



Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

Ringu Tulku Rinpoche: Questions and Answers 1

QA1: Questions and Answers 1 (after the teachings BA1 and BA2)

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Transcribed by Pat Murphy

Teachings on the Bodhicharyavatara for the Bodhicharya Online Shedra

So today I would like to answer some of the questions that people have asked about the first one or two stanzas of Bodhicharyavatara.

The first question is: *“How literally should we take the miraculous stories in Buddhism?”*

I think the miracles that were reported seem to have happened or seem to have at least been perceived by those who saw them. And this has been happening not only during the Buddha's or Shantideva's time but also in very recent times. We usually have a certain idea about what is the normal thing and then if there's anything that's not within that range we say it's something miraculous or something supernatural, or deluded, something like that. But there are many things that I think can happen. Lots of things are possible. You know, going by plane is also a miracle. Being able to talk to you in this way is a miracle...and things like that. But strictly from the Buddhist point of view, the Buddha said that the most important miracle of the Buddha is his teachings. He said that the most important and most marvelous miracle of all that I have performed is the miracle of my Speech- the teachings, the Dharmachakra. Because by listening to these teachings and using those teachings then anybody can actually transform themselves. So that's the understanding from Buddhist point of view. I don't know exactly what happened at the time. Whether Shantideva really arose from his seat and flew away or not, I don't know, but that's how- what- has been reported, it's in the legend. That's the answer.

Then I come to the second question, which is from Lynda Miller.

“Rinpoche, in the verse beginning “Just as on a dark night”... Is the birth of bodhicitta a new experience that suddenly and unmistakably arises when you are already on a Buddhist path, or can it arise gradually, even maybe imperceptibly as a very significant development in your practice and studying that you might slowly become aware of and begin to understand?”

Now this stanza I have yet to explain and I will explain later on, but what he’s saying here is that if we have a good thought or positive motivation, sometimes even a little bit, we should appreciate that. That’s the main point of the teaching here. Of course, our motivation can develop step by step, become stronger and stronger as we understand (more) clearly. Or sometimes it can happen very suddenly in a very strong way also. So that’s the answer.

Then there is a question from Joana.

“Thank you very much. I believe it is all about balance and pride. Could even negativity be used as a motivation?”

I don’t know if I understand this question very clearly, but motivation means what is the main kind of driving force that I have. That’s the motivation. It’s not something that happens suddenly. It’s just a general way of looking and general way of (thinking about) what I want now? What is my value system, what are important things for me and things like that. Of course lots of good things and not so good things happen in our lives. If you have a good motivation and want to do something good for oneself and others, then one negative thing or obstacle happening is not going to, what can you say, kill your motivation. You can take it as a challenge you have to overcome and work on that. So it is important to have the motivation to do something good and also to understand that to do very good things helping many people- even myself -in a big way is not an easy thing. So therefore every negative thing happening to us or around us should not become an obstacle, but a challenge for ourselves -so that our motivation becomes stronger. If the fire is small you can blow it out, but if the fire is big then the more wind the stronger it becomes. So therefore, if our motivation is strong then the more obstacles or the more negativity (that comes) would make it even more stronger. That’s what we need to train in.

Then there are questions from Yumma:

“Thank you very much, Rinpoche, about our way of interacting, may we comment also on questions of our fellow friends on the page or should we do so only on the debate page?”

Maybe that’s better because the Debate Page is for discussion among the people. Of course you can discuss. You don’t need to debate all the time, you can discuss every different subject. It’s not necessary to debate only on one point at a time.

“For example about what Joana is asking, if one of us wishes to say something about her question, is it welcome to comment it here?”

I think you should comment it in the discussion section.

“Your teaching reminded me of the Seven Points of Mind Training. All activities should be done with the intention of helping others. In another translation, “Do all activities with one intention.” What I have experienced is that if my intention is sincere and if I always come back to the main motivation as a direction for all the other activities, as one would travel on a boat in a certain direction but sometimes winds change, even though I do make mistakes and if it happens that I spell out negativity through habitual patterns, the long term results seems to come out okay as if the motivation itself was kind of programmed and that slowly the mind is seeking for its best way to get to that main purpose. I mean not only consciously, but also out of a growing intuition. Is that true Rinpoche? Is that the reason why it is the first teaching?”

