

Geshe Yeshe Thabkhe
TBLC Sunday Class
Aryadeva's Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way
Chapter 6 vs. 129-132
September 21, 2014

Je Tsongkhapa said in his *Three Guiding Principles of the Path*:

Listen with clear minds, you fortunate ones
Who direct your minds to the path pleasing to Buddha
Who strive to make good use of leisure and opportunity
And who are not attached to the joys of samsara.

Here we have a description of who is going to listen to these teachings and it says, “those who are not attached to the joys of samsara.” Samsara, or “existence.” That means samsara or cyclic existence. Those who are not attached means not attached to the place we are in, the body we have, and all the resources we have. Or simply you can understand it as not craving existence in cyclic existence. That can be understood as someone who is on the initial level of spiritual development. There are the initial, intermediate, and highest levels, we could say.

I'm sorry, I had it wrong. Those who are “not attached to the joys of samsara” are of the intermediate level, based on not being attached. In order to separate from that attachment, they cultivate the view of selflessness.

Then, “who strive to make good use of leisure and opportunity,”—that refers to persons on the initial level. Those people are taking the benefit of this life of leisure and opportunity—which means we have all the conditions we need assembled in order to practice the teachings, or the dharma. That means the Buddha's teachings.

“Who direct their minds to the path pleasing to the Buddha” is the highest path, the path of altruism.

Now, Geshe-la is correcting me, I had it right the first time: those “not attached to the joys of samsara” are on the initial level because what they are doing is letting go with their preoccupation with this lifetime. They are very much attached to the pleasures of this lifetime—the place you are in, the body you have, and all the resources. So in letting go of that attachment, they are focused on the next lifetime and what you have to do in order to ensure you have a good lifetime in the future. This means you are abstaining from the 10 non-virtuous actions and you are cultivating the 10 virtuous actions, which will ensure that you have a good rebirth in your next lifetime.

This first level is what we need and can undertake. And what it is saying is that when you are “not attached to the pleasures”—it is saying you have to reduce your attachment. [We cannot give them up completely.] It's not saying it isn't easy to give them up.the point is you are reducing your craving for them and you are focusing on avoiding actions that would harm others and focusing on actions that would help others.

The next level of spiritual development is then where you are practicing, where you see that being attached to a fortunate lifetime in your next lifetime is not a pleasure at all. Any pleasures of rebirth in a fortunate rebirth are seen as really only suffering. Why? Because you

are always under the power and control of your contaminated former karmic actions you were involved in and also the afflictions. At this level, you see that you are always under the influence of your karma and afflictions, so what you engage in is meditating on the teachings like impermanence and selflessness, and in that way you seek complete freedom or liberation from samsara. At that point, you are seeing the joys of samsara as actually suffering.

So, what you are understanding here, at this intermediate level, is “what is it that brings about the suffering of cyclic existence?” You look and see it is the result of your karma and afflictions. But it is the afflictions that are at the basis of the afflictions. Through our craving, greed, attachment, and our hostility....through those we engage in actions. And then you look and see, what is at the basis of these? It is this feeling we have of “I,” “I.” We are attached to this false sense of I we are always thinking of “me,” me.” In order to cut the afflictions and get rid of them at the base [we need to eliminate] the self that we are holding on to so tight, which does not exist at all. It is based on that—this view of selflessness—that one is able to get rid of, to completely be liberated from cyclic existence.

The person on the advanced level takes this idea of... “not attached to the pleasures of cyclic existence,” and instead of just thinking of how to get themselves out of cyclic existence, they have this empathetic feeling of seeing that others are in the same situation. The situation of cyclic existence is that we are taking helpless rebirth, under the influence of our karma and afflictions. They see that all beings are like that and so rather than just freeing themselves, they want to free all beings from suffering. So then they conceive of the altruistic spirit of enlightenment, where they want to become someone who has eliminated all faults and attained all good qualities—a perfect person, a buddha—in order to be of maximum benefit and work for their welfare—i.e., to liberate them from suffering.

When it says, “who strive to make use of leisure and opportunity” this also can be understood in terms of any of the three levels of spiritual development. Good use of these at the initial level would be to strive to a fortunate rebirth, where you are looking as a good rebirth as a human or deity in your next lifetime. But at the intermediate level of spiritual development, when you say, “make good use of leisure and opportunity,” you are striving for liberation. Then, from the viewpoint of the person who has advanced to the highest level of spiritual development, “who strive to make use of leisure and opportunity” means using this life of leisure and opportunity, which means to work for the welfare of others. And in order to do that it means to strive to become a buddha in order to free all beings from their suffering.

