

TBLC Sunday Class
September 12, 2010

Geshe Yeshe Thabke

Text: Ruth Sonam, trans. and ed., Aryadeva's Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way with Commentary by Gyel-tsap. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2008. Chapter XI Refuting Truly Existent Time.

Buddha stated in *Extensive Sport Sutra*:

The three worlds are imp like an autumn cloud.
The birth and death of beings is like watching a dance.
The passage of life is like lightning in the sky;
It moves quickly, like a waterfall. (see LRC, vol. 1, 151)

The three worlds refers to the three realms—desire realm, form and formless realms. Desire realm means where we experience...where humans are and animals. And other beings like hungry ghosts, hell beings and some kinds of deities. The form realm has just deities. They have ...it's a higher level of consciousness. Both of those are the result of meditative concentration. The formless realm there is no coarse body like we have. They stay in a state of meditative concentration.

These are all imperm. like an autumn cloud: the place, the body, the other resources people use within them—are all impermanent.

Everything arises in dep. on afflictions and karma. They suddenly, abruptly arise...they suddenly come into existence and then suddenly come out of existence...That's how an autumn cloud works. But it's dependent on causes and conditions.

So, they abruptly come about and abruptly go. Basically the idea is that the clouds in the sky just seem to come out of nowhere...and so they suddenly are there. Just as suddenly they disappear and we don't really know where they have gone to. And this is just how things are in the three worlds.

The birth and death of beings...is really talking about this process of death and rebirth, where one life you'll be a human, and then an animal, and then a deity. It's like you are changing costumes. That's why it says "like watching a dance." It's like you are going off stage and changing costumes.....

The passage of life is like lightning in the sky;/ It moves quickly, like a waterfall" is referring to our body forms. It is rapidly perishing, disintegrating. And that's the process of aging. And so it comes into existence, abruptly, and rapidly disintegrating or disappearing, like lightning. We don't have tall mountains here, but it's also like one of those mountain cascades. It moves quickly like a waterfall.

When we say that the movement of our life is like lightning....we think "I am alive" or "staying" (but that doesn't work in English) but in every moment we are aging and moving toward death. We think "I'm alive," but it's a constant process. Every moment we are inching towards death.

What is this telling us? We shouldn't be attached..., thinking "I'm living" "I'm alive"...there's no real rest, you are moving rather quickly towards your death, like someone falling from a height toward the ground...you are going to hit the ground at some point. It would be like thinking (as they are falling) "I'm alive"...they are never really stationary.

The Buddha usually advises us to think of the three times—past, future, and present—as being like a dream, being like lightning, and then being like a cloud. So then, if you....There's nothing to hold on to. Being like a dream means that when you wake up—past things are like that—when you wake up, things are totally gone. there is nothing left there. Whether you are happy in your dream or sad, it's all gone, it's over. And then the future is like lightning...you can imagine a cloudy, bad-looking day in the summer when you are expecting a thunderstorm. You don't know when it's going to happen but it's going to. And then it comes and goes very quickly. And then present things happen abruptly (can't think of another word)...things happen and then they abruptly disappear. You don't know from where they came and where they go.

The message here is that you should not be attached to this perishing world. Everything is constantly perishing. So then.....if everything has this nature of perishing, then what should you do? Means that you should be careful—whether physically, verbally, or mentally—to always be non-violent/ not to harm anyone. That way, you'll avoid taking some kind of rebirth and you'll have some fortunate birth in your next life.

Then, we are kind of helpless/under the control of something else—which is our mental afflictions and our former actions. We are helpless. So in that situation we have to do whatever we can to reduce the influence of such things as the apprehension of self—or grasping at self—where you are thinking "I" "I" and becoming attached to the self/self-grasping...and becoming self-oriented, preoccupied with yourself. That's what is at the basis of the afflictions and the actions that cause you to be reborn again and again. So whatever helps you to reduce that.....

If you then look at this idea of grasping at self or app. of the self and see that from that I then think of myself as more important than others and it doesn't matter to me how i use others..then that kind of an attitude from beginingless time up to now hasn't helped us at all. So you decide to change this and think about how others are just like me—they want happiness and don't want suffering—I'm going to make this determination to reorient myself toward others/becoming preoccupied with others instead of self. So then you want to become a buddha and remove all faults and achieve all good qualities.

