

November 7, 2010
Sunday class with Geshe Thabke (Joshua translating)
Aryadeva's Four Hundred Stanza's on the Middle Way
Verses 258-

**If the past and present
Are not impermanent,
The third which is different
From these is also not. (vs. 258, p. 230)**

**If a thing which will be produced
Later exists beforehand,
The contention of Niyativadins
Is not erroneous. (vs. 259, p. 230)**

**To say something which will be made to occur
Already exists is unreasonable.
If that which exists is produced,
What has been produced will arise again. (vs. 260, p. 231)**

**If future things are seen,
Why is the non-existent not seen? (vs 261ab, p. 231)**

For one for whom the future exists

We are going to start with a verse from Nagarjuna's *Letter to a Friend*:

*Even more stupid than one who fills a jewel encrusted vessel with filth
Is a person who, after being born human, performs evil deeds.*

The simile is of a person who is very foolish—a worldly person who has stumbled upon a vessel with all these jewels on the outside, and he has decided to use it—using it to transport very filthy things. Then many in the world saw him and thought “This person is very foolish to do like that.” Well, even more than that is to be born as a human and to use your life to acquire destructive actions.

If you are something like an animal, which has to hunt to get food...if you are born like that. An animal doesn't have any kind of choice. In order to eat, they prey upon other animals and in doing so are going to do destructive actions to others. We as human beings have some independence. They cannot help themselves, but we have some kind of independence because of our intelligence. We can distinguish what is a constructive thing to do, as opposed to destructive. So if we do not use this ability when we have it, then this is a shame. It's terrible.

He's saying...of course, we have an ability to understand that we have to provide for ourselves and our lives, and then we enter into various actions in order to do that—to provide for our lives, but then, if we overestimate our self-interests and then do actions that are harmful to others, then that we should be careful not to enter into actions that are harmful to others.

The practices of three different persons—we have to train in. The highest of those is this type of person who, rather than helping themselves, or thinking about themselves—or only involved in their own self-interests—are only working for the sake of others. We tend to think of ourselves as more important than others, so they are changing this orientation so they think that others are more important than themselves.

Right below that is one that is a little more self-oriented, where you are pursuing your own interest. The middle or intermediate level is where you are eliminating any kind of partiality—any discrimination between persons associated with yourself (friends, etc.). You are trying to be impartial towards all. And then, within that, doing whatever you can to reduce your competitiveness, jealousy, and pride. We call these kinds of emotions negative or afflictive emotions. This is the middle practice.

Then, the minimal practice for Buddhist practitioners is to not engage in any kind of harm. the Buddha said in one of his discourses:

*Not to do any kind of destructive or harmful actions to others
To do whatever you can, bring constructive actions to completion
To purify your own mind, eliminate all defilements
This is the meaning of the Buddha's teachings.*

So we have our close relationships to family, friends, etc. And for our children, for instance, we might want them to have anything that is good—the best for them. We have some kind of thought like that for those close to us. And also that we do not want them to have any difficulties. When you want them to have all the best things, that is called love. You want them to have happiness. Where you don't want them to have any suffering or difficulty, that is called compassion. For these practices of Buddhism, when the Buddha says to perfect any kind of virtues or constructive actions (the 2nd line of that verse) he is saying that we have these things but we need to increase them so that then we can extend them to whomever we meet, whether it is a friend or even our enemies/ anybody. We also have these feelings of joy. The first two are part of what we call the four immeasurables and the third one is called sympathetic joy, where if something good happens to others then we are happy. We are overjoyed for them when they are happy. Also, that kind of thing is something that we have in our close relationships with others and we are trying to extend that to all beings. Also, we have this idea of impartiality. We try to have our good feelings towards those close to us in an impartial way, so then, in practicing Buddha's teachings, we are trying to extend that impartiality towards all beings.

So we are talking about avoiding harmful, destructive actions. And that is something to do from right now on. But we have done harmful, destructive actions to others in the past—they were all done in relationship to others, so what is helpful to get rid of those and whatever kind of residues they have left, this love, compassion, joy, and impartiality—because they are towards others—they are the best way to eliminate any kind of residue from those former actions.

