



# Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

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***Vigilant Introspection***  
***5th Chapter, Stanza 1***



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Teachings on the Bodhicharyavatara for the Bodhicharya Online Shedra

So now we come to the 5th chapter of Bodhicharyavatara and the 5th chapter is on *sheshin*. *Sheshin*, in Tibetan, is translated by the Padmakara as 'Vigilant Introspection'. Sometimes we translate it as 'Awareness'. *Sheshin* – Awareness.

This means that we introspect or we are aware of what's going on with our body, or in our body and in our mind, in a constant way. To be able to see, to be able to be aware what's going on, that's what we call vigilant introspection or awareness.

Now this chapter is in four sections:

First, that in order to protect or in order to abide by the trainings, the trainings of the Bodhisattva Path, then, we first need to guard our mind, we first need to take care or protect our mind, be aware of our mind. And [secondly] in order to guard our mind or protect our mind, we need to bring or we need to use the mindfulness and awareness or, as we have discussed, in this case carefulness and vigilant introspection. I think it is enough to say that we need to have mindfulness and awareness. And third: how to train our mind, how to train our mind through mindfulness and awareness. Then, fourthly, some other aspects of practices, some other branches of practices that are also necessary in order to train ourselves. So it is in these four kinds of points or sections.

The first, to say that we need to protect our mind, guard our mind in order to guard or protect our training, has two points: first, to give a kind of essence in brief and then to elaborate, to explain it.

So the first, the most important thing is that all these trainings, trainings of our mind, transformation, have to come from self-discipline, have to come from our own side. These trainings cannot be imposed from outside, it has to come from within. Only if we do it by ourselves, with our own understanding, with our own seeing the need for it, with our own volition, then the trainings can become useful and helpful. If it is imposed on us by somebody else's kind of restriction or command or because there is a rule, then it wouldn't really be a training. It wouldn't be able to transform ourselves. So therefore, whether we are in public, whether we are together with many people, working together with people, or we are alone and staying in privacy, we need to examine what's going on. And then we need to apply the understanding of the things happening: whether we are doing something or reacting to something, if it is something that is good to react, the way it should be reacted or if it should not be reacted. So we have to accordingly decide and then use that understanding or use that clear kind of wisdom. So therefore that's what we call training.

First, of course, we have to be extremely clear what are the things, what are the actions, reactions, emotions or whatever that are good for us, that is a beneficial and useful way of reacting. Then we should allow them to come and we need to, we should allow ourselves to react in that way. And if

we know that this way of reacting, this way of emotions or whatever actions, is not good, is not useful, it doesn't serve the purpose that we want to achieve or we want to experience, then we don't continue to react in that way. We know very clearly it's not the right way, it's not the good way, so we kind of let go of those reactions, which might have come out of kind of negative habitual tendency or due to some circumstances or things like that. So therefore that is the practice. So we need to understand, first, what is the right thing, what is the wrong thing, what is the useful way of reacting and what is not, what are the positive emotions, what are the negative emotions, etc.

But once we understand that, then, just understanding that is not sufficient for the training because our mind is sometimes very much used or influenced or sometimes addicted to react in a certain way. And then if we are not aware, if we are not kind of vigilant, or if we don't bring some kind of introspection or awareness in us, then our mind gets distracted by those reactions, habitual reactions, by those addictions. And then we react and act in that way and then before we realize, we have done something which is very harmful to ourselves and others. And then it's very difficult to get out of that, and [once] we have done an action, then you cannot take it back. So, therefore, if we want to train, then we have to catch that. When these kind of reactions are happening at the level of our emotions or the level of our reactions in an inner kind of mind, then we need to catch it there and if we can catch it there and then we can act accordingly, react accordingly, then that can become a very strong practice, and that's the basis of all our trainings and even disciplines and precepts and things like that.

