

We Have a Huge Barrel of Wine But No Cups

by Vajradarshini

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I've never given a talk in a skirt before so that's a first. And I've never given a talk with Kavyasiddhi before, and she's going to be my beautiful assistant. She's going to do some reading for me as the talk's got quite a lot of poetry in it, and a few quotes and things, and I thought I'd ask Kavyasiddhi if she would read for me because it helps to have two voices: I find it quite engaging.

Rumi: *"We have a huge barrel of wine but no cups, that's fine with us. Every morning we glow, and in the evening we glow again. They say there is no future for us. They are right; which is fine with us."*

So this is a Rumi poem and if you've been on retreat with me you probably know that I like Rumi, and I love this poem. It's one of those poems where you love it and you don't have any idea what it means. So I read it before meditation and people say, *"Yes that's a great poem - what does that mean then?"* And I say, *"I've got no idea but it's fantastic isn't it."* I've got this sense that there's something in it that I really liked, that it was trying to communicate something I really liked that I couldn't understand.

When you give talks on these things you often have to come up with a title long before you've any idea what you're going to talk about. So I'd read this poem recently and I thought, well, I'll use this poem. So I put the title in and thought I'll just use this poem, and I didn't really know what was going to come out of it.

Giving a talk on Enlightenment is a bit tricky really. So because I started with the poem I thought well it's not a very sensible poem and I started pulling together a few ideas for the talk.

And Rumi says: *"Whoever is calm and sensible is insane."*

So I thought oh well that's it. But now I do wonder if it's become a bit too sensible. So I apologize if it ends up being a bit too sensible. I was thinking how you have to be really brave to not be sensible, don't you? You have to be really brave to not make sense. So I think I'm kind of getting there, but I'm still kind of working on it.

So the theme of Enlightenment, well I have to say that it doesn't really mean very much to me, Enlightenment. I don't think in terms of Enlightenment. I don't really use that word at all. Yes obviously there is something, I do believe there is something. Or at least I do believe that this isn't it.

Rumi says, *"If eyesight blurs find a railing to follow."*

And I really like that image of following a railing in the dark. I often feel much more like that, that I'm kind of following a railing or a bit like I'm following some kind of thread, but it's very misty and mysterious, yet it's quite definite. Anyway there's definitely something to follow.

So I'm just going to use some poems and symbols from Rumi. Rumi is a 12th C. Sufi poet, a Sufi mystic with whom most people are probably familiar in the room; but I'm not going to say anything else about him. In a way the whole talk is a bit like following a railing in the dark. That's what it felt like. Just following this sort of railing in the dark.

So we have a huge barrel of wine. Wine appears a lot in Rumi's poems and we can't say what wine is, we can't say, "*Oh, when Rumi talks about wine he means such and such*". It means a lot of different things. I think if you realize this with symbolism in general, and in Rumi the symbols that he uses he uses in different ways. You can't quite pin them down and just say that this means this; as a symbol it defies definition. But we do get a sense of what the wine is. This wine that continually appears in his poetry is something to do with essence or spirit or 'soul'. So we have to use *soul* obviously in inverted commas. But this kind of essence or soul or spirit, it's not inside of us; it's neither inside nor outside.

Rumi: "*Last year I admired wines. This I'm wandering inside the red world. Gone, inner and outer. No moon, no ground or sky. Don't hand me another glass of wine, pour it in my mouth. I've lost the way to my mouth.*"

So if I were to ask you what you think Enlightenment is, and you tell me what you think it is, really I wouldn't find out anything about Enlightenment, but I would find out something about you. So you would tell me something about yourself in telling me what Enlightenment is. And in this talk you're going to find out more about me than Enlightenment.

Rumi: "*Gone inner and outer.*"

So Dogen says, and this is one of my favorite little quotes,

"To study the way is to study the self."

So that is what we are doing when we say we are studying Buddhism. When we say we are studying the Dharma, we are studying ourselves. There is no way or path outside of ourselves.

Wine in Rumi is also the experiences that we have.

Rumi: "*Drink the wine that moves you, as a camel moves when it's been untied and is just ambling about.*"

So in Rumi we find themes of drunkenness, of surrender and abandon. But we also find that these themes and symbols go hand in hand with strong themes of discipline. In Rumi there's a lot of staying up all night. He says, "*don't go back to sleep*". Stay up all night, keep knocking at the door. There's this kind of persistence, fasting, meditating. So you get these two threads in Rumi of surrender and discipline.

