
Study Group – Aryadeva's 400 Verses

༄༅། །བསྒྲུབ་ཅོམ་བཞི་བརྒྱ་པའི་སྐྱེ་བའི་ཚོམ་ལེན་རྒྱལ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

22 August 2006

As usual we shall sit in a comfortable upright position in a relaxed manner, and develop a motivation for receiving the teachings, such as, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment, and for that purpose I will listen to the Dharma and then put it into practice as best as I can'.

1.2.1.5. ADVICE TO ASSOCIATE WITH WOMEN GIVEN IN SOCIAL TREATISES IS ERRONEOUS

Assertion or doubt:

Texts on social conventions recommend indulgence in sensual pleasures during youth; thus it is acceptable.

Answer:

It is inappropriate to act according to conventions which encourage one and others to act improperly.

In old age one dislikes [59]
What one did during youth.
Why would the liberated not
Be extremely saddened by it?

The heading refers to the social treatises that are the works used in social contexts about the benefits of engaging in a sexual relationship and the qualities of women and so forth. These treatises encourage the need for relationships and so forth. So, is it appropriate to follow those social treatises that suggest having sexual relationships and so forth? The answer, which this verse relates to, is that it is not appropriate.

Although these conventions encourage people to act improperly it is inappropriate to follow that advice. As the commentary says:

If the passionate, in their old age, despite not having achieved freedom from desire, dislike the mere memory of the bad things they did during their youth why would liberated Foe Destroyers not be extremely saddened...

Generally speaking, when some people reach old age they are actually saddened when they think about their youth and the things they did then, especially the various sexual relationships that they had during their youth. This is the case even for those who have not entirely abandoned or overcome desire. The mere memories of their engagement in social relationships in their youth bring sadness and regret to their mind. When they think about it, that brings about suffering.

... why would liberated Foe Destroyers not be extremely saddened by and deprecate lascivious behaviour? Since they see it as utterly reprehensible and a source of aversion, those interested in their own good should give it up.

As the commentary suggests, the explanation of the verse

is that the liberated, meaning the Foe Destroyers, will definitely then see it as being something to be avoided.

The main point being made here is that if attachment and desire, specifically sexual desire, were to be something to be adopted because they were useful, then having engaged in excessive sexual relationships or desire in one's youth would bring about deep satisfaction and be a source of joy and pride. But as mentioned here in the commentary, the main point being made in the root text is that this is not the case. Rather it is the reverse: when in old age people think about their earlier engagements and sexual behaviour, then it brings sadness to the mind. This is a natural occurrence even for those who have not purposely given up or abandoned desire. So that is an obvious reason why desire is not something to be cultivated and nurtured, but rather is something to be abandoned. The liberated or the Foe Destroyers, have abandoned desire and continuously see it as being something to be completely abandoned for one's ultimate benefit.

The practical application of this advice in a personal sense, would be that even though it may be initially difficult to completely abandon and give up sexual desire, it is nevertheless something that one should try to minimise and try to slowly overcome by not giving it full attention. By seeing the disadvantages of desire, slowly work on reducing the lustful mind and intentions in your mind. Then in old age, as a result of having put in some earlier effort into seeing the faults and minimising one's engagement in sexual desire and so forth, there will be joy in one's mind. Even a mere attempt at trying to overcome desire will bring joy to one's mind.

1.2.1.6. OTHER REASONS FOR THE INAPPROPRIATENESS OF DESIRE FOR WOMEN

This is sub-divided into five categories:

- 1.2.1.6.1. Unfeasibility of the pleasure from intercourse with women as the best pleasure in the Desire Realm
- 1.2.1.6.2. Unfeasibility of having exclusive control over a woman because of one's desire for her
- 1.2.1.6.3. Refuting that desire is pleasurable (This is not actually covered as a heading in Gyel-tsap's commentary)
- 1.2.1.6.4. Unfeasibility of women alone as the cause of pleasure during intercourse with them
- 1.2.1.6.5. Unfeasibility of the pleasure from women being desirable because the infatuated pursue them

1.2.1.6.1. Unfeasibility of the pleasure from intercourse with women as the best pleasure in the Desire Realm

Doubt or assertion:

Since pleasure in relation to women is the best pleasure in the Desire Realm, one should keep a woman for that purpose.

