
Study Group – Aryadeva’s 400 Verses

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As usual we will bring our attention inward and focus our mind on the teaching to be received. For that purpose we generate the bodhicitta motivation, which is, ‘For the purpose of benefiting all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. For that purpose I need to attentively listen to the Dharma and then use it to overcome all the delusions’.

1.2. Explaining the means to abandon disturbing emotions

This section explains the means to abandon disturbing emotions, and to do that we first need to identify them. Only then can we attempt to overcome the disturbing emotions. That is the purpose of this section.

The technical definition of a delusion is the mental factor that causes the mind to be disturbed and uncomfortable. That definition includes the nature of what a delusion is, which is a mental factor, and its function, which is that it disturbs the mind and makes it agitated.

At our stage, as an ordinary person, rather than trying to overcome the delusions we actually seem to befriend and harbour them within us, because we don’t recognise them as delusions. When we actually begin to recognise and identify delusions as such then we begin to develop a strong wish to get rid of them, because we do not want our mind to be disturbed or to be uncomfortable. Therefore it is really important to initially recognise delusions, and then slowly try to overcome them.

In general, the delusions are classified into the six root delusions and the twenty secondary, or proximate, delusions. They have been explained before, so we won’t go into detail about them now. You can refer back to your notes or look into the text, where it explains the specific delusions. Some of the six root delusions are actually identified here in the text, but the main point is to not just look at the list and be able to name them. Rather you should use the list of the delusions as a means of recognising those that seem to occur in your mind. When you are in a disturbed state of mind try to relate that to a particular type of delusion, and thus recognise the source of the disturbance. Just that mere recognition and acknowledgment of the delusion helps one to understand what is going on in one’s mind. Using that process we can then slowly work at eliminating the delusions.

One develops a keen wish to overcome these delusions when one identifies and recognises the delusions within oneself as being a disturbing state of mind. When one really begins to identify the function of the delusions and how they disturb ourselves and others then a wish such as, ‘I must overcome the delusions’ can be generated in

one’s mind. The determination, ‘I must abandon them’, arises spontaneously in the mind. Therefore the text explains the means of abandoning disturbing emotions in this section.

Explaining the means to abandon disturbing emotions is further divided into two main categories.

1.2.1. The way to abandon manifest disturbing emotions

1.2.2. How to cultivate the antidote which totally destroys the seeds of the delusions

This twofold classification is actually very useful. The first subdivision refers to the way to abandon manifest disturbing emotions or delusions which, when they arise in a manifest form, arise obviously in our mind. However the means to help to overcome those manifest delusions in our mind will not in themselves serve as an antidote to overcome the seeds of the delusions. For us, what serves as the antidote to overcome the seeds of delusions is actually the wisdom realising selflessness. Overcoming the seeds of delusions is very difficult to attempt without having developed what we call the wisdom realising selflessness.

On a daily basis, what disturbs us continuously are the manifest delusions. Thus techniques such as thinking about the unattractive features of an object that you are attracted to as a means of overcoming desire, or thinking about love and compassion as a means of overcoming anger are the antidotes that help us to overcome the manifest delusions.

Seeds and imprints

However while these techniques help to overcome the manifest delusions in our mind, they will not in themselves serve as a direct means to overcome the seeds of the delusions. That is how understanding this twofold subdivision can be helpful to our minds. As explained in previous teachings, there is a difference between the seed of a delusion and the imprint of a delusion. These are also classified respectively as the adventitious afflictions and the afflictions to omniscience. Even in Tibetan the terms for seed and imprint are sometimes used interchangeably so it can be confusing. However when we differentiate between the two obscurations with reference to seed and imprint then the seed relates to the delusions themselves, whereas the imprint is what we call the obscuration to omniscience. So the seed of the delusion is an obscuration to liberation, whereas the imprint is an obscuration to omniscience. To completely remove the imprint of delusions, which are the obscurations to omniscience, one has to use the wisdom realising emptiness that is infused with bodhicitta. To reiterate, the difference between a seed and an imprint is that the seed of delusion causes the next moment of a continuum to arise as a delusion bringing about an effect, while the imprint is like the residue of delusion that obscures our mind from omniscience.