Rumi: "*Last year I admired wines. This I'm wandering inside the red world.*"

So he's inside the red world. For Rumi this means that he does not admire God, he sees nothing but God, he is in God.

Rumi: "*I want to feel myself inside the arc of your mallet when you work.*"

So in our case it means that we don't talk about Buddhism, or our practice, as if it's something outside of ourself. But it is about being completely immersed in our practice, seeing nothing *but* our practice.

And I always remember my nanna [grandmother]. When my nanna was alive, I used to go round there and she used to say, "How's your Buddhism?". Which I used to think was really funny: *my Buddhism*, like it was this thing that I kept in a box under my bed.

Rumi: "*There are thousands of warriors that can take over our minds. Don't think all ecstasies are the same. Drink from the presence of the saints not from those other jars. Every object, every being is a jar full of delight. Drink the wine that moves you, as a camel moves when its been untied and is just ambling about.*"

So where do we find this wine, this essence, this experience. We find it in the tavern. If you know Rumi you will know that the tavern appears in Rumi as well, and the tavern is a sort of glorious hell that human beings enjoy and suffer and then push off from in search of truth, and I really like this image. I used to sail a little bit, I used to go in boats because I lived in the Norfolk broads and that sense where you kind of push off from hard land in a boat, where you just kind of push off and you float out. I really like this idea that you kind of push off in search of truth from this world, this glorious hell, this tavern that we live in.

So the tavern is our human condition, so it's joy and suffering. And Bjork has this image, or this song called '[Who Is It] *Carry my joy on the left, Carry my pain on the right*' – and I really like it, it's just very much like that. That is the human condition. There's joy and there's pain and they go together. And I think sometimes that what can happen is we think that Dharma practice is about fixing *samsara*. So to some extent I think that we *can* fix *samsara*. We come across the Dharma, and maybe we become happier, healthier, and in a way we've become better at life. But because of that, we can then stop that continual pushing off in search of truth because life becomes more comfortable. I think it's a bit like people being *anagarikas*, and this idea of resisting settling down, not settling down.

What does it really mean to not settle down? It's not on a superficial level that we need to not settle down, it's that we need to not settle down anywhere comfortable where we're not going to be pushing off, attempting to push off into the truth. So this is why we say for the attainment of Enlightenment that I accept this ordination. It's not so that I can be more confident, more happy, or so that I can get on better with people, all those other things that are really important and they do happen, (and it's great that they happen), but that's not what we are doing in a way. We are trying to push off into truth.

So what is wrong with *samsara*? *Samsara* is perfect, yes, so let's not try to fix *samsara*. Let's appreciate it. *Samsara* is this glorious hell, that we're in the middle of, and

because of that, because of pain and suffering, because it is this kind of glorious hell, it is the ideal place for us to push off in search of the truth.

Rumi: *“The wine we really drink is our own blood, our bodies ferment in these barrels. We give everything for a glass of this. We give our minds for a sip.”*

So the wine in these barrels, the wine ferments in the tavern. Fermentation is one of the oldest symbols of human transformation, to ferment. If wine is our spirit then this fermenting is a kind of maturing, is a kind of aging of our soul or our spirit or our essence. And Rumi also talks a lot of cooking, and I think that this has been used as a symbol in Zen, this idea of “to be cooked”. The ego is cooked, softened with discipline and with experience.

Rumi: *“The chickpea leaps almost over the rim of the pot where it’s being boiled. Why are you doing this to me? The cook knocks him down with a ladle. Don’t you try to jump out. You think I’m torturing you, I’m giving you flavor so you can mix with spices and rice, and be the lovely vitality of a human being. Eventually a chick pea will say to the cook, boil me some more. Hit me with the skimming spoon, I can’t do this by myself.”* (Laughter)

So this is Rumi and the cook that is hitting Rumi with the skimming spoon is Rumi's teacher. The teacher is seen as the cook and the disciple is seen as the chick pea that's being cooked. And I think it's a really good symbol of transformation particularly when you think about things that are cooked slowly, this kind of slow cooking. I was thinking about when you roast peppers, like really slowly, and you get hungry, and they become soft and sweet and completely different from how they started off. They're completely transformed yet nothing's really added to them.

