

Geshe Yeshe Thabkhe
TBLC Sunday Class
Aryadeva's 400 Stanzas on the Middle Way
Chapter 6, vs. 126 & 127
August 3, 2014

Candrakirti said in his *Entrance to the Middle Way*:

First, we say "I"
And then have attachment for the self;
Then we think "This is mine"
And have attachment for things.
I pay homage to compassion
For these beings who are moving helplessly
Like the buckets of a water wheel.

It scoops up the water in a well. This is expressing how all our faults, the afflictions, arise. Right from the beginning, we have this appearance of a self, and we think "I", but we do not perceive how it actually is. Instead, we superimpose something that exceeds what is actually there. You can think of that as an exaggerated sense of self. [Berzin: "not the exaggeration of something present. Rather, it is the adding of something that is not there, as if it were present."] Based on this exaggerated sense of self, we think "mine" and get excessively attached to objects. This leads to hostility towards that which harms what we are attached to. All the other afflictions follow these. Motivated by both attachment and hostility, we accumulate karma, and then in this and future lives experience suffering.

What's being said here is not that the self that experiences pleasure and pain does not exist. [7:00] What is being said is that we superimpose a self that in fact does not exist. Chandrakirti, in his *Treatise on the Middle Way*, states that the origin of our afflictions is the perishing aggregates. What we usually think of as the body and mind Buddhists think of as being the five aggregates: form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and, finally, consciousness. [7:18] They are in a constant process, a state of flux, constantly changing, never being static or truly existent. Each one of these five is engaged in the activity that makes us alive—our body has to eat, drink, breathe, etc. and its components are constantly performing functions vital to our survival. The mind operates in a similar way due to its dependence on the body. Our feelings are in a constant stream of experience. There is a self that is imputed upon these aggregates, a dependent designation, but we have this habit of projecting there, amongst those five aggregates, a self. We think that this self is static. It seems to have existed in the past. The self of the present seems to be the same self that existed in the past. And then we are assuming it is the same self that will be existent in the future. We have, then, a mistaken idea of the self as static, or permanent.

So then, we have this mistake of seeing that the self of the past, the one of the present...are all the same. We have this very static concept of the self, so that is the idea of permanence, whereas it is in fact impermanent. Then, there is also—we view this self as being pure, when in fact it is impure. So we also make that mistake. And then thirdly, we regard all these components of the five aggregates as the source of pleasure and happiness whereas they are the source of suffering—suffering is always there. Finally, we have this conception of the self as existing from its own side, with autonomous or objective existence. We make that mistake as well. Based on these mistaken notions, we make the distinction of self and other

and get involved in all kinds of faults. Faults here means the afflictions—attachment, hostility. So then we are totally involved in the afflictions.

We are making a fundamental error in the way that we are thinking. We have these fundamental erroneous thoughts—four thoughts, and based on those we engage in all the afflictions, whether it is attachment, hostility, pride, or jealousy. All are based on these misconceptions. Once we generate those kinds of afflictions, we do all kinds of harm to both others and ourselves. [15:00]

We have this wrong way of imputing things to exist in these various ways. Counter to those ways of looking at the self, etc. then, we have the idea of impermanence—that the five aggregates and the self that is based upon those are in a constant state of flux, constantly changing. Then also we have an idea that, in opposition to this thought that these five aggregates and so forth—our place, our body, all our resources are sources of pleasure—in opposition to that, we understand them as sources of suffering. Then, in opposition to thinking that the body and ourselves and others are pure, we understand how these are impure. Finally, in opposition to the final one, where we think that our self somehow exists from its own side, in its own right, with its own existence—we can counter that with understanding that the self lacks this inherent or objective existence. When we think along those ways, what it does is to reduce our attachment. It reduces our craving for our place, our bodies, and all our resources. It reduces our craving, attachment, for these things and so it disarms our afflictions, and we don't get involved in karmic actions motivated by our afflictions.

Because these four correct conceptions are a dependent arising of a great multitude of causes and conditions, they are grounded in reality—impermanence, suffering arising from change, and selflessness. Yet we misconceive them, apprehending them in a mistaken way. [21:23] In these verses written by Aryadeva, then, he starts with how to counteract thinking of things as being static, then thinking of them as pure, thinking of things as sources of pleasure, and then finally thinking of things as having an objectively existent self. These four are a way of overcoming the afflictions. In the fifth chapter he then talks about the bodhisattva deeds, what a bodhisattva does, exchanging a preoccupation with ourselves for a preoccupation with others. In the sixth chapter, he teaches about how to abandon the afflictions.

