



## Ringu Tulku Rinpoche Questions and Answers 7-8

QA7-8: Questions and Answers 7-8 (after the teachings BA10-12)

January 4, 2011

Transcribed by Franc Chamberlain

Teachings on the Bodhicharyavatara for the Bodhicharya Online Shedra

So, I have been out of station for a few weeks and, as you know, I have been to Bodhgaya for Karmapa 900 and the teachings of the Karmapa. And then I was participating in the conference of *Science, Spirituality, and Education* with lots of great scientists and spiritual teachers and educationalists, along with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. So I was a bit busy, and was not able to send answers to the questions. So, now, today I'm going to answer some of the questions that I've received.

And the first question is:

*"I find it very difficult to relate to, and feel compassion for, fellow humans whose minds seem incomprehensible to me. I find it far easier to relate to and feel compassion for nature, animals, and young children whose suffering I feel directly. I feel strongly motivated to benefit other beings and do my best to assist humanitarian work in Nepal and Tibet, but I feel that I'm withdrawn and exclusive. How can I work to open my heart genuinely towards all human beings – even those I dislike or judge as barbaric in their cruelty to animals and each other? Are there practical steps I can apply in daily life to extend compassion to all humans?"*

I think the basic understanding is that even those cruel people are human beings. They are like you and me and whatever they're doing – you know, wrong things – they actually want happiness and to be free from suffering. So, therefore, because of their ignorance, their wrong views, they're doing those things which actually bring lots of pain and suffering to them eventually, and maybe even now. If you look from that point of view, they are very unfortunate people. They are doing lots of harm to themselves as well as others. So if somebody is doing something really harmful to themselves and others, how would you feel?

There's no need to hate them...what is there to hate them [for]? You would generally wish that they would also be free from this wrongdoing, these negativities, these problems and pain that they are actually creating for themselves and others. And so if we think from that point of view, I think, it is possible to wish well to them also. And, on the other hand, if there is one person who is less cruel or less negative, then it is good for everybody. So, therefore, it is very practical to wish them to be free from this cruelty because their cruelty and their negative state of mind has also come from something similar: they must have experienced lots of cruelty or they must have, gone through [great] hardships of some kind. They didn't get that much loving kindness and compassion and things like that and therefore they become like that and so you would wish them to be free from that. So if I think like that maybe it can [help] a better understanding.

Then there's another question:

*"You talked about the cultural and historical context of the examples of generating bodhichitta in this text. I liked the purification understanding of the 'fire at the end of the world' but I have a question about the emphasis on the qualities of power and strength in bodhichitta. Elsewhere I have read and heard it being likened to the 'good heart' and tender feelings."*

Yes, compassion is "good heart". Compassion is wishing well – a kind of benevolent feeling towards everybody.

*Is this a more feminine aspect of bodhichitta...?*

The bodhichitta has no feminine and masculine sides. Bodhichitta is that "good heart": a genuine

kind of positive wish to everybody, so, therefore, that's bodhichitta. And it is that what has been described, again and again, everywhere. It is not that something is coming; it's there now.

Then the next question. There are two questions but I think that it's the same question:

*"I wish to check my understanding about the mechanism that gives Bodhichitta its incomprehensible strength? If I do a positive thing, this generates a positive fruit. If I dedicate this merit to all sentient beings, this dedication generates new merits, and so this becomes limitless. In that way Bodhichitta generates an endless multiplication of fruits for other beings and oneself. Is that the right understanding of the process?"*

I think so. I think there's another question from here saying that,

*"All other virtues (...) produce their fruit, and then their force is spent"*

Then it says that:

*"In effect, doesn't any virtue that inspires a positive deed leave a print in our mind, samsaric or otherwise, which prepares us to do gradually more positive deeds?"*

It's not like that. I mean, it's like that but if I do a positive deed – and we always do positive deeds and negative deeds also, but if I just do a positive deed – that doesn't necessarily last long. Maybe it gives an imprint or a positive effect on yourself, but not so strong. But if you make a commitment, like, I wish to free all beings from the suffering of any kind and, therefore I do this, I do that, whatever I do – small things, big things – then the action becomes much stronger because it is done for a very big purpose. I think that is mainly the difference between positive deeds done with bodhichitta and without bodhichitta, or with good intention and without so much good intention. Therefore, how strongly positive it is depends on the motivation, they say. That's why it is like that.