There's some way, some method relying on different kinds of reasons for improving our minds in these ways and one is establish some kind of belief in former and future lives. If we look at how external cause and effect works, like plants for instance come from seeds and grow and dissolve into the ground—so there is some kind of continuation where they act for causes of future plants and so forth. There is a chain of cause and effect that you can see in physical phenomena, and everything external is like that. Well, the same can be said of our body and mind. Our body—if you look at where it came from—it came from the sperm and ovum of our parents and you can go back before that as well, where the actual physical part of us came from. Generations of our...chains of cause and effect in how our

bodies have arisen. They will have their own chain of cause and effect into the future. We can say the same thing about the mind. It has arisen from its own previous causes. Consciousness has its own previous causes of a similar type. Consciousness arises from consciousness and this will also continue into the future. What happens at death is that our mind becomes very subtle, it dissolves into a very subtle form of mind and that has its continuation into our next life. And that is true into the past and will be true into the future.

It's important to keep in mind that in our system...that the mind depends upon the body. Mind is not itself a physical entity; it doesn't have any form or shape or color. The mind is not made up of some kind of atoms or particles; whereas the body certainly is. But the mind is something that depends upon the body. Nowadays there is the belief that the mind and the brain are both physical because when the mind is active it is reflected in the activity of the brain, but that is the physical. Our body and brain are the *basis* for the mind—they are what the mind is based upon.

Once you have accepted that there are former and future lives, it's easy to reflect that our former lives are without any kind of limit, so we could have very easily had a life like this with a father and mother. Even being reborn as an animal is similar to being human in that you have a father and a mother. In those cases, then, we can think about how we have had these close relationships with all beings—if we think of our former lives as having no limit in the past. So then we can deduce from that kind of thinking that anybody we meet has had this close relationship of having been a father or mother—or anyone you like, who is close to you. You can think in terms of mother and father, or brother or sister, or my lama. The point is to view them as someone you are close to and really like, someone you have a close affection for. So then we are saying about the four immeasurables, and in the beginning we say, “May all motherly sentient beings have happiness and the causes of happiness”—the meaning is putting in there all beings who have had this close relationship with you.

If you try to develop these attitudes of love, compassion, joy, and impartiality within thinking of all beings in light of them having a close relationship to you—usually we think of our mother as having the closest relationship to you, but anyway, the point is that you are having an affection for all beings and feeling that they are very appealing and attractive to you and you have this feeling of affection toward them and therefore we say, “mother.”

That's the first way of thinking that helps to increase these four attitudes of love, compassion, joy, and impartiality. Then the second one takes a little bit more thought. You have to apply yourself a little bit more. The idea here is that, for just thinking these are the beings I have affection for or my mother or someone I like is a little bit preoccupied with yourself. Instead of that—and this is a little harder to do—you have to notice that everyone is the equivalent to yourself. Like you, they want happiness and don't want suffering. So when you have this attitude that everyone is the same, and from this perspective you think:

shouldn't they have happiness and the causes of happiness
how wonderful it would be if they didn't have any suffering or causes of suffering
how wonderful it would be if they had impartiality

So if you have this attitude that they are the same in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering, then this is a little bit better way of generating these four attitudes.

The third way, then, of increasing and developing these attitudes involves thinking about the kindness of others. One way is that you wouldn't even be able to talk and walk without your mother there. You couldn't speak or walk if they didn't teach you. If you think about it, really, it's our relationship to others that makes it possible for us to live in any way. For instance, we sort of get in the car without

thinking about it, ... we don't think about the kindness of people who made the car we get into, the house we live in. They had to undergo difficulty to do this. There's this thinking nowadays that they had to do it because that was their job, but they really had to undergo some kind of sacrifice in order to do the things they did and that are now supporting us. So this is another kind of reason we can use when we develop these four attitudes.

So we just have to think over our community, the kindness of our human society and how they support us. For instance, there is a tendency to think "Oh, I'm paying this person so they aren't really being kind to me to do this task." It would be great if we gave them some kind of worthless piece of paper to do all these things—and then we wouldn't have to give them our money. But they have to sustain themselves. It's not like they are going to take the money and run, they have to support themselves as well. So when we came into Bhutan from Tibet, for instance, we ran out of any kind of *tsampa* (barley flour) or food at that time. Geshe-la was telling this story that they weren't allowed to come into Bhutan. There was a wall there that they couldn't go passed, so they couldn't return either. This was in 59 when they were fleeing Tibet. They were on the border and they couldn't come in [to Bhutan] and they couldn't go back [to Tibet] and they were [in limbo there] and were running out of food. At that time, it was very difficult to get food: some people were hiding it under the ground, some people were stealing it from each other. Money, there in that circumstance, had no meaning. It was the food. However much money you gave to people then it didn't matter, as long as you got something to eat. Money doesn't have that kind of value that we [ordinarily] place on it.

