

Revealing Treasures

Vajrashura Talk, Winter Retreat
Wednesday 30th December 2020

Canto 93 – The Advice and Admonition to the Revealers of Treasures

The finders of treasures – his future disciples who would continue to find the treasures of this teachings, including as *termas* – mind-treasures.

- These treasures, these teachings would emerge in the disciple's minds, or be found physically in a hidden place, waiting for the right conditions to emerge.
- The disciples who would find these or reveal them were called tertöns, and many of them were considered incarnations of Padmasambhava's 25 main disciples.

This canto – a series of pieces of advice and admonition to these 'Revealers of Treasures'.

- Beautiful piece, with loads of really pithy and hard-hitting statements.
- The main one for me being:

*Let these three expressions: **I do not have, I do not understand, I do not know**, be repeated over and over again. That is the heart of my advice.*

And this is the title of the retreat.

- I wanted to explore this, and will cover some of the same ground as Sadayasihi and others.

Opening of the Text

It opens – "Now Padmasambhava ... At the time when, though benediction ... do not drink."

- It does feel like it's a time where 'many evils appear', so perhaps it's appropriate.
- Indeed, it's one of the qualities of Padmasambhava, that the dire the situation and circumstances, the more powerful he becomes to respond to it.
- Perhaps we can see this reflected ourselves looking back over this year – things are more intense, but our practice has probably been more intense too, and more fruitful and insightful.

To keep yourself from the cycle of worldliness, know that attachment and yearning are obstacles to the Dharma and will break the Achievement. Work out your Achievement in some place free of hindrances; forcefully cut the ties of whatever restricts you. Do not be the ruin of yourself; these are words from my heart.

So we have the same qualities as mentioned before in other texts:

- Determination
- Renunciation
- Steadfastness
- Solitude and being self-reliant.

These are not the typical soft qualities that people normally associate with Buddhism, but they're core to the Dharma life.

- If you simply and only want niceness, softness, and relaxation, in a way Buddhism might well help but, well, you're not really likely to gain much true insight.
- There is certainly a place for the more receptive qualities, and they're very important.
- But they're not enough – we need to be determined, we need to let go and practice renunciation, we need to be steadfast and self-reliant too.

Treasures, Worldly and Dharmic

So anyway, this text is to the treasure Revealers, and is very much concerned with treasure, true treasure.

- Treasures such as jewels and riches play an important part in Buddhist imagery. For example:
 - Udana and the Buddha: The Dharma being like the mighty ocean, containing a multitude of Jewels
 - The wish-fulfilling jewel that Avalokiteśvara holds to his heart, which grants our deepest wish, which is the Bodhicitta, the will to Enlightenment for all.
 - Finding the Bodhicitta is like finding a priceless jewel in a refuse heap.
 - Of course, the ‘Three Jewels’ of Buddhism – the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The most precious things in Buddhism.

So the text spends some time then setting oneself up for practice, in a similar manner to yesterday’s text.

- We work to have no desires, so that the rewards proceed from within.
- We tighten our restless mind, and widen our awareness.
- Take measure of our wandering thoughts, and steady as a large mountain, we enter into meditation.

Then the nature of treasures and what we need is explored. And this evokes, for me, the part of the earlier manta which is *I do not have*.

Nourish yourself and dress yourself without deviating from the most humble poverty; use only what you need to merely sustain your life and protect yourself from the wind.

*When the treasure of riches comes forth, the treasure of the Dharma no longer has its place.
When the treasure of the Dharma comes forth, the treasure of riches no longer has its place.
Both thoughts cannot arise at the same time...*

So that’s quite strong – only just having the barest thing that we need to survive! To merely sustain our lives and protect ourselves from the wind!

- What can this mean? What are the treasure of riches (by which he means worldly or mundane treasures)?
- And how do can they not be held at the same time as the treasure of the Dharma?

