

Advice for Alak Dongak

by Patrul Rinpoche

Before the holy *nyagrodha*, the very best of trees,
All alone, you tamed the hosts of Māra and his army,
Simply through the force of your loving kindness—
Supreme guide who attained full awakening, care for me!

O Protector, you renounced the kingdom of a universal monarch,
Casting it aside as if it were nothing more than poisoned food,
And, all alone, you departed for the quiet of the forest,
There to accomplish single-pointed meditation—thus we've heard.

Therefore, these delightful mountain solitudes,
Are like the family estate to the supreme guide's heirs,
And, as the best of protectors himself has said,
To rely on solitude is indeed the pinnacle of joys!

Forests, hermitages and isolated dwelling places—
These are the outer solitude of the Victor's heirs.
Avoiding selfishness and faint-hearted fears—
This is the bodhisattvas' internal isolation.

Keeping, therefore, to outer forms of solitude,
Tame the inner afflictions through tranquillity and insight,
And aspire to the supreme conduct of Samantabhadra—
Possessing such good fortune one is truly the Buddhas' heir.

With its sweetly cascading mountain streams,
Rocky mountain shelters ascending to heaven,
And gently falling dew drops of whitest moonlight—
This mountain retreat surpasses even the *deva* realm.

The dance of the slender trees does not stir the passions,
And sweet birdsong brings neither attachment nor aversion,
Enveloped in non-conceptuality's gentle, cooling shade—
Such youthful companionship is surely better than a silent void!

Undisturbed by noisy chatter, that thorn in meditation's side,
Alone in this excellent place of unattended solitude,
The old monkey of the mind has nowhere left to roam,
And so, settling down within, finds its satisfaction.

Under the bright oppressive sunlight of busy, bustling crowds,
Our own faults and unhelpful thoughts eclipse the constellations,
But when embraced by threefold solitude's cooling nectar beams,
Such faults can easily be overcome through the proper antidotes.

When it's undisturbed by rippling thoughts of sadness,
The pool-like surface of the mind is still, unmoving,
And faith and compassion's reflections readily arise,
In such constancy, what need is there for a companion?

If the mirror of mind is wiped clean, time and again,
And uncluttered with objects and circumstances,
Study, reflection and meditation present a clear impression,
And what is there to prevent the dawn of Dharma's light?

Hunger, thirst, cold and the like—all forms of physical affliction,
Together with sadness, fear and all such mental suffering,
Can, through the teachings, enhance the purifying path,
And, unburdened by avoidance or indulgence, adorn the mind!

The pleasures of the five senses, longed for by the foolish,
Are not to be found in solitude as they are among the devas,
But joys of Dharma in their hundreds, lauded by the wise,
Are more abundant in a lonely forest than in Tuṣita's paradise.

To the bodhisattva who sees suffering as a spur to diligence
There is nothing that could conflict with Dharma practice.
Should a hundred or a thousand demonic hordes arise as foes,
How could they affect the wise for whom adversities are allies?

Savouring the fine fruit of the teacher's nectar-like instructions,
Do not chase after the hollow, husk-like words of the scholars;
Seeking the bright luminescence of the bodhisattvas' compassion,
Do not hanker after the flickering lights of ordinary conversation.

Like a smith skilfully taming and ornamenting the mind,
With no need for the many tools of varied fields of knowledge,
It's enough to take up the blade of renunciation and compassion,
Thereby to transform a negative character's stubborn hide.

A single nectar shower of the teacher's compassion,
Can cause the ripening crop of qualities to grow,
As the clouds of devotion amass again and again,
And there's no need to fear an untimely frost.

Love and affection are all the greater
For friends, teachers and family living far away,
But it's hard to feel so when they're close by,
As intimacy incites only irritation!

Faith and compassionate love, cultivated in solitude,
For the lofty, the lowly and all those in between,
Tied to enlightened action with the rope of aspiration,
Will never come undone throughout one's future lives.

Even the vast scented leaves of empty talk and words,
Can be embraced by the harsh touch of a serpent's evil,
But for one who's grasped the subtle meaning, like sandalwood,
What unhappiness is there in separation from an old dog like me?

If this old dog survives and is still here nine years hence,
There'll be time to hear his barking speeches once again,
But noble beings are made by the warmth of experience,
And while the breath has not yet faded, it's wrong to delay.

The supreme, gracious teacher is like all the buddhas in person,
So let his ambrosial teaching seep into the centre of your heart,
And if, through diligent practice, you imbibe life's essence,
You'll attain immortality in this very lifetime—that's avowed!

But to remain in solitude without taming the mind
Is to be like the wild woodland beasts and birds,
As the supreme Victorious One himself has said,
Vital it is, then, to unite outer and inner solitude!

Proud at the thought of having tamed the mind,
After simply pacifying a single thought or emotion,
And contemptuous of those who are pre-occupied—
These are hooks of Māra for those in retreat.

Pay no heed, therefore, to others' vices or virtues,
And inspire yourself with enthusiasm for Dharma,
For who is happier than the host of the event,
At which the mind is seen to be a mere illusion?

All the various thoughts are laid out like the features of a game,
For the child-like power of awareness to play with non-attachment,
The old mothers of the six realms take their seats as compassion's focus,
And the offerings, sources of merit, are shared by dedication's skilful hands.

All this talk of realising and seeing, it's all so hollow!
Forget bliss and clarity, they're just temporary highs!
Cultivate emptiness of which compassion is the essence,
And your own and others' welfare is assured, it's said.

Even a hundred years of exertion born of expectation for reward,
Will only postpone the supreme accomplishment, we're told.
But on the path of the six pāramitās free from the seven attachments,¹
Even without enlightenment in this lifetime, there'll be no regret!

First you met a supremely qualified guide,
Then you felt renunciation and joy for the Dharma,
And now you're meditating in woodland solitude,
O my fortunate friend, you're fortunate indeed!

I met noble masters, but failed to follow them properly,
Whatever Dharma I train in, I don't apply it to my mind,
I took to solitude, but couldn't be diligent or undistracted,
Turning into an old dog like me means remaining malign!

My friend, you've set out on the way to every happiness,
But as you tirelessly cultivate diligence and devotion,
Be ever watchful, alert for the demon of arrogant pride,
And your life will end happily too—do you understand?

Not ruining the mind with false visions of deities or demons,
But furnishing it with the treasures of jewel-like qualities,
May you follow in the footsteps of the great Kadampa saints,
This is my prayer: Original Protector, please bear witness!

Even if wicked old Abu should die and descend into the lower realms,
There'll be a time when he's freed through the teacher's kindness.
Then, I pray, may he continue to uphold supreme enlightened action
For as long as all beings, his very own mothers, still remain!

These sincere words, which arose like a rainbow from the mouth,
Were offered from the mountain solitude of Dhichung by ragged Abu,
In order to dispel the sadness of a dear, like-minded friend.
May their meaning become apparent!

| Translated by Adam Pearcey, 2014. Originally published on adamspearcey.com.

1. According to Ārya Asaṅga's commentary on the Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra,

where they are explained in connection with the pāramitā of generosity, the seven kinds of attachment (*chags bdun*) are: (1) attachment to possessions, (2) postponing the practice, (3) being satisfied with just a little practice, (4) expectation of something in return, (5) karmic results, (6) adverse circumstances, and (7) distractions. ↩



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