
Study Group – Aryadeva’s 400 Verses

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Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual let us sit in an upright, comfortable position, and set our motivation, such as, ‘In order to benefit all sentient beings, and to liberate them from suffering, I need to achieve enlightenment. Therefore I will listen to the teachings and try to put them into practice as much as I can’.

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

We have come to the third chapter in the text, which has two sub-headings

1. Presenting the material in the chapter
2. Explaining the name of the chapter

1. Presenting the material in the chapter

This is subdivided into five, which we listed last week.

It is good to develop an understanding from the heading itself, so that one understands what is presented under that heading.

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

That is subdivided into two:

- 1.1.1. Refuting satisfaction through completely 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

As mentioned previously, the material so far has mainly been advice about the methods of developing renunciation. Therefore the main content of the first chapter was how the five aggregates are in the nature of being impermanent. The second chapter dealt mainly with how the five aggregates are in the nature of suffering. In this third chapter, the primary content is about the uncleanness of the physical aggregate, which is the body.

1.1.1. Refuting satisfaction through completely enjoying the objects one craves

Doubt or assertion:

Though the body’s nature is suffering, it gains pleasure from satisfaction through the experience of attractive objects. Thus the use of such objects is appropriate.

Answer:

**Regardless of the amount of time,
Concerning objects there is no limit.**

***Your exertion for the body’s sake
Is, like a bad physician’s, useless.***

Even if one accepts that the body’s nature is suffering, one may still have the doubt in one’s mind that since one gains pleasure and satisfaction from external objects of desire, it is therefore acceptable to engage with such objects of desire. The above verse is presented in order to eliminate that doubt.

Having enjoyed things fully during one’s youth and then amassed wealth, it does not follow that one will later turn to religious practices when free from attachment to such things.

It is really true that we assume that if we have spent sufficient time in acquiring wealth and engaging in pleasures when we are young, then later on, when we get to a certain age, we will have more time and leisure to practise the Dharma. In that way, one may procrastinate about one’s practice. This advice is given for those who have this type of mentality.

One should contemplate the advice given in the text. Does it apply to oneself or not? Is it true of oneself or not? When we contemplate in such a way and see that there is some truth there, then it is said that we are personalising the advice given in the teachings, and that we are making the teachings our own personal advice. In that way, it helps the mind to really start to overcome such wrong conceptions and become more encouraged about practising the Dharma more purely. A real sense of Dharma mind will develop from contemplating these points over and over again, and then personalising them.

The notion that one could enjoy the sensual pleasures now and practise Dharma later is a totally wrong conception. If there was a predictable order in life then during one’s youth one could enjoy life and indulge in the sensual pleasures, during the middle part of one’s life one would accumulate wealth, and towards the end of one’s life, one would have time to practise Dharma. If that was the predictable normal sequence of life, then maybe we could be quite happy. We could follow that order, thinking that it’s appropriate to enjoy oneself in the beginning and accumulate wealth and so forth in the middle, and then one will have time to practise the Dharma later on. But that is not the case, because, of course, there is no such predictable order.

Regardless of the amount of time spent, be it aeons, one will not come to an end of the objects one craves by reaching their limit, for there is none.

The analogy given to explain this is:

Though a bad physician who is incapable of healing gives treatment, his efforts are fruitless. Your exertion to satisfy the body with pleasure is similarly fruitless.

The analogy is very explicit: if a physician does not have the knowledge and skill, then no matter how long he or she may treat the patient, there will be no cure, because he does not have the right technique or skills. Likewise, no matter how much time one tries to enjoy pleasures, there is no end to that enjoyment. Therefore, spending one’s time and effort in trying to satisfy the body with

pleasures will be fruitless, as there is no real satisfying end-result in trying to please one's physical body.

A further analogy is that a monkey wearing a leopard skin is a source of constant anxiety to other monkeys. If a leopard skin was to be put over one monkey, then all the other monkeys will always be in a state of anxiety, because they mistake that monkey for a leopard. It is not the case that the monkeys will be afraid for a certain time and then they will get over it. The meaning of the analogy is that no matter how long we may indulge ourselves in worldly pleasures, there is no real satisfaction to be derived from that.

1.1.2. An analogy [showing how] rather than becoming free from desire, it increases in proportion to use of the things one craves

Assertion: Those who are satisfied by sensual pleasure will not crave things.