Answer: That is not correct.

Those without desire have no pleasure, [60]
Nor do those not foolish have it.
How can there be pleasure for one
Whose mind constantly strays?

The commentary's explanation of the verse is:

How can the pleasure of one who desires a woman and whose mind constantly strays from reality be the best? It is not the best.

What the text is asking here is how can the mind that does not see reality, that does not see things as they are, consider the pleasure gained from sexual pleasure as being the best pleasure? How can that be so, when the mind itself is not clear? The reason why it is not the best pleasure in samsara is that:

Those without desire for women do not have pleasure focusing on them. Moreover those who are sensible do not have desire.

What is being indicated here is that the pleasure that is experienced in relation to women is only for those who relate to women in that way. But in reality it is not a real source of pleasure. What is being indicated here specifically is the cause-and-effect relationship between desire or attachment to a woman, and the pleasure that is derived from that. The seeming pleasure that one experiences is only in relation to the attachment or desire that one has for the woman. Those who do not have the cause of attachment to a woman do not experience this seeming pleasure. Therefore the root text is basically showing the cause-and-effect relationship between attachment and the pleasure derived from that. The attachment itself arises only in those who are infatuated with desire - those who do not have sensible minds. Whereas for those who have sensible minds, attachment either does not arise, or they do not follow their attachment.

This analogy is given in the commentary:

A young man desired a king's queen and although he experienced suffering for a long time on her account, he was not able to accomplish what he wanted.

The analogy refers to an actual incident where a simple person became very attached to a queen and tried many ways to obtain her attention, such as trying to be taken on as a servant. To cut what is actually quite a long story short, despite all the attempts that he made he was not able to achieve what he wanted, which was to be with the queen. In fact while pursuing these attempts he experienced a lot of difficulty and a lot of suffering, and in the end what he experienced was great disappointment. What this story shows is that the result of attachment is actually much greater suffering than real pleasure.

If one experiences pleasure it is only momentary and fleeting. In fact the main outcome of being attached to external objects and seeing them as a source of satisfaction (as was the case with the simpleton and the queen) is in the end only suffering. So we can see that when we focus on external objects, become attached to them, and try to pursue and obtain them, it actually just brings more misery and suffering. That is something which we can also relate to in many different situations.

The reality of the situation is contrary to what we assume. If obsessive attachment to external objects, whether they be actual objects or just thoughts and ideas,

was a source of joy and real pleasure, then we ordinary beings, rather than the Foe Destroyers or the Arhats, would be the ones who experience the most pleasure. But in fact, it is the Arhats, who have completely overcome and abandoned the attachment to external objects, who are the ones experiencing the most joy, true pleasure and real happiness.

1.2.1.6.2. Unfeasibility of having exclusive control over a woman because of one's desire for her

As the heading suggests the main point being made here refers to the erroneous view that we have of possessing an object of desire. For example, if a man has an obsessive desire for his spouse then he has a mind of complete control over her, 'She is mine and no-one else's but mine'. He has a mind set of completely owning his spouse. This is also the case for women with an obsessive desire for their husband.

Assertion or doubt:

Even if you make a woman your own, why keep her possessively out of jealousy toward other men with the thought that she is yours and no one else's? It is unreasonable to do so.

*You cannot have intercourse constantly [61]
With a woman to match your attentiveness to her.
Why keep her possessively with the thought,
"She is mine and no one else's."*

This is something which happens very often in normal relationships and daily life. It is definitely appropriate to think about this, to consider how the teachings deal with it, and how to combat these situations.