Rumi: *“The mystery doesn’t get clearer by repeating the question. Nor is it brought with going to amazing places. Until you’ve kept your eyes and your wanting still for fifty years, you don’t begin to cross over from confusion.”*

So it's a slow process of being cooked. I also like this symbol of cooking because it falls somewhere between a developmental model and a more kind of immanent model. So there is transformation, but we don't add anything on and we don't go anywhere new, yet something is transformed, we are transformed. So I quite like it in that sense. So we just need to ferment, to cook, and eventually to burn.

So we have a huge barrel of wine, our essence, our experience we live in the tavern which is a glorious hell in which we ferment gradually becoming softer and deeper, always leaving, always pushing off in search of truth, and always returning to the tavern.

Rumi: *“We have a huge barrel of wine but no cups. That’s fine with us. Every morning we glow and in the evening we glow again. They say there is no future for us. They’re right, which is fine with us.”*

But, we have no cups.

Rumi: “ *These forms we seem to be are cups floating in an ocean of living consciousness. They fill and sink without leaving an arc of bubbles or any goodbye spray. What we are is that ocean, too near to see, though we swim in it and drink it in. Don't be a cup with a dry rim.*”

So these forms that we seem to be are cups. We are like cups floating in an ocean of living consciousness. We're cups floating in, surrounded by, drinking in reality and yet we don't see it. So don't be a cup with a dry rim, drown yourself.

Padmasambhava talks of reality not as an ocean but as a clear light; but in a similar way.

Rumi: “ *Although it is evidently visible yet there is no one there who sees it. Amazing! Even though it exists in everyone everywhere yet it has gone unrecognized. Amazing! Nevertheless, you hope to obtain some other fruit than this elsewhere. Amazing! Even though it exists within yourself and nowhere else yet you seek for it elsewhere. Amazing!*”

So to be a cup with a dry rim is to limit ourselves. So a cup is a container and in a sense we're contained, we're limited, we limit ourselves to be cups with a dry rim. Now there's hundreds of ways in which we can limit ourselves I'm just going to talk about two things, two ways. One of them is *literalism* and the other is *usefulness*. I'm just going to talk a little bit about those two.

So first of all literalism. I don't know if people know Aloka. Probably most people are familiar with his paintings; he lives in Norwich, he's an artist. And Aloka says :

“In 1976, I formally committed myself to a course of action, ‘ordination’, about which I had a whole jumble of ideas. None of these have really turned out to be much use, except their gradual abandonment has provided a path of debris offering the consolation that I have actually moved from where I started.”

So I really like this image, Aloka's image of the spiritual life as a path of debris. It's as if we look behind and there's just this path of debris. And we think, *I've come somewhere then!* And it's the debris of what we've abandoned along the way. And I think that sometimes we think of the spiritual life as abandoning things, but we think what we abandon is worldly values or material things, whereas actually it's more a path of continually abandoning our wrong ideas of path. And *that* is the path.

I mean it's quite absurd! You can see why people when they do gain insight, or do become enlightened, often the response is to just burst out laughing really, as in these zen stories. So there's this path – this path of debris – is just a path of abandoned wrong ideas of what the path was. So we could kind of think well that's not very good is it: you know I've just had this continually wrong idea of what the path is that I've been abandoning for the last fifteen years. But that is the path, and that's good, that is what we're trying to do. I am beginning to realize this more and more actually that whatever I think now, whatever I hold as the truth now, whatever my understanding is now at this moment about what it is we're trying to do – what it is I'm trying to do is wrong, and I will abandon it and I will look back at that time when I gave that talk on Rumi and thought “*ugh!*”, and I'll think “*Oh, how embarrassing!*”.

So it's this continual kind of abandonment of maybe not wrong ideas but at least limited ideas of what we think the path is.

So in a sense this is literalism, holding these ideas is literalism. Bhante talks about literalism as when our intellect powered by craving grasps an idea of the path. So it's really our craving that grasps the idea of the path, but we think it's our intellect. Or our intellect is not as objective as we like to think it is. So we all want something, we all want all sorts of things and then when we come across the Dharma our intellect will grasp an idea of the path which fits nicely with what it is we want. So that's why if you ask me about Enlightenment you find out more about me than you do Enlightenment, and that's why Enlightenment is different for each of us because we each want something different. So it's really good to explore what you think Enlightenment is, because although I think you might not find out about Enlightenment, you do find out something about yourself. Which is the way to Enlightenment.

