

November 28, 2010
Sunday class with Geshe Thabke (Joshua translating)
Aryadeva's Four Hundred Stanza's on the Middle Way
Verses 268 ff.

We are starting on page 234 with verse 268:

If you look at the outline on 323, it says, "proving that duration is not inherently existent" So we are talking about the duration of the time not being inherently existent. And here, in this verse, it says:

*Just as a single consciousness
Cannot apprehend two objects,
Similarly two consciousnesses
Cannot apprehend one subject [268]*

When it is talking about a single consciousness it is talking about a single moment. So there has to be another moment of consciousness to apprehend the second moment. The object has changed. It cannot just cognize one object.

If we read the commentary:

Furthermore there is no inherent duration, for just as a single moment of consciousness does not apprehend two consecutive objects actually presenting their own likenesses, two consecutive moments of consciousness do not apprehend a single object simultaneously,--here there is no duration because a single moment of consciousness doesn't apprehend a single consciousness. There has to be a transformation. There is a similar type from one moment to the next, but not the same object.

That is said to be like the following: *two consecutive moments of consciousness do not apprehend a single object simultaneously for they undergo momentary production and disintegration.* It could be like two moments of visual consciousness or a visual consciousness followed by a mental consciousness, it doesn't matter. Two moments of consciousness don't apprehend the same object, because the object has to undergo change. For example, when we look at a light, it appears to be the same, but it is undergoing constant transformation, it is always in flux, so it never the same object for two consecutive moments. So, two consecutive moments of consciousness do not apprehend a single object.

So here, there's kind of a hypothetical objection:

Objection: Well, that contradicts the assertion in the sutras of knowledge that the five objects such as visual form are each apprehended by two kinds of consciousness. So the five objects are...when it says visual form that refers to eye consciousness. The object of eye consciousness is form. And then it is just saying all the five sense consciousness—ear, eye, touch apprehending some kind of tangible object or taste apprehending some kind of flavor. They are saying, well then the sutra is saying there are two consciousnesses. What is that about. Aren't you contradicting. So he starts out by saying:

Answer: If one does not accept momentary disintegration, one is not a Buddhist. A Buddhist has to accept that things change from one moment to the next. That is not necessarily that you are not a Buddhist....things undergo momentary change. There is a similar type and they look similar from one moment to the next and are therefore said to be a continuum of similar type.

If one does, the object of observation of a visual consciousness cannot act as object of observation for a subsequently arising consciousness. The idea is that an object is reflected in... we call it a sensory

faculty, a physical sense faculty that you have and that is then picked up by the consciousness. Picked up means that you cognize whatever is being reflected via your physical faculty. It isn't quite the organ, it is something more subtle. So then that consciousness is just a moment, an act being reflected in the sensory faculty is being done in consecutive moments in a different way—so you are never getting the same object. So we're not talking about one consciousness. What is says in the verse here is that there is one consciousness having two objects or reverse. But what does it mean by having two consciousnesses? It could be either two moments of sensory or a moment of sensory followed by a mental consciousness. *The sutra passage means that the visual consciousness cognizes the form clearly and the mental consciousness which is produced subsequently cognizes it in an unclear way.* The visual or whatever sensory consciousness it is has a direct app of the object, but the mental consciousness has to encounter the object through the medium of a conception—a hologram, something that is cast to the...well anyway...here we are just talking about a concept. The mental consciousness understands the object conceptually, so it isn't as clear as the direct experience of the sensory consciousness. That's why it is talking about two consciousnesses.

In the case of a visual consciousness, when we cognize an object with our sense of sight—when we see something—then, what is happening is that the object is casting its image—well, some kind of a mental representation that is reflected (a hologram) and this is what is picked up by the mental consciousness that is reflected in the visual consciousness. And then the visual consciousness takes that information and thinks about it. So there is some kind of conceptual image or concept that comes that is the object that the mental consciousness thinks “oh, what is that... a microphone or some thing on the table.” The mental consciousness is approaching it with a concept.