When it says, “Who direct their minds to the path pleasing to the buddha,” this also can be understood in terms of any of the three levels of spiritual development. Even the initial level is pleasing to the Buddha because you are ensuring you won’t be reborn into any of the unfortunate rebirths. Through your practice you are ensuring you will be reborn into a fortunate rebirth. This pleases a buddha just as much as the other goals—the intermediate level of liberation, and the highest level, which means to attain buddhahood.

So, you can think that at any of these levels, the buddha will be pleased by your personal—your spiritual transformation from the first level, where you have abandoned any kind of harm to others and are helping others. Then at the middle level, the transformation is that you have *nye ring chag dang*—you don’t have this attachment to self, to those who you consider nearby or close to you. You don’t make this distinction between attachment to those who you consider nearby you and hostility to those you consider far away.

Then, with equanimity—you are not being attached to those who you identify as close. It’s a kind of even-mindedness. So the buddhas are pleased with that. And then the buddhas are

pleased with the those on the highest level who are completely exchanging a preoccupation with self for preoccupation with others.

So, with these teachings today, we will be starting—we are in the 6th chapter, on abandoning the afflictive emotions, the fourth verse. When you motivate yourself, you use any of these levels and think, “I will listen to these teachings in order to attain...” any of those three levels of spiritual development.

Here, the topic, according to page 314—the outline—it calls it, “c. antidotes to anger and desire must be applied individually.”

Here if we look back, we are talking about “the way to abandon manifest disturbing emotions”—an explanation of how to eliminate the three poisons. Here it is translated as anger and desire. I usually say hostility and attachment. How do these two come about? They come about through the third of the three poisons—ignorance—which is called, “confusion” here. At the basis of our hostility and attachment is that we are misconceiving things. We view things as having their own self-contained existence. What is really there that they lack this kind of existence from its own side. We are projecting that or superimposing that onto what is really there. So we are superimposing that things exist from their own side, then we see that the qualities of that object as existing from their own side. At the basis of hostility, we see unattractive qualities as existing in their own right, right there before us. And for desire—or attachment, craving—you are seeing these appealing or attractive qualities as existing from their own side. Then, based on that one is developing, you generate attachment or desire. So then we get involved in the three poisons in that way. Because of that, you cannot say that the antidotes for those could be generated at the same time because the way they are generated is very different. So this verse is talking about how you cannot generate the antidote at the same time.

You have to understand that, ignorance is at the basis of both hostility and attachment, or anger and desire. The way that...the initial misconception is that the object there exists from its own side. That kind of confusion—from that what arises is called “improper mental attention” or “improper mental functioning” which causes us to superimpose an attractiveness that exceeds what is there—in the case of attachment—and causes us to be attached to that thing. For anger, what you are doing is to superimpose an unattractiveness or unappealingness to that thing or person (whatever is causing you to be angry or hostile). An indication that this is not correct is that in your view, you are seeing this as...you have exaggerated an unattractiveness there that causes you to get angry or hostile, but not everyone has that same view. In your perception, it seems like that person just has this quality of unattractiveness that everyone should be able to see. But other people think of them as attractive. Others [don’t see it that way.]

So this is an indication is that this is not a quality they possess for everyone. So ignorance, then, works at very much the same way at the basis of these two afflictions—attachment or hostility. At this particular verse, it is talking about that in one case you are superimposing an unattractiveness and in the other case you are superimposing an attractiveness that exceeds what is there—so the two cannot come at once in one perception.

What is happening here is that we are seeing an attractiveness, or an unattractiveness, that exists from the side of the object. If it existed from the side of the object, then everyone should see that object as attractive. It’s not like the color blue, for instance. We can all see this blue bottle on the desk here and all see it as blue. It is not like that. If it existed there in its own right—and had this quality of unattractiveness from its own side—then [everyone would see it that way.]

Like Joshua, for instance, some people see as him as attractive, some people see him as unattractive, and some people see him in a neutral way—neither attractive, nor unattractive. So the quality of unattractiveness is coming from our own side. And because it is coming from our own mistaken way of viewing it, we can do something about it. We can correct the way we are viewing the object.