This is the message of this is really to spend your life—if you look and see how this grasping at self or apprehension of a truly ex. self has caused you to then think of yourself as more important than others and this self-preoccupation has only allowed you to think about harming others. And then you decide to work against that in any way that you are capable ofand to change that orientation in whatever capacity you can—whether it is just to avoid harming them or to work to be helpful to them.

If you are able to use your life to cultivate the loving and compassionate attitude towards others and to always avoid harming others or getting angry or getting attached to others or

being jealous and so forth...if you reduce all those and do whatever you can to be loving and compassionate and also have an attitude toward impartiality towards others and a joyful attitude, then you can do this—starting out to try to do this towards everyone...start with those who are closest to you, and then those you don't have any attachment or hostility towards—neutral beings. And then extend that to those you feel harm you. So then you cultivate these attitudes, then if your life doesn't stay long...(it's perishing very quickly) then you have some constructive way of living your life.

We have this..we're going to be talking about a chapter called Refuting Truly Existent Time...so when we have this feeling of I this apprehension of a self, it's a very strong feeling that somehow we exist in our own right, independent—we don't need anything else, we're autonomous. Based on this strong feeling, we think this is my body and then we have feelings of "this is attractive/appealing" or "not attractive"...we make distinctions and get involved in all sorts of problems. and it is all based on this idea that there is a solid, self-existent me. And then that same feeling we have toward all things around us, not just the self. In fact, our body is just a bunch of diff. cells, and then we bunch them all together and think that body has its own self-existence. and this is how everything is to us.. we constantly—whether it is ourselves, chairs, etc.—viewing things as having their own self-existence whereas we impute, here, or "project"we are imputing, based upon all these things that aren't the object we are imputing...to all these things. IF we divided out all these things. It appears as if there is something called the body right there....all the different cells and so forth, if you divide all those things off—all those things are not the body and there is no way to find the body itself. It should be that the body just stands out, but it doesn't....(this is how it is with all objects)....and that includes Time. Time also seems to have its own self-existence.

In this ch. 11 Aryadeva is refuting the idea of non-Buddhist schools about permanent time. There is some kind of principle called time that is perm, doesn't change but at the same time, it creates, it acts as a form, even though it is perm. And also, it is self-existent—it exists in its own right. For them, if you have all the different causes and conditions for something to grow, a garden for instance, but in winter it won't grow...but in spring it will---because of this principle of time. Conditions cause these things to arise. So if it's time for you to wake up or go to sleep—everything we see in this world is created by this principle of time and Time is a perm, unchanging entity.

It's also self-existent, it exists on its own. It's independent, [I MISSED ONE!!] self-contained.

The Bst schools, like the V, have a slightly diff bend on this that a future pot, for ex. is when all the conditions for a pot...[MISSED SENTENCE]

when it is destroyed that is the past pot. So then it has those three different existences, but in fact all three times are self-existent in the sense that we can always think about the future, and be happy and sad, or the past, and be happy or sad. The past, pres and future exist in their own right—have some self-existence all the time. Then they're coming into existence and going out of existence based on c&c is superficial—just on the surface, but in fact they have an independent, self-existence to them.

form and consciousness.

non-associated compositional factors

They are basically asserting that there is some kind of time—that exists in its own right/has a self-existence—without connection to the things of this world (chairs, people, sun, moon, whatever). But the system of Aryadeva, of this book, is not like that. They have a different take. They say that time is connected to all things. It's an impermanent phen. that is functioning, that is imputed to the various things of this world. It's kind of a third category of phenomena. There is the category of forms, made up of small particles/atoms. And then there are mental things. And then there is this third category that time is included into that is called “non-associated compositional factors” or “non-associated imp. things” It's not associated with those first two categories. So this kind of thing exists but it is imputed to the other two. It's just like “life force”. We all have some kind of life force, but it is imputed to the body and mind of a living being. It exists, but as a non-associated compositional factor. It's connected, it's not separate from the things of this world. When the sun shines, we impute “daytime” and when the sun goes down, we impute “night.” And when we come together, we say “class time.” And so time exists in that way.

Then we say, “these are bad times.”...what we mean that there is a lot of bad behavior on the part of human beings. But if everyone is being good to one another, peaceful, happy, etc. we say “these are good times.” But if there wasn't human beings doing those things, we wouldn't have this expression “good times” or “bad times.”

GO TO BOOK

Start p. 227. “Though water, manure, seeds and so forth are present....”