Then, when you think about the sixth chapter, you bring to mind that through these practices of counteracting the four misconceptions of permanence (staticness), purity, pleasure, and an objectively existent self. Through those, I will develop my wisdom. Through the topic covered by the fifth chapter is the bodhisattva deeds, where the bodhisattva is exchanging this attitudes of cherishing oneself for an attitude of cherishing others, and having love and compassion for others. This kind of an attitude, then, I will develop through the teachings of the fifth chapter, and then how to oppose the afflictions. I will learn that through the sixth chapter. [And you also remind yourself “I am not just doing it for my own purpose, not just to achieve my own freedom from cyclic existence, but to free all beings from their suffering. So, I will listen to these teachings today, and listen in that way.”]

If we look at the outline on 314, we are on “Chapter VI: Explaining the means to abandon the disturbing attitudes and emotions which prevent the deeds.

Here, it's divided into two parts, right in the beginning, where the first part is “Refuting the contention that contaminated actions and disturbing attitudes and emotions are eliminated by tormenting the body with ascetic practices.” This is countering a non-Buddhist attitude that if you get rid of the basis, if you reduce the basis—i.e., what these disturbing attitudes are based on—the body—you will eliminate the afflictions and contaminated actions

themselves, so you should engage in ascetic practice, tormenting the body and so forth. So that is the first part, and the second is the means to abandon the emotions or afflictions.

If we look on 151: the first paragraph is addressing this idea that... non-Buddhists in India (the context) have the idea that through tormenting the body, which is the basis for actions and the emotions, we will then free ourselves. The bodhisattvas act as close friends—they are the friends of all beings. They have this attitude of cherishing all beings so then basically, they say that the source of all our troubles lies with cyclic existence. We are caught in cyclic existence. It itself is caused by actions and disturbing emotions, so if we want to put an end to all our troubles, then we have to put an end to our afflictions, because these bring about the contaminated actions. So we have to go right to the root of the problem.

There is a counter-assertion here, from the non-Buddhist viewpoint:

If that is so, it is unreasonable to give the ordained buildings five hundred masonry courses high and food of a hundred flavors.

They are saying the Buddha was wrong to build monasteries with hundreds of rooms for monks and allowing them to eat foods with 100 different flavors. That is wrong. The reason is, whatever place, body, resources—these are sources of pleasure, so if you use them then you are ...we can use the word desire, attachment, greed—these words can express “*shen chak*.”

Avoiding means to eliminate them, you shouldn't have any of these things. In fact, those who undergo overt suffering, through heat and cold means, they put four different fires and then sit in the midst of it and undergo great physical suffering because of that. They make the hair become matted—the Tibetan has two meanings: they let their hair get braided and so forth, and that is a kind of self-mortification. It can also be understood to mean where you are plucking the hair out. So they are the real ascetics who are removing the basis for the actions and afflictions and thereby the actions and afflictions will be eliminated. [they say]

In the verse here, Aryadeva answers this assertion. Here he says:

**126. If desire increases through pleasure
And anger increases through pain,
Why are those with pleasure not ascetics?
Why are the ascetics those with pain?**

[VIDEO FROZE]

Things that are problems, we can say. If we are beset by many problems, then what happens is our anger increases. So basically what is happening is that our pain and suffering increases. So, why are those with pleasure not ascetics? So he is saying that if you are really trying to release others from their suffering then why is it that those with pleasure are not ascetics...why is it that those with the pain of difficulties taken on through torturing the body...they don't seem to be eliminating their suffering.

If we look at the commentary here:

If pleasure from one's body and possessions increases desire and pleasure as well as its causes should be avoided, physical and mental pain which increase anger should be avoided too. Why are those who have pleasure not ascetics and why are the ascetics those who fast and experience the pain that sun and wind inflict on their bodies?

They will increase anger, and anger should be avoided, too, since it is a source of suffering. So why are those who have pleasure not ascetics? Why is it that they wouldn't chose to be ascetics. And why is it that those who fast, stop all their food and then experience pain through sitting in the midst of a fire or in the sun, etc. Why are they, then, called the ascetics? If they are suffering, why are they ascetics? The commentator then says:

Those who overcome contaminated actions and disturbing emotions are called ascetics, not those who torment the body.

