

RECALLING THE GURU'S INSTRUCTIONS

*A talk by Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin to the Karma Dzong
community in Boulder, Colorado, January 23, 1988*

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, sangha members of the great dharma center of Karma Dzong. It is delightful to be here and to see so many of you all together. We have come to an interesting time. The period immediately after the guru has passed into parinirvana is one of groundlessness and uncertainty, but it is also one of certainty. We are at a juncture, an opportunity to join our devotion and discipline together and ignite them in such a way that causes the command of the guru and the victorious lineage to increase and pervade not only our own sphere but also the entire human world. Everyone remembers the basic instructions we have been given, so we don't have to "beat a live horse," as Rinpoche used to say. Nonetheless, it is always good to remember the instructions of the guru and bring them to mind again and again. In that regard, I would like to say a few things.

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

We should keep in mind that the teaching we have been given is the inseparability of the hinayana, mahayana, and vajrayana, and always hold that view as our basic discipline. If we make distinctions among those dharmas, then our discipline begins to break down, and we start to fantasize about which yana we are in or what we have accomplished. That gives rise to self-deception and egotism. However, if we remember our instruction and training, we know that our intrinsic being is mindful; our basic state is mindfulness. Therefore, we have certainty in body, speech, and mind that we cannot miss even one moment, and that it is important always to be mindful of every detail. We pay attention to how we think, speak, and act. That is the hinayana view.

Further, in the mahayana, we understand that our neuroses are not a dead end. They are workable, and we don't have to cut off the life stream of our inspiration because we have negativity. Rather, we take that negativity as a stepping stone to enlightenment. If thoughts of jealousy, pride, hatred, and so on arise in our mind, we can suddenly catch ourselves and experience, "Yes, I am awake. Something is happening." We also know that neurosis has as its basis the fundamental intention to free ourselves from its imprisonment. And to do that, we have been given the key instruction of this lineage: Unless

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

we dedicate our existence for the benefit of others, there is no possible way to free ourselves.

Yesterday, I was thinking about seeing all of you and about what I would say, and it occurred to me that the buddhadharma, especially the mahayana, teaches something that is not expressed in any other teaching in the human world, and that is the teaching of dedicating all of one's efforts for the benefit of others. In the theistic traditions, one's efforts are dedicated to a higher being, such as a god, because human beings will not give you credit for your effort. Because no one acknowledges what you are doing, you feel there is no bliss. But in our tradition, the bliss is unconditioned, meaning that it is not dependent on any confirmation, any reward. In every other tradition there is some reward; but in our tradition there is simply giving, openness, and big space. Vast and profound understanding comes from that because, as Rinpoche used to say, "there are no feedbacks." That is real strength. We dedicate all of our effort, all of the merit we accrue through our practice, and all of our enlightenment to sentient beings. We constantly give away our sense of having done something good. That is the cornerstone of the teachings, and without it, there cannot be vajrayana at all.

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

Now, working for the benefit of others and dedicating the merit that comes from that takes real heart, not imaginary heart. One has to actually feel it. Feeling it means intensity, and intensity without ego is discipline. We should understand how that happens in our own experience. When we practice, shamatha expands into vipashyana, and vipashyana becomes tonglen. When vipashyana becomes tonglen, we give up the idea of some kind of reward. At that point, we have become completely soaked in the buddhadharma. That teaching is our foundation and our enlightenment. Whatever enlightenment there is has to do with letting go of all hope and fear, which means letting go of any notion of getting something in return.

As we know, the principal instruction in meditation is on working with the outbreath. The point is to begin to turn our mind around from always coming back to *this*, and begin to simply go out. That is the foundation of our practice. When we begin to realize that it is possible to go out and not come back to *this*, we have a rudimentary understanding of shunyata, which is the basis of all the disciplines that follow, and especially the vajrayana disciplines. And again, the key is not expecting anything.