To sum up, how does one practice this teaching, developing these attitudes—a loving attitude, an attitude of compassion, and attitude of sympathetic joy, and impartiality—increasing these in whatever way you can to the best of your ability. In whatever you are doing, whatever job you do, you do so with the idea that it is helpful to others. You think, "I'm doing something to be helpful to others." If you think along that way, then your actions are constructive. If you just have this attitude

then what you are doing won't be constructive or helpful. It won't be virtuous action. Like when a bodhisattva, somebody who is really helpful, who has this intention

when they enter into various activities for the sake of others, there is nothing that they...they want to learn whatever they can as long as it is helpful to others. There is five areas of knowledge they study:

1. grammar/language—helping others to learn how to speak and talk.
2. medicine—anything to help overcome illness, etc.
3. crafts—building and making things, creating things that are helpful to others. We could call it manufacturing if we want to make it a little larger.
4. logic and reasoning—learning how to understand things so that you can penetrate the meaning
5. Buddhist knowledge—learning Buddhism means mind-science (how it gets translated nowadays)—basically how to think in a constructive manner so that you are able to discipline the mind and learn self-control in order to master your mind/bring your mind under your own control.

This is what the bodhisattvas learn with an attitude of being helpful to others and therefore it becomes virtuous or constructive.

Then it is very important to keep in mind that there is one thing that will prevent your cultivation of love and compassion—anger, hostility, belligerence, and hatred. These kinds of attitudes will prevent you. If you have a loving attitude and are friendly attitude towards others, then they will be your friend. If you have anger, if you are always belligerent, hostile, and hateful, no one will want to be around you and you alienate everyone. You can see from that the difference between these two attitudes. So it is

important when you get up in the morning to think, “I’m not going to get angry or let my mind get disturbed or agitated.” You have to always be aware of [not letting your mind get irritable] and keep your mind happy and peaceful and avoid any kind of irritable attitude. This is something that then allows you to cultivate these attitudes of love and compassion, so it is important to make a determination to be patient with difficulties. I won’t let my mind get stirred up. Then, at the end of the day if you look and say,

next time tomorrow, I’ll do better. You always try and improve your ability to keep a happy attitude, a happy peaceful attitude. This allows you to cultivate your love and compassion.

I was giving an introduction there, but we have time for one verse! [we have a strict enforcer—the alarm!]

We are on p. 230, vs. 258.

What we are talking about here is time—the past, present, and future. Just to introduce our topic. What is being said here is that some people feel that time—the past, present and future—are here with us. They exist in a substantial way/have some kind of existence on their own. [missed something here] We call that substantial existent or self-existent time: self-existent past, self-existent future, self-existent present. For Aryadeva and his followers, this kind of time could not possibly exist; rather it is merely what we posit to phenomena as they undergo change. The past, present and future don’t have any existence on their own separate from what we impute to them. For example, just yesterday we changed the clocks. If time had some kind of existence, we couldn’t do that—but we are making it whatever we want. So that indicates [time has no substantial existence.]

It was 8 o’clock and we turned it back to 7 and Geshe-la’s reaction was, “Oh! it’s early!”

If you look in the back on page 322, you can see we are on the section, “Consequence that impermanence is impossible if the two times are substantially established.”

If the two times are substantially established and exist in their own right and the consequence is that there could be no impermanence.

In this verse, if we read the commentary,
[p. 230:] *The past and present are not impermanent because the past cannot disintegrate.*

In the previous verse we established that the past cannot change into anything else—if it is substantially established it cannot become the future. What is gone can only be that way all the time. If things exist in their own right as past, present, and future, then the past and the present could not be impermanent, the past cannot disintegrate.

[continues:] *If the present is impermanent by way of its own entity*—Aryadeva is refuting someone who is saying the past is permanent by way of its own entity, meaning it is somehow present on its own. Aryadeva views it as dependent upon...the future is the causal state of something. Say you take a pot: the clay and the water are the future pot/the pot to be.. We label it that based upon the clay and water there, so it has a kind of imputed existence. Something that we impute to something. The present pot is when the pot is formed and exists there and the second moment of that, or when it is broken, that is the past pot. [in the Buddhist perspective it starts with the second moment] But they don’t accept that, they say that the present is ...[sorry missed the end]

If the present is impermanent by way of its own entity, through its subsequent connection with disintegration, it follows that disintegration, too, is impermanent

Disintegration means going through the process of change. We are saying that the present is impermanent by way of its own entity. If it is connected to disintegration then that would make disintegration impermanent. So you have contradicted yourself.

