



Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

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How All Harm Comes From Our Mind
5th Chapter, Stanzas 2-8



BA5_2-8 How All Harm Comes From Our Mind
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Teachings on the Bodhicharyavatara for the Bodhicharya Online Shedra

So, now we are going through the fifth chapter of Bodhicharyavatara. First we went through briefly that it is important that we need to guard our mind in order to practise or in order to guard our practice or actually preserve or actually do the practice of bodhisattva's training.

Now to explain this in more detail there are three points: how all the problems and harm are coming from our mind; and how all the positive things are also coming from our mind; and thirdly, therefore, it is important to guard our mind. So these are the three topics. We'll deal with the first one, that all the problems will come from our mind, or from a mind that is untamed and is not trained or not practised or is completely out of control.

So, this is from stanza number 2 to, I think, stanza number 8. So it says:

Wandering where it will, the elephant of mind,

Will bring us down to torment in the hell of Unrelenting Pain.

No worldly beast, however wild and crazed,

Could bring upon us such calamities. [5:2]

I think at that time, maybe the most dangerous instrument of creating hazard or destruction was an elephant. You made the elephant completely drunk and wounded it painfully and then put certain kinds of weapons like swords and things like that on it or on its trunk and then let it loose on your enemy, and this will create havoc and make lots of destruction on the enemy.

This is kind of the highest destruction that can be caused. But that was that time. But now, also, all the kinds of weapons of destruction – who made them? It's made by our mind, our clever mind which is not thinking about the welfare of the people but how to destroy, how to kill, how to harm, how to destroy. So, all these things will bring us – any kind of weapon, any kind of animals of destruction or weapons of destruction – can bring lots of destruction, but they can only bring destruction to this life. They can kill you, they can maim you, they can torture you, but however strong that means of destruction may be, somebody else from outside can only kill you this life, can do some harm to this body, but cannot actually make permanent harm, they cannot throw you into the hell realm. But then, if your mind is always in a very negative way and negative emotions always take over and you act accordingly and you kind of react in that way then you can suffer much more and more permanently and more continuously and that can throw you into the hell realm as well.

So therefore:

If, with mindfulness' rope,

The elephant of mind is tethered all around,

Our fears will come to nothing,

Every virtue drop into our hands. [5:3]

So therefore, we need to tame our mind and like an elephant, if you kind of put a rope on its legs and tie it to a kind of a strong pillar or pole then it cannot do any harm. In the same way, if we can tame our mind, if we can also, somehow, let our mind be tied and not go wild, discipline our mind

in such a way that it doesn't create havoc, it's under control, it's tamed, then all the fears, all the problems that it will bring us in this life as well as next lives will go away. We can get rid of them and all the positive things can be brought to us like something that is in your hands, every virtue will drop into our hands. That means that every good thing can come very easily like something dropped. It's not like making something happen but drops in our hands. Also in this way, to have our mind tamed and controlled is extremely important.

Stanza number 4:

*Tigers, lions, elephants, and bears
Snakes and every hostile foe,
Those who guard the prisoners in hell,
Ghosts and ghouls and every evil wraith, [5:4]*

So these are some of the things people fear or some of things that could be very dangerous to us like "*tigers, lions, elephants, and bears, snakes*" and all other hostile enemies that would cause trouble to us in this life, as well as "*those who guard the prisoners in hell*", in the next life or after we die there are also lots of problems like going into the hell realm and then all those guards and things of the hell, and problems and dangers of this life and dangers of the next life and "*ghouls and ghosts*" and other things that people fear or that might be harmful to us now and also in the next lives: all those things can be dealt with "*by simply binding of this mind alone*":

*By simple binding of this mind alone,
All these things are likewise bound.
By simple taming of this mind alone,
All these things are likewise tamed. [5:5]*

Now this is at two levels: if your mind is tamed, has no fear and has great love and kindness, then,

sometimes even wild animals do not attack you, they become friends. If your mind has no fear and you have lots of love and kindness, even tigers and lions and elephants and bears and snakes etc can become your friends, they can help you. There are many stories of this kind that in Buddha's time even somebody let loose a drunken and very ferocious and angry elephant at him. When it came next near the Buddha it just kind of laid down and put its trunk on his feet, on Buddha's feet.

