



# Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

## Ringu Tulku Rinpoche *Questions and Answers 3 (Chapter 4)*



BA4Q3: Questions and Answers 3 (Chapter 4)

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Transcribed by Pat Murphy

Teachings on the Bodhicharyavatara for the Bodhicharya Online Shedra

The first question is from Bodhicharyavatara Chapter number 4, stanza number 12 to 20.

*“I was especially interested in reading what you said in your earlier commentary about how there will always be problems in samsara. So, best to accept that and thereby have less aversion to the problems. Does that mean that if you have a problem in your mind, even if it has a disturbing feeling attached to it, you can just let it be there in your mind and not pay too much attention to it, especially if you can't immediately do anything to sort out the problem?”*

Now this is something that is very important. When we talk about samsara it's not just like a dogma or religious belief. Through looking at our lives we see that life is not just something where

you solve a problem and then all problems are solved forever. Life is actually the consequences of solving problems. One problem is solved and then another problem comes. That's living.

So when you understand this, then you don't become too overwhelmed by a problem. Because the problem is something that you have to face. If you want to live you have to face the problems and you have to try to solve them. Some problems get solved, some problems do not get solved also. But you have to live through it. There's no other way. So when you have understood this, you have kind of learnt to face reality. And it's very, very important, to face reality. The basic understanding of the reality of the situation in the world is very important. So, you don't get too much stressed or too much overwhelmed by little problems. And when you have less problems or no problems, then you appreciate so much more.

Of course every problem has a kind of a disturbing feeling attached to it, but how much disturbed you become depends on how you look at it and how you take it. If you take it as something more ordinary and something that happens to everybody, then you are less disturbed than if you think "Why me? This is something that happens only to me." Then you are much more negatively affected. Understanding this helps a lot in living your life in a positive way.

The second question is a question for the 4<sup>th</sup> Chapter, stanza number 21 to 27. The question is,

*"It is obviously important to keep this sense of needing to seize the opportunity to make use of the teachings in the front of our minds. Would a good way to do this be to meditate upon our own death every day, as thinking about death certainly highlights the absolute necessity of practicing the dharma? If this were a good idea, what would be the best way to do this? Is there a practice that helps one to realise the precious opportunity of having a human life that will end in death?"*

I think it is not that you have to only to think about death. Every moment of our life is an opportunity, an opportunity to live life joyfully and to do something that's useful and purposeful for others. It's an opportunity to create something, to create a positive action that will be good for me and good for others, to create a positive karma.

It's not only at the time of death, we actually have this opportunity at every moment. Even when

you have problems there is also an opportunity. An opportunity to practice, an opportunity to do something either to solve the problem or find a way to do something that would be an improvement, something good for you and for others.

To understand this is an important thing.

And it's not useful to completely ignore death and to be too much afraid of death. Death is a change and change is happening every day. Everybody has to change at every moment and everybody has to die also and that's a fact. That's something that will happen to me and will happen to everybody so we need to be ready for it.

But to make ready for that is how you live your life.

You live life every moment in a positive way, in a joyful way and so then you also die in a peaceful way. It's no big deal. You have lived your life as best you could so when death comes you are ready. There is nothing you can do about it, but you can do something now to learn how not to have any fear, how not to have any regret. If you can really understand yourself in such a way that you find deathlessness through knowing the nature of our mind and the nature of everything else, through understanding emptiness and things like that, then it's an even better preparation for the death. So that's what we are talking about.

*Then the next question is, "I am having trouble with Chapter 4 and I think that "I" have missed something quite fundamental. In verses 21-27 there is a lot of the use of "I." For example, verse 21: "What I will spend an aeon.." etc. When I die then what "I" will suffer in hells? I, this I, can see the sense to follow the path to improve future rebirths but I have never been much moved by threats of future hells. I tend to view them as constructs of this human mind. Then after death I will face what comes in whatever form I have taken."*

Now it's like this. We are always worrying for our future. What will be tomorrow like? Will there be enough to eat? Will there be work? Will there be right situations? Will there be problems? Will everything be okay for my family and my friends? If we are sensible we try to do something that will make our future better. So therefore, this is the same thing. I need to be thinking more about

securing my long term future rather than just focusing on what I do or what I get, what I like or dislike in this moment.

So [the stanza is] saying here is that I need to think of my whole long future and how that would be. I should not do something that will create lots of problems and sufferings and pain for the future. That is sensible. That is wise. If I do something just because I am under the influence of my emotions, something that will bring lots of pain and suffering for the long term future, then that is foolish.

I think this is very important, it's not something just to make you frightened. Sometimes when people are talking about hell and heaven people think that they just made it up to frighten people. Maybe it is like that, I don't know. But I think it is very, very important to be able to do something that is important for the long term future.

