
Study Group – Aryadeva’s 400 Verses

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Sitting in an upright position we set our motivation for receiving the teachings, such as developing the state of mind where we think, ‘In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teachings in order to gain the means and methods to achieve enlightenment’.

Normally we talk a lot about the benefits of bodhicitta. We find that in almost every teaching the benefits of bodhicitta are explained in great detail. The significance of explaining bodhicitta in very great detail is so that we can put some of it into practical use, such as developing a bodhicitta motivation for whatever practice we do. Therefore, it is really beneficial to try to incorporate the bodhicitta attitude into our practice at the very outset, and in that way we can use it in a practical way that is of great significance and benefit to ourselves and others.

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

We covered this outline last week. The root verse explained that the person who is blinded by desire does not see the faults of sensuality. The verse indicated the analogy of lepers scratching their wounds: even though the scratching causes blood and pus to ooze out and the wounds become very sore, the lepers cannot control themselves and continuously scratch their bodies, which then causes more and more pain. Similarly, even when there is a lot of suffering that comes about as a result of desire, those infatuated by desire cannot stop their desire for objects.

As was explained with a further analogy last week, it is the same with gambling and drinking. With addiction to alcohol to the point where one’s health deteriorates and one loses one’s wealth and so forth, or with addiction to gambling to the point of losing one’s possessions, still they blindly carry on and comfortably indulge in their addiction. These are further examples of desire.

1.2.2. Refuting desire while seeing the body as unclean

This heading shows that if one does not see the body as being unclean then many faults arise. There are six subdivisions:

1.2.2.1. Refuting that a woman’s physical and verbal behaviour is pleasurable because with her one bears the gross insults that she inflicts

When we actually relate to this we find this is actually very true, in that it explicitly shows all the faults that arise from desire.

1.2.2.2. Refuting the existence of pleasure to women because of the jealousy felt over them towards other men

1.2.2.3. Inappropriateness of strong desire on realising that women’s bodies are unclean

1.2.2.4. Refuting that the body is not objectionable on the grounds that it is without shortcomings

1.2.2.5. Refuting the idea that women’s bodies are clean

1.2.2.6. Refuting other seeming reasons for considering the body clean

1.2.2.1. REFUTING THAT A WOMAN’S PHYSICAL AND VERBAL BEHAVIOUR ARE PLEASURABLE BECAUSE WHEN WITH HER ONE BEARS THE GROSS INSULTS THAT SHE INFLECTS

Assertion:

Though sensual pleasure is unclean, bearing insults from a woman, like being spat on, and responding with flattering physical and verbal behaviour is pleasurable for those that [are under the influence of] desire.

Answer: That is incorrect.

*During a famine the destitute,
Tormented by hunger [bear] what occurs.
This is how all the infatuated
Behave when they are with women.*

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To further illustrate the meaning, normally one would not bear such insults from anyone, but if under the influence of such strong desire for a woman one bears any kind of insult, even to the extent of physical pain. There are cases where being bound with chains, strapped up and beaten up is also experienced as pleasure. These sort of circumstances are nothing else but the desire that completely overwhelms the mind, to the extent that it perceives this as being pleasure. Normally, of course, it is not considered as pleasure at all, because it is actually pain, but in that moment it is perceived as pleasure. For someone who is infatuated by the desire, say for a woman, when she insults and uses disparaging words, then rather than becoming angry and upset with that, one tries to please them with nice words. To consider that sort of behaviour as being pleasurable is not correct.

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

During a famine the destitute, tormented by hunger, bear what occurs, such as being insulted even a hundred times by merciless rich men. In the hope that he will give them a trifle. Since the behaviour of the infatuated when they are with a woman is like that, it cannot be pleasurable.

When someone is really destitute and at the mercy of others, gaining some meagre food just for bare survival may mean bearing insults and the like. There is no choice but to bear those insults. It is similar with those who are infatuated with desire, as in the case of a man for a woman: there are times when they do not wish to be insulted and so forth, but they have to bear the insults because of their desire for the object.