So a measure of effective going for refuge isn't so much that we are transformed, it isn't so much that we become completely different when we're effectively going for refuge, but that we continually confront the limits of our understanding. So we are continually forced to abandon our limited ideas of what the spiritual life is, and I think that is effective going for refuge, when we are continually willing to and, in a sense, forced to by the momentum of our own practice, to just keep giving up our old limited ideas of what the spiritual life is.

Often when we hit a crisis, when we have doubts, when something goes wrong or we think that something isn't working... but often I think what's happening is that we're just faced with a bigger vision of what it is we're actually doing, bigger than we thought and maybe less comfortable than we thought we were doing. In a way we've hit our own literal mindedness about the spiritual life and that's a really good thing. You know it's good to keep coming up against our literal mindedness about the spiritual life, and in a way I think the whole movement [the FWBO] recently has had this crisis, in a sense, and I think what happened is that there had been kind of ideas of what the spiritual life is all about which we collectively have had to kind of give up, and embrace something bigger, something less literal, something less comfortable.

So Aloka says that an antidote to literalism is beauty and myth. I think for me Rumi is an antidote to literalism because in his poetry, in his symbols, there isn't really anything that you can get hold of, you can't really take Rumi literally. He slips out of your grasp time and time again.

Rumi: “ *The cup wants to be lifted and used, not broken but carried carefully to the next. The cup knows there is a state for you beyond this one that comes with more vast awareness. The cup looks still but acts in secret to help. Sometimes you pour cup to cup, nothing happens. Pour instead into your deep ocean self, without calculation. If eyesight blurs, use a railing to follow.*”

So another way that we limit ourselves or contain ourselves, is through being useful. It's another way that we keep our rim dry, to take a utilitarian view of the spiritual life, when what we're really trying to do is way beyond any kind of usefulness in the

ordinary sense of the word. So Bhante talks about this in *‘Wisdom Beyond Words’* as the greater mandala. And it’s really, I means it’s just pure genius this chapter on the greater mandala which some people don’t know about, I think. So if you’re interested do look that up.

So he talks about this greater mandala, and he says that the Bodhisattva operates within this greater mandala. It’s a mandala of relishing, of enjoying, of taking delight, it’s a mandala of aesthetic appreciation.

Vajradarshini: *“Kavyasiddhi what are you doing today?”*

Kavyasiddhi: *“Well Vajradarshini I’m mainly just relishing people, taking delight, and enjoying what arises, within that I will be, you know, earning money, washing my clothes, having a run, but that’s by the by really.”*

So often I think it’s the other way around isn’t it? We get all the things done and then if we’ve got time, any time left at the end of the day we’ll relish something. Maybe relish going to bed with a cup of tea. So we put first all the kind of useful things, and then we add in these little treats. And I think also, I mean it’s interesting this word *aesthetic*, which is a whole other talk... Maitreya said that I’m quite into music and art and things like that, and she didn’t say what sort of music, she didn’t say that she hears me in my room listening to Iggy Pop. I think that sometimes we can have a kind of limited idea of what is aesthetic. So we have this kind of useful life where we do all these very worthy things, and then as a treat, you know, we then do something aesthetic. Which means going to a gallery or listening to music, preferably classical, going for a walk in the country; it’s a bit of a literal way of thinking. Well what does it mean to have aesthetic appreciation in our lives?

Rumi: *“Every object, every being, is a jar full of delight.”*

So we need to kind of turn it on it’s head, and we need to see that aesthetic appreciation is an attitude. It’s an attitude that we can take anywhere.

Rumi: *“The cup knows there’s a state for you beyond this, one that comes with more vast awareness. The cup looks still but acts in secret to help.”*

So the cup, our limited self, knows more than we think. It helps us to go beyond limitation. I think this is one of the things that came out of Saddhanandi’s talk, for me, is this idea that it’s in us, we can trust ourselves. The cup is acting in secret to help, I really love that idea. So to say that we have no cups in Rumi’s poem is to say that we are useless and limitless. That’s fine with us.

Rumi: *“We have a huge barrel of wine but no cups. That’s fine with us. Every morning we glow and in the evening we glow again. They say there’s no future for us, they’re right. Which is fine with us.”*

So in the morning we glow, in the evening we glow again. So what would it be like for us to break the cups, the half measures.