I was brainstorming a list of worldly or mundane treasures that might be relevant here. I’m sure you can add your own:

- Money, wealth, jewellery, gold – literal treasure!
- Status.
- Material things, such as big houses, property, cars, works of art.
- Access to parts of society that others are excluded from.
- Beauty of appearance.
- Children – often considered a sign of wealth, especially in more traditional families.
- Similarly food, expensive food and in great quality and quantity.

I Do Not Have

But I do not have! I do not have!

- None of these are truly ours, especially in the face of death.
- To remind you of the Padmasambhava reading from a couple of days ago that Jnanadhara read out from Canto 21:

*What we value does not go with us into death;
relatives do not go with us into death;
riches accumulated do not go with us into death;
neither beauty nor jewels go with us into death.
Since we must wander alone in an unknown land,
consider respectfully if all this is real!*

So it's not real, it's not ours, I do not have.

- We are, as the text we're looking at says, soon to die.

Most men are like the sun at the peak of a mountain – soon to set.

It's a very striking image – the peak of the mountain – remember this is set in the Himalayas.

- At the peak of life, everything seems so incredible and high and powerful.
- But in the mountains, if any of you are fellow hikers or mountaineers will know, the sun sets very abruptly and swiftly, almost unexpectedly.

So in the context of this impermanence, worldly treasures are insignificant, unworthy to be the object of craving.

- The view of Padmasambhava or a Buddha is one immeasurably greater, vaster, richer.
- To a Buddha, all our striving for career, wealth, status, possessions, are like a meaningless children's game.
 - Where the children are all squabbling and getting upset and overly concerned with getting things, and taking it all much too seriously.
 - Or we're like a child on a beach proudly building a sandcastle, unaware of the incoming tide that's already lapping at our ankles.

There is nothing dependable upon in the world in the face of change and transience. Even our friends are not ultimately dependable to allow us to gain what is truly important.

- As the text says:

Who is there in whom we can trust?

This is not to say we shouldn't have and cultivate friendships, but rather we need to remember that while friendships are a vital and necessary part of the Dharma life, they can't do the work for us.

- As the Buddha says, by us must the intense effort be made.

What's more, the text seems to indicate that not only is wealth not going to help, it will actually hinder us in our quest.

*When the treasure of riches comes forth, the treasure of the Dharma no longer has its place.
When the treasure of the Dharma comes forth, the treasure of riches no longer has its place.
Both thoughts cannot arise at the same time...*

So when we are preoccupied by these worldly treasures, we cannot practice the Dharma fully.

- We're locking ourselves back into this narrow view of the world, engaging with the world on its own terms.
- When we're busy accumulating them, we cannot be accumulating momentum in our Dharma lives – both thoughts cannot arise at the same time.

Now, usually at this point we say it's ok to have money, etc. as long as you are not attached to them.

- That's true enough, in principle!
- You could have lots of wealth, treasure, etc and be completely unattached to it, in which case it would not, I think, be what Padmasambhava is talking about here.
- But for almost all of us, that isn't very possible.
- All-too-often, to have, is to be attached.
 - To own, is to be owned. To hold onto, is to be held back.
- And while you may not *feel* very attached, just have a go at giving stuff or money away and see how attached you are then!

We need to take Padmasambhava's advice seriously and look at the effects of how we live our lives on our Dharma practice.

- It's less about giving everything away to charity (though you're welcome to do that if you want to give it to the DBC!) and then living as a pauper.
- More about being utterly uninterested in these things except to the degree that one needs them to support a Dharma practice.
- So we only get money to discharge our responsibilities and to provide support for our Dharma lives into the future, for example.
- Because the danger for us of getting lost again and again in the accumulation of worldly treasures is too strong...

We do this because we have the biggest perspective of what human life is about, which is the desire for Enlightenment that rests in us all, waiting to be activated and drawn out.

- And with this vision, our usual worldly desires for security and wealth dissolve away into the much greater security and riches of Going for Refuge to something true and real.
 - Which happens when we sit with our back to the stupa, as Padmasambhava did in the great exposition from Padmavajra last night.
- We face the world, but leaning against the stupa, which represents the Buddha.