As the commentary says, those who willingly accept the insults and hardships from an object of desire do so only

because the lust in their mind influences them in that way. There is no other reason.

The analogy is:

...like someone in prison who wanted to drink the liquid from cow dung.

Apparently when someone is in a destitute situation, such as being in prison, and neither fed well nor given drink, then in a state of complete weakness they may even be willing to drink liquefied cow dung, which would give them some sort of nourishment. Even though one would normally never consider drinking something like that, they are willing to do so in such a situation. The main point being made here is that this is inappropriate for anyone in their right mind. It is not feasible for anyone who can see the obvious uncleanliness of the body to be attached to it, and to indulge in that sort of desire for such an obviously unclean object.

As I mentioned earlier, and which is also explicitly mentioned towards the end of the chapter, although these examples explicitly refer to a woman's body it is exactly the same for women who are attached to a man's body; they should use the same analytical meditation procedure in exactly the same way.

1.2.2.2. REFUTING THE EXISTENCE OF PLEASURE TO WOMEN BECAUSE OF THE JEALOUSY FELT OVER THEM TOWARDS OTHER MEN

Assertion:

There is real pleasure from women because those who are attached to the pleasure from women are seen to be jealous of others.

Answer:

This does not establish the existence of real pleasure in relation to women.

*Through arrogance one may be
Attached even to one's privy,
Anyone infatuated with
A woman would be jealous of others.* 66

When we refer again to the earlier explanations of what is, and what is not, real pleasure the teachings are not denying that there is a seemingly pleasure that one experiences in relation to the objects of desire, in this case from sexual desire. What is being shown, however, is that in reality, there is no real pleasure, and for those who do not have attachment to the object, not even the fleeting pleasure is experienced. When this relates to the relationships between men and women, it is the same experience for both. The fact that there is no real pleasure from its own side can be seen with attachment, and particularly in the case where the attachment is exceedingly strong.

One seems to get some pleasure from the object, and that attachment is based on exaggerating the qualities of the object. There are instances where the exaggeration has to be really worked at. When you see a beautiful object you may not see it as being extremely beautiful in the beginning, but as you view the object and think about its qualities again and again, then the more one becomes familiar with the object and exaggerates its qualities, the

stronger and stronger the attachment to that object becomes. Then one seems to get some pleasure whilst being in the company of that object.

If we just follow the influence of the desires in our mind, which is to exaggerate the qualities of the object, then there would be no way of dealing with attachment, because one is completely under the influence of the desirous mind that keeps exaggerating the qualities more and more. We need to recognise that the only way to deal with desire, to initially minimise it, and then to eventually overcome it, is to analyse it in the way the teachings describe. There is no other way to combat desire except in this way.

The actual meaning of the verse is that just because others are jealous of the desirable object, that does not serve as a sound reason to say that there is real pleasure to be derived from the object of desire.

As the commentary explains:

A rich man who is arrogant because of his wealth may be possessive about his privy and forbid others to use it.

A toilet, especially in the Eastern context, is not considered to be a place to be proud of; it is not considered a clean place. However a rich person, who is proud of his wealth, may be very attached to his own toilet and be angry and jealous when others use it. In the Eastern context it is quite absurd to be very attached to such an unclean place such as a toilet. The main meaning from the analogy is that one could be attached to even lowly things such as a toilet, but that does not mean that just because one is attached to something it has to be very special, with a lot of qualities. One can be attached and jealously can arise even for such an unclean thing as a toilet. Although it is not specifically mentioned, this can also be the case for other things.

The main point is that a rich person, or anyone else, who is attached to the toilet, is attached not because it is a great object with qualities, but rather because of their miserliness and their attachment to objects.

The meaning is indicated in the next part of the commentary:

Anyone who is infatuated with a particular woman is seen to be baselessly jealous towards other men.