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

Now, individually and as a community, we have been accused of heartlessness and too much cynicism. We should understand when that happens and how that happens. When we become so hard and cynical that we begin to resent sentient beings, then we have lost our discipline, and we masquerade our deception as egolessness. We think, "Who cares? They deserve what they're getting." From moment to moment, when we begin to solidify and become too tough and blame someone outside, we have to check ourselves. Those thoughts are always so justified in the moment; the logic of why that person, thing, or event made us say those nasty things is always perfect. I would like to suggest, ladies and gentlemen, friends, that it is always useful to check with yourself to see if you are becoming too solid in your ideas and opinions. Check to see if there is kindness in your body, speech, and mind—the kindness which doesn't need feedback, congratulations, or confirmation. That all-pervasive kindness is maitri.

Our sangha, Vajradhatu, is very well known in the world. Because of Trungpa Rinpoche's great compassion and wisdom, we have become the focal point of a lot of discussion and a lot of emulation. That's wonderful, because we have done things very well. But please, please, please, even if we do things well, let us never lose heart and never lose

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

sight of the fact that real understanding and discipline has to be behind doing things well. At the same time, we should not simply say and do nice things or whitewash and sugarcoat everything. Quite the contrary, being the good mahayana people that we are, we know that behind every nice thing is the understanding that there are, as the Vidyadhara was fond of saying, “no feedbacks.” The good guru pointed that out to us over and over again. I don't think we have to worry about becoming too wishy-washy, because our sangha is so strong that if anyone is bullshitting and trying to make an ego trip out of this, it won't last. It will simply be shot down by the inherent sanity of what has been transmitted to us and practiced by us.

With that as a basis, we should cultivate kindness. I remember when the first wave of Tibetan teachers came to North America, after Rinpoche had established the ground of conquering the three lords of materialism in this culture. We were skeptical of their teaching, because they all began by saying, “One should develop an enlightened attitude and think that all beings have been our mothers, and therefore we should have kindness for them.” In our cynicism we thought, “Yes, right, sure we should.” So now, it is time for us to do that. Very one pointedly and with tremendous heart, we should make that expansion

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

possible. No matter what happens, we should dedicate our effort to all sentient beings. Considering that everyone has been our mother at one time or another, we should not develop any unkind thoughts, speech, or actions. If we can't do that, we should shut up. Especially, if we hear something, we should not immediately repeat it to someone else. At the least, we should remember that it may be just discursive thought. We should return to our basic discipline and label it "thinking." If there is anything true to embrace or take on, or anything to be discarded, that will become obvious if we are kind to ourselves and others.

So, please, think about your actions, in body, speech, and mind. Whatever arises in your mind that separates you from others, dissolve it, like a rainbow. If your speech cuts you off from others, keep it in a jar. If your body splits itself away from others, be relaxed and at ease, as in sitting practice. Those three actions are important, and they do great service to our teacher and bring great benefit to others.

Rinpoche said that maitri is the way to overcome aggression, because it is the mentality of egolessness. If we understand that, we can visualize properly. We won't get fixated on various yoginis or herukas and attempt to use them for our personal benefit. It is time for us to

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

make that offering to our guru, who was always kind. He may not always have been nice, but he was always kind. He was never nice to ego, but he was always kind to the possibility of basic goodness. That is the basic message I would like to give.

It is good to belong to this victorious lineage. Now that the guru has left his body, we have taken on the burden of attaining the very same enlightenment that he demonstrated to us. To do that, we have to be very, very tight and at the same time spacious—tight with attachment, and spacious with neurosis. Being tight with attachment means being disciplined about not clinging to things that are impermanent; and being spacious with neurosis means understanding that attachments are nothing solid. If you do that, kindness will arise naturally. If you can't do that, sit yourself down on a cushion for a long time. No matter how much it hurts, stay there until you feel a difference in your mind.

I would like to encourage everyone to sit more and practice shamatha. Does that sound familiar? Consider your former vows, and how we can each work for the benefit of others. That involves how to manifest in body, speech, and mind. When you sit, hold the posture of the Buddha, and manifest in all directions. I think as a community, we

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

still have a skeleton of nyinthun practice. And since we have some understanding of the charnel ground principle, that skeleton is able to sit. And since that skeleton has no brain, heart, kidney, or lungs, it has no difficulty sitting. Devotion will keep it upright.

