

Feedback is More Valuable than Gold (continued)

良言如玉 (續)

A Dharma talk given by Ajahn Amaro at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas on October 29, 2018

Chinese Translated by Ling ChinBen & Ma ChinXi

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凌親本、馬親喜 中譯



According to the southern Buddhist (Theravada) calendar, upon the completion of the Rains Retreat on the 15th day of the tenth lunar month, we held a special ceremony called the Pavāraṇā Ceremony. It is a ceremony that the Buddha established in which we invite our friends, family, and companions in the holy life and we say to them, “Whatever I have done during this last period of time that has been upsetting or difficult to you, I invite you to please tell me [in hopes that I can change and reform].” Hence, **Pavāraṇā means invitation for suggestion.** I feel that this is a very useful practice and every year around this time I will emphasize the importance of Pavāraṇā.

當我們剛結束南傳佛曆上的結夏安居，就是農曆十月月圓那天，同時舉行一個叫「自恣」的特殊儀式。這是佛陀制定的，我們會邀請親友和道友來參加，然後對他們說：「這段時間，無論我做了什麼觸惱你們或是給你們惹麻煩的地方，請告訴我，我才能改過自新。」因此，自恣代表邀請人家給予意見。這是很受用的一種修行，每年這個時候我都會重提它的重要。

佛陀曾經說過，如果有兩樣東西給你選：一個是價值一億美元的一堆金子，一個是針對你的行為給予批評（反饋）。佛陀說如果你夠

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The Buddha once said, "If somebody offered you either a pile of gold worth a hundred million dollars, or feedback about your conduct, if you're wise, you would prefer to receive the feedback rather than the huge pile of gold."

The Buddha tells us that it's more valuable to be criticized, to have someone point out to you that your speech is unkind, that you dress sloppily, or that you are careless with the work you do and how you carry out your teachings. So, when we're told that our behavior could be better, our ego (self-view) is pained and we think, "Oh, don't say that." But the Buddha said, "This is very valuable to us. If our friends don't tell us where we can improve ourselves, then it's unlikely that we'll see it for ourselves." So, we improve ourselves through receiving feedback from our friends.

Another part of that same ceremony is what we call "asking for forgiveness." So, again, even if we recognize the mistakes we make, even with the best of intentions, we still annoy each other. Maybe, when we have the circumambulation, we go too fast or too slow or chant too fast or slow. Or, maybe, we're doing it so perfectly that it's really annoying to the other people. Last year, when we had the big Sangha meeting at Amaravati in England, the heads of the branch monasteries from around the world gathered together. I was the abbot and host because it was a big community gathering.

When it came up for the opportunity to bring criticism or to express displeasure, I was criticized for being too punctual. "Ajahn, you're always on time; it's really intimidating. You're never late. It's upsetting." Yes, I'm kind of proud of being criticized for being too punctual, so I confessed to that, but to some people, that was actually painful. "Oh, he's always on time. It makes me look bad."

So, we annoy and upset each other, and often do this unconsciously. This is the reason why we ask for forgiveness. We say, "For whatever I have done by body, speech or mind, intentionally or unintentionally, that has been upsetting or painful to you, I ask for your forgiveness." And then, the other person says, "I forgive you, please forgive me also."

I feel that this is a very beautiful and wholesome traditional custom to say and cultivate to help guide our lives. When we are

聰明(你有智慧)，你寧願選擇批評(反饋)，也不會要那堆金子。

佛陀告訴我們，他人的批評比黃金更有價值。人們會告訴你，你言語不友善、穿著不整齊，或者工作粗心，以及你把所學的道理實踐了多少。被人講自己不夠好時，我們的我相(我見)會感到不舒服：「哦，別這樣說！」但是佛陀說：「這對我們很寶貴的。如果朋友不告訴我們哪些需要改進，我們自己不太可能看到這些問題。」因此藉由朋友的指正，我們才能提升自我。

自恣的另一個部分，是請求寬恕原諒。即使認識到自己的錯誤，那怕這個錯誤是出於好意，我們還是觸惱了對方。例如繞唸繞得太快或太慢，或者唱誦唱得太快或太慢，甚至事情做得太完美，也會觸惱其他人。去年英國永生寺有一個大型的僧伽會議，世界各地分支道場的方丈都雲集於此。因為身為永生寺的方丈，所以我是那次會議的主席。

當邀請參加者提出批評或是不滿時，我被批評太過準時：「法師，你總是那麼準時，讓我們很緊張。你從不遲到，讓人很不自在。」對於因為守時而遭人批評，我承認感覺有些自豪；但是對某些人而言，我的守時確實傷到他們：「哦，他一向準時不誤，這讓我顯得相形見绌。」

我們就這樣經常不知不覺中，令彼此生煩惱或者不愉快。這也是為什麼要請求寬恕，我們會跟對方說：「我以身口意對你造成的困擾或者痛苦，無論出於故意或者無意，都請求你原諒。」這時對方會回答：「我原諒你，也請你原諒我。」

我認為自恣是既美好又有益的一項傳統，像這樣的自我發露和修行，有助於指



not ready to call upon our friends, (our kalyana mitra), and ask for criticism, then we might feel that we are okay. You might think that you don't need feedback and that you are in control of you life, and feel happy about your actions. But I feel it's very helpful to recognize the mistakes that we're unaware of because we're not reliable, and our memories and opinions are not absolute facts. They are our point of view. Sometimes, we're not very well informed or we don't remember things very clearly.