I do not have – let this expression be repeated over and over again.

What do we not have?

- Any kind of wealth that's dependable upon.
- Any kind of status that's dependable upon.
- Any expectations of samsara that are reliable.
- Any possession that we can fully trust to not fail or leave us.
- Anyone to fully depend upon to save us from ourselves.

In particular, we don't have a solid self which is beyond the flow of conditions.

- It's a particularly modern viewpoint that we can hold, that all we have is our own perspective, our own way of thinking, our own sense of self.
 - This has been lionised and exalted in these times of social media and the like.
 - As something unique and precious.
- And consciousness is very precious from the Buddhist perspective, but not in the conventional way.
- When we stop thinking of the self as fixed and exalted and somehow beyond the conditions we find ourselves in, those riches emerge.

So we can take on this reflection as a practice: *I do not have*

- It can be repeated over and over again.
- It can be a reaction practice of a sort.
- Subhuti – when he reacts to people with anger or ill-will or irritability.
- Reflect – what did I think that I had there that was dependable?
 - What story or view did I have about that situation?
- Actually, I do not have!

As the text says

When the life of the treasure is not understood, all kinds of evil will come.

It's only by reflecting that we do not have that we can understand the life of the treasure.

- By reflecting like this, we free ourselves up from our attachments to what we think we have.
- We are able to let go of attachments into something deeper.

- And the deeper riches and beauty can emerge into our lives, overflowing from within and from without.
- We experience the true and dependable treasures of the Dharma, which actively come forth to meet us once we've let go of worldly treasures.

When I think of the happiest I've been, it's often when I've had very little.

- For example on long ordination retreats in Guhyaloka, where you barely have a couple of sets of clothes and wear robes most of the time, and just live almost like in a monastery.

Three Jewels are dependable – they are 'true refuges', in that they cannot let us down.

- We can fall short in our engagement and commitment to them.
- But they are fundamental to the universe and woven into reality.

So do we know what's truly valuable in life? Not just in what you think, but also in what we do?

- As Padmasambhava says later in the text (and this is one of my favourite lines in the text):

Your actions should agree with your views – that is the essence of my advice.

Question: What is most valuable to you?

- Where do your actions not agree with your Buddhist values or views? What might you do to manifest your values more in your actions?

I Do Not Understand

The next part of the text is as follows:

When man's mind is affected by demons, perception is not clear. You will lose. Therefore do not involve yourself! How can the precepts of the Buddha ever deceive? Until you have attained the stage of warmth, be wary of Attainments; the Black Demon reveals himself strongly in the presence of the profound Dharma. Do not rest on a doctrine which you have not learned yourself! Boastfulness provokes envy, so do not show a high profile - that is the heart of my advice ... Until your work is completed, plan carefully! Be stoical and attentive! This is my advice.

We fundamentally do not understand the Dharma! And we should be careful of thinking that we do.

- Do we still suffer? Then we do not understand the Dharma.

There is the very important teaching of 'The Three Levels of Wisdom'.

1. The wisdom we hear
2. The wisdom we reflect upon
3. The wisdom we see directly for ourselves

Progressive, move from one to the next as we deepen.

Our lack of understanding could be at any of these levels.

- For example, we may be quite clear about what the ethical precepts are, which is the first level of wisdom.
 - We hopefully have meditated upon them, and they have sunk in a bit into our being, which is the second level of wisdom.
 - But we are unable to follow them and act upon them some or even most of the time, so at the third level, we still do not understand them.
- And this is ok! It is better to admit that we don't know them and be open to that than to pretend.

The text warns us to be wary of arrogance, boastfulness, attachment to attainments, and so on.

- In fact, it says that in a time of attainment, effort should be sustained for three years!

