



Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

Ringu Tulku Rinpoche *Questions and Answers 4 (Chapter 2)*

BA2Q4: Questions and Answers 4 (Chapter 2)

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Transcribed by Pat Murphy

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"Thank you for such a full explanation of the meaning of making prostrations. I had not really understood this at all before. Is it okay just to start doing a small number of prostrations, while keeping in mind the meanings you describe as part of my daily practice?"

Of course. You can make prostrations at any time. The prostration is not necessarily a part of any practice. Sometimes people think that you can only do prostrations as part of the Ngondro practice. That's not true, you can prostrate any time. And it is not that you have to do lots of prostrations, you can do only three prostrations, seven prostrations, twenty one prostrations, or just one prostration also. Or hundreds if you want. Or thousands. You can do this at any time, it is not necessarily that you have to do it all the time. You don't have to make a commitment, you can do practices any time like that. This is just understanding of the prostration, something that you have to know [so that you understand] what you are doing while prostrating, but it is not that with every prostration you do, you need to kind of visualize all those things and remember all those things. I think it's not totally necessary.

"Rinpoche, at the moment I am disabled and therefore unable to do prostrations. This is irony, as I liked the physicality of the practice. I'm inclined to believe that the merit however lies with the pure intention and not the physical expression in itself. With this in mind I sit on a chair and visualize the activity and I'm sure this must be okay if the intention is the criteria. Sometimes, however, I wonder if this is a denial of my condition which I don't feel guilty about, it just being the way it is at the moment. After all, this is a situation that many folk find themselves in to varying degrees. The text can often ignore the diversity of the human condition and assume that we function with all our faculties and physical attributes so therefore, it's tempting to visualize ourselves with these. But as I said above, this seems to be denial of my reality. I wonder if that is the point I should be working from? It would be very grateful for you comment on this."

It is very true. You can sit on a chair and then do the visualization of making prostrations. Sometimes it is even recommended that you emanate thousands and thousands and millions and millions, limitless number of bodies and then do the prostration. And also see or consider that all the sentient beings are also doing the prostration together with you. If you are not able to do the prostration with your body it is not that you cannot imagine your body doing the prostrations. You can even feel that you have emanated lots of bodies from your body. All of them very young, very energetic and all of them doing prostrations along with all the other people. I think this is the usual way. And then of course you can also just fold your hands and place them on the centres, you know, body, speech and mind and then bow down a little bit. This is usually done and this is something recommended also especially for people who cannot physically do the prostration. Of course that does not mean that you need to do only prostration, that you can't do other things. Of course you can do other things also. It is not that you *have* to do only prostration to practice dharma. This is very much something that is very important to understand. I don't really understand what you mean by "*denial of my condition*". Of course, if somebody is not able to do it with your body, then they're not able to do it with their body, but can do it with their mind. There's nothing about denying or denial. This I think it can be understood.

"I would also like to add how much I and other folk who are unable to attend your teachings, appreciate this Shedra. A heartfelt thanks to you and those who have made it possible."

Thank you very, very much. This is not too much effort for me but sometimes when I'm travelling,

because of the busyness of the travelling and because of the facilities of sending and recording, sometimes it doesn't happen on time, but I'm sure you will forgive me and whenever I'm able I will record the sessions and send it online. Thank you very much. I appreciate your letter. Thank you very much. Then there is another question:

"It is always puzzling for me when I find contradictions in the teachings. I recently received one where it was explained that we shouldn't stay for long on the floor while prostrating because the speed at which we got up symbolizes our celerity to give up samsara as there are many wishes to make when our head touches the floor in your description. I don't really know what to do. Please can you advise?" (Rinpoche laughs)

What is the time limit explained as the, you know, too long? How long is too long that you can put your head on the ground? I think it is nothing like that. I don't think there are any contradictions. You know, you can do very fast prostrations, but you can do very slow prostrations also according to the conditions of the body and conditions of the mind. And if you are doing many, many prostrations, you know, hundred thousand and things like that, then maybe you want to do them quickly. So then you can do them quickly.

So these descriptions or explanations of the significance of each kind of movement and what kind of wishes you can make with these body movements, doesn't need to take lots of time. It's just a wish. It's just a kind of a understanding. Also, every time you do a prostration, I don't think it is necessary that you have to think about when I'm putting my right hand and when I'm putting left hand because most of the time you are putting your right and left hands together and also you are putting your right and left knees together. But you can do it as fast as you can, or you can do it as slowly as you want, or you can.

Also I don't think if you stay on the ground little bit longer it's not necessarily a big problem. It doesn't mean that you will not get (*Rinpoche laughs*) out of the samsara for a very long time, for however long you want to put your head on the ground. So therefore I think it is not a problem. But you know, the prostration is not necessary always only to do with the Ngondro. You can do prostrations as I said earlier, anywhere, anytime and it's not that the Ngondro's prostration is somehow different from other prostrations. it's the same thing. But actually, I think you should

also understand that what you really do at the Ngondro when you are doing prostrations is not prostration, it's the Refuge. You are doing Refuge practice and sometimes people do Ngondro with it, you know. Some, like in Kagyu, do prostrations along with Refuge. Some don't and some do prostrations along with Seven Branch Practice and not with the Refuge, but do Refuge also. So there are many slightly different ways of doing things and you know, traditions and things like that. It's not that important whether you put your head down and get it up in two or three seconds or one second. It doesn't make any difference there.

"Another point is about the Ngondro: I already find it difficult to practice prostrations with body, speech and mind. I fear it could become overwhelming to add these wishes for the different members touch the floor. So I wonder if this teaching matches with the Ngondro?"

So, as I said already, the Ngondro prostration and the prostration that's described here is exactly same. It's not two different things. Whether you want to do it elaborately or unelaborately is a different thing. Making prostrations, or making homage with the body, speech and mind is when you are touching your three sites of body, speech and mind, clarifying the body, speech and mind. This is very much part of the description and you can sometimes concentrate more on another part or another way.

You can do it without too much thinking, you know, and sometimes you can concentrate on the Refuge Tree when you are doing the prostration, not on your body, speech and mind or what you are doing with the prostration, but more on the Refuge Tree.

Sometimes you can concentrate more on all the sentient beings doing their prostrations. Sometimes you can concentrate more on transformation or the blessings being received. So, you know, it's not that you have to concentrate or focus on only one thing all the time. You can change this according to your situation. If you are tired of one way you can adopt another one. Then when you are a little bit tired of this, you do something else. If you need more inspiration then you think of all those things that have been described. So this is generally the way.

I hope I've made things a little bit clearer, so therefore, you say,

"I'm sure you'll make things clear for me again, and for that I send you my thanks and homage."

So thank you also very much and I hope I've made it a little bit more clearer, but if not, you are most welcome to send another question. 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.