

His Eminence Garchen Rinpoche's Heart Advice



Question to Rinpoche: Why bother to live if you will die at some point?

Answer from Rinpoche: Don't think about whether I live or not. What needs to be eliminated is the karmic imprint of the grasping at the self "I". Whenever that kind of thoughts arise, immediately think of for example a deity like Tara wanting to help sentient beings. Whenever you have difficulties, the best is that you can remember the Three Jewels, because then there is no thought of "I" in the mind and the imprint will go away. All karmic imprints arise from the "I". Thoughts like whether I am going to die or get sick come from the concept of "I" and "me". Also remember that your mind is actually buddha nature and for this reason you can remember the Three Jewels. Even if you do not, at least you can think about sentient beings and wish to help them. Don't even think about whether I die or I won't die, instead think that I want to help sentient beings no matter what circumstances you might be in. When thinking "May I benefit sentient beings," it is possible that one dies, it is also possible that you don't die. No matter what the circumstances are, remember altruism, remember love, then you will definitely not be mistaken. Even if you do not remember the refuge of the Three Jewels, always remember love and the wish to benefit others.

Question to Rinpoche: I have done many years of practice, but I still encounter many obstacles, can we improve karma for this life or will karma be created and manifest only next life?

Answer from Rinpoche: Actually, your practice will help you in this life and also future lives. Whenever you encounter obstacles and difficulties, you should always think that you are repaying your karmic debt. It is said that if you wish to know what you did in the past in your previous lives, look at your present life and present body. By any means, the karmic imprints that we accumulated in previous lives must become purified. Until then, they are stored in the mind like pictures in a camera. Therefore, the benefit of the difficulties is when you recognize now that this suffering purifies my past karma. When you recognize that, you will also suffer less. If you wish to know where you will go next, look at your present actions. Whatever you do now it is for the preparation for your future lives.

Question to Rinpoche: How can I balance my practice between the two extremes—laziness and excessive effort?

Answer from Rinpoche: Actually, between these two—laziness and excessive effort, excessive effort is much better. Laziness is not so good. Whenever you feel that you are making excessive effort in your practice, you should recognize that now I am actually not wrong. Whenever you are lazy, you should recognize that now I am wrong because I have to purify my mindstream from previous lives. For that, I have to practice. The karma is like a picture that is stored in the mind. Therefore, in this moment, develop even greater trust in karma.

Question to Rinpoche: What can I do to become self-confident?

Answer from Rinpoche: In general, your confidence increases as your bodhicitta increases. The more love and compassion that arise in your mind, the more self-confident you will be. The more you grasp at the self, the more you will lose your self-confidence. You need renunciation. If you really think about it, it is because the karmic imprints or tendencies in the mindstream have not been purified. Once it is purified, your trust in karma will increase and you will naturally be more confident.

Question to Rinpoche: I worked in an organization that helps to support snow leopards and support local communities in Asia. But I worry that my effort is not enough and if I make a mistake, it will create problems for the snow leopards and local people. What can I do to avoid these negative thoughts?

Answer from Rinpoche: If you have the motivation from the bottom of your heart to benefit them, even if you are making mistakes, actually there will be no fault. Actually, it will still become beneficial. Motivation is what is most important. Whether or not your effort will benefit them also depends on their karma. But if your motivation is completely pure and you try your best just want to benefit them, then you do not need to have any doubt, even if the leopards get killed for example, the activity still becomes virtuous. It mainly depends on you having the right motivation, what happen then is secondary.

Question to Rinpoche: Is self-love allowed in Buddhism?

Answer from Rinpoche: As long as you have love, you are fine. But it is good to have great love which is the love for all sentient beings when having the wish: May all sentient beings be happy. Remember that all sentient beings have been my parents. The love for all sentient beings is truly precious.

Question to Rinpoche: How do I know that someone is my root lama?

Answer from Rinpoche: There are many different lamas, among them all, if there is a lama through whom you have understood and seen the nature of the mind, you have found your root lama. But actually, don't even think about who is your root lama because most people do not really feel or recognize that. It is better to think that all lamas are precious. That is because the lamas open our eyes to karma from previous lives. If you do not know karma, you are like a blind person. Therefore, remember the kindness of all the lamas and think that all the lamas are actually one with the Buddha. It is better to have devotion to all of them in general. But it is said that the first root lama that you encounter is the one who gave you the refuge vow.

Question to Rinpoche: What is the fault of sexual misconduct?

Answer from Rinpoche: According to the Dharma, in general, the cause of suffering of all sentient beings such as sexual abuse, rape and so on is the result of a previous cause of having harmed the body and the mind of sentient beings; having abused them physically or mentally or even caused them disappointment, especially sexual misconduct that led to a lot of suffering physically and mentally, and all kinds of suffering and difficulties arise. In brief, all the activities that hurt others, their feelings, their bodies, any activity that comes from the mind of anger will lead to negative results like that. As a result of previous sexual misconduct, in this life, for example, one will have fewer friends or one will be unable to find a partner and so on, and one will encounter a lot of difficulties. We don't just have to talk about actual physical violence and verbal abuse, even if you speak with others in a harsh way or say something that disturbs the mind of others which cause them to feel upset and angry, you actually have created a cause for the hell realm. That is why in the 37 Bodhisattva Practices, it says that we must not use harsh speech towards others. This is how we should understand that point. Also, it is denying freedom for others, like forcefully taken away freedom from others. It is said that all freedom is happiness and all lack of freedom is suffering. Engaging in these actions is the cause of suffering. Whatever actions one has created, karma will come back and one will experience the result. Actually, it is not just actions towards human beings or animals or sentient beings, even inanimate things for example trees, or earth or stones and so on. Even if you get angry or aggressive towards them, for example, you are angry at the tree branch and cut it off in anger, Buddha has spoken much about even that being a great fault. Basically what it really comes down to is that anything that you do that comes from a mind of anger, jealousy and so on is of great fault. The body is just a branch, speech is much more severe, and the mind is even more. It really comes down to the mind, really negative thoughts in the mind, anger and jealousy and so on. When these thoughts are prevented within the mind, all negative outer actions are naturally prevented.

Question to Rinpoche: How do immeasurable love and compassion help us to see that sentient beings are empty of inherent existence?

Answer from Rinpoche: Love and compassion are like the warmth in the mind whereas self-grasping and afflicted emotions are like ice blocks. Also, anger and hatred are when it gets too hot while attachment is when it gets too cold. They arise from the root of ignorance. These three (attachment, aversion, and ignorance) make the mind unworkable and obscure the buddha nature. The worst obscuration is anger and jealousy.

Source: Question & Answer with H.E. Garchen Rinpoche on May 22, 2021 at Garchen Buddhist Institute, Arizona.