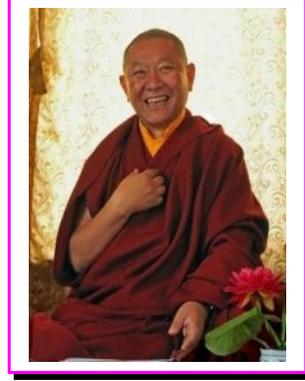




Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND



Ringu Tulku Rinpoche

Chapter 1: The Excellence of Bodhicitta

Stanza 1: Homage

BA 3: Chapter 1 Stanza 1 Homage

October 29 2010

Transcribed by Albert Harris

Teachings on the Bodhicharyavatara for the Bodhicharya Online Shedra

Now, we come to the first chapter of Bodhicharyavatara and the first half of the first stanza is the homage. Now this is the homage, the original homage by Shantideva himself and here he says in Tibetan [speaks in Tibetan]. In English: “To those who go in bliss, the dharma they’ve mastered, and to all their heirs, to all who merit veneration, I bow down.”

So here, the first is “To those who go in bliss”. This is the translation of *Sugata* [epithet of Buddha meaning “one who has gone to bliss”: Andrew Percy]. The [prefix of] the Sanskrit word *sugata*, *su*, is *well*, *beautiful*, *beautifully*, *completely*, *nicely*, *wonderfully*. *Su* is *well*, *good*, *completely* and *gata* is *gone*, *one who has gone in a very good way*.

Now this, *sugata*, is one of the names, one of the words referring to the Buddha. There are many words referring to the Buddha, *tathagata*, *sugata*, and many others, but here Shantideva has chosen the word *sugata*.

Now with *sugata*, there are three [meanings], *well-gone*, *beautifully gone*, *without carrying any negativity or negative things with him*. He's *gone over* or *gone beyond*. All the negative things that we have with us are not with him, he is not with any kind of faults and therefore [he is] *sugata*, *well gone*.

Another [meaning is] *gone without obstacles* or *without returning, having got to return*. The way he has experienced and understood and practiced and has developed, that all these negative things don't need to come back again. So therefore, it is also *well gone*. Like somebody who has become enlightened, has got rid of all the ignorance and all the habitual negative tendencies have left, so therefore they don't come back. Like somebody who has had infectious diseases. You once get this disease, measles, or something like that; once you get it, you never get it back again so it's completely got rid of.

Another meaning is *gone completely*. The journey that Buddha took, that Buddha has gone through, is complete, there's nothing more...nothing more to attempt...there's nothing more to get. It's complete. There are three-different adjectives to the meaning of *su*.

So anyway, this reference to the Buddha, all those beings who have got rid of their ignorance, their negative emotions, their negative habitual tendencies, developed their wisdom and compassion to the utmost and thereby have attained lasting peace and happiness and have been able to free themselves from all kinds of problems and pain and suffering, to those Buddhas, to those enlightened beings, to those beings who have done that, this is the homage to the Buddha.

Now this becomes very important in Buddhism because when we talk about going [for] refuge to Buddha, for instance, it's not talking about, "Buddha, please come and help me and save me," and things like that. It is about an ideal as a possibility, a transformation. To understand and know that there is a possibility for a complete transformation, complete freedom from the problems and suffering and pain, freedom from ignorance, freedom from all this negative way of reacting; that is possible for anybody and everybody, any beings can attain that, everybody has the potential to experience that. And that's the main thing for Buddhists, that's the main thing. Every being has the capacity or the potential.

It's not that everybody is already enlightened. When we talk about *Buddha nature*, it's not saying that everybody is totally good and there's nothing negative. Nothing like that. But, there is a possibility to improve, a possibility to develop. There's a possibility to enhance, develop, you know, to learn. Therefore, we can train and we should train positively and then we become positive. [If] we become completely positive, we can get rid of all the negativity from us. *That* is the Buddha. Therefore, if you have that understanding, that I have that possibility, I would work on it myself; and if I know that there is that possibility in every sentient being, then I would also work to help everybody to attain that.

Therefore, this becomes very important. That's the first thing. He bows down, he appreciates and he gives his homage.

The second one is the *dharma*. The *dharma* is the experience, the complete experience of somebody who has become a *sugata* or the Buddha. That's the *dharma*. *Dharma* is the teachings, the experience, how to transform yourself. The way, the path, methods and skilful means are as important. Because, even if you have a kind of idea, or if you know somebody or you have heard about somebody who has that experience of complete wisdom and compassion, if you don't know how to develop that or how to get there, then it doesn't work for us. Therefore, we need to have the understanding that there is a method, there is a way, there is a step by step kind of a road or a path that I can walk on and everybody can walk on. There's not just one path, there are many different kinds of paths. There are many levels...many paths that are suitable for [all] beings, wherever I am. It's not that I'm *so* bad that I can never practise *dharma-I'm not good enough to practise*-there's nothing like that. However, a beginner, however low or negative they are, they can start with that stage and then they can go forward. That is extremely important...so the second is homage to the *dharma*.

And the third is *sangha*. So here he says, "and to all their heirs." In the Tibetan it says *gyalse*. [The prefix] *se* is like "the heirs", the children or the prince or the princess. The Buddha's heirs or the Buddha's child or sons and daughters...it can be many different [things]: the body, the heirs of the body. It's like your child, your son and daughter. For Buddha, Rahula was his physical son-the body-a son of the body.

And then we always say his children, the sons and daughters of his voice or his speech. We say that the *arahants*, the *shravakas* and *pratyeka-buddhas*, his monks and nuns and many devotees, were there following his teachings. They are regarded as the sons of his speech. And then there are the sons and daughters, the heirs of his heart, the *bodhisattvas*.

So all these are heirs of the Buddha, especially the *heart-heirs* of the Buddha who practise the same kind of *bodhichitta*, the same kind of wisdom and compassion, working, training after the Buddha, to them all. That's very important because now the Buddha is the ideal, the *dharma* is the experience of the Buddha, the path. And the *sangha* is those people who are actually practising or who are actually trying to follow that path. That's the *sangha*, especially the *bodhisattva sangha*. He says to all of them, "I go for refuge, I pay homage, I bow down." But not only to them. To all who merit veneration, not only *Buddha, Dharma* and *Sangha*, but to every other being also who are worthy of my veneration, I respect [them]; to them all I bow down.

There are people who are more learned than me, who are more qualified than me, more elderly than me, more experienced than me. To them all also I should show my respect whether it is in a spiritual way or a mundane way. Also, worthy of my respect and worthy of my homage are those who have been kind, nice and helpful to me and have been kind and compassionate [doing] good things for me and others. So there is not just *Buddha, Dharma* and *Sangha* or only Buddhists...to every being, to every thing, to every kind of community, anything that is worthy of my appreciation and my respect and veneration, to them all I bow myself.

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