
Study Group – Aryadeva's 400 Verses

༄༅། །བསྐྱབས་འཛིན་བཞི་བརྒྱ་པའི་སྐྱེ་བའི་ཚོགས་ལེན་འཁུར་བྱས་པ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

18 July 2006

Sitting in a comfortable position, and withdrawing one's mind from external distractions, let us keep the mind focused inward, and generate a positive motivation, such as: 'In order for me to liberate all sentient beings from every type of suffering, I need to achieve enlightenment. Therefore I will listen to the Dharma and put it into practice, creating the causes to achieve enlightenment'.

1.3. How to meditate on the pervasive suffering of conditioning

The meaning of pervasive, or more literally, pervasive compounded suffering was explained last week. To explain it briefly again, pervasive can mean either our mind being pervaded with suffering from past life to future life and so forth, or it can mean the suffering that pervades from the peak of samsaric existence to the lowest hell realms, which is called the hell without respite.

'Compounded' in this context means the compounding of the different delusions that pervade our minds. This specifically relates to the seeds of delusion. When we relate that to ourselves we can see how true it is. We see how easily our mind is provoked into delusion, and how vulnerable to delusions our mind is. That is an indication of how the seeds of delusion pervade our mental state. There is a difference between the seed and the imprint of delusions, however here we particularly talking about the seeds of delusion, because our mind is pervaded by those seeds. That is why the mind is habituated by the influence of delusions, and why they arise in the mind very easily.

Both the mental and physical aggregates serve as the basis for the seeds of delusion to pervade, which brings us to the second connotation of the word *du che*, which we translate as compounded. This refers to the physical and mental aggregates that, when put together, serve as the basis on which the seeds of delusions prevail. So when we refer to our own mental and physical aggregates we can understand how they are actually in the nature of suffering.

It is good for our practice if we use the summarised explanation of all-pervasive compounded suffering to really contemplate the fact that, for as long as we are under the influence of delusions and karma, we are bound to acquire the contaminated aggregates, which are the basis for the delusions. In summary, for as long as we are under the influence of delusions and karma we are bound to experience sufferings, over and over again. Contemplating in that way helps us to generate a real

sense of renunciation, a real wish to overcome this conditioning.

When we understand the meaning of all-pervasive compounded suffering and relate it to our own conditioning it should really instil the genuine thought: 'Unless and until I overcome the contaminated aggregates within myself, there is no way that I can be free from samsara'. That is precisely what the teachings explain: without developing a disgust or a distaste towards the all-pervasive compounded suffering, one can never generate a genuine sense of renunciation.

Assertion: Although the body is impermanent it is pleasurable

Answer: This is not so.

The impermanent is definitely harmed.

50

What is harmed is not pleasurable.

*Therefore all that is impermanent
Is said to be suffering.*

This again relates to a pleasure that is perceived as real pleasure.

Whatever is impermanent, like the body which is a maturation of contaminated past actions and disturbing emotions...

Our contaminated body and our contaminated state of mind are said to be the maturation of contaminated past actions and disturbing emotions. This,

...is definitely damaged by factors causing disintegration, and therefore produces aversion. Anything affected by causes of harm, whose character is to produce aversion, is not pleasurable.

As mentioned earlier, our very physical aggregates are in this situation because they are impermanent. This, in itself, is a cause of the sufferings that are experienced, so our aggregates are not pleasurable.

Therefore all that is impermanent and contaminated is said to be suffering....

This explanation relates exactly to the teaching on The Four Seals that the Buddha gave in the Sutras, which is said to be the essential basis for all the Buddhist schools.

- All compounded phenomena are impermanent
- The contaminated aggregates are in the nature of suffering
- All phenomena are empty and selfless
- Nirvana is peace

We can relate the **first two seals** to our own conditioning. Because our physical aggregates are compounded phenomenon they are impermanent, and as mentioned in this commentary, being impermanent means that they are vulnerable or subject to harm. Therefore the conclusion is, all contaminated aggregates are in the nature of suffering. So in addition to being impermanent our contaminated aggregates are in the nature of suffering.