If you would like to discuss anything before we do that, please feel free.

QUESTION: Sir, now that Rinpoche has passed into parinirvana, my first question is who are you? And my second question is what is our relationship with you, and how do you view that?

VAJRA REGENT: The fundamental issue is your heart connection to the Vidyadhara; you should always venerate that connection. That never ceases. No one would not venerate the Buddha, because that is where the teachings emanate from. In the same way, in our lifetime, the teachings emanated from the Vidyadhara, so he is the Buddha to us. Many of us knew him and had contact with him, so he will always remain as our visualization, the crest ornament of our life. In the future there will be people who have not had direct contact with him, but they will have tremendous faith in him simply by seeing his picture or listening to his voice on a recording, and understanding his teaching.

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

For those of you who knew him, my relationship to you is as the regent of the Trungpa Tülku. I think it is obvious that I intend to carry on his teaching in the way he instructed me to. In whatever way you understand that, that is the nature of your relationship with me.

Q: Thank you.

VR: You should always trust what you understand as the essence of enlightenment. Always follow your basic understanding. If you ask, “What do I do now that my guru has died? Should I go to India or Nepal?” then you didn't understand your guru, because the guru is the very air you breathe. Any flash, any memory you have, immediately brings him back. Therefore, there should be no question. And, as I said, I will carry on as he wished me to do.

QUESTION: It's very lovely to have you here, and I very much appreciate your exertion on behalf of all of us. Thank you.

VR: Thank you. Well, I think if we could get the shrine room cleaned up, then I would appreciate your exertion. It's appropriate, because an abhisheka is like inviting someone to your house: you have to clean it up. I'm conferring the abhisheka here because the Vidyadhara's footsteps are imprinted in this place, and because I am following those

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

footsteps, I thought I should have the abhisheka here first. Therefore, we have a good reason to clean up. Animate and inanimate objects are simply aspects of our mental projections. If we would like to energize them, we merely have to project our mind towards them. And because we are in the bodhisattva yana, everything here that we call Dorje Dzong should be seen in that way. Thank you for your sentiment; but, I'm sorry, I'm always going to be this way.

QUESTION: I'd like to say something about my relationship with you. I feel that my relationship and a lot of people's relationship to you is that you mean a lot to us. That was the first thing.

VR: Go ahead.

Q: You spoke about kindness and about being tight with attachment and spacious with neurosis. I'm wondering about a thing that people in the sangha do, which is called cutting someone else's trip.

VR: I don't believe that anyone other than a vajra master can do that. Everyone else is simply talking too much. They are not being tight with their discipline; they are not cutting attachment. But don't tell them that, because they'll get even angrier. Rinpoche talked about this a long time ago. He said, "This business about cutting—everyone should stop

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

that.” In the early days, everyone thought that because the teachings Rinpoche presented were so strong and direct, that spiritual materialism was completely unworkable and even shameful. People thought they could and should cut someone else's ego. There are still remnants of that, which is good, because it means there is still blood in the veins here. But we must refrain from taking ourselves too seriously.

QUESTION: I never had the good fortune to meet Trungpa Rinpoche. My question is about devotion, and I'm feeling a little lost. I'm not sure about what to do with the longing I have for a teacher. I'm planning to attend the dathün in February. Can you give me some advice?

VR: Yes, I think so. Longing is why you connected with this lineage altogether. In fact, we all have that experience. Longing for a teacher is longing for one's basic nature, enlightenment. It can only be experienced by letting go of all pretense. Then, longing becomes genuine emotion. That's why we practice dathün, so we can experience that. Go to the dathün and let go of the notion of having to get anything. Let the longing simply occur in the realm of space. Truthfully, you don't have to do anything with it.

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

QUESTION: You talked about remembering the guru's instructions again and again, but in my experience, I seem to forget them again and again. And I notice that you don't seem to forget.