Whether you believe in hell and heaven is another matter, but you can see very clearly that there is lots of evidence. There are many people who remember their past lives and things like that, so there is lots of evidence that there is a continuation after we die.

But if there is nothing after we die and it is completely, you know, finished, then there's nothing to worry about, it's very good.

In a way there's nothing to worry about.

But in case there is something afterwards, then it's very important to take care of that because it's our future.

We have two kinds of futures here. One future is what we will leave behind for our children and children's children after we die. It's very, very important that we do not leave something terrible behind—a terrible world with situations that are really not worth living. That's one future.

Another is my own future after I die: the bardo, then next life and next life and next life and things like that.

According to the Buddhist way of understanding, my future is very much, dependent on how I react, how I experience, how my emotions are. How I am now depends on my past. If I did terrible things, if I was too negative in the past, then I would be a much more negative person now. If I was doing more positive things in the past, then I would be a little bit more positive now.

Therefore, if there is a continuum it will be according to way I am. So I have to be careful. I have to look and see that if I am heading towards something very dark and very hateful, an intensely negative state of mind, then I should stop that because it will create hell for me.

Hell is not necessarily only like burning lava. Hell is a state of mind which is totally negative and totally painful, where you are overwhelmed by completely negative emotions. To understand this is very, very important. If you don't believe in hell and heaven that's okay, but we have to learn that our future is very important. Therefore we have to do something that will be good for our future. That's the understanding.

Now the next question is, *"Dear Rinpoche, it is so good to have the Shedra teachings again, thank you."* Now this is for Stanza number 28 to 32. *"These stanzas are clearly very important if we are to make any real progress. It sounds to me as if in one sense, you have to feel that there is a division in yourself between a strong, courageous part of the self and a destructive part of the self in the form of the kleshas. Is it useful to conceptualise these teachings in this way? That is, a brave part of the self - ready to deal with the kleshas?"*

We don't have to create divisions, but you know, we do have the kleshas. We do have negative emotions that we experience and react with. But we also have some sense of wisdom to see what is good and what is not good, what is right and what is not right, what will bring more negativity or what will bring more positivity.

So when we have that certain wisdom, we should allow ourselves to take the right path and not the wrong path. When we feel that the kleshas are taking over, then we should remind ourselves – that's what mindfulness is – that this is not the way. We should not allow our negative emotions to take over, we should not react in that way because that will then create lots of pain and problem

for myself and for others.

When we can kind of catch this, when we are not completely distracted and overpowered by the kleshas, then there's nothing else to practice. That's the practice.

So therefore, it's not that we have two parts. It's not like that. We have a very strong, habitual tendency and are influenced by negativity, by the kleshas. But we also have some understanding, some wisdom so we need to catch that and not allow our negativities to take over our life. I think that's the main understanding.

Then there is another question, also for the stanza number 28 to 32.

*“The idea that the kleshas are much more harmful to us than being tortured and killed, challenges my deeply held assumption that the worst possible thing that can happen to a human being is to be killed. I think you explain that the kleshas are more harmful because the suffering they cause can be interminable, unrelenting pain, whereas being killed just happens once, then it is over. Is it through really understanding this that we can become less fearful of death and realise the urgency of overcoming the negative emotions?”*

Now it is like this. The Buddhist way of understanding is that we have life after life after life. We die, but we are born again. And how we are born again, whether we are born in a more positive way or a negative way depends on how we are, on what state of mind we are in. So that means that the more negativity, the more kleshas, then the more we could be born in a negative way and we could suffer more.

We have to die anyway in each life. I mean whether we like it or we don't like it, we cannot not die. It can be a little bit earlier, or a little bit later, but we do have to die. There is no choice. That is the process. So therefore, for the future of our selves, if there is a life afterwards and you are reborn and again reborn, then what kind of life is extremely important.

It's not only about death. If we completely give in to our negative emotions, then we will have a very difficult and negative time in this life. Having too much kleshas is like that. We create so much

problems and pain for ourselves and so much problems and pain for others that we make our lives very unenjoyable and very difficult. So we don't live a very great life. And we die anyway.

If you have too much negativity, too much klesha, then there is also too much fear. But if we can overcome the kleshas, if can have less fear, or no fear and then even death becomes easy. And then after we die, (because the life afterwards is said to follow the way our mind is reacting), we have a much more pleasant life, a much more pleasant form of life. So it goes on and on and on.

Therefore, the kleshas are much more important than death, in the sense that they have a much more stronger, negative or positive effect than the death.

This one life and one death is certain, because death is something that we cannot avoid. But then if you have too many negative emotions, too much klesha, then there too much fear also. So much aversion results in death being more difficult when we die and also more difficult afterwards. That's the main understanding.

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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.