



Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

Ringu Tulku Rinpoche **Questions and Answers 6 (Chapter 2)**

BA2Q6: Questions and Answers 6 (Chapter 2)

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Transcribed by Pat Murphy

Teachings on the Bodhicharyavatara for the Bodhicharya Online Shedra

"Rinpoche, thank you for your very clear and helpful answer to my question about prostration. I have an additional question. I have practiced hatha yoga for many years and in some ways this links in my mind with doing prostrations. In the west, hatha yoga is often taught as a physical rather than spiritual discipline. Would it be appropriate at the beginning of a hatha yoga class to silently say the refuge prayer and at the end of the class to silently say the dedication, to make the hatha class more clearly part of my dharma practice, also trying to be mindful during the class, focus on asanas, not be too distracted in my mind?"

Of course you can do that. Actually, hatha yoga always has been part of a spiritual practice and Buddhism especially has lots of hatha yoga practices which we do in retreat which is very much part of the spiritual practice, actually a very strong one. But in the west it's taught as an exercise because they don't want to have the spiritual side. At least the teachers thought that people don't want that, which is why it's like that, but of course individually you can do whatever is appropriate for you. There's nothing wrong with doing refuge or generating the bodhisattva motivation in the beginning, and at the end doing dedication, whether silently or aloud doesn't matter.

Then the next question is,

“It seems to me that the Buddhist concept of confession is quite different from that of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Both involve deep regret, but the purification process you describe sounds very clear cut. You see clearly what you have done wrong and you make a decision not to do this again. In the west, I think confession is associated with remorse and guilt, even a feeling that one deserves to be punished for being bad. Is this a correct understanding of the difference between the Buddhist and the Judeo-Christian concept of confession?”

Probably, it is. I cannot say that I know everything about Judeo-Christian way of doing things but from the Buddhist point of view, you can purify, you have to purify. Because the negative deeds are not part of you. It is affecting you but it is not yourself. So therefore you need to get rid of them. It's like a habit. You can't get rid of them, but you should try to get rid of them like a bad habit or a bad addiction. So therefore, you need to take steps and use whatever methods are needed to let it go. So that's the main understanding from Buddhist point of view.

“Why does Shantideva talk about death in Chapter 2 so realistically? I mean, I guess he, dear Master, finally died, but why is he exposing death in Chapter 2 and not in the last Chapter? Also why is purification important at this point of the Teaching? Why is not purification needed at the end when we have all the information to do the best purification?”

Well, from the Buddhist point of view you need to think about death at the beginning because you need to inspire yourself to practice and you need to understand death, you need to understand impermanence, you need to understand karma and that's why you want to practice. Why do you practice? You practice because you are afraid of death. You want to practice because you want to transform before you die. You want to practice because you want to understand the situations of our lives. Because if you talk about death only at the end then why do the practice? So therefore, it needs to be done in the beginning. There's nothing wrong in discussing purification in the beginning because that's the purpose of why we need to practice.

Also, because we are now discussing about how to take the bodhisattva vows, we talked about why it's necessary to generate the bodhicitta. So we are about to take the bodhisattva vows and in order to do that, there is a Seven Branch Practice recommended. Therefore we talked about prostration, we talked about offering and the third is the purification. Then there will be other

things like rejoicing and things like that. So the place for purification is here. This second Chapter is chiefly about the purification. That's why it's discussed here. You know, we need to try to purify from the beginning, not at the end, because by the end, then it's purified. Of course the purification will take place gradually all the time, it's not that you only have to do it in the beginning, but anywhere, any place is a good place to start.

Then Isabel Rodriguez:

"Dear Rinpoche, thank you for your positive way to explain the confession of negative deeds. I realise that all negative things that I have done were related with my convictions at that moment and remember[ing] is painful. Ignorance, poor training of mind, a limited sense of others welfare were the greatest causes. May I offer them to the Buddha and bodhisattvas, asking for awareness? Because I'm not sure to not commit it again, I only can take refuge again and again to guide my journey."

Well I don't know whether you offer the Buddhas and bodhisattvas your misdeeds. That's not a very good offering. By understanding that it is harmful to you and harmful to others, you try not to do it again or at least reduce doing it. At least thinking before you do something like that would very good. You can seek the blessings and the help of Buddhas and bodhisattvas that you may not do these kind of negative things again. That's the important part, I think.

And,

"Identifying failure is so important to rectify and prevent it from occurring again, but if those failures are traces of character, we have a tendency to deal with them as being normal and we easily forget and so it comes again, how to find the motivation for change. Is it necessary to establish a plan? Does it contradict our spontaneity? Because I think all of us have tolerance toward ourselves. Is it treachery?"

I think the motivation to change is through seeing its negative effect. I think it's good to establish a plan. We don't need to be spontaneous all the time, we can have a plan. We can make efforts and then with clear understanding that we want to do the right thing because it's better for us and

better for others, we try to remind ourselves again and again and try to act accordingly. And that's the practice. Of course, sometimes we miss it, we don't do the right thing. Our habitual tendencies take over. But again we say, okay this time it happened, but now next time I will make sure that it doesn't happen so much. Or even a little less or not at all or whatever.

"For people who are not highly realised but are trying to change and not get so caught up with negative emotions, is it realistic to say you can get rid of negative emotions? This sounds to me like a very advanced practice as in "cutting the root." Is it more realistic at a less advanced state of realisation to say that the negative emotions are still there but you can sometimes let them go, not identify with them, not get so caught up with them."

We are not saying that we can get rid of all the kind of negative emotions just now, we are saying that we can get rid of the negative emotions eventually. Nobody's saying now. We all know that we are not that advanced but we don't have to be so advanced to know that it can eventually be got rid of. So therefore, in order to do that we need to practice step by step, not expecting it to happen now, but eventually after a long, long time. I want to get rid of it. I will try to get rid of it, but I may not get rid of it at the moment. But even if it is a little bit better, if I can let go a little bit, if I can be a little bit more relaxed about it, that is much better. And if that happens, I have to appreciate myself and be happy with that.

So this is more or less, the questions so far about the confession. I see that some of you are starting to discuss certain things in Bodhicharyavatara. That's very good. Please go on and you can discuss among yourselves also and if possible I will also join in sometimes when I am a little bit free. At the moment I'm travelling very fast but by the middle of next month I'll be home and maybe have a little bit more time. Thank you very much. All the best. Thank you.

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