



Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

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

BA4Q4: Questions and Answers 4 (Chapter 4)

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Teachings on the Bodhicharyavatara for the Bodhicharya Online Shedra

This is continuation of questions and answers of Bodhicharyavatara Chapter number 4. And now this will be question and answer number 4.

The first one is,

“Dear Rinpoche, Each year I’m very happy to receive your wishes. I found your poems so inspiring. Usually in France during the New Year Eve the situation is difficult. People use to drink and fight. I don’t think it is the right way to begin a new year. In this sea of pain and negative emotions your message gives me so much hope and strength. Thank you so much. Here is my question. This year you said that we should celebrate the freedom of choice that we have. Last year you said the same, so I guess this point must be very important. Could you please explain a bit more, because freedom of choice seems so natural and obvious to me that I do not really think of it as worthy of consideration.”

I think many people feel that when they are in a situation and they have no choice to act in a different way. Or react in a different way. But when you look a little bit more deeply and closely you will find that there are many options that you can choose from in terms of how to live your life and also many options in terms of how to react to the situation that you are in. We need to be reminded of this, I think, because when we really understand that, then we can become more

responsible for ourselves. We know that there is a choice so therefore whatever choice we make, we make it out of our own will.

Of course, some people are more fortunate than others and there are lots of countries where there is very little choice. You live in a democratic, liberal country and you have more choices about how to live your life and how to do things than in many other places in the world. Therefore I think it is even more important that you appreciate this situation and thereby do not feel completely kind of “choiceless” or completely unfree. The way you should live your life, do your things and react to them is, I think, the main understanding.

Actually there was a story, maybe you have heard it. There was a Jewish person, who was in the camps during the Nazi time in Germany. And he had to actually push the button to kill lots of people. He was very, very unhappy and depressed because he thought that he had no choice.

But one day he found out suddenly within himself that actually what he was doing was not completely without choice. “*I could choose,*” he thought. “*I could choose to do this, or I could choose to die.*” And when he understood this, it is said that he felt much freer than before and started to plan how to run away from there. Then he actually succeeded in running away and I think, wrote a book about all these things.

Then next question is, *“Dear Rinpoche, first of all I would like to thank you for these teachings. I think there can never be a way in which I can express my gratitude for receiving them, except maybe through practicing them and devoting my life to them. Through these marvelous blessings with the Online Shedra, you have placed me on the right path forever and, as I said I can never express my gratitude for that. Nevertheless, I thank you from the core of my being for your noble work. May it bring all beings to perfect enlightenment. Now I took a little break from studying so I’ve started again from the beginning, and a few questions came up that I would like your advice about. I hope I’m not taking up too much time and space here. My question is about the fact that I haven’t formally taken refuge yet although as soon as I get a chance I will. I recently moved to a pretty remote place and there are no dharma centres nearby. So it isn’t easy for me to get to a place where I can take refuge. I understand the importance of taking it formally, but I do take refuge at least every morning and evening. I do believe I have an understanding of refuge through*

your kind teachings and I also finally have non-returnable faith in the dharma. is this good enough for now? Will it make my practice less beneficial if I have not formally taken refuge? Does it actually make that big a difference in comparison to my personal aspiration and commitment of refuge? Would it be better for me to go to a city immediately to take formal refuge so as to make the most of my practice? Also is this personal refuge good enough to take the Bodhisattva Vows for myself? Or should I wait until I have formally taken refuge? Thank you for your kindness, dear Rinpoche. May we all be able to benefit being as much as you do.”

Actually, it is said very clearly that if you don't have a person like a monk or a upasaka or somebody from whom you can take refuge, then if you take that same refuge by yourself in front of a representation of a Buddha, like an image, it is allowed, it is the same.

Or if you can't find even that, you can take refuge by visualizing or feeling the presence of the Buddhas in front of you. When you do that, you have actually taken refuge and that is formally the same as if you have taken refuge in a proper ceremony. So you have actually taken refuge.

If you want, later on you can retake the refuge from a lama or someone like that and get a name and things like that. That's also possible. But actually you have taken refuge. Especially if you do the refuge every day.

Now is that basis enough for taking the bodhisattva vows? I think it is. Because the Buddha said very clearly that you can take refuge without another person from whom to take the refuge, so then there is no reason why this cannot be a good basis for taking the bodhisattva vows.

And it's also very clearly mentioned that you can take bodhisattva vows by yourself. So if there is nobody from whom you can take the bodhisattva vows around you, then you can take the vows by visualizing, by feeling the presence of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas in front of you and then taking the bodhisattva vows. That is a valid bodhisattva vow.

So I think you don't have to hurry and you don't have to feel that by practicing in this way you are kind of accumulating a less positive deed so your practice is not good enough. I think it's not like that. So you can be confident about it. And of course when the time comes and when there are

right situations, then you can take the refuge and bodhisattva vows from a genuine teacher at that time.

Then there are two comments. Maybe it's not necessary. I think these are about the dohas of Dusum Khyenpa. It says, *"Thank you. I appreciate these and look forward to the explanation of the dohas."* And another one: *"Dear Rinpoche and Bodhicharya team, nice to hear from you again and again. Thank you very much for your generosity in sharing these most compassionate and exciting stories. Me too I look forward to listen and sing the dohas with you and dharma friends everywhere in the world. With much love and excuses for not communicating so little lately. I should put much more effort in applying the teachings on Bodhicharyavatara and bodhichitta in daily life and dharma practice and stop clinging to past (romantic) experiences and hoping for same experiences again and again, fearing ad experiences in the future. All the best to everyone."*

So thank you very much, that's the end of the questions and answer session this time.

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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.