
Study Group – Aryadeva’s 400 Verses

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual it is good to sit in a comfortable position and generate a positive motivation for receiving the teachings such as, ‘In order to liberate all beings from all suffering I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose, I will listen to the teachings and try to put them into practice as best as I can’.

1.1.2.5. Considering how very powerful suffering is (cont)

Doubt: The experience of pleasure can overcome suffering.

*Pleasure is governed by thoughts; [34]
Thoughts are governed by pain.
Thus there is nothing anywhere
More powerful than pain.*

The view that the experience of pleasure will overcome suffering leads to the view that there is no need to consider the contaminated body as being in the nature of suffering, because when one experiences pleasure it can overcome that suffering. Such a doubt is eliminated with this verse, which explains that it is not the case that the experience of pleasure can overcome suffering. In fact the suffering that we experience on a continual basis is much more prevalent than the fleeting pleasures we occasionally experience. Since suffering is more predominant than pleasure, it is not the case that pleasure can overpower suffering.

The main point made in relation to this verse is that we need to contemplate more deeply on how the fleeting pleasures that we experience are actually contaminated pleasures, and so are in the nature of suffering. Therefore contaminated pleasures cannot be relied upon; we cannot trust the contaminated pleasures, because ultimately they bring us more suffering.

Contemplating more deeply on the fact of how the contaminated pleasures are actually also in the nature of suffering can in the long run help to develop a sense of renunciation. Normally, it is relatively easy for us to develop a sense of renunciation, or disgust, towards obvious physical and mental suffering, but we don’t seem to give much regard to the suffering of change and the pervasive sufferings. In fact we seem to deliberately engage in experiencing the contaminated pleasures, which are in reality sufferings of change. Therefore it is very important for us to really contemplate and develop a sense of renunciation towards all levels of suffering.

1.1.2.6. Considering how the sensation of pleasure is like a visitor or guest to the body

Doubt: Although contaminated pleasures relating to the physical body are hard to find, they do no harm. But since pain harms, it is alien (or like a guest) to the body.

*With the passage of time
Pain increases.*

[35]

*Pleasure, therefore, seems as if
Alien to this body.*

This verse serves as an answer to the doubt that arises from the view that contaminated pleasures are favourable, and therefore must arise naturally in the body. Whereas pain is unfavourable and harms the body, it is as if it is alien to the body.

Pleasurable sensations are not natural to the body, for with the passing of time from childhood to youth, maturity and old age, suffering - such as that of aging - increases and pleasure vanishes.

As indicated in the commentary, childhood refers to the period from birth to the early teens, youth is from the early teens to 18 or 20, then maturity follows from 18 or 20 to about 35 to 40, and old age comes from then on. The pleasures that are experienced in childhood are all left behind, and it is as though one is moving forward towards more suffering, not towards more pleasures. The pleasures experienced in the earlier stages are left behind and will not be experienced again; one moves forward towards more difficulties and problems as we mature.

In youth, a certain amount of pleasure is experienced, but later it transforms into more problems. As we grow up we are given more responsibilities which are followed by more worries mentally. Then as old age comes, we experience more suffering related to the physical body as well. Therefore it is as if we are moving forward towards more and more suffering and leaving behind the pleasant or ‘pleasurable’ experiences. In this way, we can clearly see how suffering prevails as we become older. Therefore it is not really in the nature of our body to experience pleasure; rather suffering is much more prevalent in relation to our body.

In relation to the doubt that pleasure is in the nature of the body and suffering is alien or like a guest, in fact when we look into our situation it is the complete opposite of that. The reality is that pleasure is alien and like a guest, because it is experienced randomly, whereas suffering is in the nature of our body as it is experienced constantly throughout our life. When we are young, we experience a certain amount of pleasure, but we leave that behind and move forward towards experiencing more difficulties and problems in life, so therefore more suffering occurs and more pain is experienced. As we age, our bodies start to fail us and we experience much more suffering. When we look at our contaminated bodies, it becomes obvious that our body is in the nature of suffering rather than pleasure, which is completely contrary to the earlier doubt that pleasure is the nature of the body and suffering is alien, like a guest. Rather, the reality is that suffering is in the nature of the body, and pleasures are like the guest.