If we want to see what the assertion of these non-B schools, then this is basically how they feel. “Though water, manure, seeds and so forth are....others.

“*From this one can infer the presence of another cause....*” so they say there is this principle—time is a cause for making things happen. At the same time, they say it is a permanent entity—unconnected with all those things but is permanent in the sense of static. But it acts as a cause. You can see this in things like instants. Instants means something very quick. “moments” means 60 (?) of these instants. “brief spans” means divisions of the day like morning, etc. So this is where time is revealed.

There is this idea in the non-B schools, but also in some of the B schools—like Vaibhasikas...where there are these things called partless particles and durationless moments. Which means that if you divide time down to these fine instants you are going to come down to these tiny parts that are durationaly partless. Same with physical things....you divide down and down until you get the teeniest tiniest partless particle. This is not accepted by Aryadeva, but this is what is posited by non-B and then also the Vaibhasika schools.

For example, some of the B schools divide time down to a sixtieth of a finger snap. That's the smallest duration of time. But then the school that Aryadeva follows, the Prasangika school, they have a different idea. They say it's the time it takes for the smallest particle to move. It's almost like a nano-second, a very teeny moment of time. So they have a very different idea of the smallest unit of time.

Geshe is saying that it is hard to think of a 60th of a finger snap. Things happen very quickly, like for instance when light comes. Light travels so quickly, and so then it's hard to grasp moments of time in terms of that. But if you think of the smallest particle moving, then it seems a bit easier to grasp duration in terms of that kind of movement. This answer is actually the position that is asserted by this particular tenet system, the Prasangikas.

“This is unacceptable, for if time were an entity different from functional things it should be perceived but it is not perceived.”...functional things means impermanent objects that cause something, that give rise to c& effect. It should be perceived. If it exists totally separate, like blue and yellow (totally different), then we can point out,it's easy for us to know that it's daytime or nighttime because we can point out something. So we should be able to point out something with time also.

In this context, it says...well THAT has already been refuted-in ch. 9. In this context, here, when we are talking about time as a non-associated compositional factor, it's hard to think of time in that sense, but it's easy if we take something physical. So you have the pot—it's past, future pot. Better to say clay pot. And we are going to base the non-Bst refutation in relation to this clay pot.

[20 minutes left warning tone rings]

Now, time is speaking from it's own side!!! We are not thinking it is some kind of non-associated compositional factor, it seems to come from its own right.

This gets tricky! I thought it would be helpful to have Diana right it on the board. If you keep these things on the board:

[OKAY SORRY....THIS SECTION WAS ALSO HARD TO GET DOWN IN TIME]
the future pot—the ingredients are there, someone put it in the kiln, etc....it hasn't come into existence yet.
present pot—
past pot—when that pot is shattered.

So keep those three pictures in mind and think of this. Usually, it is sequential. But here is not.relative to the past pot is its future. We're just talking about...it's easier to have something physical.

...What we are calling the future pot is past. What we see as the past pot is future, if we do it sequentially, it's a slightly different take.

Put your three fingers there. Index, middle, ring. Ring finger represents your future pot—it's the ingredients but it hasn't been made. When they are all made and put together, that is present (middle finger). Past pot is when that is broken, with shards, and that would be the past pot. If you look relative to your middle finger, that which is the future is past...it's already past at the time of your present .

Even though we are calling it the past pot, it's the future relative to the present pot.

Then, if we do another relative, or from the perspective of the future pot (ring finger) this present pot and the past pot are future.

In this one verse, if we take a look at that based on how we have looked at these three pots or times of the pot....the present and past one do not exist in the future.

It follows that the present pot does not exist in the future pot, nor does the past pot exist at that time, for if they both existed at that time, time would be disrupted, since things which are to occur later would already exist at that time.”

This is all based on their assertion that time exists in its own right. For something to be self-existent, to exist in its own right, means it has to be right there, it has to be findable.

Therefore, if you have your present pot—middle and index finger—are already future, they already exist as future—they have to exist at the time of your ring finger. Time would be disrupted means that there wouldn't be any present or past, everything would come together as the future pot.

If things exist in their own right as future, then the present pot and the past pot would already exist as future pot. Which means that then the present and past would exist at the same time as the future, so there wouldn't be any way of presenting past, present and future—it would exist all together. They'd already exist as future pot. “disrupted” the idea is that you couldn't present the past or present—they'd already exist there at this earlier time. There wouldn't be any sequential unfolding of time. They'd already exist at one time.

