



Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

Ringu Tulku Rinpoche
Questions and Answers 3 (Chapter 3)



BA3Q3: Questions and Answers 3 (Chapter 3)
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So, some of the questions, this is chapter 3 and question video number three and the first question is:

“What is, according to Buddhism, the difference between 'dedication' and an 'aspiration prayer'?
For instance, when Shantideva wishes to become 'medicine for the ill' and 'food for the hungry', it looks to me more like an aspiration prayer, that in Shantideva's case, as he was a great Bodhisattva, it's also a practice of compassion.”

Well, actually, the aspiration is just an *aspiration*. You *wish that*, you want that, you kind of aspire to all of those things, that's the aspiration. Dedication is the same as you aspire, but it is when you

have done something positive. With that aspiration you do something positive, you do some action and the result of that action then you dedicate. So therefore it's about the same thing but what you do, what you aspire for in the beginning is the *aspiration* and whatever positive things that you have accumulated, to dedicate them, to distribute them, and the way you distribute them, the way you wish the results can, should be achieved, how you distribute or how you want the results of that positive action to be, that is the *dedication*. So, therefore, in essence it's the same but it is for different kind of purpose. Aspiration is done at the beginning, usually, and dedication is done at the end of any positive action and that's the main difference.

Now the second part of the question is:

"Dedication is clearly a practice of compassion as we include all other beings. But, when an ordinary being (like me) makes an aspiration prayer, like for instance: 'May I always find Dharma teachings and good Lamas in future lives' it can be a wish only for myself. Is that OK?"

So, if you just make an aspiration or a prayer like that, then you make an aspiration, that's an aspiration. And if you do something positive and at the end of that or the result of all this what I have done and all other things I have done, may it kind of ripen in getting a good dharma teacher or, what can you say, positive friend or a guru, then it's a dedication.

So the next question is:

"These teachings match the seven-branch prayer."

It is seven-branch prayer. And all the seven-branch prayers, actually most of them, in the lojongs or in any different kind of teachings in Buddhism are actually derived from here. Most of them actually are, even word by word, taken from Bodhicharyavatara. So this is seven-points prayer. And then he says:

"In the one I'm used to recite there is an added part where we ask the blessings of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to develop like them love and compassion for every being."

You can do that, I mean, there's nothing wrong. That's very good. It's like, I think, maybe prayer, to add that.

"I would like to know if it takes place like an eighth (or ninth with refuge) branch, and what it means. The concept of blessing is very common in all religions, but I must admit that I don't understand it that much."

I'm not sure I understand your question that much, but I think what is here is that I make the seven-branch practice and then I pray to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and Buddhas and bodhisattvas, that they also help me to accomplish what I aspire. So that's a good thing to do, you're kind of praying and making a request to all the great beings to kind of support you so that all your aspirations and all your wishes or positive wishes and positive aspirations come realised... to its kind of fruition. So that's I think the understanding.

The blessing I think we discussed this before also. Blessing is... We receive blessings all the time, it's kind of basically also influence. I think blessing can be seen like an influence also. So, if you are associated with good people you become a little bit like that. You get their qualities, you learn from them, you become more positive and that's the blessing. If you associate with bad people you also, kind of, acquire their bad habits and you become a little bit like them so, therefore, you are also "blessed" by them. You can be blessed in a positive way and you can be blessed in a negative also. So therefore blessing is more like an influence, I think. In quite a strong, in quite some way it is like an influence. So, therefore, you know, the idea is that we can be influenced in the positive way, we can be influenced in the negative way, so therefore we must associate ourselves and, kind of, ask the great beings to help us, to bless us, to influence us, to keep us under their protection and guide us in the way that I go in right way. So this is important, and if I really wish that and I pray for that then it is more likely that I will be directed in the positive way also. There *is* blessing. This is something we can actually see, you know, it is not something just un-understandable, it is

something that is understandable.

Then the last question here is:

“Dear Rinpoche, when I first listened to your explanation of these stanzas on dedication I felt a bit despondent because I could not imagine that I will ever achieve such a high level of altruism. However I have just listened to BA3Q2, and in your answer to the second question you talk about the seed or essence of bodhicitta that is in all of us; this makes me feel much more hopeful. I usually think about the 3 poisons as being in my mind, so is the essence of bodhicitta something that is deeper than the 3 poisons, which will become more apparent as we are better able to purify our minds?”

Yes, I mean, three poisons is an addiction. But, however bad the addiction is it is an acquired habit. It's very difficult to get rid of, it is very strong, but it is still something we have acquired. It is not our natural quality. Now, bodhicitta is our natural quality. The compassion is our natural quality. Our mind naturally has love, kindness, clarity and therefore wisdom. Wisdom, compassion, is a natural quality of our mind. Those natural qualities, it is not so apparent now, it is not so developed, it is not polished but it is there. It is the same as like the gold in the stone, you know - we have the gold in the stone, we have the golden ore. And then, you know, you can't see the gold at the moment but when you can work on it, when you melt it, the gold is necessarily there because it's there in its essence, so this is the understanding. So, mind poisons, negative emotions, are not the natural essence of ourselves. It is addiction, it is an acquisition. It is a habit we have acquired, so this is the difference I think.

So maybe that is three questions so far. So thank you very much. See you soon.

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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.