We need to relate the main points that are made in this verse to ourselves, and contemplate the sufferings that we experience in relation to this body. On very rare occasions we experience some pleasure and it only comes randomly. What we experience on a more continuous

basis is suffering. Therefore suffering is more in the nature of our body. When we reflect further we see how pleasure is fleeting, and suffering is much more prevalent. When we consider the sufferings that we experienced in our childhood, such as a trauma or some sort of abuse that haunts us again and again throughout our life, we see that certain kinds of traumatic sufferings experienced as a child can be carried throughout life. Every time we reflect on them, it brings so much pain and suffering in the mind and it is perpetuated throughout our life. Whereas what is left of the pleasures that we experienced as a child is but a memory. Do those memories give us any pleasure and happiness now in our life? We don't see that. Rather, we find that the pleasures were all fleeting and they are just mere memories.

The pleasures we experienced as a child are just a memory, whereas the suffering that we experienced is much deeper in ourselves. So when we reflect on that reality we can see how suffering is much more prevalent. That is why the teachings explain how the nature of our contaminated body is actually suffering. In contemplating that, it is very important that we develop a real sense of renunciation to overcome the contaminated body. Contemplating further we realise that it is karma and delusions that are the contributing causes to bring about this body. Having the strong grasping at the self (or the 'I') produces the delusions and karma, which is what we call the causes to obtain such a body. When one develops renunciation, one develops a deep sense of understanding that one must overcome that initial ignorance of grasping at the self. This then overcomes the delusions and karma that produce such a contaminated body.

Relating to earlier doubts about whether we have to nourish our body, it was explained in the earlier part of the text that we need to sustain our body, because we can use it to obtain the ultimate goals that we wish to achieve, and we can accumulate much merit with this body. Therefore while we still have this contaminated body, we need to nourish it to achieve our ultimate goals. We can use this body to live an ethical life, to accumulate merit and engage in the six perfections.

Meanwhile we must also understand that the nature of the body is contaminated. Therefore with an intention of completely and entirely overcoming the causes for obtaining this body in the future, we use the body we have now to accumulate merit. When we have that understanding we can see that there is a huge difference in how the body is nourished and sustained when one has understanding of the Dharma. It's completely different from a worldly view of sustaining the body, which is just for its fleeting mundane achievements. Whereas with the Dharma attitude, we engage in sustaining the body in order to accumulate merit for the purpose of obtaining the ultimate goals. Therefore we can definitely see that there is a huge difference from the Dharma point of view.

Contemplating on the nature of the contaminated body as being in the nature of suffering serves as an impetus to develop a strong longing to achieve what is called

liberation – to be free from samsara, which is to be free from this conditioning. The very attitude of developing renunciation is an attitude of wishing to be free from being bound by karma and delusions. For as long as we are bound by karma and delusions, we are held in the cycle of obtaining such a contaminated body over and over again. What binds us is karma and delusions. Therefore in developing renunciation, one develops a very strong longing to overcome that factor that binds us to the cyclic existence, which means overcoming the delusions and karma.

As we develop that strong sense of renunciation with the understanding of what binds us to samsara, which is delusions and karma, we can then use that very understanding of renunciation to focus on others, and wish for them to be free from samsara, which then becomes love and compassion. Therefore when we develop a strong sense of renunciation within ourselves, that can also serve as an impetus to develop love and compassion by focussing on others. Then that love and compassion we have for others becomes much deeper and more profound, rather than just a sense of pity. The need to help others becomes really very strong in the mind, because one sees others in this very pitiful situation of being completely bound by the delusions and karma, and engulfed in ignorance. When one understands the state that others are in, when we get a glimpse of that by developing our renunciation, then a very strong wish to free other beings from that state of being bound to samsara will develop as well.

I explain this in an attempt to lead to a deeper, and more profound meaning, deriving it from other sources of the teachings. Therefore when we relate the verses here to other sources of the teachings, then the understanding becomes much deeper. In personalising the teachings for ourselves there may be some sort of doubt that renunciation is just focussing on oneself, which seems very selfish. But in fact, when one understands how developing renunciation can be an impetus for developing love and compassion for oneself and love and compassion towards others, we can see how renunciation and love and compassion are related and linked, and one can see the great importance of why one should develop renunciation. As explained in the teachings, renunciation is a basis for developing love and compassion. As the teachings explain, without developing renunciation, it is quite impossible to develop the real true, unique love and compassion towards others. Therefore as one enhances renunciation within oneself, with an understanding of the teachings we can then use that experience of renunciation to develop love and compassion towards others. This is quite important for us to understand and integrate.