The **second two seals** relate to what we call the means of overcoming such a conditioned state, through the realisation of emptiness and selflessness, and thus achieving the state of peace of nirvana.

The analogy given in the commentary is that whatever falls into a salt pit will eventually become very salty. Likewise, since our contaminated body is in the nature of suffering, whatever is experienced with it will also be an experience of suffering.

2. Summarising the purpose of this chapter

This has three sub-divisions

- 2.1. The actual purpose
- 2.2. Showing that real pleasure does not exist
- 2.3. Eliminating others criticisms

2.1. The actual purpose

Having aroused in trainees aversion to cyclic existence, the author Aryadeva quotes sutra saying that birth is suffering, to bring them to enlightenment. Also in the treatises of knowledge the Teacher says that the five contaminated aggregates are suffering.

They are suffering, its sources, the world,
The basis of views and also existence

This quote presents the categories that are in the nature of suffering, and they are: the sources of suffering i.e. karma & delusions, the world or environment, the basis of views, and samsaric existence itself.

The **five contaminated aggregates** were explained earlier: they are the aggregate of form, the aggregate of feeling, the aggregate of discrimination, the aggregate of compositional factors, and the aggregate of consciousness. Quoting from another text, the reason why the five aggregates are in the nature of suffering is because they are intertwined with the three types of sufferings, and they do not accord with the Aryas. There is not a single contaminated aggregate that is not intertwined with one of the three types of sufferings.

To explain the actual quote:

The five contaminated aggregates are in the nature of suffering because they are intertwined with suffering. We can also relate this to our bodies; no matter how much we take care of our aggregates, we find that all our suffering arises because of them. When we think about it, there are so many different types of suffering that arise on the basis of just our bodies. We hear about so many different types of diseases, some which even doctors can't identify.

The Tibetan word for what we call the **world** or the environment is *jig ten*. The Tibetan word *jig* has the connotation of change, which refers to momentary changes and changes due to opposing forces, *ten* means base, so the basis of all momentary changes is the world.

The **basis of views** refers to all the views that bind us to cyclic existence such as the view of the transitory collections and so forth.

Last is samsaric **existence**. The Tibetan word for samsaric existence is *se pa*, which has the connotation of a continuation, of being born again and again with suffering. Therefore it refers to ordinary beings existing in samsara.

The commentary says that even though the quotes are found in Vasubhandu's *Treasury of Knowledge* they are actually direct quotes from the sutras. The next quotes are:

Whatever without exception has any of
The three kinds of suffering, is thus suffering

Here **whatever** refers to whatever is intertwined with the three types of suffering.

The next quote is also from the *Treasury of Knowledge*, and is a direct quote from a sutra:

The attractive, the unattractive and
All else that is contaminated...

From an attractive object, one experiences a feeling of pleasure, which is the suffering of change. From an unattractive object, one experiences a feeling of pain, which is the suffering of suffering. From all else that is contaminated, one experiences the all-pervasive compounded suffering. Thus these lines refer to the way in which the three types of sufferings are experienced by all level of beings in samsara.

Having developed attachment towards an attractive object one experiences a sense of pleasure. Even though the feeling of pleasure is initially experienced, it is not real pleasure, but it is contaminated pleasure, and so it is actually in the nature of suffering.

Of the three types of suffering, the **suffering of change** is when an initial pleasurable feeling turns into an unpleasant experience and then one experiences pain. **The suffering of suffering**, is the actual pain one experiences in relation to an uncomfortable feeling. That which serves as a basis for experiencing either pleasure or pain is the contaminated aggregates, which identifies the third type of suffering, the **all-pervasive compounded suffering**.

In relation to **attractive objects**, one experiences the pleasure derived from attractive objects, but because it changes into an unpleasant experience later on, it is what we call in the nature of suffering. Because it transforms into an actual pain that is an indication that it is actually in the nature of suffering. Even the pleasure we experience is actually in the nature of suffering, and because it has what we call the nature of changing it is contaminated. So within the object itself and the experience of the object there is also underlying basis of what is called the all-pervasive compounded suffering. So when analysed further, on both an obvious and at deeper levels, attractive and unattractive objects all have a combination of all three types of sufferings.

