



Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

Ringu Tulku Rinpoche **Questions and Answers 8 (Chapter 4)**

BA4Q8: Questions and Answers 8 (Chapter 4)
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Teachings on the Bodhicharyavatara for the Bodhicharya Online Shedra

So this is the set of last questions on chapter number 4 of Bodhicharyavatara. There are 3 questions. I would like to answer them in a short way.

The first question is:

“Dear Rinpoche, thank you for the beautiful strength and clarity of this teaching and for your patience with us for not always getting the point. Is it appropriate to think of anxiety as a negative emotion, and to deal with it in the way you described? You talk about fear, which I think must underlie anxiety. Is that a correct understanding?”

I think that is very correct. I think anxiety is, of course, fear, and fear is expressed in many different ways, and it comes out as anxiety, as aversion, as anger, as hatred, as also attachment and clinging, in many different ways, I think.

Next, I think, it’s a similar kind of question, so I wouldn’t explain here too much. The next question is,

“In chapter 4, Shantideva describes negative emotions as an enemy, the cause of sorrow, and something to get rid of. You suggested just being angry, at our negative emotion is not an answer

to how to work with them. And we need to have mindfulness and awareness, understanding, intelligence, wisdom and relax. This approach does not sound like rejecting negative emotions, but more like being fully present with them. It seems that adopting the attitude of these emotions being an enemy might limit one's ability to stay open and allow intelligence, wisdom, and understanding to occur. Would you clarify how these all go together."

So when we say that negative emotions, or disturbing emotions are an enemy, it just means to say that these emotions are causing problem and pain to you and others, so they never can become very useful and very helpful to you, or to bring lasting peace and happiness to you as well as others. That's what it is saying. So that understanding must be very, very important, because if you think that all these negative emotions or disturbing emotions are something very good or something useful, or something that you need, I think that is wrong, because it doesn't bring anything really good in the long run if you allow yourself to be overpowered or carried away by the negative emotion. That is why you need to understand; that is the main thing.

Once you understand that, then how to deal with it skillfully, that is the important thing. You can't just be angry at that, or have too much fear of that. That wouldn't help, that wouldn't get rid of this problem. That wouldn't uproot these disturbed or negative emotions. So what we need to know, what we need to learn, is how to instead of indulging in these negative disturbed emotions, you need to allow yourself to remain free from these negative emotions. And to do that, that understanding is necessary, intelligence is necessary, skillful means is necessary, to work on it step-by-step is necessary. Because you cannot say, *"Okay, to be angry is not good, so I will never be angry from now on."* It is easy to say but not easy to happen. Or you cannot say that I will never have fear from now on. It is easy to say. But then when those things happen, when the negative emotion arises, say, *"Oh, it is another negative emotion. It is not useful to indulge in it, not useful to become like a slave of that"*, so you allow it to go, you use different methods, whatever is appropriate to you at the moment, and then slowly, kind of, but certainly and slowly you don't become enslaved to it. That's the idea.

So I don't know if you want to call it, what you say as "fully present" with them. To say "fully present" or "being fully present" with them, you can understand in many different ways, so then

sometimes people might think that oh, “you have to be fully present with them” means you have to be angry, or you have to keep it, or you have to get angry. I think this can be understood by many slightly different ways. So it is important to understand this, that you understand what is the effect, what is negative emotion, what does it do to you. That is important. Then how to work on it is also important to understand: in a skillful way, in a step-by-step way.

Of course you will get angry and you will get all those negative emotions, until you become really realized. But of course, you can't expect that once you understand negative emotions are not good, then immediately all of them are gone, and you are totally free. That cannot happen. So you have to live with it but you have to work on it also, you have to know that this is something that is not really good for you, so you have to work on it. So this understanding I think is very important, and that is what I am trying to say.

So working on it (we discussed this I think a few times) sometimes even abandoning is also good: that you say I am not going to let it drive me, or let it overpower me, or let it control me or my actions. That also is a really good step, but that also is not going to uproot that, so therefore we need different kinds of methods, we need to have abandoning, transforming, understanding, these 3 ways. Abandoning is to not allow yourself to be overpowered by that negative emotion at that moment. That is also important, very important, because if you act according to this disturbed emotion, then sometimes you do lots of damage to yourself and to others. And it creates so much problems that it is very difficult to get rid of. Also that is a very good thing, and also, if negative emotion comes up and you don't act accordingly or you don't react in that way, after 5 minutes you don't even want to act that way, so therefore it is very good, very important to understand that also. To understand that these emotions are not permanent, [they are] impermanent, emotions also change very quickly, so if you just wait a few minutes, then that emotion is gone. That is also abandoning.

Transforming means when there is a negative emotion or disturbing emotion coming, you allow something positive come in at the same time, so that is also a very important thing. You deliberately allow very positive emotion or very positive thoughts come into your mind so the negative emotion is a little bit overpowered. That doesn't completely transform it, or completely eradicate it, but it helps.

And then understanding. That you really understand the emotions – then you are talking about being fully present with them. But if you really understand there is not much substance in these emotions, then you can relax in that; you don't have to fear them, you don't have to allow that emotion to take over; then it is the best. You understand the nature of yourself, you understand the nature of your mind, you understand the nature of that emotion. So you have no problem dealing with it. And that can actually transform, that can actually completely change, and even uproot that negative emotion. So that's the important thing. So this is the answer. I hope I have made it clear.

Now the last question is:

“Dear Rinpoche, thank you for this explanation, it is very helpful as it is making me notice more in myself the small subtle ways in which I can get discouraged as well as the more obvious times of struggling against the kleshas and finding it very difficult. These stanzas also remind me very much of a Christian hymn, I think written in the 17th century by John Bunyan, called To be a Pilgrim. The first verse is:

He who would valiant be against all disaster,
Let him in constancy follow the Master.
There's no discouragement can make him once relent
His first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.

Could it be said that the meaning of this is very similar to that expressed by Shantideva, or is the religious context too different?”

To be honest, this verse is very high poetic English, so I don't understand very much and there is nobody here with me at the moment to explain this. So, I don't understand fully, what this stanza says, but I have a kind of a clue that I think it is saying the same thing. Usually the different religious context is completely not of much significance, as far as I understand it. The real kind of understandings or experiences of great beings, or spiritual masters expressing their experiences, whatever kind of philosophical background or religious context that they are talking about, I feel, is totally immaterial. It doesn't matter at all; it is that experience which actually comes to the same

thing. This is what I understand, so I am sure it gives the same kind of message. But I can't say exactly because I am not very good at English poetry, because I don't even understand what is not poetry. That is my problem. I have been asking the question to some of the English poetry teachers: what is not poetry. And until now, I've asked all different kinds of great professors up to Oxford University professors. They try to explain to me but I am too dull to understand, I don't know what is not poetry. Therefore I can't really say what is poetry. But that's of course besides the point. But I will of course, maybe when I meet the questioner here, I think she is Lynda, then maybe she can explain to me more clearly what this stanza actually means and maybe then we can discuss more. But I think it's the same thing.

Anyway, that's it, thank you. So this is the last question and I don't think I have received any more questions so far, so I'll end here. Thank you very much.

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