



Ringu Tulku Rinpoche: Questions and Answers 2

QA2: Questions and Answers 2 (after the teachings BA3 and BA4)

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Transcribed by Pat Murphy

Teachings on the Bodhicharyavatara for the Bodhicharya Online Shedra

The first question is from David and he says,

"In his commentary, Kunzang Palden speaks about the four preliminaries preceding the writing of a book. He adds that these are useful to whatever we may attempt. Could you please tell us more about these four preliminaries and if it is suitable for beginners on the Buddhist Path to use a method like writing to improve our mind?"

Maybe what you refer to, these four preliminaries, is how this book starts with the Homage and the Promise to Write, then Show the Humility and then to Encourage People, to kind of bring interest or encouragement to the people. So these are actually already explained. Not all books necessarily have that, but this is how Shantideva wrote and it's something which is quite common in many Buddhist texts and commentaries. As to whether writing is a good method to improve your mind: maybe that is a good thing. Usually, reading, writing, listening, meditating, reflecting, all these things, are supposed to be very good. Writing is a way of reminding. Teaching is also a very good way of reminding yourself, because you are trying to explain something and understand something yourself, so you must make it understandable to others. All these things can be good methods and you can use them.

And now the second question is from Jackie.

"I'm trying to find a Buddhist understanding and reframe for the Western idea of self-care. (I would like) to hear it explained in your words."

Now as far as I understand, self-care means looking after yourself, doing something good for yourself. From Buddhist point of view, everything that you do in dharma, every instruction on dharma, every practice of dharma is, in one way or another, a (form of) self-care. Even generating compassion, trying to be kind, trying to refrain from doing negative things, trying to do more and more positive things, generating positive experience, all these things have to do with generating self-care, so therefore there is nothing which is not self-care.

I think this is important to explain because I think many people feel that being compassionate is something different and caring for yourself is something different. Doing dharma practice is something different and taking care of yourself is something different. This is a very bad misunderstanding actually. So I think it is very important for us to understand clearly that any kind of practices you do, the dharma practice, activities, understandings, motivations, all these things is about helping yourself also. Because if you don't take care of yourself, if you don't improve yourself, if you don't make yourself better or learn how to be more free from problems and sufferings and generate more happiness and more wellbeing in yourself, there's no way that you can help others. So therefore everything is actually taking care of yourself. Whether it is for something long term or something for just now all the practices are about that. And if you understand this connection, that everything we understand and we try to practice, or we try to generate or we try to become more integrated in dharma or in these instructions is directly linked to your own care, your own improvement, your own welfare. Also, working for the benefit of others is also caring for yourself. As long as you don't understand this, then you cannot really practice dharma in a genuine way. This is, I think, very important.

So the third question is from Linda.

"When I read the first stanza before hearing your teaching on it, it seemed to be at such a high level that I wondered if I would be able to understand it at all. I think this is because I have the Shambhala Library edition of the Padmakara translation and the first line reads "To those who go

in bliss, the dharmakaya they posses and to all their heirs” so I thought it was directed at those with only the highest level of realization. Is that misunderstanding?”

(Rinpoche laughs) Well now if you have understood something, that's okay and you don't have to worry about it. It can be understood at many different levels and you can go deeper and deeper into that. But I think we should first understand the simple explanation and then maybe later on you'll understand more and more deeply.

Then I have-the next question, again from Linda.

“If I find myself in any sort of negative state of mind, what is the best way to remind oneself of the dharma when there is no time to be in formal practice? For example, recite a stanza or a sutra, is it maybe just to remind oneself to be mindful.”

That's right. Just remind yourself to be mindful. It doesn't need any time. It doesn't need a special kind of a posture or special recitation or anything like that. Just being mindful. Understand it and then through that you can change your way of reacting. And if you cannot change your way of reacting just then and there, even if you change your way of reacting afterwards it is also good.

Then the next question is from Pema Chalmers.

“With humility, are you saying that in order to recognize a good quality in others we must, even in small way have some of that quality in ourselves in order to recognize it in others? But could we have an understanding in the head, but no feeling of it in the heart?”

The more we see the positive qualities the better it is. Usually, if you have the quality then you can see it more in others. I think that is clear. When you can see the positive qualities in others, at least that's the beginning of developing it in yourself also. It's not that you should not see anything bad. You will see the negative qualities also. You don't need close your eyes or try to negate that and imagine it's not there. This is not necessary. But it is very important to make a habit of seeing

the positive qualities in others and positive things around yourself. To look for the positive aspects makes you more optimistic, makes you more positive, also more happy, more joyful and more hopeful. So it's a very good thing to work on and to train in.

Then there's another question, I think this is from Raquel Garcia.

"Can regular people, not masters, help to translate holy scriptures?"

Why not. I mean translation is basically a language matter. Of course, the more you understand clearly, the better you can translate. You have to know your own language very well also. So it is very much possible and it is very much welcome and if you can translate you should contact Minna or somebody. Then they will guide you on how to contribute in this matter with our study group. Thank you very much.

Then I think that's all the questions I have this time, so thank you very much.

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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 edited lightly and is meant to be used within the Online Shedra study context.