King Gambhirasikhara who was arrogant about his status would not allow a serving woman to drink water.

Out of his miserliness he even made his maids drink water from another source than his.

1.2.2.3. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF STRONG DESIRE ON REALISING THAT WOMEN'S BODIES ARE UNCLEAR

Assertion: Although women's bodies are unclean desire is reasonable because they are a source of pleasure. As mentioned before this applies equally to women's and men's bodies.

Answer: When one realises that they are unclean desire is inappropriate.

*It is reasonable for confusion
And anger about unclean to occur;
It is not at all reasonable
For desire to occur.*

67

would anyone sensible not consider the body from which this filth comes objectionable?

The doubt that even though it is accepted that by nature bodies are unclean, desire is reasonable, because bodies are a source of pleasure seems to be a very strong doubt.

As the commentary explains:

When one steps in excrement without noticing it, it is feasible that confusion could occur and that the offensive smell could give rise to anger. However it is not at all reasonable for incongruous desire to occur.

This is a very explicit example of stepping in some excrement because one did not see it in the first place, maybe because it was dark or just because one did not see it. Not seeing the excrement in the first place is the analogy of the ignorance in one's mind when one engages with the object of desire. The ignorance blinds one from the true nature of the object of desire, seeing it as being pleasurable. Stepping in excrement without having seen it means that out of ignorance one stepped on it, and then when the foul smell starts to rise that generates anger in one's mind. Feeling happy and pleasurable and attached to that experience is just totally unreasonable. That is the analogy that is being explained.

Similarly when attached to the physical body of the opposite sex (here it specifically mentions a man being attached to a woman) then out of ignorance one may initially feel desire for that object, and then become upset when it does not meet with one's actual satisfaction and provide pleasure. Blindly maintaining one's desire is not feasible at all, and the analogy is that it is like stepping in excrement at night.

1.2.2.4. REFUTING THAT THE BODY IS NOT OBJECTIONABLE ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT IS WITHOUT SHORTCOMINGS

Assertion:

Though the body is unclean it is not considered to be objectionable because conventionally it is without shortcomings. In some areas there is a common saying that 'Brahmins are purer than others and women are purest of all'.

Answer: That this is not correct.

*If, accepted to some people,
A pot of filth is objectionable,
Why would one not think objectionable
That from which the filth comes?*

68

Of course this is in a setting where the caste system was at its strongest. Within the caste system in India Brahmins are said to be the highest caste, and they are considered to be the pure caste. Conventionally there are sayings where Brahmins are purer than others meaning other castes, but women are the purest of all, meaning that women are very pure. So there is this very high regard in the conventional sense, which relates of course to the physical body. That is not correct.

The meaning of the verse is:

When all except people not in their right mind find a pot full of filth, such as vomit, objectionable, why

Again the analogy is very explicit in portraying the main meaning of this teaching, which is that the filth coming out of the body, such as vomit or excrement, is considered to be very dirty, and even the very containers of that filth are considered to be dirty. So if the very pot holding filth such as excrement or vomit is also dirty, then why wouldn't any sensible person consider the very source of the filth, our bodies, as being dirty as well. When we think about it, it is exactly the case that our bodies are filth producers; they are the mechanism that constantly produce filth. Because excrement is constantly produced we have to constantly go to the toilet, and many other kinds of dirty substances are constantly produced by this body. Therefore when we look at it realistically, we can see that if we can consider what comes out of it as dirty, then why is the source itself, the body, not dirty as well?

A further analogy given in the commentary is of a

lustful man who saw attractive qualities in a beautiful woman, but found fault with her when he saw her carrying a pot full of vomit.

A rich man had a beautiful maid but when others saw her carrying a pot of vomit, they thought she was not clean, and no longer regarded her as beautiful.

When we think about these analogies and the meanings that are derived from the teachings we can see how explicit and meaningful they are, and how much weight they carry.

