

October 31, 2010

**Sunday class with Geshe Thabke (Joshua translating)
Aryadeva's Four Hundred Stanza's on the Middle Way
Verses 255-257**

GYT: We are starting with a quote from *The Bases of Discipline in The Great Treatise* (Vol. 1 page 286)

*The end of accumulated things is depletion,
The end of things that are high is a fall,
The end of meetings is separation,
The end of life is death.*

We are talking about the three times, the topic of our discussion with the 400 Stanzas on the Middle Way.

“Three times” is talking about impermanence.

In this context/verse:

“The end of accumulated things is depletion”. Accumulated things means our material resources, whatever we are using in this life. It is giving an instruction on how to use material things. There are two extremes: (you are) never satisfied, you have too little and always wanting more and you have no satisfaction or contentment. The advice that is implicit with this line is: you have to find the middle way between two extremes: to have enough to support your life and to give to others, and then that is the middle way between those two extremes.

The advice that is implicit in the next line: “The end of things that are high is a fall.” This is saying that no matter how perfect things can get, and you think, “Oh this is real success”, and you think “It’s always going to be like this”, and you get pride. It is not always going to be this way. Gradually this will decline. Whatever you have perfected, brought to perfect state, high level, that eventually will decline.

So then how is this helpful to keep this in mind? If you have this idea, that it will always be great and stay like this and you’re feeling proud and self-satisfied, then when things do decline and you have a fall, as things will, then it is very painful, unbearable at that time. On the other hand, if you kept in mind that the end of things that are high is a fall, if you have kept that in mind, you won’t get so upset, undergo such suffering at the fall. When things decline. When it has reached its end, as things do.

So then the third line is: “The end of meetings is separation.” This is any kind of coming together, meeting together with others, whether beautiful friends or old friends, the end of any kind of meeting is separation. Eventually you will have to separate. What is the benefit of keeping this in mind? If you keep this in mind when together, you will be very careful not to do any harmful things or make difficulties or disharmony. When together, you will be loving, compassionate, caring with anyone you are with because you understand that eventually you have to separate.

“The end of life is death” is the final line. Although when we are born, then we say, “Well I’m living” but in fact every moment we are headed toward our death. In each moment we are dying actually. Keeping this in mind has its benefit because at the end of your life, when you die, if you haven’t thought about this and thought “I’m always going to be here”, increased your belief that “I’ll always be here”, you will be miserable and have a difficult death. Whereas if you kept in mind that “Eventually I’ll have to die”, you will make good use of your life and do things helpful to others, and if you

cultivated compassionate and caring attitude, and at the end of life are satisfied, you will avoid that kind of suffering at the end of your life.

If you have kept these lines and advice in mind, then what happens is that you make good use of your life. Whereas if you don't have those in mind and sort of use your life in a way that is harmful to others, doing a lot of things that are creating wrongdoing, etc., then the result of that is to take a miserable rebirth in your next lifetime whereas if you are helpful to others, then this verse comes to be true here. (*Great Treatise* vol 1 pg 266, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*)

*After repeatedly coming to happy rebirths,
And experiencing much joy there,
You die and fall into the protracted
And unbearable suffering of the miserable realms.*

The advice that this verse is giving is that: in your lifetime, once you are born, then you should try your best to cultivate with your family, close friends, etc. and whomever you meet, then you try to cultivate an attitude of compassion where you are always thinking, "May these people always be free of any kind of difficulties, suffering." This is compassion, when you want them to be free of suffering "May they always be happy": that's a loving attitude, when you want them to have happiness. And you always treat others with a kind of impartiality, when you are not favoring/ attached toward some and hostile toward others. Even toward all. Always having a joyful attitude, always wanting others to have happiness and freedom from suffering.

In that way, if you have cultivated those four kinds of attitudes, then you will not be reborn into a difficult situation in your next life.

Then when you are trying to be loving and caring in those ways, cultivating love and compassion toward all, then usually we get some kind of anger and hostility, belligerence, they start to come. Then it is good to keep in mind to try your best to reduce this kind of feeling. There is a verse from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* from Shantideva: once you have a wound of anger or hostility in your mind, then there is no way to be happy. You won't even be able to sleep and your mind will become unstable and the advice is to try your hardest to reduce your anger and hostility.