Since the third which is different from both the past and present, namely the future, also is not impermanent, there is nothing impermanent for proponents of inherently existent things.

[missed a bit here]...they say that it exists in its own right—i.e. it is static and always that way. This means that these three—the future, present and past—never move, never have any kind of movement or transformation and therefore ...then there isn't any kind of impermanence for them, they never undergo any change. Basically past present and future means change, so the last line is obvious: *"Therefore, it is inappropriate for them to assert the existence of time."* Time means impermanence so how could there be permanent time?

That in a nutshell is what we have been talking about, but if there are any questions....

Priya: In our culture, we say that the past is gone, [so what do they mean that the past is still there]?

Josh: The opponents have this kind of view that it still exists. There is a certain school of thought that says that it is still present.

GYT: Geshe-la understands your question, but their idea is based upon us thinking about...they are thinking about well, there is no question that yesterday is gone and today is present. But when we think about something yesterday, we feel happy if something good happened and sad if something bad happened. So [for them] that means it is performing some function now. Their assertion is/they are thinking that it is having some kind of effect on us, so it is present. They say the same of the future—we can think about the future and be happy...maybe I'll see my friend tomorrow, or "uh oh" if we are going to see someone we don't like. [So for them it indicates it is here in some way.]

There is a problem with thinking like that. You have to learn about how to think about things. When you think like that then, as Aryadeva is pointing out, everything is frozen and there wouldn't be any way to transform. The past would be here and the future would be already here. He's pointing out that this is a faulty way of thinking about things.

You have to think about...if you think about the future as causal—that the future is the causal state when things are to be/they will become something. And then when they actually are the thing that 's the present and when they go out of existence that's the past. But there's a way of thinking about the past, present and future in relation to ourselves. Yesterday is the past in relation to ourselves and tomorrow will be the

But here we are thinking about the past, present, and future in terms of how objects undergo a process of trans. So if you think about things in causal way, like Buddhists do—or at least in Aryadeva's way, anyway!—then this way of thinking about the future, present, and past in a causal way, it allows for things to be impermanent and undergo transformation. If you think of how it is being presented here—that the past, present and future are all substantially existent because they perform functions and have an effect on us, then in that case nothing could be impermanent and undergo transformations. So that 's where their problem comes in.

Yesterday, we say that it exists, but it doesn't exist today in the present. Their idea is that—it is gone. You can think about it and be happy, but it is completely gone. It doesn't exist. There is nothing here that is yesterday.

Karen: My question is about former lives. I'd like to understand more clearly. You said there is a seed, you plant it, the soil nurtures it and grows and it nourishes new growth. However, someone has to plant the seed of new growth. The cycle is not clear to me. I find it easier to understand when Buddhists talk about how at birth one baby is more aggressive and one [more gentle] and how this might have causes in the past. We developed aspects of our lives in the past and it continues. Could you ask him to repeat that cycle with plants. I'm not at the point that I could convince someone—and often non-Bsts ask how you could accept past lives.

GYT: What you are looking at is the mind in the mother's womb at the moment of conception—the very first moment there is some kind of mental presence there, some kind of consciousness. That consciousness has to have a substantial cause—it's almost like a primary cause. Mind has to come from mind. There has to be a former moment of consciousness. That's where it gets established through reasoning. There has to be a moment of similar type for there to be this main cause/substantial cause. It has to come from some main cause and therefore it has to come from previous lives.

That consciousness has to be something other than the mothers

The body is obviously created from the sperm and ovum, so there is this idea of a previous moment of consciousness establishing this moment of consciousness. So once you have a previous moment of mind, you have a previous person, and so you have a previous life.

Karen: So which consciousness enters your body at the moment depends upon your karma then?

Josh: I think you are getting confused about "consciousness." There is some kind of mental continuum of mind or sequence of mentality that enters the womb at that time.

Karen: So it's nature depends upon karma?

GYT: If you want to say that it is dependent on your karma... depends upon what kind of habits you had in your former lifetime. Geshe-la is reiterating that it has to be a primary cause to things, so there has to be this former existence of mind before the existence of mind in the womb and mind can only come from mind. Also, in dependence on karma, you can be born into an animal's lifetime, etc.—i.e., it can set up a lifetime. What you are talking about is habit—whether you have a constructive mind, destructive mind, etc.