You have to understand it is not something coming from the side of the object. It is coming from us. We are conceiving of it as very attractive or very unattractive. It is not inherent to the object and it is really dependent upon our conceptuality.

When we look at this verse, then, this is what we are talking about. One can get rid of both hostility and attachment by simply cultivating the view of selflessness. That would eliminate the confusion at the basis of both of them. But the question is do they both occur together?

Here it says:

**129. Just as it is seen that bile
Does not occur with phlegm,
One sees that desire, too,
Does not occur with anger.**

When you have a bile illness, you don't have phlegm at the same time. [So, anger and desire cannot occur simultaneously.] The reason behind that is the desire is seeing thing as attractive. How can you see one object as both attractive and unattractive? How could they occur together in one mind with regard to one object? The commentary says:

Just as it is seen that bile and phlegm do not occur together, one sees that desire and anger too, do not occur simultaneously in manifest form in one mental continuum. Since one has the aspect of longing and the other of aversion, the two must be treated individually.

That means each has to have its own counter-measure.

It is like putting fire into a water-pot. A fool thought he would mix fire and water and dropped some fire into a water-pot. Since they are incompatible, the two cannot co-exist.

So, obviously, the fire went right out. The two of these cannot co-exist.

So this next verse then is “How to treat students having desire and anger” (or attachment and hostility). When we are talking about dharma, or the Buddha's teaching, when we are trying to practice the dharma, we are not talking about ...what this verse is discussing is that the teacher has to look at the student and see how that student is thinking. The actions that the student is doing come out of their thoughts, of their mind. So it is the mind that has to be treated. Something has to be done with the mind. And when you are talking about the mind; it's the way the student is thinking. So the teacher must understand how the student is thinking and apply a method that helps the student [if they are gravitating towards desire or hostility.] They have to treat that certain way of thinking. The initial verse of this chapter talked about ascetic thoughts of self-mortification, thinking that harming the body will help reduce their attachments. That idea of approaching it through the physical manifestation won't get at the base, which is the way the student is thinking. So that is the approach here.

Here what is being discussed in this particular section is “how to treat students having desire and anger.” This is talking from the perspective of a teacher. Usually, when someone gets angry at us, this causes conflict, so we get angry back and try to put them in their place. But this is not what the teacher is trying to do. They are trying to think about how the student is thinking and how a particular affliction is operating. And then they are trying to reduce it so they can apply a countermeasure for anger, for instance. So, the verse is:

**130. Desire should be driven like a slave
Because severity is its cure,
And anger looked upon as a lord
Because indulgence is its cure.**

When a person is very attached and is seeing things as attractive—they have an excess of attractiveness there. When it is saying, “should be driven like a slave,” if you keep them focused on a variety of tasks, then they won’t have time to reflect on these things that they find attractive and causes them to increase their attachment.

When it says, “severity is its cure,” the meaning is that you sort of have to keep the person constantly focused on something else. That is the meaning. Anger is “looked upon as a lord because indulgence is its cure”—the idea is that the mind is constantly being preoccupied. With anger, the teacher is trying to uplift the student to draw their attention from the unattractive qualities they are seeing and keeping their mind in... “indulgence” means you are trying to keep them always feeling comfortable. The commentary reads:

Understanding the characteristics of desire and anger and how they function, a spiritual teacher engaged in forming students makes those with desire work like slaves. This is because severity and lack of deference cure desire.

They are trying to keep the mind preoccupied with their work, which helps them to reduce their longing, desire, craving, attachment.

The angry should be looked upon as lords. By treating them with indulgence and serving them respectfully their anger will not rise; thus indulgence cures it. It is like the order in which a washerman trains his donkey.

Again, it is to keep the mind preoccupied with something else—away from thinking things are unattractive, in this case. So the teacher has to operate in this way.

When it is talking about attachment, then the teacher is trying to keep the person preoccupied with the work they are engaged in and not on the attractiveness of the things he or she is attached to. In the case of anger, the food of anger, as it says in the *Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*, is frustration or unhappiness—it is translated many ways according to the context. Discontent is another way to say it. So what the teacher has to do is always keep the person happy, never thinking about unappealing qualities. It is when they get frustrated or discontent, that is when their anger is going to flair up. So this way of dealing with the student..there is an example here of the washerman. In India, when someone is going to do the wash for someone, they go out with the donkey and then put it on the back of a donkey. But so the donkey won’t go running off, or spill the clothes, the washerman is constantly directing and carefully controlling them. So then they can get to wherever they will wash the clothes. They will bring the clothes back on the back on the donkey, so they do that very carefully, too. So, the donkey’s attention is always being directed. Then, once the washer person gets home, what they are doing is trying to make it so the donkey is

cooperative the next day and be able to go out to pick up. So the washerman gives them food and makes it easy for them in the evening.