VR: We always forget the guru's instruction. How many times have we heard a simple teaching about maitri, and how many times do we produce aggressive thoughts about others? How many times do we think, "Well, it's just thoughts, and thoughts are empty, and therefore I can say nasty things." We convince ourselves that thinking negative thoughts has no cause and effect. It is said that to follow the guru's example and instruction is almost impossible. However, it is also said that in order to attain enlightenment one must do that. So we are continuously balancing between remembering the guru's instruction and forgetfulness. That is our path, always. When you forget, then you will remember, because something will come back to you from the phenomenal world about your aggression, your jealousy, your pride, your anger, and then you will remember the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. But most of all, you will remember the guru, because the guru is the one who gave you the teachings. So when you don't remember, don't lose heart, because every time you forget, there's a gateway.

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

Q: Is it a matter of dropping your thoughts or seeing what you did in the blindness?

VR: There are two approaches. One is the practice of moment-to-moment recollection of what arises, what follows—what's happening now, what you do or don't do—and what occurs afterwards. That is the practice of recollection. The other approach is seeing everything at once and dropping it on the spot, which has to do with feeling, texture. Both approaches are adequate. One is not better than the other.

Q: By feeling, do you mean feeling the texture of your experience?

VR: Yes—totality, all at once. That is the way we have been trained—to feel everything at once and then drop it. At the same time, there is the method of working with the arising of thoughts, their dwelling, and their cessation. That approach is also adequate. The approach that Rinpoche taught us was immediate and complete, and he understood that we could build on that. If you can do both, that's really good.

Q: Thank you.

VR: Thank you. It's very good that we're together and can talk about meditation. That's always good.

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

QUESTION: My question has to do with working tirelessly for the benefit of others as opposed to workaholism. Do you have any thoughts on that?

VR: Yes. Workaholism will make you tired, and working tirelessly for the benefit of others won't. I'm quite serious. When you are a workaholic, it's because you intend to get something. When you intend to get something and you don't, or even when you do, you will feel tired. Feeling tired isn't bad, particularly; but if you're tired because you haven't yet received the desired feedback, that is an entirely different attitude. Everyone has to increase their understanding of working for the benefit of others. It is not about keeping a balance sheet, nor about some confused idealism; it is a matter of moment-to-moment awareness with spaciousness which is free from fixating on a result.

QUESTION: Sir, could you say something about the meaning of Halifax, and why we should or should not move there?

VR: Well, I didn't decide to move there. The Vidyadhara wanted to establish Halifax as his center, and the center of Vajradhatu altogether; in other words, the center of the mandala. To understand that, one has to understand the mandala principle. It means that from the center,

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

wherever it is located, various connections emanate, and all of those emanations are interconnected. When Rinpoche first came to the West, he landed in Montreal and then went to Tail of the Tiger, which is now Karma Chöling, and that became the center of the mandala. Then he came to Boulder, and that became the center of the mandala. Now Halifax has become the center of the mandala. We would like to strengthen the center, and therefore anyone who can move to Halifax should. If you are able to come and live in Halifax, I would suggest you do, because Rinpoche wanted it to be a strong international center. But you should do it properly. It's not easy; you have to go through the immigration process and find a job and a place to live. Whenever you're ready, I'd like to see you there. No problem. We'll be waiting for you! We might have a Nova Scotia welcome wagon.

The most important thing, though, is that wherever you are—Boulder, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Halifax, Toronto—you are dedicating your effort and time one hundred percent. First, understand the dharma of where you are before thinking about how to get to the higher realms. You never know what might be in the higher realms, especially if you don't understand what is in the lower ones. In other words, if what you're doing here in Boulder you can also do in Halifax,

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

then you should go. But if you think you have to go to Halifax because that's where the action is, you will be sorely disappointed. At the same time, there is always the desire to be in the center, so you should come to the center when you can. Moving to Halifax is correct when you understand the whole process and path according to your own life. When you come to Halifax, your tusks will fall off. Don't be in too much of a hurry. Grow your tusks first before you shed them. When you're ready, the elephant burial ground is waiting for you.