That is the Buddhist viewpoint. So what is he really saying here? When he says, "Why are those who have pleasure not ascetics?" it is saying that those who mortify their bodies are then experiencing a lot of suffering. Actually, those who indulge their desires and pleasures will eventually, as a result of such indulgence, suffer as well. Why aren't they ascetics, since they will be suffering as well. We tend to think that those with power, like a king, have a lot of pleasure. But when you think about it, they have to worry about making more and protecting against invasions. They have so much to worry about. If you really examine it, they have to suffer greatly from any warring, etc. They are the real ascetics.

The Buddhist assertion is that you are not undergoing spiritual hardship by bringing a lot of trouble to your body and mind and undergoing great difficulty. This will not eliminate your afflictions. The real practicethere is no ascetic practice requiring hardship like patience. It is an internal practice. That's where spiritual hardship is—when you are trying to overcome your afflictive emotions. That is where spiritual difficulty comes about.

[The commentary says:]

The Supramundane Victor gave certain individuals twelve rules of training to prevent desire. To prevent anger he gave the angry fine food, clothing and so forth.

For some people, the Buddha had—well, not rules—12 practices where they restrained themselves. These practices of self-restraint helped them. He was giving instructions to those who have this or that problem. When you have too much attachment and craving, etc, there were certain practices to reduce their craving. And in order to reduce the anger of some of his followers, for those with a lot of anger, he would give them more—fine food, clothing, a good place to stay, etc. Anger comes about through having a lot of difficulties, so if they were relieved of their difficulties...[they were in a better position to reduce their anger.]

Therefore only the Sakyas who conquer disturbing emotions should be called ascetics.

Sakyas, here, means the followers of the Buddha. They are overcoming their afflictions, so they should be called ascetics.

In short, these twelve rules are given to those with a lot of craving, etc, to help them to be—the craving that they have is for a place to stay, food, the way in which they sleep. Seeing that they have these problems, the Buddha have them these [to help them reduce their attachment.] Then, if you have a lot of suffering, your anger will increase, so the Buddha had to handle that kind of problem as well.

The Buddha had these rules for those who had problems with being too attached to pleasures, but it wasn't for everyone. He understood that certain people, if it would cause them too much suffering it would reduce their [missed end of phrase...].

He would relax those rules for such people. He had these rules in the place where they would stay. In the case of food.... For the place where they would sleep, he would make it so you couldn't lie down, you would have to sleep sitting up. For eating, for instance, you couldn't get up in the middle of a meal. If you did get up, you couldn't come back to the meal. You had to beg alms. Now I am forgetting the third one, but restricted in that way. You had to stay out amongst the trees, not in a house with a roof on it. And with regard to clothing, you had to have simple garments. You take garments and sew them on. So these are teachings to help some of these reduce their craving.

Even nowadays there are examples of people who do these practices. There is one Geshe in Ladakh who just had a box. He would just sit in that box and fall asleep in that box, sitting up in meditation posture. There are people in the South of India who will sleep out in the trees. And there are examples nowadays of people engaged in these practices.

But those with an angry, quarrelsome nature are forbidden from doing these practices that would only increase their anger. So the example here is of crushing sugar cane. It says here:

Just as one gets sugar and so forth by crushing sugar cane, all kinds of happiness in this life and in the future are gained by crushing the disturbing emotions.

So, this practice of reducing your afflictive emotions—when you do that you are producing all sorts of benefits for yourself and others. So it is similar to the idea that when you crush sugar cane you get sugar, syrup, and candy cane, etc.

So the next verse here is going to talk about how to eliminate the afflictions, or disturbing emotions. There is a way of going about that that eliminates them superficially, and there is a way of eliminating them from the root, eradicating them. Here we will start with “A. The way to abandon the manifest afflictive emotions. 1. General explanation of how to abandon the three poisons.” The three poisons means attachment, hostility, and confusion. In the outline, you can see it starts with “a. Functions of the three poisons must be understood.”

So if you understand what the function of attachment is, you will be able to eliminate it. If you see the function of anger, you can eliminate it. If you see the function of confusion—ignorance—you can eliminate it.

**127. Desire's activity is acquisition;
Anger's activity is conflict.
As wind is to all the elements,
Confusion's activity is nurture.**

Here we have in the verse, the activity of attachment is acquisition—this kind of attachment to things and others. Then, anger's activity is conflict. It is involved in doing what you can to get even—all the different activities that come out from anger that bring about a conflict with a person you are angry at. And as wind is to all the elements, confusion's activity is to nurture. “Nurture” has the sense of increasing the problem. Confusion, we were talking about earlier, is ignorance, which we mentioned is at the basis for all the afflictions. It is just like the wind. Wind is an element that is necessary to have with earth and with fire, etc. So all the elements require this wind property; it increases the other elements through that activity.