Answer:

**Just as the craving for earth
Does not stop in those that subsist on it,
Similarly, longing for sensual pleasure
Grows in people as they indulge.** 52

The doubt is that if one was to partake of sensual pleasures, then after a certain point one's needs would be satisfied. To overcome such a doubt, it is explained that there is no point where one could say that one was content, and had no need to indulge anymore. In fact indulgence just increases the desires even more.

The analogy presented in the verse is that an earthworm never stops craving the earth on which it subsists. According to some ways of looking at it, the earth can be seen as something very bland, and nothing very special – it is just the earth. However, earthworms, who dwell in the earth and consume substances from the it, crave and survive on the earth. Even though earth is something that has no real value in itself, an earthworm who depends on it begins to really crave and continuously partake of the substances in it. At no point does the earthworm feel satisfied and think that it needs nothing more from the earth. That is how an earthworm dwelling in the earth survives. The main point of the analogy is that even though the earth is seen to be one of the lowest dwelling places, for an earthworm it is their haven, which they see as being pleasurable; they partake of the essence of the substances that they derive from the earth, and they are never satisfied with that.

Similarly human beings indulging in the things they crave are not only dissatisfied by them, their longing for sensual pleasure keeps growing.

This is very true for humans who only indulge in the sensual pleasures. There is no real point where we can say that we are satisfied. Rather than becoming satisfied, the desire for the objects of one's pleasures just increases in proportion. They are like deer tormented by thirst. This analogy particularly relates to deer on a very hot summer day. From a distance they see a mirage where they think there is water. Even though they move towards the source of that mirage with the intention of

quenching their thirst, their thirst will never be quenched, because in fact there is no water there to begin with.

In his commentary Chandrakirti gave more examples such as sleep, and sexual desire, as well as looking in a mirror. These are said to be yet further examples of where there is no real satisfaction; the more you engage in them, the more you want to experience them again. It never seems that we have enough sleep, and we are never satisfied. In the evening we have to go to sleep again and if we sleep in, we would like to sleep in longer. Lust and desire are said to be similar. There is no real end to engaging in sexual desire; it is said that one will never be satisfied. There will be no point where one says, 'That is sufficient'. Likewise with looking into the mirror; one has to keep looking again and again. These other examples show how one's desires can never be satisfied.

1.2. Explaining extensively why it is inappropriate to consider the body clean

This is subdivided in two:

- 1.2.1. Refuting desire for women's bodies
- 1.2.2. Refuting desire while seeing the body as unclean

1.2.1. Refuting desire for women's bodies

This is subdivided into six:

- 1.2.1.1. Inappropriateness of desire towards a woman's beautiful appearance
- 1.2.1.2. Inappropriateness of desire based on the difficulty of finding [one with] a beautiful appearance
- 1.2.1.3. Refuting desire for a woman with good qualities
- 1.2.1.4. Inappropriateness of desire for a woman exceptionally attached to one
- 1.2.1.5. Advice to associate with women given in social treatises is erroneous
- 1.2.1.6. Other reasons for the inappropriateness of desire for women

1.2.1.1. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF DESIRE TOWARDS A WOMAN'S BEAUTIFUL APPEARANCE

This is subdivided into two:

- 1.2.1.1.1. Reasons for the inappropriateness of desire for a woman's beautiful appearance
- 1.2.1.1.2. Desire is not necessarily caused only by a beautiful appearance

1.2.1.1.1. Reasons for the inappropriateness of desire for a woman's beautiful appearance

Assertion or doubt: Even if pointing out the above mentioned disadvantages can stop one desiring ordinary women, it cannot stop desire for women whose appearance and behaviour are exceptionally beautiful.

Answer:

**Among all women there is not the least
Difference in sexual intercourse. 53
When others, too, enjoy her appearance,
What use is this perfect woman to you?**

Many might find this to be true when they look into their own situation.

As these verses are presented, one should not misinterpret them by thinking, 'Oh, it seems that they are talking a lot about the faults of women'. In fact, as

mentioned earlier, the main fault that is being dealt with here in this chapter is the uncleanliness of the body. Although a woman's body is explicitly mentioned here, it also relates, of course, to a man's body. Both a man's and a woman's body are equal in the nature of being unclean, meaning that there are many faults in relation to the body. Nevertheless, even though, for example, a man's body is unclean, a woman is still attached to it. Likewise, even though a woman's body is unclean, men feel attached to it.

