



Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

Ringu Tulku Rinpoche Questions and Answers 10



QA10: Questions and Answers 10 (after the teaching BA14)
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Transcribed by Pat Murphy
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So again this is answering some questions and it's question number ten.

“How does bodhichitta link to the experience of meditating on compassion? I think what I mean is, can a meditation on compassion and the experience that that engenders be used to strengthen bodhichitta?”

Of course. Bodhichitta is compassion, although all compassion may be not exactly bodhichitta. So in order to generate bodhichitta we must cultivate compassion and any kind of ways to bring compassion, whether it's meditation, or whether it's understanding. Any kind of way of generating compassion is directly leading towards bodhichitta, so to generate compassion is very important.

Actually, bodhichitta is a limitless, or a very high level of compassion anyway.

“We learn that the bodhisattvas like Manjushri, Tara and Chenrezig made particular bodhichitta aspirations (the Medicine Buddha made twelve different aspirations for example), regarding how they wanted to help in a particular way. The long term benefit to supplicating them is enlightenment, but in the short term we can receive quite quickly the benefit of these particular aspirations. For example, wisdom, fearlessness, freedom from illness etc. which seems to be a tremendous help for beings. Should we, as aspiring bodhisattvas, also make particular aspirations as long as it doesn't limit our limitless aspiration? I can think of many particular aspirations that might be helpful in our current world condition. For example, care for the environment, or for animals, for resources, curing addictions and cravings, curing mental illnesses and depression, eradicating hunger and poverty, eradicating oppression and many more.”

Exactly. This is exactly what one should do. The examples, or the stories of Medicine Buddha, Manjushri, Tara, Chenrezig and many other great bodhisattvas like Buddha Shakyamuni are all examples on how a bodhisattva should, you know, aspire, should act and should train. So like them we should also have a very general and very kind of long term wishes and aspirations like lasting peace and happiness for all the sentient beings.

Please note that I'm not saying enlightenment, I'm saying lasting peace and happiness because that's what we actually want. Enlightenment is very particular. It's like an understanding or concept, a Buddhist concept called enlightenment. And we think that if we have enlightenment then we have lasting peace and compassion. I think if you read the Jataka Stories, you know, it's not that all of them aspired to be enlightened, but all of them aspired to bring all the beings to lasting peace and happiness. So this is very important. You don't have to be like Buddhist, or don't have to have a particularly Buddhist idea of what lasting peace and compassion is but that you want that.

But then, [in the] meantime, you know, when we see something like people suffering very much with depression and then you really want to work for depression, you know, because that's the need of the time, need of the hour. Or you see lots of problems with the environment so you say that I really want to help do something about the environment and then work on that. So this is

very important, very good. That's what the bodhisattva's of the past did also and we should do also. It's not that we should only think about enlightenment.

It's like this, you know, I want all the beings to have lasting peace and happiness. But you know I cannot just do it like that. Then I say, okay, what can I do now, at this moment? Maybe I can do something about people [who are] hungry. Maybe I can do something about the people in Africa or in Tibet or in India. But maybe I cannot do everything, you know, to everybody in Africa, in America and Tibet or India, so I can do something for one, you know. Maybe I can do something like, maybe in Rigul, or maybe somewhere like a small place, you know, start a small kind of a school or a clinic, something like that. That doesn't help everybody but you know, I should at least start somewhere and do something. It doesn't mean that I want to only help these people and nobody else, but, you know, I have to start from somewhere. So this is the way it is and it's very important so we should, you know, develop according to our stage, our power and also [our] aspiration and situation.

“Can the aspiration to generate active bodhichitta be understood in terms of the true purpose of human life? I think by this I mean that is enlightenment for all sentient beings the ultimate reason for our existence, or am I mixing up different Western and Eastern philosophies and religions by conceptualizing it in this way?”

I don't know whether you are mixing things up or not but from my point of view, we say what is the most important thing I think should be. What is the most important thing that should be and then I should work towards that. The most important thing is not just for me, not just for some people but for all the beings that they should be free from suffering, free from negative pain and problems and suppression and you know, poverty and hunger and all sorts of things. Because when I see them it's very bad and I don't like it. I don't want to see that so therefore I should want that [that they would be free from their problems]. And if that can happen - if eradication of poverty, eradication of hunger, eradication of oppression, eradication of depression - if these kind of things can happen it would be so nice, so good that even if I spend all my life doing that, if I can do a little bit about that I would feel so good. If I feel like that, then can you say it's the purpose of my life? Maybe I can, you know. I think that is what we call the purpose of our life. So you can decide whether it's the purpose of your life or not.

“Can we be, with the power of our best, true and big heart, active bodhichitta without having accomplished the bodhichitta intention? In other words, can our goodwill and generosity be active bodhichitta when we didn’t make the commitment in our dreams to the bodhichitta of intention?”

I think you have a certain misunderstanding here. Aspiration is very important, you know. Say I am doing something, if I am giving something to somebody like a donation or something like that. Now, why I am giving this? Is it because I want something back from this person? Is it because I’m trying to get some benefit, like a big profit out of that, or I want to kind of control this person or something like that? Or I just wish this person to be free from some problems and to have a better life. I just want to help. Now if my motivation, if my aspiration to give this donation to this person or to give to this person is not right, is only for me, then it’s not really positive action, no? It’s not really positive action even if it seems like [it is]. But if it is with my good intention, real good intention, then it is a very positive action so therefore aspiration becomes very important, no? If you don’t have the good aspiration or intention, good motivation, then even if you seemingly do something positive it doesn’t become good and positive. So therefore you know, you cannot practice active bodhichitta without aspiration, you know, without good intention bodhichitta. If you don’t have the compassionate intention, then whatever you are doing doesn’t become even positive so what to talk about bodhichitta. So therefore that intention is the most important thing. That intention makes your actions actually bodhichitta in action. Without that intention your action doesn’t become bodhichitta.

But, here you say “accomplished.” That is another matter. I don’t know what you mean “accomplished,” but if it is really completely perfect, if it’s for all the sentient beings and it’s really limitless and there’s not even little bit of selfishness, [then] that kind of thing cannot happen. This [perfect, limitless aspiration] happens only if you are a very, very highly developed bodhisattva and that can happen only after you have trained in a very deep way. So you don’t need to have that kind of complete [aspiration], you know, complete like accomplished, I don’t know exactly what you mean by “accomplished”, but perfect. That is not possible, that has to grow. Unless you have the intention, unless you have the good motivation, then it doesn’t become bodhichitta. So therefore this has to be understood clearly. I have to have a good motivation and then I do an action. If I do the action then it becomes active, you know, action bodhichitta. If you have that

intention of a [bodhisattva] and you do an action on that intention, then it becomes action bodhichitta. If you don't have that intention, or that motivation of a bodhisattva, then if you do a positive deed, it is a positive deed but it is not becoming bodhichitta in action. I think that is important to understand.

But you know, it is also important to understand that let us not use too much of enlightenment all the time, because then it becomes too much Buddhist. Of course when you say "lasting peace and happiness" it means enlightenment, but it is not seen like that, it is not said like that. As I said before, if you look into the Jataka Stories and what those bodhisattvas' aspirations were, they don't say "I want enlightenment." They say "I want to help. I want, you know, this person to be free from suffering and to have a lasting kind of happiness." And so therefore I think that is more or less enough, I think. But if you define bodhichitta in a kind of an ideal way, then you define it in this way that you want the two things, the wisdom and compassion. And that's kind of ideal bodhichitta. So that's the understanding. So I think that is enough for 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 lightly edited and is meant to be used within the Online Shedra study context.