So it's the same with ignorance. We mentioned that it is increased with the ignorant attitudes of thinking people and objects are static, that the body and so forth are pure, and that our resources, body, etc. are sources of pleasure when they are not, and then having the idea that there is an objectively existent self when there is not. All of these things increase our ignorance, so then eliminating those.

Here in the commentary it explains the meaning more closely:

Desire's activity is to acquire both the animate and inanimate. Its antidote is to meditate on repulsiveness and to give up one's circle of friends and one's possessions.

"Desire's activity is to acquire both the animate and inanimate" means both things and sentient beings. Usually nowadays we avoid this word desire and talk about "attachment" or "longing." Greed, lust, etc. are included in this translation of that word. So, its antidote is to meditate on repulsiveness. "To give up" means to gradually reduce them.

Anger's activity is strife and conflict. Cultivating love and using houses and so forth that one likes are its antidote.

So anger has this activity of wanting to strike back, so then you get involved in strife and conflict. Some people say, "This doesn't really bother me, but I have to say something." Then, one hasn't really become patient when one has that feeling. So patience means you have eliminated wanting to say something in return. Cultivating love is a way to counteract hatred. "Using houses" means that idea of giving comfort to reduce suffering, or it's antidotes.

Just as wind increases the strength of fire and the other elements, confusion's activity is to nurture both desire and anger. Its antidote is meditation on dependent arising and so forth. It is like killing a sea monster with fire.

So, we were mentioning that at the basis of the other elements you have wind—to increase the strength of fire or help earth to give rise to plants. You can think of it as motility, movement. In this way, confusion's role is to increase hostility or attachment; it is at the basis of the afflictions. So then, its antidote is to meditate on dependent arising and all the causes and conditions that go into things. The existence of anything comes about through a complex of causes. That's a way to overcome this ignorance.

So then, the example for this is, like killing a sea monster with fire, something it doesn't like:

[missed something.]

Does anyone have questions?...No? Then we will do the next one.

We are not talking about getting rid of the afflictions from the root, but how to remove them in a more superficial way, so the next one is talking about "b. Reason for the need to eliminate the three poisons."

So there is an assertion here. [Geshe-la jokes:] So we do have a question here, even though no one asked one.

Assertion: Though there are antidotes to the three poisons, why should one get rid of them?

**128. Desire is painful because of not getting,
Anger is painful through lack of might,
And confusion through not understanding.
Because of this, these are not recognized.**

Whatever you want to get you are attached to or are longing for/craving for, these things won't come about easily. And when you don't get them, it will cause pain. So the short answer is, because they produce suffering. Anger is painful through lack of might. You just don't have the ability to get even with the person and you have to think about how to get even with them. This also is very painful. Then confusion is through not understanding. "Because of this, these are not recognized" means that you don't see what the problem is with attachment and hostility and, through not recognizing their difficulties, much suffering arises.

In the Tibetan, the response to the question is after the verse. It says that we don't want to suffer, so we have to reduce them.

If we read the commentary here:

Desire produces suffering when one does not encounter what one badly wants. Anger produces suffering when one lacks might to crush the strong. Confusion induces suffering when one fails to understand a subtle matter thoroughly.

So again, the idea is not getting what you are craving and worrying about that, and suffering. "Anger produces suffering when one lacks might to crush the strong" is when you don't have the ability to get even. "What can I do?" All these things come up and cause suffering. "Confusion induces suffering when one fails to understand a subtle matter thoroughly." Again, ignorance of the afflictions, particular attachment and hostility, give us a lot of suffering as well through our failure to understand. In fact, it is anger that causes many people to commit suicide, because you get so worried about how to get back at whatever is causing your anger, and you cannot think of a way of doing it and you feel helpless and that's what causes some to commit suicide.

When you examine then, it's really that ignorance or confusion causing us to engage in either anger or, because we don't understand that it is anger that is giving us all the trouble and we are trying to get even and don't know what to do. Or we.....aren't getting what we want. There is an example....of a poor man who wanted a queen.

Through confusion, we don't understand that these afflictions, then, through their activity or function are bringing us a lot of suffering.

We are out of time. There were no questions earlier. If you have questions you can always email them, if it occurs to you later on. What Aryadeva is saying here is that you really have to examine, check, what is causing you to be unhappy, that is causing your suffering. It is not getting what I am craving for, it is because I cannot get back at the source of my anger/someone causing my unhappiness, and confusion about this that I am getting a lot of difficulty and suffering. You have to look at and examine what is causing your suffering.

Dedication.