A washerman curbs his donkey's spirit and keeps him busy. Anything capricious the donkey does he considers a fault and beats him hard. Similarly, the wise deliberately keep those habituated to desire busy, and when they do something wrong, make them go on working. When the washerman takes his donkey home, he treats him like a lord and gives him a nose-bag of fodder and other things, one after another. Likewise, spiritual guides should treat those habituated to anger like lords.

The next one, the topic in the outline, "e. How to apply the antidotes on understanding the sequence in which disturbing emotions arise." Here, afflictions arise at certain times of the day. If you pay attention to what time of the day it is, you can pay attention to the afflictions that happen. The commentary says:

The antidotes should be applied with an understanding of when disturbing emotions arise.

**131. First there is confusion,
In the middle there is anger,
And later these is desire,
In three stages during the day.**

In the early morning, it is not that anger and pride will arise right then. It's A misconception of self is always going to be right there, so it will be there in the morning. In the middle of the day, what is more prevalent is anger. You are going out and trying to accomplish things. Sometimes it goes well; sometimes it doesn't go well. What gets stirred up is anger and hostility. So, you have to be aware [of anger arising at that time.] For us, it's not so much this way. If someone makes you angry you will get angry no matter what time of day it is. But this is just saying that anger is what predominates at that time of the day.

Geshe-la was correcting me. For us, we are thinking, "I have to be tolerant and forgiving." We want to get angry right away. We forget our preparation of thinking how good it would be to be patient. So, there is confusion in the morning, anger in the middle part of the day, and then later at the evening, desire is more prevalent. This is how the three poisons tend to work.

At night sleep and lethargy increase and because phlegm predominates, first in the morning there is confusion. In the middle of the day one rides on the wheel of suffering caused by the frustrations of making a living, and anger arises because one is plagued by hunger and thirst.

When things are not working out, then one tends to get angry.

Later, in the evening, when one has recovered from exhaustion and so forth, desire arises. Thus, associated with different forms of physical weakness, the disturbing emotions arise in three successive stages during the day, and one must apply their antidotes accordingly with care.

The example here is of how the afflictions arise in succession:

It is like the following analogy: When King *Jentaka asked a Brahmin questions, the Brahmin felt hostile, but when he was given pots of oil, his greed was aroused.

Apparently, the king asked the Brahmin 100 questions and made him irritated, so his hostility arose. After he had dealt with all the questions, the king was so pleased that he gave him pots of oil. Traditionally, people used oil to clean themselves and for the feet. So when he saw this, he felt good that he had made good use of his time answering all these questions, so then attachment arose.

Here we have the next verse, 132, which is starting another section of the outline “2. An individual explanation.” Then it is talking about “a. How to abandon desire,” “b. How to abandon hatred,” and “c. How to abandon confusion.” The first one is “How to abandon desire/attachment.”

Desire masquerading as a friend deceives ordinary people.

What is being said here is that it is very hard for us to recognize that we are being attached to something, because we see it as fulfilling what we want. Through that, we are getting what we want, so we don't see it as a problem. In fact, in the end, it is a problem because if we get attached to something and someone does something to it, we immediately get angry. If we weren't attached to it, we wouldn't get so angry. So, it is hard to recognize this and we have to make a lot of effort to see our longing and craving and attachment as a problem. The other part of understanding desire is about understanding the causes and conditions, which is a different way to talk about how to get rid of attachment or longing.

If we read the verse on page 154, it says:

**132. Desire is no friend, but seems like one,
Which is why you do not fear it.
But shouldn't people particularly
Rid themselves of a harmful friend?**

What we see is that our attachment, or “desire”—we see it as providing for us, so it is hard to see it as an enemy. We see it as a friend, so in that way it is deceptive.