Unattractive objects are contaminated and therefore they are in the nature of suffering. Because the immediate experience one has is an unpleasant sensation, it is experienced as suffering, and it is clear from the very first moment that this experience is one of suffering. Therefore it is in the nature of suffering, and also what we call contaminated and compounded. Therefore it has the basis of all-pervasive compounded suffering.

The last line of the quote, 'All else that is **contaminated**' refers to everything else that is compounded. Of the four

seals this refers to the second seal, (which is that all compounded phenomena are in the nature of suffering). Here, 'All else that is contaminated', refers to the all other existences that are contaminated compounded phenomenon, and in the nature of suffering. The reason is because it is produced through the influence of delusions and karma, and does not accord with the Aryas. Therefore it is in the nature of suffering.

'All else' also can be related, in principle, to all of the samsaric realms. We can refer to the individual realms in samsara and how all of the three types of sufferings are experienced in all six realms. More specifically:

- In the **desire realms** it is said that the experience of all three types of sufferings, the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and all-pervasive compounded suffering, are prevalent.
- From **below the third concentration in the form realms** there is no suffering of pain, but there is the suffering of change and all-pervasive compounded suffering.
- From the **fourth concentration and above in the formless realms**, the first two types of sufferings are not experienced, so the only suffering prevalent is the all-pervasive compounded suffering.

The author Aryadeva explains the faults of cyclic existence, establishing the intended meaning of these statements to bring those who are afraid and desire liberation into the Great Vehicle.

From our own experience, when we hear the faults of samsara, and when we realise the subtleties of the sufferings in cyclic existence, and what brings about rebirth in cyclic existence, we become really focussed and develop a sense of urgency about the situation. Those who have fear and a desire to be free of such conditions may have a tendency of wishing just to be free themselves. Here, however, the intention of the author Aryadeva is to bring those who have that fear and a wish to be liberated, into the Greater Vehicle, i.e. the Mahayana path. The intention is not to bring such trainees to the goal of achieving mere liberation, but to actually lead them to full enlightenment. That is the real intention behind Aryadeva's explanation.

Moreover the Teacher said, 'Monks, while you have been circling in cyclic existence there is no one who has not been in position of your father, mother and so forth'.

Again, this is indicating the need to develop the wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all beings, by generating the awareness of how all beings have been kind to us at one time or another. Realising this, just as bodhisattvas willingly make sacrifices to rescue sentient beings from cyclic existence in the ship of the Great Vehicle, the author of the treatise shows extensively in the first four chapters how to generate the aspiring altruistic attitude, i.e. aspiring bodhicitta, intent on highest enlightenment, by explaining the faults of cyclic existence.

2.2. *Showing that real pleasure does not exist*

As the commentary reads:

According to the protector Nagarjuna, who asserts that phenomena do not even have an atom of inherent existence, there is real suffering but not the least real contaminated pleasure.

If there were, it would entail many errors, as was explained earlier.

Therefore, as already explained, the pleasure of alleviated suffering, meaning the arising of a feeling of satisfaction when suffering is somewhat weaker, is posited as pleasure.

This was also explained earlier in detail; in worldly terms what is called pleasure is nothing but a state of alleviation of an earlier intense pain. So an earlier intense pain being alleviated is perceived as pleasure, but in fact it is not real pleasure.

2.3. *Eliminating others criticisms*

The criticism refers to the debates between Master Vasubandhu and Master Aryadeva.

The actual question asked of Aryadeva by Vasubandhu is,

The one who denies the existence of pleasure should be asked this...

The question refers to Aryadeva's assertion that there is real suffering but there are no real contaminated pleasures.