The next question is:

*"Could you explain what a blessing is, actually?"*

I understand blessing more like a positive influence and, as I said before, also, a blessing is not something that is only given, it is something that you receive because the blessings of the Buddhas, the blessings of the enlightened beings, the blessings of great beings are always there. A Buddha would not say: "I don't want to give blessings to this person". There is nobody that Buddha doesn't want to give blessings to. Then why somebody has it and somebody doesn't have it, is because whether I am ready to receive that or not. It's like good influence. If I understand the positive quality of somebody who has some good influence and then I appreciate that and if I look with that way of seeing then I am positively influenced. I will act the same way, I will become more like that, and that's receiving the blessings. But if I don't, if I close myself to those positive qualities and things like that, then I never get influenced by that. So, I think blessing is more of that. And you cannot say that without [being conscious of it] you cannot receive blessings, it is not necessarily like that. You get influenced unconsciously, also, by lots of things, so, in the same way, the blessings also, I think.

*"My question is about aspiring to generate bodhicitta, to help people find lasting happiness and freedom from suffering. Although I understand this to mean enlightenment, I think that the people I wish this for usually have a different idea of what happiness is. Like having a good relationship, job, house and enough money, but not enlightenment. Is there a problem with wishing something for other people that they do not consciously wish for themselves? Indeed they may even say they definitely don't want enlightenment if I were to ask them?"*

I think that doesn't matter because what I wish [for] them is the best. And what that best is – even if we say 'enlightenment', we really don't know exactly what enlightenment also is. But what I really wish is that freedom from all the sufferings, completely, that, I think, everybody wishes – although people cannot describe what that may mean – and then I wish them the highest kind of happiness, and the kind of lasting peace and happiness which what [it] exactly is maybe people don't know, but that's what they want, in fact, whether they know how to express it this way or that way or not. Of course, what you wish for is something sometimes not so easy. People cannot

understand what they really wish [for]. There's the story of The Four Hands, the story that I sometimes tell. There was one person who went into the forest and then he didn't cut any wood so the forest goddess became very happy with him and then appeared in front of him and said: "You are very good, you didn't cut any trees so what do you wish? I give you one wish."

So he thought and thought but he couldn't think of anything and says:

"Maybe I'll...Can I come back tomorrow? I can ask my friend and then come back."

And then she said: "OK. You come here at the same time."

And he went back and asked his friend: "If I have to ask for a wish that I will get, what do you think I should ask for?"

His friend said: "You are a weaver. So, you have only two hands and two hands cannot do much work, so if you had four hands then it will be much better because then you can do double work."

So he thought that was a good idea and he went back and then he met the goddess and he said: "I want four hands."

She said: "Are you sure you want four hands?"

And he said: "Yes, I'm sure I want four hands."

So she [snapped fingers] like this and he got four hands. But then when he went home everybody saw him and he was looking so strange and so different that they ran away and nobody wanted to give him any work because he was so strange.

So, many people don't know what they really want so, therefore, it doesn't matter that what you wish for them is not exactly they are consciously asking for or not.

Then the next question is:

*"As we are moving gently through the text I have time to look closely at the translations. I find the word 'sin' in verse 13/14 inappropriate. Sin in the west is an acquired bad thing, which one cannot free oneself from. Only an external agency, like God, can absolve it. Is this word in accord with the Buddha's teachings and the dharma? I thought enlightenment leads one beyond the relative of such a God and absolutes like 'sin'. Could you also explain if Buddhism has these within it?"*

I think that the 'sin' word is not the problem. The sin concept within Christianity may be a problem. I think we should not mix up these things. The words are words. Actually the meaning of the words keeps on changing. Because the meaning of the word is what we explain and attach to [it]. So, therefore it's not necessary always what the concept of sin or the concept of virtue in one way of thinking [is], in another way of understanding it can be different so therefore here the 'sin' should not be understood as what we have described.

But 'sin', the word, is used here by the translator. I don't know if it could have other meanings or not, but this 'sin' has to be understood as 'negative deed'. I think when you write in verse, and because this text is translated, they have tried to translate into a kind of verse form, and 'negative deed' is a long word, two words, and 'sin' is one word and maybe it was easier to use 'sin' than 'negative deed' and things like that. And even if you use 'negative deed' that could also be understood in many different ways , you know, so, therefore, no word is totally free of possibilities of misunderstanding. So we have to understand this and understand in this way.

*"Along with the Bodhicharyavatara, I have been reading a book written by the Venerable Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, entitled 'Progressive stages of Meditation on Emptiness'. It explains the different ways in which the Buddha's teachings are organised, like the three Vehicles, the numerous schools and the three turnings of the Wheel of Dharma. Could you explain where and how the teachings of Shantideva fit in with these thought systems, if at all?"*

Generally, if you want put [him] in one category of philosophy then Shantideva belongs to Madhyamika philosophy and from Madhyamika also Prasangika Madhyamika philosophy coming from Nagarjuna and Aryadeva and Chandrakirti. So, he's actually regarded as one of the most

important exponents of the Madhyamika Prasangika philosophy. But this is explained in the ninth chapter.

So this is it for this time. I wish you all a very happy Christmas and New Year.

©Ringu Tulku Rinpoche

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.