If we look at the outline again, this is vs. 269: “Refutation by examining whether or not time has duration.” Duration means the present. This is the idea that once something is produced, it has to abide or stay. Then, we call that the present. So this assertion is by a Realist, who thinks things are somehow inherently existent:

Assertion: Duration has inherent existence because of being the characteristic of present time. They feel that because there is some kind of duration, there has to be inherent existence. It has to exist. So now we are going to examine this.

Answer: If time and duration are different and have an inherently established relationship—means that they have to have some kind of relationship and are related in a certain way...then, they must act as basis and that which is based upon it. Between two different things, like the cup and the table, they have to have this relationship: one is the basis and one is the dependent.

If we look at the verse it says:

If time has duration

Duration is not time.

If it has not, without duration

There will also be no end. [269]

If duration relies on time as something separate, like that idea of a basis and dependent—then duration is not time because they are mutually exclusive. Mutually exclusive means that one cannot be the other. *If time does not have duration, then without duration there cannot finally be disintegration.* If it isn't produced and never stays, how can it ever come to an end? *Therefore since time does not have inherent duration, the latter is unsuitable as the present's characteristic.*

Basically, that was what the verse is saying, so if we look at the commentary again here. *If duration relies on time as something separate duration is not time because they are mutually exclusive. If duration exists in its own right. If time does not have duration, then without duration there cannot finally be disintegration. Therefore since time does not have inherent duration, So it isn't possible the latter is unsuitable as the present's characteristic.* In other words, you have to say that time doesn't have any duration then therefore you couldn't possibly say that the present is somehow inherently existent. It cannot exist in its own right.

The next verse is having to do with "Ref by exam whether things and imp are one or different." Here, we are talking about the principle of impermanence and some kind of functional thing like a cup. If we then look at the assertion. Duration exists because...The person asserting it is asserting intrinsic existence. There are impermanent. things that have duration, so then, if you look at the first two lines of the verse, the answer is:

*If impermanence and things are separate
Things are not impermanent.
If they are one, since things are precisely that which is
Impermanent, how can they have duration? [270]*

When you are saying that impermanence and things are inherently existent, then they have this relationship that is two totally different things, like a classic example is a pillar and a cup. Those are very different. If they are different like that, if they are separate in nature...we aren't talking about a cup being impermanent they are two different things...*If impermanence and functional things are separate in nature, it follows that things are not impermanent.* In other words, they would have to be permanent.

If we look at the second two lines:

*If they are one, since things are precisely that which is
Impermanent, how can they have duration?* means how can they have inherently existent duration, meaning it won't change. So it says here:

If this is accepted, they must be permanent. If things and impermanence are one, since precisely that which is impermanent is a functional thing, how can they have inherent duration? If you have inherent duration, then there is no change or transformation. If impermanence and the thing are the same, then the are impermanence. So they are changing. But if they are inherently existent, they cannot change.
Duration is impossible.

Here we are switching to a new way of examining duration or truly existent duration. On page 323, vs. 271 is one of 3 parts. This is a "Refutation by examining which is stronger, duration or permanence." And the first part is "Consequence that subsequent reversal is unfeasible if impermanence is weaker":

So the idea is that duration is stronger and impermanence is weaker, but somehow in the end duration can weaken and impermanence can take over and there can be some change:

Assertion: While things continue to exist, duration is stronger and impermanence is weaker, but it is not impossible for the weak to overcome the strong. What they are saying is there could be change.

*Answer:
If duration is not weak
Because impermanence is weak,
Why should a reversal*

Afterwards be seen? [271]

How can such a reversal be seen when things later finally become impermanent? It follows that it is unfeasible. It is unfeasible for things to change in this way. Once duration is inherently existent, how can there be some kind of change? If duration is not weaker because impermanence is weaker while things continue to exist, nothing can harm what is inherent strength. If it duration is inherently strong, how could it be affected by anything? It won't be affected at all.

Here, basically, if duration is not weaker, if it is strong, because impermanence is weaker...if duration is inherently strong, then there is no way for that inherently existent duration to change. nothing can change that which has inherent strength.

