



# Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

## Ringu Tulku Rinpoche ***Questions and Answers 3 (Chapter 5)***

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So the first question is:

*"I have two questions. The first question is about stanzas number 19 and 20 in which Shantideva refers to the mind as a wound. Does he mean that just the samsaric mind is a wound in the sense of the three poisons? Because the true nature of the mind surely is not a wound in any sense."*

Yes, it's talking about, you know, if our mind is kind of infected with all kind of mind poisons, then we should be very careful that it's not kind of touched or it's not injured more. And if somebody is near you and little bit touches you, you cannot totally blame that person, you have to see that it's because of your own wound. So therefore this understanding is very important. If the complete nature of your mind is pure or not doesn't matter at this stage.

*"The second question is about stanza 22. Does this mean that if you are having a very difficult time because losing your job or finding that you have a serious illness, the best way to deal with this is to be vigilant and careful about your state of mind, then you are better able to deal with the practical aspects?"*

No, no, that's not the idea. You try to deal with the practical aspects, of course you have to deal with the practical aspects. There's nothing, when you are talking about dealing with mind, it's not saying that you don't deal with the practical aspects. We have to deal with the practical aspects, you try to do whatever you can to make things better, to get a job, to get your illness under

control or cured. But, how much you suffer from that, how much your mind is affected from that, that's your mind. So therefore, even if you lose your job, make sure that you lose your job and your mind also! Or, you know, you should not lose your job and also peace of mind together and become totally lost. Same thing with the illness. So that's why it's even more necessary and even more important at that time to see that your mind is okay and not totally affected by that thing that affects your job or whatever situation.

Then the next question is:

*“Thank you so much for these rare and precious teachings that you are offering to us all. I truly feel very lucky to have this opportunity to study with you online. It is rare indeed. A question that comes to my deluded mind is this: If the mind is the source of all positive and negative experiences, then is it possible to have only positive thoughts or virtuous thoughts all the time, even if very negative things happen to us? And also does vigilant introspection and mindfulness involve spending time resting in shamatha even in our daily activities? Surely we can't spend our day resting in shamatha. If we have negative thoughts of others, then I guess we confess them.”*

The idea is, I think it's not very difficult to understand, that the more positive we are, the more positive we experience, the happier we are, the more peaceful we are. And the more negative we are everything becomes more gloomy. Now that's why we should try to look positive, even within situations where there is lots of difficulties, lots of problems, we should try to feel the more positive side of it, [we should see] the opportunities, and if we can do that generally and naturally we feel much more happier and much more positive, and kind of optimistic. So therefore, working on that, working on that. I think, ultimately, the idea is from the Buddhist point of view that it's not impossible to have positive way of experiencing all the time. That's what we call Buddha. Even if everything around you is not right, it is possible that you can feel okay. But that's not to say that it is easy and we will be able to do that at this moment, but that doesn't matter. We have to try to work on it, step by step and we cannot expect that we will be all positive all the time. The meditative state or *shamatha* is a training on how to be calm and peaceful and not totally affected by everything around you. Usually we think that if something is not right around us, then we have to be disturbed. We think that if there is sound around us, we have to be disturbed. That's not the case. I don't know, maybe some of you have felt [like that] also. Like for instance when you go to India, the dogs are barking all the time. And people

sometimes don't get any sleep because the dogs are barking all the time. But if you get used to it, like I – I'm in Sikkim and the dogs barking all the time, but I don't even hear the dogs, because I know the dogs are barking all the time and I don't listen. So you know it is not impossible that if your mind is in a certain way, then you can have shamatha – or it's not even shamatha – your mind can be resting, and your mind can be in peace, even if things around you are not totally in peace. That is possible. That we can see very well. So therefore, it's not only about awareness or vigilant mindfulness all the time. And also, I think being aware is not an effort. If you know how to do that in a direct, simple way, in a kind of experiential way. We are always aware at different degrees. And so therefore it's not a big effort, it's just a training. When we are walking down the street, we are aware, we have to be aware, because otherwise we'll fall down, otherwise we will kind of have an accident, otherwise we will kick something on the way, but we don't because we're aware. So therefore awareness does not need to be too kind of stressful or completely, kind of, [that] we can't do anything else when we are aware. It's not like that. We can do all our jobs being aware! Actually we have to. The more aware we are, the more we can do better, because then we are concentrating. If we're distracted we can't do our job and that's also important to understand. It's practical.

Next question is:

*“This is a question related to your commentary on stanza 23. When you talk about mindfulness in terms of knowing what's the right thing to do, I think that I have not been understanding mindfulness correctly as I thought it was aware of what is happening in the present moment. But I did not realize that it also involves knowing the right thing to do. Does this mean that there is a wisdom component to mindfulness which allows one to discern the difference between positive and negative alternatives? And is that wisdom a natural part of our mind or is it something we learn through studying the Dharma?”*