Yes it is in a way. Even if you have a good motivation of course we make mistakes. We do negative things sometimes. But you know, we come back to the positive thing. We can change the negative things, we can correct ourselves. And that’s why it’s so important to correct our motivation, to remind ourselves of our motivation, to reflect on our motivation. It’s so important because that’s how we bring ourselves back on the path. And the more clear our motivation is the less mistakes we make. But even if we make mistakes we can go back and we can correct it. And if our motivation is not correct or if there’s no motivation, then there is no way, not even the motivation

to correct that. So that's why it's so important to remind ourselves very often about our motivation.

And then there is a question again from Lynda Miller.

"Rinpoche, when I reflect on my own motivation, I think that when my motivation is good there is an open generous feeling. When it is not good it feels like a contraction in upon myself, a selfish, closed-in feeling. Could you kindly explain to me how this is connected with bodhicitta? I think that perhaps I am not really sure what bodhicitta is. I know it means something like the mind of enlightenment but could you help me to understand it in a less abstract way?"

In a way it's true. If you have a good motivation, if you have a little bit of compassion or loving kindness and bodhicitta, generally you feel good, you feel you have a purpose in life. You feel that life is going into the right direction and if not, then you know. Because we all have that wisdom a little bit, we know that something is going wrong. We need to watch from our inside, inner wisdom. We have to listen to our inner wisdom a little bit. Bodhicitta we will discuss, because the whole book is on bodhicitta so I don't need to try to explain here too much.

Then there is a question from Annette Tamuly.

"Thank you Rinpoche for your inspiring words. It's a great blessing for all of us to follow your teaching directly. The question is this: sometimes our motivation might be genuine but it's misunderstood by others."

Of course, our good motivation is not always understood in a good way or even appreciated by others. We should not expect that others should always appreciate us or appreciate what we do. That's the way it is. We cannot blame them. We cannot expect too much from others, but we need to do it for ourselves, you know, we need to do it for ourselves. We do what we can that's good for us and might be good for others. Then, whether people appreciate or not, whether they

understand it or not, we just keep on going because that's the right thing to do. Maybe then sometimes, slowly, people will come to know and understand better and appreciate more. You know, that's the way it is so therefore one should not be discouraged. But then also there are times when you have to also examine your motivation, you know. Sometimes we do things thinking that I am going to do this to help other people but actually you are just looking for appreciation. Maybe you would like them to come and give importance to you and love you and things like that. And then it doesn't happen exactly like that. So we have to be more openminded, more spacious minded, more tolerant and patient in this matter.

And then there's another question about translator's homage and it's from Lynda Miller again.

"Thank you Rinpoche for this very interesting teaching. Could you kindly explain when and how the concept of a bodhisattva first arose in the history of Buddhism? Was it in India after the lifetime of Buddha Shakyamuni, so it was a development within Buddhism or maybe not?"

The bodhisattva concept was there right from the beginning. The Jataka Stories are regarded as the most original, the first teachings in a way, that are known to be from Buddhism or from Buddha. And in the Jataka Stories there's always the mention of the bodhisattva. In all the different sutras, Theravadin sutras, Pali Sutras, Mahayana Sutras or Sanskrit based sutras the Buddha was always referred to as bodhisattva before he became the Buddha. So it's not something developed, it was there right from the beginning. But in many sutras, it was not so much explained how to become a bodhisattva or what is involved in becoming a bodhisattva or how to train as a bodhisattva. Those things are not mentioned in what we call Shravakayana sutras. These special teachings are in the Mahayana sutras, so that's the main difference. Also, the Buddha taught not just to one way or just to one thing. He taught different paths and different methods and different ways to different people in his life. Sometimes it is said that he gave 84,000 different teachings. That's well known, that's not disputed. For a long time the Buddha's teachings were (in the form of an) oral tradition. Then the oral traditions were collected and then slowly, they were written down. Now it has been found that the earliest Mahayana sutras and the earliest Shravakayana sutras which were written down were not from totally different times. They were more or less written at the same time, so we have to understand from that point of view.

It's not necessarily that first there was only Shravakayana and then slowly Mahayana developed out of it. I don't think it's exactly like that. The different teachings were going on after Buddha passed away and then slowly they came out more and more and then they were written down.

So these are the questions I have received so far. If you have got more questions please don't hesitate to ask. Thank you very much. I am very happy that many of you are listening to these teachings and participating and I hope that you will get something out of this. Of course, it's a two-way thing so we should study not only what I am saying but also read the books and then let us discuss, and if you don't understand then please ask me. Thank you.

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This is a transcript of a video talk given for the Bodhicharya Online Shedra by Ringu Tulku Rinpoche. The transcript has only been lightly edited and is meant to be used within the Online Shedra study context.