This anger: how does this come about? It comes about through wanting something, and then someone prevents you/you can't get it, and you get irritable and your mind becomes ill at ease, and it is that kind of unhappy feeling/ill at ease feeling that is the food for anger. Anger feeds on that kind of feeling that you have. And then you will do something out of that that is hurtful to others, or say something. So you have to always be aware. You have to try to always keep your mind happy/at ease.

Basically the skillful are: whatever may happen, they are always trying to keep their mind on an even keel, so that, once the mind gets stirred up, then there is some kind of anger (that) will occur. So you have to keep your mind even-tempered and keep it and also be tolerant, forgiving, patient with others' actions.

So if you wake up in the morning and have a strong determination that "today I will not let my mind get disturbed by what happens today". Even if I lose all my money then I (still) have enough to eat, I am still alive, I have good health. Keep your mind always/ if you see your mind slipping in to irritability, disturbed, always trying to keep your mind from having that kind of feeling. Then cultivate a loving, compassionate attitude. If you avoid irritable mind, then you get a great deal of happiness, and accumulate a great deal of virtue, constructive action or karma. This will only be helpful to you. You

are creating constructive causes for your own happiness. If you are able to keep your mind from being disturbed in that way, it is very effective to create these good causes/merit/good karma.

For instance, if you know that you will be with a difficult person that day, someone who is hard to get along with, you need to be patient all the time, instead of being unhappy about it. Think, “This is great, I get to practice being tolerant/ patient, what a great opportunity. (Nancy missed a little here) Without them how would I get to practice?” If you do that, like Shantideva says, you would be a real hero. That is heroic. The other kind of hero: when killing people in battle, that’s not really a hero. Those people are going to die anyway, it is like killing a corpse. How is that heroic? The real hero is someone who maintains a tolerant/patient attitude towards all.

It is sort of like when an enemy appears, be joyful. We have that kind of advice. So then basically, you are thinking, “Oh, this is great. I get an opportunity to cultivate patience. If this person wasn’t around, I would never have such a wonderful opportunity.” Be happy at having that.

Atisha story: he kept someone with him who had bad behavior and was difficult to be around. People used to say to him, “Can’t you get rid of this guy, he’s a really difficult person to be with?” Atisha said “Why would I want to get rid of such a treasure? He’s helping me cultivate patience every day. “

(We will) now change to philosophy, *Four Hundred Stanzas* , Ch 11 verse 5 (p 229, verse 255)

If it has passed beyond the past,

Why is it the past?

If it has not passed beyond the past,

Why is it the past?

Before we get into this, you have to keep in mind that what is being refuted here is a truly existent time. That things somehow past, present, future are always there. That there is something about the future that makes it always here, that the past, present, and future are always with us.

It starts off with this verse:

The future is not substantially existent since future time cannot exist in the future. Similarly has the past passed beyond its own nature as the past or not?

We already refuted the idea: this verse is refuting truly existent past. The future has been refuted as being truly existent with verse 253 on previous page.

If the future is already existent and is causing things, then it is not the future. That is called the present. How can that be called the future, because it is present?

The idea is repeated here. Similarly, has the past passed beyond its own nature or not.? There are two questions here: has the past passed beyond the past or has it not passed beyond the past?

You have to remember, what is it that is being refuted here. The idea is that they really feel here, the people that feel that time is truly existent, then when we think about the future, it can make us happy or sad, so therefore it must be here. It must be that the future is already here. It has some substantial existence. It is the same with the past: “Oh, the person died, the thing is destroyed, and I feel unhappy, so that means the past must be here in some way because it is causing me to have these feelings.”

So when they think about the future pot, the future pot is the pot to be made, and that the pot is actually there. It is a future pot, but it is still a pot. A truly existent pot. Then, the past pot is the shards there, but still, the pieces of the pot lying on the ground are still the pot. Still “pot” in sense of being past.

That kind of philosophical perspective is very different from our own perspective where we say that the past, present, and future are designated on the basis of the state of those various things: clay, water, pot itself/bulbous thing able to hold water, or pile of pieces that we designate, or label future, present, past.