As the commentary reads:

You lustful person, you are not capable of constant sexual intercourse with a woman to match your attentiveness toward her in the hope of enjoyment.

This is quite clearly the explanation of the verse.

The main point being made here is that the greater the possessive attitude towards one's spouse, the greater the degree of attachment. This leads to jealousy arising in one's mind when one's partner seems to have even a casual relationship with others. Even just talking with another brings a lot of jealousy, and that is because of one's obsessive, possessive feeling towards the object, 'Its mine and no one else's but mine'. Even though we may not use those words, that's how we think, 'The object of my desire belongs only to myself'. That possessive feeling arises from very strong grasping at the object.

The next analogy given in the text indicates that jealousy does not arise when others interact with something to which we are not attached. Rather jealousy arises only in relation to an object that one has obsessive attachment towards. It is actually absurd when you think about it that the very object that one is obsessed with is not, in reality, at least not in practical terms, something that one is using all the time anyway. Yet even when one does not use it all the time, a sense of jealousy arises when others use it.

The analogy which is related in the commentary is:

An old Brahmin whose digestion was weak found a lot of good food. Though he was unable to eat it, he did not give it to anyone else but took still more.

This is an absurd situation of someone who has a lot of food they cannot possibly digest themselves. He has digestion problems to begin with, and he couldn't possibly consume all the food. While he could have shared it with others, he did not do so out of obsessive attachment to the food. In fact, he still wants to take more. A further example that is given is about a king who has a lot of queens, and who can not possibly have a relationship with all of them, yet he has a sense of possessing them all and keeps them in his palace.

1.2.1.6.3. Refuting that desire is pleasurable

In the Desire Realm it is conventionally accepted that having women is a source of happiness. However in reality, that is not the case. Even though it is conventionally accepted, it is inappropriate.

If desire were pleasurable [62]
There would be no need for women.
Pleasure is not regarded as
Something to get rid of.

As the commentary explains:

If desire were pleasurable one wouldn't need women as a means to quell it, for pleasure is not regarded as something of which to rid oneself.

When we consider the facts this is very true. If desire or attachment itself was pleasure, then one wouldn't need to try to satisfy it or try to overcome it. In other words in the case of a man desiring a woman, he would not need to have a woman to fulfil his desire, because the desire alone is pleasurable. What is being indicated here is that attachment or desire in itself is not something that is pleasurable. In layman's terms it means that if desire itself was pleasurable, then a man wouldn't have to rely on a woman because he would just be satisfied by having desire for her. Just the desire for the woman would be fine, because that in itself would be pleasure.

The analogy which is given in the commentary is:

A hungry man entered a house at night and saw a pot of ash, which he mistook for flour...

I think that the flour in Tibetan would be *tsampa* which is an instant food.

...and another of water. [Out of delusion about the contents] he mixed them together and ate. When his hunger was gone he realized it was ash. Feeling disgusted, he threw the remainder away and left.

The analogy actually goes further to say that he becomes quite unwell, and sick from the ash. So the moral of the story is that while under the influence of a delusional mind, in this case being completely overwhelmed by hunger, the person failed to recognise ash as being ash, and thought it was something edible. Also the time and circumstances didn't help the situation; in the dark, he thought there was something edible. So having consumed it, he was sick. Actually this analogy really fits the situation of desire towards any object, and particularly the case of sexual desire, in that it is only out

of delusion and the illusion of being a pleasurable object that one seems to experience some pleasure. But in reality what is left afterwards is an unpleasant feeling – more suffering. When we really contemplate the situation of sexual desire, we can see that it actually brings much more unpleasantness in the future as a result. Contemplating in this way should help us to minimise and eventually overcome sexual desire and indeed all desires.

1.2.1.6.4. Unfeasibility of women alone as the cause of pleasure during intercourse with them

Assertion or doubt: Pleasure occurs through intercourse with a woman.