Rumi: *"I have a thirsty fish in me, that can never find enough of what it's thirsty for. Show me the way to the ocean, break these half measures. These small containers."*

So wine and cups, emptiness and form. Form is emptiness. Emptiness is form. This is the truth that we're attempting to push off into. And every time I've felt myself to any extent push off into the truth, it's been into an experience of seeing through things, of dissolving, of fluidity, of seeming to be less real than I thought they were. Of things becoming alive and breaking up, becoming less fixed. But I think to see this, to whatever extent that we see it, is just one side of the truth. And I don't think that the truth has sides, so one side of the truth is not truth. You can't have one side of the truth. So, again I think that this experience, it tells me more about myself than about reality. *"To study the way is to study the self."*

In Rumi's terms it tells you that I want to merge with the ocean, be the moth annihilated by the flame, that I'm drawn to nothingness. So it tells you that I have a tendency too towards nihilism. In realizing this it also helped me see something about why I've never really connected with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. At least not in anything but the most abstract sense. So in a way I've sometimes used that fact that I don't make that connection with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as a way of sort of undermining myself and thinking, well therefore I don't have a connection. And in a sense I do know that I have quite a deep connection in my sadhana practice with Akshobya, and I do know that I have a deep connection with Akshobya, it's just that he doesn't have any arms and legs! So for me there's always been this question – he doesn't have a body either actually, in case you've got a funny image; there's never been a question really about Akshobya, you know the existence of Akshobya or whatever it is that I think about Akshobya as being (or the Thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara, or whatever it might be). So there's never been a question about that, yet always in my mind there's been a question, 'Why would reality take form, why would reality take human form?' That, I just kind of think that no it wouldn't, you know. It doesn't make sense and I haven't believed it.

So quite a lot of you know that my dad died at Christmas quite suddenly, and I was with him when he died. I saw his cup fill and sink without leaving an arc of bubbles or any goodbye spray. I felt that I had very strongly an experience of form becoming emptiness. And something happened which in a way I can't talk about yet because it's very sort of recent but it's obviously had a very strong effect on me and now I feel that whenever I have that sensation that I'm pushing into the truth, it's full, there are forms appearing, in a sense. There's a kind of fullness there, a continual sort of manifesting. It's almost like I've seen one side and therefore something else is showing me itself, a kind of fullness of life is showing itself. And since then I've just very strongly had this sense that there is this play of form and emptiness all around us, all the time, and that is the greater mandala. Our sort of appreciating, our relishing in this form and emptiness, this play of form and emptiness is the greater mandala. It's reality just showing itself to us all the time.

Just recently we did a retreat on lineage, and we were doing the going for refuge and prostration practice, and I was talking. I gave a talk about the practice, and I was particularly talking about visualization, visualization practice. And it just struck me that it was springtime and it just felt like oh, oh yes. It almost sort of felt like we're living inside this visualization practice. It's spring; it is like form is appearing out of

nothingness. Out of nothingness trees appear, out of nothingness leaves appear, flowers appear, and it just had quite a strong effect on me just realizing that it is continually being shown to us. And then it comes to autumn and things will dissolve, things will disappear and, in fact actually, as things come into being they are disappearing. The closer we look the more we see that they disappear as they come into being, and that this is the truth. So when we do a sadhana practice, when we do a visualisation practice, this is the truth that we push off in search of. This manifesting, dissolving, creating, letting go. So they go hand in hand, and it's just happening everywhere. So once I started seeing it in spring I could see it everywhere. And I was thinking there, when we prepare a meal and it's there, and then it's eaten, and then it's gone and then all these dirty dishes appear, and they manifest and then we wash them and we put them away. And I think you can also see it through time how you anticipate something, you anticipate a meeting with somebody, and then you meet, you connect, and then you part and then you forget, even, you know. It's like this continual thing's coming into being and dissolving. Continual approaching, being, letting go, dissolving; and this truth is so obvious, so in front of our eyes, and yet we don't see it. Amazing.