They don't have their own self existence. In the system being refuted they seem to exist on their own without having to rely on anything else.

If you look at the verse: *If it has passed beyond the past, why is it the past?*

We are asking two questions: has it passed beyond the past or not? That means it is no longer the past, it is something else. It is not the past? Why is it that past? It is not the past, it has passed beyond being past.

The next 2 lines: *If it has not passed beyond the past, why is it the past?*

In this idea, their idea is that the past is something that exists truly on its own, already there, and it can make you happy or unhappy. It is a functional thing, exists in its own right, doesn't need anything else. If it is there and producing effects, then it is not the past, it's the present. Something that is sitting there and causing effects, then it is the present. If it is not beyond the past, and you're calling it a truly existent past, that is not the past, it is the present.

If we move ahead to the next verse: then we have to look in back on pg 322 to see where we are in the refutation #3: Detailed refutation of the future

a. Refuting the assertions of Vaibhasikas and so forth...

a. Refutation by examining whether the future is produced or unproduced...

(first two verses of this section)

Regarding Vaibhasikas and so forth who assert that there is a common locus of a pot and the future. (p 229, verse 256)

In their system, they feel there is a "pot", and there is "future". It is a pot, and it is future. It is a "pot" and it is "present", pot and present together, saying pot and future are together. The future pot is there. The idea is, how can there be a common locus for pot and future? Basically a pot is defined as something that holds water and pours. How can it be pot and future at the same time? That is how our refutation will go.

When we talk about the past, present, and future, it has a cert definition. Like a pot that came into existence, was produced based on causes and conditions and exists there. That pot, as long as it hasn't been destroyed, is a present pot. Their contention is that it is produced and future, that it is pot and future. How can that be? If a produced future pot exists, why is it not present? Something that is produced based on causes and conditions and hasn't been disintegrated, we have to think of as present. It can't be past or future. The first 2 lines: *If the future is produced, why is it not present?* Commentary: *If a produced future pot exists, why is it not present?*

It has come into existence based on causes/conditions, and there it is as a pot. It is remaining as a pot and hasn't been broken into pieces. That we call the present pot; it couldn't be the future pot.

That is the refutation.

If it is not produced, the next question. Next 2 lines. *If it is unproduced, is the future permanent or what?*

If we look at 2nd sentence of the commentary: *It follows that it should be permanent because of being an unproduced thing.*

If something is not produced, it means it never depended on any causes and conditions. Usually when something is produced, it goes through a constant process of change, constant flux. Then if you say, if it is not dependent on causes and conditions, if it wasn't ever produced, then it follows that it has to be permanent, static, because it never goes through the process of momentary change. Permanent means

static, never changes. Doesn't change, static or permanent. Because of being an unproduced thing, never depending upon causes and conditions.

The Vaibhasikas come back with a rejoinder: Although the future is unproduced, causes and conditions make it because the present thus it is not present (Nancy didn't quite get that). The future pot is the water and clay, the "pot to be". So based on causes and conditions coming together, it becomes the present pot. Therefore the future pot cannot be considered permanent, because it goes through a process of change, it transforms into present pot. Therefore it is not static. That is the idea they are coming back with.

The answer then is: So if the future is impermanent because it is not produced, it disintegrates, then since the past does not disintegrate, why not consider it permanent? Basically it is saying that if you consider:

Even though the future is not produced, the future pot is impermanent because it subsequently disintegrates, why not consider the past pot permanent since it does not disintegrate?

Once a pot is destroyed, it can't be destroyed more. It can't be changed into something else. That means the past would be permanent, would be unchanging, it follows that it is permanent because the past never changes.

You can go forward from something: the pot -to- be comes into present and then is destroyed and becomes past pot. You can't go backward, that the past can somehow change into the present. Once something is past, it is completely gone. Therefore that must be permanent.

What is being refuted here is from our perspective, when the pot is in a causal state, where the causes for creating a pot are all there, they say "that is a pot". We say that it is not a pot, it is the future pot, it will be a pot, when it is actually assembled, put in kiln, then it becomes the present pot. When it is destroyed, then it is the past pot.

They are saying that when it is the pot to be, it is a pot that time, in the present, and in the past.