In this next one, if we look at the outline on 323, this is the “Consequence that nothing will have duration if impermanence is stronger”:

*If impermanence is not weaker
And is present in all things,
None of them will have duration
Or not all are impermanent. [272]*

So, there are two consequences. If you look at the commentary:

If impermanence is not weaker and is present in functional things at all times, it follows that all functional things do not have inherent duration, for impermanence, which overrides it, is always present. So they could never have any kind of inherent duration. They would always be changing and there wouldn't be this idea of inherent changing. Alternatively, if not all things are impermanent, in other words, if there were some things that are permanent.. it follows that those which are not permanent, because impermanence is weaker and duration has inherent strength. Then, there would be these things that would never change. So you have two consequences.

Furthermore, does impermanence arise together with the products it characterizes or does it arise later?

For the next one, we are looking at the “Consequence that what was permanent will later be impermanent if duration is stronger” So there is a hypothetical question:

*If there is always impermanence
There cannot always be duration,
Or else that which was permanent
Later becomes impermanent. [273]*

So, you have the product—the causal phenomenon—and it is asking, is it characterized by impermanence right away or does it arise later?

If there is always impermanence because that which is characterized and its characteristic are inevitably concomitant, That means, that which is characterized, the imp. object itself and then its characteristic have to be there together—then it follows that duration is not inherently existent. There could be no inherently existent duration because then it couldn't undergo change, which is already a characteristic of it. Alternatively, having been permanent, a thing would later become impermanent, and if it remained for a second moment, it would be permanent. Yet one thing cannot be both permanent and impermanent. You cannot have something that can be both.

For the next one, we are looking at “Refuting that both exist together”—that both inherently existent duration and impermanence exist simultaneously:

*If things have duration
And impermanence together,
Either it is wrong that things are impermanent,
Or duration is a fallacy. [274]*

Because there is inherently existent duration, there couldn't be any impermanence or this idea of inherently existent duration is wrong.

The characteristics of products are concomitant with one another. Thus if one accepts that the duration of a thing's existence and the impermanence of its existence are simultaneously of one nature with a thing, either it is wrong that things are impermanent or else inherent duration is a fallacy. When we are talking about duration, we are talking about it somehow remaining. When we are talking about impermanence, we are talking about not remaining. So you cannot have remaining and not remaining in one thing. *These two can exist together in false products [which do not exist as they appear] but cannot have a common locus in truly existent functional things.* So if something is truly existent, if there is a quality of them being truly existent impermanent things, then there is no way that they can co-exist. They can't be both staying and not staying.

If you examine this, we are talking about how, basically, it is impossible for things to have some kind of i.e. duration. So, if you posit things as being dependent arisings, then both duration and impermanence are possible. As a dependent arising, a thing is coming into existence. A future thing is going to come into existence and is undergoing a constant sequence of change or transformation before the thing it becomes but it cannot stay for a second moment. When it becomes what it is, like a sprout, it cannot remain for a second moment or it would be permanent and you couldn't see it as disintegrating or coming to an end. But because it is a dependent arising, it is always in flux and there is never any staying from one moment to the next. It is like something falling from the sky. Say something falls from a height, we say it is falling, but it is constantly undergoing a process of changing. We can call that duration staying, but there is no possible time when it is the same from one moment to the next. Whereas, with this idea of inherent existence, there is this idea that somehow it stays from one moment to the next and this discussion shows that to be impossible.

Assertion: Time exists because there is past time depending on past products. If that were not so, it would be impossible to remember past rebirths, thinking that one was this or that in the past.

Answer: This proof of time's true existence is also without the slightest substance. Memory focuses on an object which one has experienced. Means something already experienced, it has passed.

The last verse is talking about “Refuting proof based on memory of the past:”

*Things seen do not reappear,
Nor does awareness arise again.
Thus memory is in fact deceived
With regard to a deceptive object. [275]*

When they say that time exists, it exists independently, in its own right, inherently.

Though things seen previously do not reappear later, it is not like they are somehow reappearing, and though awareness observing objects belonging to a past rebirth does not occur again, you cannot have the same awareness you had previously.. memory arises with a sense of seeing as one sees present objects. It seems just as clear as your present observations of what is present with you. So then the next two lines say: Memory which is in fact mistaken and deceived arises in relation to a so-called remembered object which is false and deceptive like an optical illusion. It seems to have some kind of inherent existence but in fact it does not, so then it is like an optical illusion—it seems real but it is not. Usually they call it a hallucination. However, we do not deny that memory focusing on past objects arises dependently. This is certainly accepted in our own system. So it is not that we are denying memory, we are just saying there is no inherently existent past object or past that you are somehow accessing.