**Desire is no friend, but seems like one,
Which is why you do not fear it.**

The reason it is “no friend” is that through our excessive attachment to something is that when something doesn't go well, this causes us to be angry. There are all sorts of problems that arise with our strong sense of attachment to something. We get involved in competitiveness and pride and so forth. If we knew that, we wouldn't get so involved in it and would not see it as a friend.

**But shouldn't people particularly
Rid themselves of a harmful friend?**

In general, if you were associated with someone who was bringing you harm, you would separate from them. It is hard to get rid of because it aspects as a friend. Anger, on the other hand, seems like your protector. So then, it is like “how can I protect myself without anger or hostility?” That's the way with anger.

Since desire is hard to recognize, you must pay special attention to getting rid of it. Ultimately it produces suffering, so it is not a friend, but looks like one because it seems benevolent. Therefore you do not fear it.

You aren't looking at how it is going to effect you when the think you are attached to gets compromised in some way.

Shouldn't people make a particular effort to rid themselves of a harmful friend?

As attachment is aspecting as a friend, if we were going to actually get rid of it, we would have to understand what the harm it is bringing is and then get rid of it. So then the example is simply of how attachment brings us trouble:

It is like the following analogy: King Pandu shot an arrow at a sage copulating with a doe and, disregarding his curse, died as soon as he had intercourse with a woman.

When King Pandu was out hunting, he heard a sage, who had turned himself into a deer, copulating with a doe. He shot an arrow and hit the sage, who cursed him, saying, 'When you have sexual intercourse you will die.' Wishing to practice sexual continence the king gave up his kingdom and went to the forest. One day he saw his queen standing naked, facing the setting sun. He thought, 'my queen is so beautiful, she could seduce even the gods.' out of desire he had intercourse with her and died.

Questions and Answers:

Q: It seems like some of this is restrictive, in terms of holding back emotions and desires, whereas in mindfulness training—letting it be, without doing anything about it. Also, in tantra, they make use of anger and desire. Here it seems to be on a restrictive level. Is that because it is taught at the lowest level of encounter?

Geshe-la: What are you meaning by mindfulness—as just watching?

Q: See it arise but not engaging with it. So you don't have to restrain yourself.

Geshe-la: Perhaps this is like in Mahamudra, where you are just looking at it and letting it go. At this point, what you are recognizing—you are really trying to understand what drives our helpless rebirth in cyclic existence. And its the afflictions, based upon which we get involved in karmic actions. So it is recognizing that the faults in the afflictive emotions, counterproductive, destructive emotions. They are at the basis of our being helplessly reborn in cyclic existence.

When we are doing a mindfulness practice where you are not opposing them, it is a different context. You are understanding that a normal reaction to something to which we are attached entails thinking a lot about the object. We think a lot about it, so the stronger it gets (and same with anger). So then this is talking about to not have all those thoughts about it and it will disappear on its own. That is a different approach.

It's a different practice. In the beginning, you are developing a determination to be free.

In this next one, you are developing ...without engaging in reactive thoughts. Then, in the final one, where you talk about Vajrayana or Secret Mantra, that is really for someone who is highly advanced—a prodigy who has already developed this kind of determination to be free of cyclic existence, the spirit of enlightenment, [and the wisdom cognizing emptiness].....to a very high degree. What they are faced with is: “Why should I spend such a long time—when I see sentient beings suffering—why should I wait?”

What they are able to do, with their high level of development—the afflictions, they don’t see them as a problem but as ways to get them to enlightenment as quick as possible. So they have this unusual ability. For instance, with attachment—it’s not like ours. What it is evoking in them is a very subtle consciousness and they are able to use that to have a deeper understanding of emptiness. So, in that way they are able to use what would normally be an affliction but use it in a way that helps them to reach enlightenment. There are different examples. It’s like a bug that is born in wood eats the wood it is born into and thereby increases. Another example is that they are able to be like a lotus born from the mud—the mud doesn’t attach to the lotus, doesn’t pollute it.

But it’s a question of stages of mental development. At the point of secret mantra, you attain *samatha*—calm abiding or serenity—you have this ability to focus the mind at one point on different parts of the body. There are all these different practices—and this is after you have already developed your determination to be free from cyclic existence, spirit of enlightenment, and wisdom. You have mastered those and then you are ready for this very advanced practice where you can focus on the drops and channels in the body. Through it you are able to produce subtle forms of consciousness that are very powerful for understanding emptiness. It’s the most advanced you could say.

Dedication.