So, I often tell the story of how, in 1983, I made a long pilgrimage. I didn't do three steps, one bow, but I walked all the way through England in a very windy route about 830 miles from the south of England in Chithurst Monastery to the little branch monastery in the north of England near the Scottish border. That took about three months. 25 years later in 2008, both the layman who did the pilgrimage with me and I decided to revisit some of the places to retrace the steps of that walk.

One of the most powerful experiences of that second walk was seeing how all the things that I remembered and the places that I visited had changed. For example, on that first walk in 1983, we went to visit this church on the top of a hill called St. Martha's Church, and I had this clear memory of standing in the doorway of the church and looking toward the southern hills. When we got to the church the second time, the whole thing had been moved through 90 degrees. The door of the church no longer faced south, but to the east! Oh, that's not right, it was facing that way last time. How strange! Well, of course they didn't change the church because it's around 500 years old, but I had this clear memory of the door facing the southern hills.

So we walk on, and then a few days later, we come to a layperson's village house where we were invited to in 1983. I had this clear memory of the big house right by the village green with a driveway going up from the field and a nearby house on the top of the little hill.

引我們的人生。尚未打算尋求朋友（善知識）的批評時，我們會覺得自己還不錯。你會認為你不需要別人的意見，你知道自己在做什麼，你也很滿意自己的行為。但是我認為，善知識的糾正批評能幫助我們認識自己察覺不到的錯誤，因為我們並不可靠，我們的記憶和想法未必符合事實。那些只是我們的個人看法，有時候消息不是那麼靈通（有時候我們看事情不够全面），或者事情記得不清楚。

因此，我經常講關於1983年行腳的故事。我當時不是三步一拜，而是從英格蘭南部的威瑟斯特寺出發，徒步穿越英格蘭，到達北部靠近蘇格蘭邊境的一座小道場，沿途經常是颶風的氣候，全程八百三十英里，歷時三個月。2008年，當年一同行腳的居士和我決定重訪以前到過的一些地方，回顧二十五年前的景物。

這趟的二度行腳，令我印象最深的是：所有記得的事物、到過的地方都改變了。例如1983年位於山頂上的聖瑪莎教堂，我清楚地記得當年站在教堂門口向南俯瞰，丘陵起伏連綿。但是二十五年後，當我們再次來到這裡時，所有景物都旋轉九十度；教堂大門不再面南，而是朝向東邊了。哦，不是這樣的，當年明明是對著那條路。真奇怪！教堂一定不會改變，因為它已經有五百年歷史

The village green and driveway were gone. "Where have they put the house? What's happened?"

Then we look at the map and it indicated that the house was half a mile outside the village. But then we walk down the road for half a mile and saw the driveway. They had moved the whole house. Every single place that we revisited had been changed.

There was this huge copper beech tree in Yorkshire village that used to be right in front of the post office, and this 300-year-old tree had been moved to the other side of the street.

So, I have a reputation for having a good memory, and all the changes I saw was a really interesting teaching because it showed me that memory is unreliable. What you think is a fact might not be true, or when you're certain of things, which is your opinion, it might not actually be a fact. So, we need help from others and recognize our mistakes, so we can be freed of greed, hatred, and delusion. If we can understand that everything is our opinion and that we might not always be right, then we can be much more flexible and adaptable in improving ourselves.

The importance of having good friends is emphasized in both southern and northern Buddhist traditions and in general everywhere. A part of our human experience is the value of good friends. And one of the teachings that I've been reflecting on a lot in the last year or so is where the Buddha speaks about ignorance as the basis which causes us to get lost, make mistakes, and create difficulty for others and ourselves. And the Buddha points out that if you have good friends (saparisa), you are then given more opportunities to listen to good teachings and true dharma.