1.1.2.7. It is therefore proper to develop aversion to the suffering nature of the body.

Doubt: Although the body's nature is suffering, causes of pleasure act as a remedy. Therefore one need not feel aversion towards the body.

*There seem to be many causes
Of suffering like sickness and others,
But humans do not seem to have
As many causes of pleasure.*

[36] Answer:

*With the intensification of pleasure [37]
Its opposite is seen to occur
With the intensification of pain
There will not likewise be its opposite*

When we think about it, this doubt can definitely arise in the mind, but that view is not correct. The verse acts as an explanation for why that attitude is incorrect. As a means to overcome that erroneous attitude, the commentary explains that there are many more causes for physical suffering than there are for pleasure. The reality is that there are many more causes for physical suffering: there are internal causes such as the different types of illnesses that arise within our body, as well as many external causes such as the feeling of extreme cold or heat, and other kinds of unpleasant sensations that can arise from the elements, or from harm that is inflicted by others. Therefore there are actually many more internal and external causes and conditions for the body to experience suffering rather than pleasure. In comparison the causes to experience pleasure are fewer. Therefore it is a completely erroneous view to think that pleasure can act as a remedy for suffering, when in reality suffering is experienced much more. Since the causes for pleasure are few, they cannot serve as a remedy to overcome suffering. Therefore one must feel an aversion towards suffering, by understanding how prevalent it is within our physical body.

1.1.3. Refuting the existence of real pleasure

This has five sub-divisions.

1.1.3.1. Showing that though real suffering exists, real pleasure does not

1.1.3.2. Showing it is erroneous to think of suffering as pleasure

1.1.3.3. From the start there is no real pleasure in riding and so forth

1.1.3.4. Ordinary people think of the feeling of satisfaction from alleviated pain as real pleasure

1.1.3.5. Showing other reasons why there is no real pleasure

1.1.3.1. Showing that though real suffering exists, real pleasure does not

This is sub-divided in two.

1.1.3.1.1. Reasons why seeing a slight increase in pleasure does not prove the existence of real pleasure.

1.1.3.1.2. Although there are causes producing real suffering, there are none producing real pleasure.

1.1.3.1.1. REASONS WHY SEEING A SLIGHT INCREASE IN PLEASURE DOES NOT PROVE THE EXISTENCE OF REAL PLEASURE

Assertion: If pleasure did not exist it could not increase, but since it is seen to increase, real pleasure does exist.

The explanation of the verse shows that it is not true to say that there is real pleasure just because there is an increase of pleasure. When we experience pleasure and it seems to increase, an obstacle or hindrance, which is pain, occurs and we lose that experience of pleasure. Just as we reach a heightened experience of that pleasure, what takes place eventually is actually pain. After experiencing pleasure we end up with dissatisfaction and unhappiness.

While that is true for pleasure, the same does not apply to pain. When we experience great pain, as the pain increases it is not as though there will be any pleasurable experience at the end of that pain. The pain continues to increase with no hint of pleasure.

At a very subtle level, although pleasure increases, it does not go up to a heightened state where we are just left in the state of bliss and where we are completely satisfied. From our own experience we find that we are never left with a completely satisfying experience for too long. Soon after a pleasurable experience, something happens where we lose that nice feeling of pleasure, and in fact we are left with a dissatisfied and discontented mind. So in the end what is left in place of pleasure is actually pain.

Whereas on a very subtle level when suffering begins to increase, it can increase to the point where we are completely overcome physically and mentally with agony, which can continue for long period of time. With experience we can find that this is actually very true, isn't it?

The main point is that just because there is some pleasure which increases to a certain point, that does not mean that real pleasure exists. Rather the very fact that pleasure is not stable proves that pleasure is not real.

1.1.3.1.2. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE CAUSES PRODUCING REAL SUFFERING, THERE ARE NONE PRODUCING REAL PLEASURE

*With the conditions for pleasure [38]
Its opposite is seen.
With the conditions for pain
There is not its opposite*

The first two lines, 'With the conditions for pleasure, its opposite is seen' refer to the fact that, as explained in the commentary, when, for example, we engage in the partaking of a delicious meal, this is considered as a condition for the experience of pleasure. If, however, we indulge to the point where we overeat, it is obvious that we will experience discomfort, suffering and pain as a result. Therefore as the verse mentions, pain is seen to occur together with the conditions for pleasure. This refers to the fact that by the very process of continually engaging in the conditions for pleasure such as eating, those very conditions for pleasure will turn into a cause for the experience of pain.