The main point being made here is that in both cases sexual desire or attachment towards the opposite sex can be overcome by seeing the uncleanliness of the body. The first three chapters are specifically to overcome the erroneous views that we have in relation to the five contaminated aggregates and specifically the physical aggregate. One erroneous view is that the physical aggregate – the body – is permanent. To overcome that erroneous view of permanence the first chapter explained how the body is in the nature of being impermanent. The next erroneous view one has in relation to the body is that it is a source of pleasure. To overcome that erroneous view, the second chapter deals mainly with how the body is not pleasurable, but is in the nature of dissatisfaction, or suffering. The third erroneous view to overcome is that of the body being pure and clean. That erroneous view is overcome by explaining the natural uncleanliness of the body; how the body is not as pure and clean as one may think it is. These erroneous views arise from specific delusions in the mind.

I wonder whether one of the reasons why a woman's body is explicitly used here with reference to attachment is because male attachment is much stronger. So in order to deal with male attachment more directly, a woman's body is specifically mentioned. I wonder if it is the case that males have more sudden spurts of attachment, which seem to be stronger, and to arise quickly and immediately, whereas a woman may not have that immediate sexual desire arising, but then it may be a case that when it does arise, it may be slower to subside. *[Geshe-la laughs]* I'm not sure if that is the case or not. *[laughter]* Those of you who have experience may know whether this is true or not. That is just my guess, as I don't have much experience! *[laughter]*

In normal circumstances a man may pretend he doesn't have much attachment. He might think that with normal women it is easy not to feel too attached. But then the doubt may arise, 'When a very, very beautiful woman really appears in front of me, then I may not be able to overcome my attachment; maybe it's not possible?' What is being pointed out here is that it is possible to overcome these sexual desires.

Chandrakirti actually uses a specific example of someone having a really excessive attachment towards a beautiful woman, to the point where it is like putting butter on a hot plate – it just completely melts. With such attachment one's heart completely merges into the object that one sees, like butter melting, and you feel one with that object. One's inner mind is completely immersed in the object of one's desire. In that sort of circumstance, where

one sees the object as extremely beautiful, appealing and attractive in every way, then it may seem to be almost impossible to distance yourself from that object, in one's thoughts and every other way. What Chandrakirti says is that even in cases like that, it is still possible to overcome attachment. The objection that is raised to which this verse serves as an answer is:

Even if pointing out the above mentioned disadvantages can stop one desiring ordinary women, it cannot stop desire for women whose appearance and behaviour are exceptionally beautiful.

The verse answers that objection, saying that even though the woman appears to be very beautiful and the behaviour very appealing, it is still possible to overcome that lust for the woman's body.

As the commentary mentions:

What use is this perfect woman with her beautiful appearance and behaviour to you who lust for a woman's body. It is inappropriate to feel particularly attracted to her, since the unclean part of all women stinks and constantly drips of its own accord. It is a sewer for the body's filth, and like a lavatory readily receives the filth emptied into it by many people.

Again, this applies to both male and female bodies, even though the body itself isn't the object of attachment. When we investigate and analyse what the body is made up of, and particularly what goes in and comes out of the body, we can see that it is actually not really of a clean nature. It is very true that, as the commentary mentions, the body is like a lavatory, because no matter how delicious food may seem, taste and smell, no matter how beautiful it looks, as soon as it has been chewed in your mouth and goes down into your belly, then it starts to ferment, and from then on it becomes an unpleasant substance. It turns into excrement, which is true in both male and female bodies. What comes out is definitely very unpleasant; it doesn't have a pleasant colour, and it doesn't smell nice. In a way, our bodies are a mechanism that is like a walking lavatory. What comes out is definitely something that we do not appreciate. How could a body that produces such an unclean substance be clean itself?

Except to erroneous perception, there is not the least difference of good or bad regarding the sensation of intercourse with this cesspit-like dark filth. Since a woman's appearance may also be enjoyed by other men and even dogs, crows and so forth, it is unreasonable to feel particularly attracted by beauty.