Things don't decrease or increase by people moving around. Over the past seventeen years whenever someone said, "Everyone is moving to Boulder, and the Dharmadhatu is getting depleted," we have seen that the membership doesn't really change; some people leave, but new people come in. It's a process of circulation and ecology. If we pass the dharma on to others, then those people will make a great dharma center. Then we move on to the next place. Karma Dzong is an indestructible fortress. It should be kept that way. The shrine room in Boulder should always be filled, because as the Vidyadhara said, no matter how many sentient beings there are, the dharma is always applicable.

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

Q: All I ever heard about Halifax were rumors, which is why I asked the question.

VR: What can I say? Halifax is a delightful place. Nova Scotia is a delightful place. It is dull and barren. It is an excellent place to practice the dharma. The Dorje Dzong shrine room is much more beautiful here, but that makes no difference in terms of one's practice. Wherever we practice the dharma, the dharma is the same.

Q: Your presence is refreshing, sir. As you walk in, thunderclouds seem to gather in the air, and enormous reverberations fill the shrine room. Things are very bright and clear, and your humor is really helpful. Thank you for your kindness.

VR: That's the point—especially humor. The last time I was here, I asked everyone to remember what the Vidyadhara said over and over again: “Please, please, enjoy your life.” That has to do with humor, and humor has to do with not being so serious about this ego. It is basically a matter of cleaning up.

I'm delighted to see such strength in Karma Dzong. Take it upon yourself to commit to sitting nyinthun this month. Think about it, please. Make a commitment to sit nyinthun in the coming month. Talk

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

about refreshing! Meeting your mind without a first name is the best thing you could do. You can do it. That is one of the Vidyadhara's best sayings: "You can do it." You can sit. When he first introduced nyinthun, everyone said, "Sit all day?" He said, "You can do it." If your legs hurt, move them. Label it thinking. If your mind hurts, relax it. Label it thinking. If your emotions become unruly, make friends with them. Label it thinking. Please include everything at once. It's a wonderful practice. The great tantrikas of the past, like Shavaripa,ⁱ Maitripa, and Lord Marpa, practiced mixing mind with space—which we call mahamudra, and which is no different from what we were taught by the Vidyadhara. It's sitting practice. Whether you are an exalted tantrika or a beginning shamatha student wondering whether or not you have the technique right, it's the same. Please do it. Okay? Please? Yes.

So, now, I will be giving each of you a capsule containing some of the salt the Vidyadhara's body was packed in after he passed into parinirvana. Do you know what this is? This salt is a precious relic. It is the continuity of the lineage. It contains the quality of the Vidyadhara's body, speech, and mind. The Vidyadhara's body was packed in this salt, and the elements of the body were absorbed in the salt. Our tradition

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

makes no distinction between samsara and nirvana, good and bad, so the elements of the body are seen as sacred and of the same nature as the awakened state of mind. Keep this close to you in whatever way you can. Place the capsule on your shrine or enclose it in a reliquary, or wear it on your person. If you are extremely sick and about to die, you can consume the salt as a way of connecting your mind to the Vidyadhara's; but you should not do this with any hope of attaining a long life. Let us begin by making a bow to the photograph of Rinpoche, acknowledging our connection with him. After that, I will give you a blessing, acknowledging the continuity of the lineage, and you will receive the salt. While we are doing this, please let us continuously chant the rebirth supplication. Thank you.

Copyright © 2012 by Lila Rich. All rights reserved.

Used with permission.

Recalling the Guru's Instructions

Notes

ⁱ Shavaripa (one of the Eighty-four Mahasiddhas of India) was a hunter who, after an encounter with the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, renounced his livelihood and turned to the Buddhist path. He later became a disciple of Nagarjuna and a teacher of Maitripa. Shavaripa is a key figure in the transmission of the early mahamudra lineage of teachings in India and is counted among the Indian patriarchs of the Kagyü lineage.