Any questions on any of this?

Natalie: We think something is there. It's trying to refute our idea that something is there? (Something about label)

GYT: It is true that this is the way we usually think. We think about the past, it has some effect on us. We spend a lot of time thinking about what we did, what went on, and it makes us happy or sad. Same with thinking about the future, making us happy or sad

That is a lot of the way we spend our day. When you analyze this: what is past is like a dream, it is completely gone, once you wake up it is gone and there is nothing to be found. The future is said to be like lightning. It is going to happen but you don't know where or when it is going to hit and there is no way of knowing that. Present is said to be like a cloud; it comes into existence and goes out of existence, never know at any moment where it is. When we think about the past, present, future as being somewhere there, then it is completely contraindicatory to momentariness, the constant state of flux, constantly changing one moment to the next. That is the way the past, present, and future really is. Past is like a dream, future is a lightning strike/flash of lightning, present like an autumn cloud which comes into existence and goes out of existence right before your eyes. You can never really point at where the present really exists.

You are more concerned with the label? It is helpful that if something happened in past that you don't want to think about, that it is like having a dream and so it is useful.

Kathy: but the past is helpful isn't it? Mankind learns things that are helpful. We learn to walk, to talk, etc.

Josh: you're talking about them being useful because of having effects

Kathy: was thinking about the past of objects, but I am thinking about things we have learned in the past. Isn't thinking about the past useful?

GYT: We are not saying they don't exist. In terms of past and present, today we are thinking about yesterday. It's not a question as to whether they are helpful or not helpful. We are thinking about the past as existing, future existing. Tomorrow will exist, it is something we can plan for. It is not to say that the past doesn't exist: oh I did this and today we can think about our history, last year we did this or that and that was really good. We are not refuting the idea that we can think about the past, that it is something that doesn't exist. The problem comes about when they say that it is somehow here in the present.

Karen: Along those same lines, what about the karma we produced in the past? Doesn't that have some effect in the future? What about the past karma?

GYT: We have previous actions that are going to experience as consequences in the present, that is the law of cause and effect, of karma. That past karma exists, but those past actions don't exist now.

Karen: What kind of existence do (karmic causes) have?

Psychotherapy looks at people who were abused in the past and that they might abuse in the future. We produce something by an action in the past that somewhere has its energy or power to have an effect in the future. Where does that exist?

GYT: Just like, if in the past, it exists as what we call...there are different ways of referring to it...think of it as a propensity, or state of destructiveness.

If you hit someone in past, that action of hitting doesn't exist in present, but it stays in your mind. A state of destructiveness, a latent propensity of some sort that exists with the mind and will give an effect. Like an injury, if you hit yourself on the head and you suffer the effects of that today, then it exists but you are not constantly in the present hitting your head. That is not what exists now. The past action does not exist in the present.

Josh: Natalie thinks the label has some kind of power. (Asks Geshe-la)

GYT: Basically, a past thing is completely gone. We can think about it in the present. It has some, we have an ability, in the present to think about something in the past. That is our present thought about something that exists in past. It is our present thought, it doesn't mean it exists now. It is the object of our thought in the present.

Karen: I have a question about the first section. When you see someone else angry about not getting what they want and having negative speech and actions, I suppose compassion is what should rise in you. Do you find within yourself the next action? Is there any further advice? What next, when you see someone else experiencing what Geshe-la asked us to overcome but they don't have the means to overcome it?

GYT: Basically, there are a couple of things we can do in that case. One is to be patient with that anger. It is a good opportunity for us to be patient. Also if you can see that they are under the influence of their own misconception of self, that is the basis for that kind of experience, and then generate compassion toward them. Then when you talk about compassion, may they be free of suffering and its causes. You could ask them, "What's troubling you" and then you can try to figure out what is giving them trouble and say, "No it's not like that, it's like this", and console them then you are eliminating the causes of their suffering. That is a compassionate action. The enemy really is not the person, it is the affliction/negative emotion that they are experiencing. Therefore if you can do something to eliminate the anger...say they got angry at you...then you say, "Oh I'm sorry I did that", ask their forgiveness, whatever initiated their anger. Anger is the problem, not the person. You have to remember that.