Rumi : “ *Praise to the emptiness that blanks out existence; existence, this place made from our love for that emptiness. Yet somehow comes emptiness. This existence goes, praise to that happening, over and over.*”

In Rumi's poems he uses what he calls ‘*fana*’ and ‘*baka*’, and they are these two streamings across the doorsill. Rumi talks about a dervish doorway which is often in his poems; there is a round door, which appears quite a lot in his poems. So there's this round door and doorway, and it's the dervish doorway between the human and the divine, or the doorway between the secular and the sacred. And across this doorway, across this doorsill, there are two streamings, one coming towards, one going away. These two streamings continually across the doorsill. So *fana* is this streaming that moves out, from the human into mystery. It's a magnificent disintegration, it's the drop dissolving in the ocean, it's us pushing off from the tavern into truth. And *fana*, I think we can sometimes mistakenly think of as the spiritual bit, and then there's *baka*; and *baka*'s the streaming that comes the other way across the doorsill. So it's a return from an expanded state into just the work that we have to do that day. It's like a return to the tavern, to the glorious hell, a return to pain and effort, confusion and ordinariness. So *baka* we can sometimes mistake as the worldly, but actually there are just these two continual streamings across the doorsill. And in Rumi's terms what happens – and in our terms as well – is that we realise that these two streamings are one. We realise that there aren't really two streams across the doorsill, there is just experience.

So Shams is a bit of an example of this, Shams is Rumi's teacher; well he's talked of as a fierce god man that Rumi meets and they have a very interesting relationship because he is a teacher, but he's also very much a friend. It makes me think, I often think of Bhante as Shams actually, it's very much like a personal relationship that he has with Rumi, a very kind of mutual relationship but he is his teacher, or his inspiration. And Shams would spend half of his time in ecstatic trance, and then the other half of his time working as a stone mason. And I really like that combination that you do both those things. You're either, you know, in ecstatic trance or you're

working as a stone mason. It's a kind of bringing together in a way of form and emptiness.

So I think that unless we really try to understand something about form and emptiness (I mean I know it's not really an easy thing to try and understand) – but unless we can really reflect on that underneath everything else that we reflect on in the Dharma, I think that it can be really easy to kind of get the wrong end of the stick, with a lot of different things.

I remember standing at a bus stop when I was probably still a hairdresser, but I had come across the heart sutra. It says in the heart sutra form is nothing but emptiness, emptiness is nothing but form, and I was standing at this bus stop thinking about this and it just hit me, you know, it still seems easier in a way to grasp *form is nothing but emptiness*, that's what we try and work on: trying to see that form is empty, but then trying to see that emptiness is form; in a way, again, it is a bit like a streaming back across the doorsill. And we really do have to try and push off into that truth. It's not something that we're going to be able to grasp with our intellect or our mind, but we do need to let a sense of that inform how we think about the Dharma.

One of the things I've been thinking about recently which I wonder if in some ways we've sort of, got the wrong end of the stick with a little bit, is the Bodhisattva Ideal. Recently Dhammadinna did a retreat studying the eight-point mind training, an Order retreat at Tiratanaloka. So the essence of these verses, probably some of you have come across them, is to take all difficulties onto the path. So it's all to do with, you don't see obstacles to your practice, you don't see obstacles on the path because whatever you see, which we might call an obstacle, we take it onto the path. So it's taking all difficulties onto the path. In a way it's another way of not having Buddhism in a box under your bed, you know that you get out when you've got time or when things are going okay. It's like everything is your practice, nothing lies outside of your practice. We'd been studying this all week, and at the end of the week we had a sort of questions-and-answers, discussion thing, and somebody said, "*But you know, wouldn't people practicing this, this taking all difficulties onto the path, wouldn't they be studying, or within the Bodhisattva Ideal?*" So it raised the question of, well, are we? Do we think that we are practicing the Bodhisattva Ideal? Is that how we see our practice? And in a way these verses, they don't make any sense if you don't think you're practicing the Bodhisattva Ideal. So they say:

"When someone out of envy does me wrong, by insulting me and the like, may I accept defeat and offer victory to them.

Even if someone whom I have helped and in whom I have placed my hopes does great wrong by harming me, may I see them as an excellent spiritual friend."

So these verses go on like this becoming more and more outrageous, until you're just thinking "*No way!*". You know, no way: the worse, the more awful someone is to you, the more you think that they are a 'treasure trove', and the more you appreciate them. And you do feel like everything in your whole being is going *no way*, forget it, that's beyond the call of duty. So anyway, I started doing a bit of a survey, an informal survey about the Bodhisattva Ideal, asking people what they thought about the Bodhisattva Ideal. And it started off with Order members, because it was an Order

retreat, and then I've been asking a few other people; and I don't think it's exactly flavour of the month, Bodhisattva Ideal. It is at Tiratnaloka, actually, in a way I do think that's one thing I've been struck by in joining the team there, is just how inspired everybody is by the Bodhisattva Ideal in a very kind of real ordinary sort of way, that is their kind of informing principle. But anyway, it doesn't seem like it is flavour of the month, although the last year or two the retreats that we've done on the Bodhisattva Ideal people have really loved them; well I've loved them actually, and other people have really loved them because I think they've filled out the picture a bit of what the Bodhisattva Ideal is about.