I do wonder, however, if these are really that relevant for most of us. I think the form we're much more likely to experience is pride. Pride in the sense of:

- Feeling like we need to do it all alone.
 - We can and need to do the Dharma life with others, even if we ultimately have to make the main effort ourselves.
- We don't accept that some people are further along the path than us and we can learn from them.
- We feel like we have to portray that we know it all.
- We feel that we can't let it be known that we don't know.
- We don't take responsibility for things we do wrong.
- We don't want to apologise when we do something wrong.
 - The more I practice the more I see how profound fully taking responsibility and fully and unconditionally apologising for times we have been unskilful.

When we are in a state of pride, we definitely do not understand, though we probably think we do.

- And, of course, pride and insecurity are usually the two sides of the same coin, with one flipping into the other.

So can we admit that we do not, really, understand?

- When we reflect that we do not understand, we free ourselves up from the tyranny of having to project a false image of ourselves.
- We free ourselves up from pride in particular.
- We allow space for a much richer and truer understanding to emerge.
- And the universe responds, pours out teachings to us which help us to understand.

I Do Not Know

Quite similar to *I do not understand* but here I want to focus it on how we can unhelpfully 'know' things.

When we know someone, when we know something, one thing that can happen is that we stop seeing it.

- We know it, so we don't have to take it in anymore. That's just that thing, or that person, that I know.
- We take it for granted, we put it in a box and don't really engage with it or them anymore.
- So there's indifference.
- Or, as the saying goes, familiarity can even breed contempt, where our experience of things or people are much more based in our stories about them, stories we 'know', than the actual experience of those things or people.

Actually, everyone is deeply unknowable... And they can surprise us if we're open to them.

- Do our friends surprise us? Do we surprise them from time to time? Are we taking each other in enough as unknowable beings?

At a deeper level again, we can 'know' things and situations and people in order to keep a sense of control and security around them.

- We fix everyone and everything on their knowable and pre-set tracks so that we can feel safe around them, we can feel in control or we can feel secure.
- Don't underestimate the desire of the unenlightened mind to try to control everything.
 - In fact, that the main function of this self that we're invested in.
 - To 'know' everything in a particular way so that we can't be hurt by anything.
 - Deep, primal instinct honed over lifetimes, according to Buddhism.

I'm sure I don't have to explain this too much – we can all easily see how we respond to threat or to change.

- Usually we tighten up and try to control it, subtly or not so subtly.
- Often when you practice the Dharma, you feel even gets stronger as it comes more to the surface.
- At times of spiritual death, when we're asked to let go, it can kick in incredibly strongly.

So we reflect that we do not know... We cannot know things, people, situations.

- We can have a sense of them, but, really, we do not know.

When we reflect like this, we free up the universe to be more alive and magical.

- We no longer attempt to freeze it into tightly held familiar shapes.
- The frozen room around us starts to flow and swirl again, as if in a summer sun.
- The universe offers itself up to us more magically than we could have ever imagined.

When we allow ourselves to not know, we are freed of the burden of having to know:

- Of having to have an opinion on everything.
- Of having to be fearful, of having to be wary.
- Of having to always be steering things to a particular outcome.
- Of having to game life so that we're ok.

But when we stop, the universe comes alive and responds.

- Our desire for worldly treasures falls away.
- The riches of the Dharma come forth and we end up in a richly alive universe.
 - With a much less focused attention on ourselves.

We've all had some experience of this already I'm sure, but if not, you will if you keep practising.

Keeping the Mantra Going

So let's keep this mantra going in our minds and hearts – I do know have, I do not understand, I do not know.

*Let these three expressions: **I do not have, I do not understand, I do not know**, be repeated over and over again. That is the heart of my advice.*

When we get into a reaction, when we think we have, or get into pride or arrogance about our understandings, or try to 'know' something in order to control it, remind ourselves that we do not have, we do not understand, we do not know.

- Pick the most appropriate one and drop them in during a just sitting session, for example. See what effect that has on you.
 - And be open to any response from the universe too.

To finish with a line from the text:

Practice your whole lifetime; wrap yourself in the Dharma!