It becomes a little clearer now. “*Since both would be future, the future would not exist.*” They have those three times, now, ...if they exist already in their own right, they must already exist in their own right as future. So they do not already exist at that time.

These are both the future of the future...meaning the present and the past. So if they existed by way of their own entity...

“Also at any one time another cannot exist. For these reasons, since both the past and present would be future if they existed at the time of the future pot, they do not already exist at that time.”

Usually, we think that they don't already exist at the time of the future pot, but if the future of the future were to exist in its own right, that means they are already future. Each one should be future. In that case all three times would become future, because of this idea of their essentially existing...There couldn't be any past or future. The future would not exist because it couldn't be posited as future in relation to anything. So, all three times collapse.

I forgot to translate: In a system where the past, pres, and future are imputed there by terms and concept then this whole scheme works. Its problem comes when you try to say that things exist in their own right, that they are essentially existent. For ex., if you have a seed, soil, etc. if you say that at that time the sprout that is going to come out from those is essentially existent, then the Prasangikas say it would have to exist right at the time of the seed and soil...and so they say “then, show me the sprout.” But if you take the idea of dependent arising, when you have these causes and conditions arising and then we can impute a “sprout.” It's not until the change is undergone and then we can call it that....and

that is enough to say it exists. In a system of dependent arising, where you talk about c/c then this presentation of time works; otherwise, the system breaks down when you start talking about things being essentially existent.

Question and Answer

K: I was imagining what if there were an element of time in each—water, flower seed, etc—such that when they come together, time would work its ability to produce the sprout. [instead of being separate]

J: So you are making a different argument/ are starting a new philosophical [school]?

GYT: [GOT DISCONNECTED AND MISSED SOME]....There is no problem with the existence of time...it just doesn't exist permanently. Of course time works...it is an existent thing. We're calling it a non-associated compositional factor...but it is an impermanent thing that functions, that gives rise to effects. It's just like a life force is imputed to the body and mind of a living being. We live because we have a life force. It's the same with time. Time is an impermanent thing that functions. Functions means that it acts as a cause and gives rise to effects.

K: How do you visualize it?

GYT: It's hard for us to...if we think of our body and how long it takes us to move. A large physical body takes a while to move. So it's hard when you think of little particles—like photons—and how quickly they move. So we just have to imagine....they have to move very quickly in the same way that light moves very quickly. And so for that particle to move

N: This term “life force” is new to my ears, in Bst context. I’m wondering if that is a newer translation of a word we had before. And do only sentient beings have this or plants also?

GYT: What do we say... “vitality”?....Life span, life force. You might just call it “life.” He has a long life. But it is something we attribute to the body and mind together. We could agree to impute it to plants, but usually we impute it to mind and body—humans and animals. When your mind and body haven’t separated, there is some kind of warmth there and we say “this body has life.” In Tibetan, they also use the name *tshe*...for which we say “life”...and then I use “life force” or “vitality” for *srog*.

Diana: We’re talking with someone who does hospice!

X: isn’t this buddha nature?

GYT: This is quite different. This is our potential to become a buddha. This exists with us.

X: That’s the life force, in my view.

J: Everyone is getting hypothetical here....

GYT: There are two ways to define buddha nature. One is it means the emptiness of the mind—the mind is empty of any kind of self-existence. The other one is that the mind has

this ability to be purified, that it has its own clarity. It has a clear nature that can be developed to having ...it has the capacity. We have the capacity to attain or develop our minds to have this pure nature of the buddha. There is something called the nature body of the buddha. The factor of their being no defilements of the mind at all. So there are two different ways of looking at it.

X: Can he show me your buddha nature?

GYT: If the mind...When we talk about buddha nature, that it is the mind's emptiness of any kind of self-existence. If it did have this self-existence, then we'd always be angry, we'd always be jealous. We couldn't ever change a situation. But because we can change...that we can separate from the defilements, it shows that there is emptiness of existing in its own right. Maybe we can end with that hopeful note.

There is a famous statement by the future Buddha, Maitreya: "The nature of the mind is clear light, the defilements are temporary." So we can get rid of these superficial or temporary defilements. "Luminous"...the mind has this clarity to it. In our system we say that all sentient beings have this capacity to get rid of their defilements and to make manifest this natural clarity of the mind.