1.2.2.5. REFUTING THE IDEA THAT WOMEN'S BODIES ARE CLEAN

Assertion or doubt: Women's bodies are clean because people regard them as clean.

Answer: It is absurd that a women's body is by nature clean.

*Clean things are looked upon
As most worthless of all.
What intelligent person
Would say that it is clean?*

69

The commentary explains that:

Clean things like flowers, perfume, ornaments and so forth are looked upon as most worthless of all by virtue of having being in contact with a woman's body...

Here again one has to understand that as with all the other verses the meaning here is in relation to any male or female contaminated body. When we look into the analogy further, the meaning is that what is initially considered to be nice and clean, turns into something filthy as a result of coming into contact with this contaminated body, whether it be male or female.

Let us look first of all at delicious, nice-smelling food which is consumed: soon after coming into contact with this body it is turned into excrement, something which is named nicely, but which is actually filthy. Likewise with other substances such as perfume, or as mentioned here, flowers and so forth. Initially they are very beautiful for a

certain period of time if they are left on their own, but having come into contact with this body perfume begins to mix with sweat and starts to smell quite foul. Therefore anything that comes into contact with this body turns into something being filthy, and the reason for that is because the body itself is quite contaminated and not clean to begin with.

The further analogy given in the commentary is:

...just as the sweet water of the Ganges becomes saline on meeting the ocean.

The analogy of the Ganges River that is given here is that at its source the Ganges is clean, fresh, sweet water, but as it flows down into plains and meets with the saline ocean the Ganges water becomes saline, because of coming into contact with the saline sea water. Likewise in relation to the physical body, whatever comes into contact with the contaminated body also becomes filthy, because the nature of the body is unclean.

In this way the teaching provides many different ways and angles for contemplating the unclean nature of the body.

1.2.2.6. REFUTING OTHER SEEMING REASONS FOR CONSIDERING THE BODY CLEAN

This is subdivided into three further subdivisions:

1.2.2.6.1. Refuting the idea of the body as clean because others are seen to be proud of it

1.2.2.6.2. Refuting that the body is clean because one sees what is unclean about it being removed with effort

1.2.2.6.3. Refuting that women's body need not be given up on the grounds that sages are seen to enjoy them

1.2.2.6.1. Refuting the idea of the body as clean because others are seen to be proud of it

Assertion or doubt:

The body is clean because one sees people taking pride in it.

Answer:

*Whoever has lived in a privy
And without it would not have survived,
In such a dung worm, arrogance
Arises through stupidity.* 70

As the commentary explains:

Whatever is born from the womb has lived in the mother's womb between the stomach and the intestines, which is like living inside a privy. Like a dung worm it has been nurtured by excremental juices without which you would have not survived.

What is being described here as excremental juices refers to the amniotic fluid, without which the baby would not survive. When we are in that sort of state we are like what is called a dung worm. So it is absurd to be proud of that, and thinking of that as clean only arises through stupidity. When one actually thinks of the reality of how one came into being then there is nothing to be so proud of. Rather, it is as it is explained in the analogy.

Then the commentary goes on:

It is like the following analogy, a young man who had been put in a cesspit and lived on excrement escaped, and afterwards thought it was unclean when someone else's clothing touched him.

What this analogy refers to is the particular instance where a man, who had indulged in adultery, was punished for that act and, in the tradition of old days, thrown into a cesspit. He had to live in filth for a period of time. After he escaped from that the cesspit he was taken to the doctors who cleaned him up and nourished him, and he was restored to his normal health. After he had regained his former lustre and his health was restored, he went through a particular area where a lowly person touched him. Completely forgetting that he had recently being immersed in filth himself, he considered that even the touch of a lowly person's clothing was very dirty. This shows the absurdity of the situation.

1.2.2.6.2. Refuting the body is clean because one sees what is unclean about it being removed with effort

We will leave this for the next session, when we might also be able to finish the third chapter.

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Edited Version*

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