So what I've been wondering is to some extent if we haven't grasped the Bodhisattva Ideal wrongly, in the sense that we've grasped it without the emptiness aspect. I think that the Bodhisattva Ideal is easy to grasp wrongly in a way, and it's easy to end up with thinking about it in terms of compassion but not necessarily in terms of emptiness. And without emptiness there is no real compassion. So it's not compassion then that we're practicing. I think it's quite dangerous because it's so easy to think that it's good to be good, you know, it's good to be good and it's good to help people. So when we come across the Bodhisattva Ideal I think we can grasp it in that sense, oh yes of course it's good to be good and it's good to you know hold the door to nirvana open. You know, "*Don't you worry, you go through I'm alright here! I'll be alright.*" And actually to miss the emptiness aspect of the Bodhisattva Ideal and I think, don't know this is controversial to say this, but I think maybe particularly as women it can be easy to kind of fall into a kind of martyrdom of just doing everything for everybody else and genuinely aspiring to practice the Bodhisattva Ideal; but we've kind of missed the crucial link. So when we go through these eight verses, the people that were studying this and had been practicing this, they probably were really rooted in the Bodhisattva Ideal; but there is a little bit at the end of the verses that says, "*may I see all things as illusion.*" That's what it says or in another translation it says, "*aware that all things are illusory.*" So it just kind of brings in sort of the idea of *shunyata*, of emptiness, just at the end by which time you're really grateful for it. So it's slightly tagged on the end but it's absolutely crucial, because without that kind of perspective, without the perspective that there's emptiness, I think that the Bodhisattva Ideal, well it isn't the Bodhisattva Ideal and not only is it not the Bodhisattva Ideal, I think it's a bit off-putting. So I think we've been a little bit off-put by the Bodhisattva Ideal, maybe by grasping at a little bit too much one end of that particular stick. Bhante says in '*Wisdom Beyond Words*':

"The Bodhisattva does not think here I am, a Bodhisattva. Or, here I am, coursing in Perfect Wisdom. The Bodhisattva is absorbed to the point of self forgetfulness all the time."

Dogen says: "*To study the way is to study the self.*" And the next line of that Dogen quote is "*To study the self is to forget the self.*"

"When you're totally integrated, when your reason is your emotion and your emotion is your reason, it's then quite difficult to say whether you're doing something for a particular reason or simply because you feel like it. You are aware of why you're doing whatever you're doing and you're emotionally engaged in what you're doing, but they seem to come to the same thing. That is intelligence."

So, “*Every morning we glow and in the evening we glow again*”, because there is nothing to be done. So in the highest sense, the spiritual life is an illusion, in the sense that it is beyond duality. The two streamings across the doorsill are actually one. But, this can only be realised by leading the spiritual life.

So all of this, yes, all of this is neither illusory nor real. So because all of this isn't illusory we do have to act, we have to practice, we have to practice the Bodhisattva Ideal, we have to practice bearing in mind other people, bearing in mind the planet, bearing in mind the effect that we can have on the world because it's not an illusion; but it's not real. So because it isn't real we can't get hung up about it, we can't control it. That's the kind of balance that we're trying to strike.

Rumi: “*We have a huge barrel of wine but no cups. That's fine with us. Every morning we glow and in the evening we glow again. They say there's no future for us, they're right, which is fine with us.*”

