rest here as long as the experience remains fresh.

THE THIRD INNER REFUGE:

Draw clear and open attention to your heart. Be aware of the spaciousness at the centre of your being. This space is like a clear, open sky.

You are that sky. Be aware of it, feel it, connect with it.

When the sky is clear, the sun shines and you feel its warmth. Allow a sense of warmth to arise within you.

Feel and connect with that genuine warmth.

Appreciate this and rest here as long as the experience remains fresh.



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Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche is the founder and spiritual director of Ligmincha Institute. Recognised as one of the few Bön masters now living in the West, he is known for his clear, engaging style and his ability to bring the ancient Tibetan teachings into a contemporary format that is relevant for Westerners.