Now here when we kind of separate or when we discern the mindfulness from awareness, then the awareness is knowing what's happening and mindfulness is the knowing what to do or not to do at that stage. So therefore, of course there is some wisdom, there is wisdom involved, but wisdom is something that's there in our mindfulness, in our awareness. Of course, if we are completely ignorant or if we never thought about anything, we never observed anything, we don't think about anything, we don't look whether this is how to do or how not to do or what is right

and what is wrong, what are the causes and conditions – if we never looked before, then of course maybe we don't have much wisdom. But, because we are human beings, we have a certain wisdom. You know, we have a certain capacity of knowing, capacity of knowing what's happening or what will happen if we do this, or what others are thinking. We have a natural wisdom and that natural wisdom we need to develop. We need to kind of exercise how to bring it out or make it stronger or more apparent. So therefore, and especially, the more wisdom we have, the more understanding we have, the more clarity we have, then, the mindfulness will apply that wisdom on ourselves. So mindfulness itself maybe is not kind of more wisdom. But the wisdom that we have is applied by that mindfulness. I think maybe I should say this. And of course this is also the question. We have a natural wisdom – if we don't have the natural wisdom, we can never learn it. Because we have the natural wisdom, therefore we can increase it, we can develop it, we can bring it out. So through the study, study of Dharma as well as study of anything, and through our experience, we try to bring out this or develop this wisdom.

And then the next question is:

*“Firstly, thank you for your extended commitment to giving these precious Bodhichitta teachings in such an accessible and modern way. My question pertains to stanza number 26 of Chapter 5 which highlights the presence of faith, devotion, diligence and learning may be insufficient if not accompanied by mental vigilance and introspection as well. Possible techniques to transform negative emotions would seem to include generating a positive state of mind, mindfulness and resting in the nature of mind (ultimately best if one is able). My question relates to the specifically Vajrayana methods of transforming negative emotions into wisdom. Could you please talk about these skillful means techniques? Do they involve visualizing the Dhyani Buddhas for instance Akshobhya, Mitrugpa transforming anger into mirror-like wisdom?”*

Well, this is actually Vajrayana practice, and what we are discussing, the Bodhicharyavatara, is not the Vajrayana practice, it's the Mahayana practice. So maybe this is not the exactly right place to discuss those things. But I think the question, the real question here is, what it's saying here in stanza 26 of chapter 5 is, that all these things, whether it's [that] you have faith, devotion, diligence, learning, whatever is there, these are there, these good things. But to apply them you need mindfulness and awareness. If we don't have awareness and mindfulness, we can't apply them because when we need them we don't have them. So therefore, it's talking about how

important to have some awareness in order to apply any of the understandings or any of the qualities or positive things that you have. Same thing in the Vajrayana thing also. If you know how to do some Vajrayana practice it's very good, it's very good. But you need to have, you need to develop this awareness and mindfulness in order to use that on yourself when you need them. Because when you need them, and if then your mind is distracted, you're not able to use that. Your mind is overpowered by something else and you're not able to use that, then knowing that practice would be not much of use. So therefore, the mindfulness and the awareness is, like they sometimes say, the only tool we have. Mindful awareness is the only tool we have to work. The tool with which we practice the Dharma. So this is the main understanding.

Next question is:

*“In your commentary on stanza number 24-28 I found it helpful when you said that vigilant introspection is a strong translation of the original text, whereas awareness is a lighter translation. For me vigilant introspection links in my mind with my psychoanalytic training in which you get quite involved with the habitual tendencies, trying to analyze and understand them in terms of your own personal experience. I think this is different from the Buddhist approach based on awareness and mindfulness, in which introspection means seeing the habitual tendencies but not getting caught up in them, if possible letting them go. Is that the correct understanding?”*

I think so. I think it doesn't mean that from Buddhist perspective [you don't] look at things clearly. You know, if you see that this particular emotion, this particular way of reacting is coming from this source or that source and that was why I have this but it is not necessary to have that, and that way if you go and kind of little bit analyze this, it's also okay, there's also nothing wrong with that. That's good maybe. But basically it's not just finding out where it comes from, because there are too many things, there are too many causes, there's too long history. The history of countless lifetimes, so therefore it is not necessarily possible to, because there's layer after layer after layer. So what we are trying to do here is to know that this is like this. This is this kind of emotion, this kind of reaction is there, so it's not useful to allow that reaction or that emotion to take over and kind of control me, because that's neither good for me nor good for anybody. Whatever sources it may be. So I need to learn how to kind of let it come and let it go and not kind of control me, and

also to see that these emotions are very transient and it's not necessary that I completely get bound or entrapped with these emotions.

The next question is:

*"I'm trying to understand the difference between having a punishing form of conscience which gives rise to guilt and the kind of conscience I think you are describing which can guide you so that you know how to act positively. Sorry if this is not very clear. I think I am confused about this, so I would be very grateful if you could comment."*

I think, basically, guilt is coming when you have this sense that you have made a mistake or you have done something wrong that cannot be changed or that cannot be corrected or that cannot be condoned or that cannot be you know kind of erased. Then you feel the guilt. The regret is that something happens or you have done something, a mistake, but it can be changed, it can be corrected, it can be erased, it can be purified. I think that's the difference. Whether you see a negative deed or something that happens, not so good, something you have done or something happened to you, [if you feel] that can be purified, then it doesn't become guilt, I think. If you feel that it cannot be purified, then it becomes guilt. I feel that's the element, the element of feeling, this is something done and it's kind of done forever and you cannot get out of it, that is very important, that's kind of the main source of guilt, I think. So if you see it [as] something that can be changed and transformed, then maybe there is no need of guilt. There is only regret and then you just go ahead and change it, it's not serious, it's not heavy, it's light. I see it like that, but I don't know whether it's completely true or not.

Thank you very much. So this is question number 7. Thank you.

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