Yet when one has prolonged contact with the causes of pain, while engaging in these conditions for pain there is never an experience of pleasure. In other words, while experiencing the conditions for having pain, we are never left with an experience of pleasure. That is a fact; there is no real lasting pleasure. What is really prevalent in relation to our physical contaminated body is suffering.

The main point being made here is whether the pleasure that we experience is real or not. If the pleasure that we experienced was real, then the more we engage in the conditions for pleasure the more pleasure we should naturally experience, and we should be left with an end result of great pleasure and bliss. But the reality is that the more we engage in the conditions for the pleasure that we think we are experiencing, the more we are left with misery and pain.

Whereas the conditions of suffering are more of a real experience, because of the fact that the very conditions that produce suffering don't change. As we engage in the conditions for suffering we experience more suffering. It is only by avoiding the conditions for suffering that we can overcome that experience. Whereas with pleasure, it is not the case that we experience more and more pleasure as we engage more in the causes. In fact we are left with pain. I think that we can see the reality of this quite clearly when we relate this to ourselves.

As the teachings indicate, there is an assertion that for every contaminated pleasure, or what we call worldly pleasure, there is definitely a suffering. In reality, contaminated pleasures are actually a form of suffering. This assertion is made based on our experience, which is that even though the immediate experience may be pleasurable, the ultimate outcome of that experience is an experience of suffering, because the end result of engaging in that pleasure is suffering. Therefore the teachings indicate that every contaminated or worldly pleasure is actually in the nature of suffering. That is based on reality. Therefore developing renunciation in relation to the worldly pleasures, which is explained in the teachings as being a suffering of change, is what we need to try to meditate on. For as long as we hold onto the view that contaminated pleasures are to be acquired and held onto, then a real sense of renunciation and wishing to achieve liberation cannot occur in our mind.

1.1.3.2. Showing it is erroneous to think of suffering as pleasure

This is sub-divided into six sub-divisions.

1.1.3.2.1. Inappropriateness of considering the process of dying pleasurable.

1.1.3.2.2. Inappropriateness of considering being afflicted pleasurable

1.1.3.2.3. Inappropriateness of considering pleasurable a composite of various incompatible factors which is like an enemy

1.1.3.2.4. Inappropriateness of considering being destroyed pleasurable

1.1.3.2.5. Inappropriateness of considering the doing of tiring actions pleasurable

1.1.3.2.6. Inappropriateness of considering pleasurable the creation of causes of suffering for the sake of a little pleasure

1.1.3.2.1. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF CONSIDERING THE PROCESS OF DYING PLEASURABLE.

Doubt: When we see someone else experiencing worldly pleasures, we comment, 'They are having a pleasurable and enjoyable time'.

*When you have spent, are spending [39]
An will spend time dying,
It is not at all proper to call
The process of dying pleasurable.*

This verse is presented to overcome yet another doubt that we normally take for granted. There are expressions in the worldly sense relating to the experience of pleasure by others. As the commentary indicates with its explanation of the verse, there is no real pleasure that is experienced by anyone.

Composite or compounded things by their very nature disintegrate moment by moment and furthermore this is true with regard to the three times. Because of being in the nature of impermanence, compounded things are changing from moment-to-moment, meaning that they are disintegrating. That reality of disintegration moment-by-moment is true at all times. In relation to the three times it was true in the past, it is true in the present and it will be true in the future. Therefore we have already spent certain amount of time disintegrating in the past, which has led to our physical condition now.

At this very moment, we are spending time in disintegration, meaning that from the very subtle level to the gross level our body is changing. It will continue to change in the future, leading ultimately to the actual gross disintegration of our body, where it completely ceases to function, which is when we experience death. Therefore in reality, we are spending our time in the process of dying. Every moment brings us closer to death, and it is as if we are spending all our time in the process of dying. When we reflect on that reality, there is no time for pleasure. Therefore the main point here is that we need to put every moment of our life in trying to prepare for the actual moment of death, and to not to waste our time in fleeting pleasures.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

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