Nobody else can actually even know what's going on in our mind. So we cannot really totally rely on our teacher or somebody else to tell us what to do and not to do. It's not useful. Like somebody said, *"Mother told me to do this, so I do that."* That wouldn't work, because mother doesn't know exactly what's going on within. Maybe she or your teacher or your parents or your friends can see how you act with your body, speech and mind. They can comment on that, but they cannot see what's going on within your mind at the level of reaction. And in Buddhism we have to work at that level. That's the most important thing. Then it's training. We have to work at the level of emotions, at the level of reactions, at the level of our way of seeing things. So therefore we have to watch our mind, we have to be aware of what's going on and when positive or negative kind of thoughts or reactions arise, then we become aware of it, we know, *"Oh, this is*

*a thought coming up, a reaction coming up, and if I let that kind of build up, it's not going to be useful, it's not going to be helpful for me and others, so that's not the kind of way I should go.*" So when I decide, understand that clearly, then I can follow the other way. *"It's not that way, I have to think in another way, I have to react in another way."* So when I understand it and catch it at that level and then when I kind of redirect myself in the right way, then it's the real practice. So therefore I am my own teacher. I have to become my own teacher. That's what Buddha said again and again. Like sometimes it has been described that your mind is like a horse, and the mindfulness is like the rope or the kind of steer, that thing that is holding the rope that holds the horse, and then the awareness or the vigilance, the introspection is like a person who is watching.

So therefore, if we really want to train ourselves, if we want to practice the path, then we need to first protect and guard our mind. Because if our mind is distracted, if we are not aware of what's going on in our mind at that level, at the level of our thinking, at the level of the way we see things, at the level of [how] we react to things, then it's too late. It is very difficult [for us to] practice; we cannot practice, there is nothing to practice on. So therefore we have to, you know, that's why it says [1]:

*Those who wish to keep the trainings  
must with perfect self-possession guard their minds.*

Very strongly or very carefully, or with *rab dim sem de* – *dim* means like one-pointedly, or here it says 'self-possession'. With strong clear mind, one-pointedly we have to guard our mind, [which] means we have to be very aware what's going on in our mind. And not be totally distracted and do things not knowing what's going on. And so therefore we have to protect it from negative emotions, from distractions and negative way of thinking and things like that. And if we do that, then the training can be very transforming and very useful, and if not, then the training would not be useful. Because if we do something, if we act or if we kind of live our life or if our body and speech are controlled *because* there's a rule - because everybody is doing like that and I'm supposed to be doing like that and because it is an order - by only that, then I'm not really transforming myself. I'm controlling or disciplining my way of action, but it's not really transforming. I'm just restricting myself, I'm imprisoning myself. I'm not really transforming myself. So that's where sometimes people ask these questions, that I did certain way because

somebody else compelled me to act in a certain way and then that later on became a problem, because I suppressed those emotions. So that's no use. That is not a training, it doesn't really help. Because if I'm too much suppressing, if my mind is not transformed, if my way of seeing is not transformed, if my way of reacting is not changed by really knowing what is the best for me and for others, then that's not really training. It's just kind of controlling or putting a lid on, but it's not. So therefore, from Buddhist point of view, when we are saying training, it's at that level. That's why understanding is important, that's why really changing our way of seeing, not way of acting [is important]. Not just way of acting with our body and speech, but way of seeing and thereby reacting.

And then when we know this, when we really use this like that, then there's nothing to suppress, it's not about suppressing anything. It's knowing very clearly that this is not the right way of expressing myself and so, therefore, I would not express like that, there is no need to express like that. Therefore the negative way of reacting is not just happening. So, I need to train at that level – my mind level, my reaction level, my understanding level. So if I do that and if I am aware of this, then I'm actually training myself, I'm training my mind, and therefore the mind is the most important to train on. If I don't train my mind, if I don't train my thoughts and emotions and reactions, then there is no use. It doesn't work. It doesn't mean to say that I shouldn't also watch my actions, of course, but if I really watch my mind, then it's automatically done. Because my mind, you know, if there is no desire to act in my mind, then I wouldn't act that way. So therefore it's automatically kind of controlled, automatically trained. So therefore, this is important to work on our mind at that level. To do that, we have to be aware what's going on in our mind. Of course we have to be aware what's going on with our body also, but especially our mind, in the sense of, at the level of reaction and seeing things.

So this is the first stanza and this is the kind of the general outline. And then we slowly elaborate this. So I think I stop here and this is the first stanza of the fifth chapter of Bodhicharyavatara.

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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.