So there are many incidences of this kind. But also, when your mind is under control, when your mind is aware and undisturbed then even if there are dangers and things like that you are more likely to deal with them in a more efficient way. The real problem is not the problem of the things but your mind. Your mind is creating these problems. Even if there is a very negative element like a weapon, if somebody has a very destructive weapon, whether it's a bomb or a rifle or a sword or something like that, if your mind is at peace then this weapon will do no harm to anybody. But if somebody's mind is disturbed with anger or all sorts of negative reactions take over then they would use this weapon to make lots of destruction.

So therefore, the destruction caused by these instruments or negative things, it is not because of these weapons, because of these tools, but it is the mind itself. So therefore, whether it is in this life, all these dangerous things, or the next life, like hell, it is something that is created by your own mind. This is the understanding from a Buddhist point of view: that if your mind is always with hatred, with lots of anger, lots of hatred, lots of negative kind of reactions, very strong and all the time all the time all the time, it will create what is called hell realm. Therefore, the hell realm is not something out there; it is what we feel out there is actually created by the way we react all the time. Therefore, our environment, our circumstances are eventually, karmically you can say, created by our mind. So whether it is something more kind of near and immediate or something more long term all our problems are created by our own negative mind. So therefore, if we really control our mind, tame our mind, bind our mind then we are actually working on the source of all these problems.

Then the sixth:

*For all anxiety and fear,
And pain in boundless quantity,*

*Their source and wellspring is the mind itself,
As He who spoke the truth declared. [5:6]*

And that's what the Buddha said – "*He who spoke the truth* " means the Buddha – all these anxieties and fear and all these immeasurable problems actually are coming from a negative state of mind, uncontrolled state of mind, a mind which has all kinds of negative emotions and reactions.

*The hellish instruments to torture living beings –
Who invented them for such intent?
Who has forged this burning iron ground;
Whence have all these demon-women sprung? [5:7]*

So, when people talk about hell realms, these hell realms and all these burning grounds and hell guards and things like that are not created by anybody, from a Buddhist point of view, they are created by your own reaction, your own negative emotion. So it is said that sometimes you are in a certain kind of hell experience that whatever you hold or whatever you put your hands on becomes a very destructive weapon and then you throw at each other and you destroy each other, all the time again you are not dead, and do like this like this like this continuously: or if you are too much clinging or attached to someone; and then sometimes also this kind of *shamala i dugpo* [?] – they described a kind of a hill or a mountain or a forest with lots of sharp leaves or sharp thorns, and you hear that somebody to whom you are extremely attached, sometimes in a kind of negative way, that person is calling you from above. So you climb up and your body's totally torn and you find there is nobody and then you feel you're being called from down there so you go down. I think it's not really demon woman here. There are two different translations here. One is *me tsug deda* and one is *so mo tsug deda*. *Me tsug deda* means all these fires, where do these fires come from and *mo tsug deda* means, *mo* is like female, so this is kind of supposed to be *shamala i dugpo* [?] that if you're too much attached to somebody, like a woman – this is talking to a man, this whole thing is instructions to people in Nalanda University, so it's for the monks.

So anyway, what it's saying is that whatever negative things [there are], even in hell realm, it's not something made by others, it's by own experience, so therefore our mind is the source of this.

*All are but the offspring of the sinful mind,
This the mighty Sage has said.*

So the Buddha, “*the mighty Sage*”, has said that all the negative things that we experience is actually coming from or its main origin or source is our own negative mind, our own negative reaction, habitual tendencies.

So therefore:

*Throughout the triple world therefore
There is not greater bane than mind itself. [5:8]*

So, in all these worlds, three worlds – triple world can be desire, form and formless realms, these three realms, or, you can say (there are two ways of counting them) under the ground, on the ground and above the ground. This is another way of talking about the three worlds. So, anyway, everywhere in the whole kind of cosmos, in the whole experience of the living beings, there’s no greater evil or there’s no greater bane than the mind itself, the mind that is uncontrolled, the mind that is negative, the mind that’s become negative.

So therefore, the source of all the problems and pain and difficulties is also the mind. But then, all the good things are also because of the opposite, the positive state of mind. So therefore, when we understand this, when we see this clearly, then we become very convinced and very clear that we need to actually do something about our mind. We need to work on our mind.

So, that’s stanza number 2 to stanza number 8. So, we stop here.

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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.