He presents us numerous parallel reasons for either the existence or non existence of both real pleasure and real suffering, the need to accept the true existence of functional things being a forgone conclusion in that system. With regard to this the author of the commentary Chandrakirti states numerous refutations here.

A lot of these refutations were explained earlier in the chapter. According to Vasubandhu, the forgone conclusion is that there is true or inherent existence. He concludes that because compounded phenomena exist they have a true and real existence.

Chandrakirti's refutations include:

If pleasurable feelings existed inherently it would be senseless for them to rise again. Moreover if collected effects existed as truly functional things, they would not need to be produced by causes, and if collective effects existed truly as functional things they would not need to be produced by causes.

This sort of explanation has been given earlier. If things were to have inherent existence then there would be no need for causes to produce them again, because inherent existence connotes a permanent existence. The explanation of how these questions are refuted by Aryadeva should be quite clear, as they were also presented in Chapter 1.

Furthermore there is also *The King of Meditative Stabilisation Sutra* which reads as follows:

A person who is tormented by thirst
In summer at noon - that transmigrator
Sees mirages as a body of water.
Understand all phenomena are like this
Although a mirage contains no water,
Confused sentient beings want to drink it.
Unreal water cannot be drunk;
Understand all phenomena are like this.

The analogy in the sutra is of a person, tormented by thirst in summer at noon, who sees a mirage as a body of water. It shows how, under certain conditions, a person may see water when water does not actually exist at all, and be totally convinced they are seeing water, and so develop attachment and a longing to drink the water and so forth. Although there is no water at all the conviction is still very strong.

'Understand that all phenomena are like this', refers to the fact that although phenomena don't inherently exist, beings in cyclic existence, who don't have an understanding of the lack of inherent existence, perceive things as being inherently existent, and they totally believe in the appearance of inherent existence and phenomena.

In the second verse of the quote 'all phenomena' refers to existence in general. With reference to our own existence it refers to the five contaminated aggregates. When we view the five contaminated aggregates within ourselves it appears, of course, that they exist nominally, and are in the nature of being impermanent. However they do not exist inherently. Even though they do not exist inherently, ordinary beings perceive the contaminated mind and body as being inherently existent. From that misperception all the rest of the assumptions that cause attachments and aversions to arise. It is mentioned here that all phenomena are like the analogy of the mirage in a sense that even though they appear to be truly and inherently existent, in reality they do not exist like that at all.

The chapter concludes with its name.

This is the second chapter of the Four Hundred on the Yogic Deeds showing the means to abandon belief in pleasure.

CHAPTER 3 EXPLAINING THE MEANS TO ABANDON ERRONEOUS BELIEF IN CLEANNESS BY CONSIDERING THE UNCLEAN NATURE OF CYCLIC EXISTENCE

Now we come to the third chapter. The Tibetan word *rap che*, which refers to the different parts to the text, and sometimes the word *liu*, is used. In English this is translated as chapters.

Having explained the five contaminated aggregates as being impermanent, and being in the nature of suffering, this chapter is an explanation of the means to abandon the erroneous belief in the cleanness of the physical contaminated body.

It is presented under two main headings:

1. Presenting the material in the chapter
2. Summarising the purpose of the chapter

1. Presenting the material in the chapter

- 1.1. Refuting that pleasure is experienced through satisfaction from savouring attractive objects
- 1.2. Explaining extensively why it is appropriate to consider the body clean
- 1.3. Refuting the idea of cleanness because of wearing perfumes and so forth
- 1.4. Refuting the idea that anything towards which freedom from desire may arise is clean
- 1.5. Nominally all four non-erroneous features are possible with regard to one thing

1.1. Refuting that pleasure is experienced through satisfaction from savouring attractive objects

This has two sub headings:

- 1.1.1. Refuting satisfaction through completely the enjoying the objects one craves
- 1.1.2. An analogy [showing how] rather than becoming free from desire, it increases in proportion to use of the things one craves

We will go into the text next session.

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

© **Tara Institute**

Verses and text from *Yogic Deeds of Bodhisattvas* used with permission of Snow Lion Publications.