In relation to the earlier assertion that one cannot overcome attachment to a body with an exceptionally beautiful appearance: in reality no matter how beautiful a body may appear, the nature of the body is no different from any other body, which is that it is unclean. Therefore being attached to such a body is like being completely obsessed with a filthy substance. It is just erroneous perceptions that make one believe that it is beautiful or attractive and so forth, which generates

attachment. The analogy that is given relates to a particular incident where:

An unattractive woman's husband told her she was ugly-looking. She replied that ugly or good-looking, when it came to sexual intercourse there was no difference.

There are also further analogies that are found in Chandrakirti's commentary: the wife puts peas in different bowls and presents them to the husband. When the husband looks in astonishment, saying, 'Why do you have the same sort of food in different bowls?', the woman replies, 'Well there is no difference is there?'. Similarly, intercourse with any woman is the same. No matter how they may appear, they are all the same.

1.2.1.1.2. Desire is not necessarily caused only by a beautiful appearance

Doubt: For what reason does it follow that an unintelligent and misguided person like you will only be attracted to someone beautiful?

Answer:

Whoever sees her as appealing 54
Thinks himself satisfied with her.
Since even dogs and the like share this,
Why, fool, are you attracted?

The verse says that desires will also arise for ugly women. In answer to the objection or doubt that one would be attracted only to a beautiful or women, the verse indicates that actually that is not the case, because whatever object that one is attracted to will be an object of one's desire. Therefore:

Just as grandma appeals to grandpa, any man who finds a woman attractive feels satisfied with her. Even dogs, crows and the like share this desire for their own mates.

So no matter how unattractive an object may seem to us, there will be others who will be attracted to that object. For example, a male donkey will be attracted a she-donkey and vice versa; it will be the same with dogs too. It is the same in each category, whether animal or human. There will be a desire for an object that one finds attractive, regardless of whether or not the object can be considered as being beautiful in general.

There is also the analogy that is presented in the commentary. This is a story about how two particular evil spirits were prejudiced about the attractiveness of their wives. They were arguing about whose wife was more attractive, so they approached a monk and asked him to be the judge. In answer to their question the monk just said, 'The one you find most attractive is the best looking'. He didn't say that one was better than the other, but he just said that the one that you find most attractive to you is the best looking.

1.2.1.2. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF DESIRE BASED ON THE DIFFICULTY OF FINDING [ONE WITH] A BEAUTIFUL APPEARANCE

Assertion: A captivating woman is hard to find and since finding one is remarkable, it is reasonable to desire her.

This doubt may arise when one feels that one has come into contact with a very beautiful woman, which is very

difficult to find, as it is so rare, it seems appropriate to have a strong attachment towards her.

Answer:

This woman, every part of whom is 55
Lovely to you, was common to all before.
Finding her is not as
Astonishing as it is for you.

This verse particularly relates to the object of desire being extremely attractive. In such a case one may not only feel that such a beautiful and attractive woman is rare and hard to find, but others may encourage and influence you to think in that way. They may even say that you are extremely lucky to have such a beautiful woman, and she should be your partner. One may then feel astonished, thinking, 'How could I have met with such a beautiful object? It is such a rare opportunity, and such a rare thing'. In that way the desire towards the object increases rather than decreasing.

The answer that the verse presents is that is not so.

When this woman, every part of whom seems lovely to you, was common to all before she met you, how can finding what is common to all astonish you? It is absurd.

As the commentary explains, there is no such thing as a woman or a man that particularly and exceptionally belongs only to you. It would be uncommon if it specifically belonged only to you. In this case, there is no such man or woman who can be said to be uncommon, someone to whom no one can have access to or befriend. There are no such objects like that. Therefore it is just an absurdity to think that only you have a very beautiful, exceptionally attractive woman belonging to you. There is nothing astonishing about that, just as there is nothing remarkable about being in contact with something that is common.

The analogy that is given in the commentary is that, 'It is like King Udayana's amazement at his discovery of a woman who was common property'. Apparently King Udayana had come into contact with a woman with whom he was astonished and amazed, thinking that he had found something remarkable and very uncommon. But in fact, the woman was already common property, to parents and friends and others and so forth. Even though the king thought he had found something remarkably uncommon, that was not the case. Similarly, in your case, your view of attractive objects would be the same. That is what is being indicated.

1.2.1.3. REFUTING DESIRE FOR A WOMAN WITH GOOD QUALITIES

We will cover this heading in the next session.

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Edited Version

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