The summarizing stanza:

*Not knowing how to posit continuity and transitoriness,
They say time is permanent and the three times exist substantially.
Having understood that phenomena are like optical illusions,
Learn how the three times are perceived.*

What is being said here, when we are talking about a sprout, then all the causes and conditions for a sprout are there but it hasn't shot up, then that is the future sprout or the sprout-to-be. When those causes and conditions are complete—they have to undergo processes of transformation—it is the same with anything, but we are just discussing sprouts—the sprout is going to arise. It's not like it cannot arise at that time—when the causes and conditions are all there and it arises, we call it the present.

We talk about duration of time, but in relationship to disintegration—when a sprout becomes a past sprout, there are two ways of looking at it: one is the second moment. A sprout cannot stay the same. In the second moment it has to have changed, so we call that the past sprout. Or, it has this process of disintegration, where it fades and becomes yellow. The first is momentary change, the constant disintegration while the sprout is there—so it is never the same sprout.

If we understand production well, then we can understand disintegration and impermanence. If we understand how things come about based on a constant transformation of causes and conditions, we understand they cannot stay. Once we understand things are constantly subject to change and causes and conditions, we can understand nothing can exist in its own right. It doesn't have its own power to stay or exist the same from one moment to the next. If we look at how things are under something else, it is like leaves in the fall. They are under the power of something else moving around. Then we see we have this lack of being able to stand on our own, we aren't self-existent.

If we take time, time is this constant process of change. If we look at it as somehow self-existent. If there is some self-existent thing that is present, past or future, then it is very hard to maintain that such a thing could exist. But if we look at it as a dependent arising, that all three times are dependent or interdependent...they are an imputation. They are imputed or designated to some kind of a basis. If we look at time in that way, then time can be established and what we come to understand through this process is that things are undergoing constant flux and constantly changing. This becomes something we can meditate on and become more and more certain about. The idea is you have to induce some certainty about that this is how things are. If you don't, you won't come to any certainty about it, but if you constantly bring it up and continue with that, you'll be able to induce some certainty about things existing in this way.

Questions

Lou: Where exactly do we exist as this entity of karmic debt we are accumulating? If we are constantly changing, where is this self that is collecting karma—is it outside, inside, where is it? (my interpretation of his question—sorry to have missed the exact wording)

GYT: WE have to talk about the person as being a dependent arising. There is this constant process of momentary transformation of the body—constantly things are going on in our bodies and minds, feeling this and that and undergoing change. In that process of change, we are experiencing the effects of our actions and creating new karma—in a dependent relation of body and mind. And then we call that “person” and the person is experiencing good effects or feeling...It holds up in dependent a. But the minute you go looking for it, you are never going to come up with something that is the person. If you search among the constantly changing parts that are always transforming, you are never going to come up with it. But if you just leave it as—based upon its basis of imputation, the body and mind, the aggregates, then that is the person/a dependent arising. If we just talk about it as dependently designated, then we can say person.

Geshe-la keeps on giving the example of the electric light—it is constantly undergoing change, but there is continuity from one moment to the next. So then, we can read a book even though the light is changing constantly.

Even if you put on an electric burner, it heats up. It is undergoing constant change, but we can heat up tea. There is some continuity.

So, you have to think over the idea of it being illusion like. It really looks like there is something there, but if you look for it, you are not going to find anything there. There is a continuity, a constant process of change. There is dependent arising there and it appears to us in a way that it is not actually there—like there is something there. But every time it appears like that you have to look into it and consider.

Another question:

Is this process of constant change, can we call that somehow inherent? That things are naturally that way? [hammering out the meaning of inherent...] that that’s just how things are?

GYT: You can say that that’s just the nature of things—anything that is brought about on causes and conditions—as long as there are causes and conditions to continue it it is going to stay and then gradually it disintegrates and that is the way things are. And impermanence is the nature of all composed...

If you are thinking of karma in the sense of causality—things being caused phenomena means that they are impermanent.