So ‘*They say there is no future for us, they're right, which is fine with us.*’ So what does it mean to have that kind of perspective, that kind of attitude. Some of you might know Vajrasaki, she's been living at Gampo Abbey, Pema Chodron's place and she's an Order member. She writes into Shabda, and it's been really interesting reading her Shabda reports from Gampo Abbey. It's just a completely different setup, a completely different training. And recently she had an interview with Pema Chodron and she wrote about it in Shabda [the Western Buddhist Order journal]. And one of the things that she asked Pema Chodron is, how do you avoid burn out in intense situations? So Pema Chodron said, well you need to have a stabilized realisation of shunyata. So I read that, I read the first bit – how do we avoid burn out – and thought that's interesting; and then I read the second bit – you need to have a stabilized realisation of shunyata, and I just caught myself, I just caught myself doing this thing which is just like forget it – yeah, out of my league. Not even consciously actually because I don't think I lack confidence in a certain sort of way, but I just realised that I can very easily just go, “*hmm, not for me*”, “*I'm not going to do that*”, and I caught myself doing that and I think well hang on, you know, why do I do that, why do I assume that shunyata is like so... it's like it's a different planet or something. It's like there's no connection between me and it.

As Padmasambhava says in his quote earlier, it's like we're often looking elsewhere for what is right under our noses. And you know, more and more I've been thinking well maybe we do have experience of insight. I definitely think that my dad dying, I mean I wouldn't make any claims about it,, but it was a very, very strong experience, and what is insight if it's those experiences where we just see something in a very real way. You know I felt, well maybe I do have some experience of emptiness or fullness, and maybe I just don't recognise it, maybe I'm continually having these experiences but I don't really recognize them. And then I was thinking, well what would it mean to have a sustained realisation of shunyata; presumably I could do that and still be on this planet. You know presumably it wouldn't be so way off that it would be unrecognizable. It got me thinking, I'm not going to go into it now, but it just got me thinking what would I be like if I did have more of a realisation of shunyata, you know maybe I'd be a bit more flexible, maybe I do this, maybe I'd do that. It isn't like that, I'd be completely other than what I am now.

Again I think Saddhanandi drew that out in her talk that we can have unreal ideals and between us and them there is this gulf that is just impossible to even think about crossing because they're unreal. There's a quote from Dennis Potter when he was dying. He was being interviewed, and he knew that he was dying of cancer, and he says,

“The blossom is out in full now, it's plum tree, it looks like apple blossom but it's white. It's the whitest, frothiest blossomest blossom that ever could be, and I can see it. Things are both more trivial than they ever were and more important than they ever were, and the difference between the trivial and the important doesn't seem to matter. But the now-ness of everything is absolutely wondrous.”

Sraddhagita sent me this quote just after my dad had died and it's been on my mind a lot since then. I think there's a certain kind of perspective that comes with death, with being close to death, and you do see the world differently; and I suppose I do believe that what you see is a bit more close to reality than what we usually see.

One of the main ways that I would explain that feeling, how it felt to me, that change of perspective was seeing that there is little difference between the trivial and the important. In a way there is no such thing as trivial and no such thing as important, yes. So when I came back to Tiratanaloka after my dad had died there were all sorts of things that normally I would think were so important, that needed to be done, that were just not important. And then there were all these little things, just like listening to the birds sing. I mean I lay in the bath one day thinking, and I couldn't bear the thought that if I was going to die – I was thinking about what would happen if I sort of knew that I was going to die, thinking about this trivial and important; and I was thinking, God, I couldn't bear the thought of never hearing the birds sing again. That seems like an unbearable kind of thought, yet I hardly ever notice the birds singing; my alarm clock goes off and I get up, and I don't really give the time to all those little things.

So I still don't really know what Rumi is going on about in his poem, but it does feel like finding a railing to follow in the dark. Thinking about that poem is like following a railing in the dark, and what I get a sense of that poem being about, is to do with trust. I think it's to do with trust, and it's what Hsuan-Tsang calls *'the trusting mind'*. It's about trusting ourselves and our experience. I think it's about trusting that reality is manifesting all around us, and that we can trust that there is reality and there is our own sense of that and our own experience.

So Hsuan-Tsang says: *“Emptiness here, emptiness there, for the infinite universe stands always before your eyes. One thing, all things, move among and intermingle without distinction. To live in this realisation is to be without anxiety about non-perfection. To live in this faith is the road to non-duality, because the non-dual is one with the trusting mind.”*

So, *'the non-dual is one with the trusting mind.'*

I'm going to finish with a little story, and it's a little story that you can think about when you're washing your clothes.

Soap is the dirt we buy. We introduce it to the dirt that we already have. These two dirts are so pleased to see each other, that they mingle and swim around in water together amongst our clothes until, when the moment is right, we lift the clothes free of both soap and dirt.

Buddhism is the dirt you buy. Introduce it to the dirt you have.