If you listen to good teachings and true dharma, this will increase your quality of

了；但是我記得很清楚，教堂的大門是朝南、面對著山的。

於是我們繼續走，幾天後來到一個鄉村，因為1983年這裡的一位居士曾經邀請我們來此作客。我對那間大別墅仍記憶猶新，旁邊有一大片綠地，還有一條通往山下的車道，山頂上還有另一戶人家。但是當我們到那兒時，綠地和車道都不見了！「他們把房子放哪了？怎麼一回事？」

我們查看地圖，上面說別墅在村外的半英里。於是我們往山下走了半英里，果然看到房子的車道，竟然整棟別墅被移動了。幾乎每個重遊的地方，都發生了變化。

還有，約克郡有一棵巨大的銅山毛櫸樹，就在郵局的前面。現在這棵三百歲的老樹，已經被移到街道另一邊。

我的記性可是出了名的好，然而這次親眼所見的改變，著實給我上了很有趣的一堂課，告訴我記憶是不可靠的。你認定的事實，未必是真的；而你非常有把握的某些事物，或許也只是你個人的看法，而不是事實本身。因此我們需要藉助旁人來認識自己的錯誤，這樣才能免於貪瞋癡的毒害。如果能明白凡事只是自己的觀點（如果我們能意識到到世事其實都是我們分別心的投影）不是永遠都對的，這樣面對不同觀點的時候，我們將有更多的包容力與接受度，來令自己更上一層樓。

無論南傳佛教或北傳佛教，乃至普世的價值，都很強調善知識的重要。好友跟善知識的價值是人類經驗的一部分。過去一年多裡，我經常思惟的教法之一，就

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faith (srađđha). If faith increases, this supports the quality in wise reflection. With faith in the Triple Gem, then the mind can be more reflective and develop wisdom, clear comprehension (sampajañña). Then you're more attentive, you're more attuned to the time, the place, the situation. You will be more restrained and not influenced by discrimination; hence, you won't react to life based on impulses, you will have indriya sanwara, the restraint of the senses.

When there's restraint, that reduces the causes for greed, hatred, and delusion. Because the three unwholesome roots are deprived of the fuel from ignorance (avidyā). When greed, hatred, and delusion are weaker, then that also weakens what we call the five hinderances: sense desire, ill will, restlessness, dullness, and doubt.

Therefore, having good friends is vital. Whom do you choose to spend your time with? What do you put your attention onto? The Buddha points out this makes a huge difference. If you don't spend time with good people, then the opposite things will happen. If you don't hear good teachings, faith doesn't arise, and you won't have wise reflection and restraint of the senses. And as greed, hatred, and delusion increases the five hindrances, we see even more unclearly with ignorance.

Finally, I want to mention this evening that I feel very happy to see that both City of Ten Thousand Buddhas and Abhayagiri Monastery are flourishing and doing so well in terms of the living community and the physical structures. Abhayagiri Monastery exists where it does because of the great generosity of Master Hsuan Hua 23 years ago. When he was reaching the last weeks and days of his life, he made the offering of 128 acres of land that forms half of the property at Abhayagiri. This was offered to Ajahn Sumedho at end of May in 1995.

But even with signs of success and flourishing, I still encourage us all not to be overly content with the qualities of blessing and success. Don't just think, "Yes, this is great! Everything's going really well!" Instead, what can we learn from this?

We are following the Buddha's way and appreciate the blessings and the opportunities given to us, but they are most fully actualized by the attitude of non-grasping (non-attachment). This way, these blessings and fortunate situations can be received and made full use of to benefit everybody who lives here and who passes through these doors.

是佛陀曾說導致眾生迷失、犯錯、給別人和自己障礙的根本原因，就是無明；若能時常親近善知識，聽聞善法和真理的機會就會增加。

多聽聞善法和真理，信心就會增強；信心增強，觀照力就會提高。如果對三寶有信心，內心會時常迴光返照，開發自性的智慧正知；因此而能更加專注，對境界更加理解。我們的心不再被外境的不平所干擾，而能自己做得主，遇事不會衝動；不再放縱六根感受，而能調伏諸根。

諸根若能調伏，貪瞋痴三毒就會減少，因為三毒的根源就是無明。貪瞋痴減少，障礙禪定的五蓋——貪欲、瞋恚、睡眠、掉悔、懷疑，亦隨之減少。

因此善知識非常重要，你選擇和哪些人在一起？你注意力放在哪些事情上？佛陀說不同的選擇，後果截然不同。如果不與善知識在一起，壞的事情就會發生。聽不到善知識的良言教導，信心就無法增加，就開發不出智慧正知，以及調伏諸根的能力。於是，無明生出三毒，繼而滋長五蓋，我們就更加無法看清事實。

今晚最後想說的是，我很高興看到萬佛聖城和無畏寺欣欣向榮的景象，無論社區活動以及硬體設施，都發展得很好。無畏寺能有今天，完全來自二十三年前宣公上人的慷慨布施。上人臨終前送我們一百二十八英畝地，這佔無畏寺目前土地的二分之一。1995年五月底，上人把這份禮物送給了阿姜蘇美度。

然而，儘管我們現看到一片成功繁榮的景象，我還是鼓勵大家不要過於沉浸在福報和成功之中，不要想說：「喔，太棒了！一切都這麼順利！」。反之，我們應該問，「我們能從中學到什麼？」

我們依然遵循佛陀的教誨，並且感激眼前的福報和機會，但是唯有保持不求（不執著）的心，這些福報跟機遇才能够更好的被利用，發揮它最大的用途，真正利益這裡的居民和過客。