Answer:

Even in intercourse with a woman [63]
Pleasure arises from other [factors].
What sensible person would say
It is caused just by his lover?

Who but a fool would say that his lover alone is the cause of pleasure during intercourse? The pleasure from intercourse is caused by other factors, namely by an incorrect mental approach.

The analogy which is given in the commentary is:

A simpleton's wife made him work and he enjoyed it.

What is being indicated with this analogy of a simpleton, is that only fools would think that all pleasure comes only from one's spouse. As the analogy indicates, the wife asked her husband to do a lot of errands for her, such as fetching wood, making a fire with it, then boiling water and then, 'You have to wash my body and serve me in various different ways'. In such a way the story describes the many errands and tasks the wife gave the man to do, which in reality were not pleasurable tasks. But as the man's mind was completely obsessed with his wife, he saw them as being pleasurable tasks, which he did willingly and without any hesitation, whereas normally he might not have considered them as being pleasant. His willingness was only because of his obsessiveness towards his wife. Only a fool would accept doing so many errands for a bossy and lazy wife. This also refers to a wife who serves a bossy and lazy husband.

Other commentaries indicate that the main point being made in relation to this verse is that the actual interaction with men and women – sexual desire that is experienced from sexual intercourse, for example - is not something that is in itself pleasure in its own right. There has to be attachment involved. Without attachment, the mere fact of having a sexual relationship would not be considered as a pleasure. Specific examples would be a celibate person, one who has taken vows to refrain from sexual activity, such as an ordained person who has taken vows because they are trying to overcome attachment. If they were forced to have a relationship with a woman (in the case of a man), it would not be experienced as pleasure. Rather it would be experienced as an unease in the mind; it would actually be considered as suffering. That is because the attachment is lacking. Without attachment, then it is not experienced as pleasure. Going back to the

earlier point: if the mere sexual contact with the other sex was in itself a pleasure, then anyone who experienced it would have to experience pleasure from that. However it is a fact that not everyone experiences it as pleasure.

1.2.1.6.5. Unfeasibility of the pleasure from women being desirable because the infatuated pursue them

Assertion:

Sensuality does give rise to real pleasure, because the infatuated seek sensual gratification again and again.

Answer:

They do not seek it because desire is pleasurable by nature

Blinded by desire they do not see [64]
Sensuality's faults, like a leper scratching.
Those free from desire see the infatuated
As suffering like the leper.

Like a leper who, because it gives a little pleasure, keeps scratching without seeing the harm it causes, like bleeding and oozing...

The first part of the verse is very obvious with this particular analogy of a leper who has sores on his body, which can apparently be very itchy. When the leper tries to soothe the itch by scratching the sores, the scratching gives a temporary satisfaction, but the actual result of the scratching is unpleasant when blood and puss start to ooze out. Nevertheless, he keeps scratching again and again, and it is impossible for him to control it, because of the intense desire to scratch. The itch is so strong that the desire overpowers the knowledge of the consequences.

Similarly,

...those whose eye of intelligence is blinded by desire, do not see sensuality's faults.

People seem to keep engaging in sensual activity again and again. I don't know what sort of real pleasure is experienced, but somehow people seem to get into relationships again and again.

The analogy given to describe it further is:

It is like gambling and drinking which cause one to waste one's property

This again is a very obvious problem in society: by engaging in gambling and drinking people may experience temporary pleasure, but they lose so much and this causes so much suffering afterwards. Yet they go on doing it. Engaging in drinking, for example, seems to really harm the physical body.

I think the particular point is that engaging in sexual desire again and again, is not beneficial for the health either. [laughter] It is explained in teachings that it is not beneficial for one's health, when one excessively engages in sexual intercourse. It is explained that by engaging in sexual intercourse, one loses one's seminal fluids, which actually is essence of strength in one's body.

1.2.2. Refuting desire while seeing the body as unclean

We can refer to this heading in our next class.

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

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