1.2.1. The way to abandon manifest disturbing emotions

The way to abandon manifest disturbing emotions is further sub-divided into three.

1.2.1.1. General explanation of how to abandon the three

poisons

1.2.1.2. Individual explanation

1.2.1.3. Detailed explanation of how to abandon anger and desire.

1.2.1.1. GENERAL EXPLANATION OF HOW TO ABANDON THE THREE POISONS

This has five subdivisions which are:

1.2.1.1.1. Functions of the three poisons must be understood

1.2.1.1.2. Reason for the need to eliminate the three poisons

1.2.1.1.3. Antidotes to anger and desire must be applied individually

1.2.1.1.4. How to treat students having desire and anger.

This is in relation to how a teacher treats students with particular types of strong delusions in their mind.

1.2.1.1.5. How to apply the antidotes on understanding the sequence in which disturbing emotions arise

1.2.1.1.1. FUNCTIONS OF THE THREE POISONS MUST BE UNDERSTOOD

First of all the functions of the three poisons must be understood. The three poisons, as we all know, are desire, anger and ignorance, and they are three of the six root delusions.¹

They are referred to as poisons because for as long as one of these delusions is prevalent within oneself there is no ultimate personal benefit whatsoever, and it also serves as a means of harm for oneself and others. Therefore it is likened to poison, which if consumed would affect one with unwanted consequences. Likewise, for as long as the delusions are prevalent in one's mind they bring about unwanted sufferings. Despite this, however, it seems that we befriend and welcome the three poisons to our mind, instead of trying to remove them.

In the beginning, it is actually very difficult to recognise the difference between attachment and real love, and in fact in a worldly sense the word love basically refers to what we call attachment. We are encouraged to express love, but when it is mixed with strong attachment, then it can bring unfavourable consequences. Recognising that, and in order to overcome attachment, one must be able to differentiate between real love and attachment, and then cultivate the love and drop the attachment.

It is also good to note the reasons why the root delusions are called root delusions and the secondary delusions are called secondary, or more literally, proximate (meaning close) delusions. There are two different interpretations. One is that the six root delusions are called root delusions because they serve as the primary, or main delusions that arise in the mind, while the secondary or proximate delusions are like the branches or extensions that are derived from the main delusions.

Another interpretation is that each one of the six root

delusion arises in many different ways and circumstances, whereas the secondary or the proximate delusions arise very specifically. They are a specific state of mind that can be identified as a particular type of emotion at that particular time. Therefore root delusions are more general in nature, and when one of the root delusions arises a lot of other secondary delusions can arise. That then contributes to focusing on the object of the root delusion in many different ways.

Desire or attachment

The definition of attachment is that it is a mental factor which focuses on a contaminated object and exaggerates the qualities of that object, thus seeing it as being attractive.

The definition of attachment specifies focusing with an exaggerated view. The Tibetan term is *drotak* meaning superimposition. What that means in plain English is exaggerating the qualities of the object. A delusion is classified as a mistaken consciousness. If you were to define attachment as a mental factor that focuses on the qualities of an object and sees it as being attractive, then it would be hard to say that it is a mistaken consciousness, because there are indeed certain qualities in objects. Viewing an object, seeing its qualities, and being attracted to it is not sufficient to identify the attachment as a mistaken consciousness. What makes it a mistaken consciousness is the exaggerated part. Focusing on the object one sees its qualities but what happens is that the mind exaggerates those qualities. This means that one sees extra qualities of the object which are in fact not there. It is that extra perception, which is contrary to the actual mode of the existence of the object, that is referred to as being a mistaken consciousness.

We can actually gauge this from our own experience of having a very strong attachment to an object. How do we view the object? It seems completely appealing and attractive from every side, but later on, when our attachment to the object is reduced, we see it as being the complete opposite and even quite sour. That is how one can identify a feeling of attachment.

Anger

The definition of anger is focusing on one of the three types of object, and being unable to be patient or endure the object, and then generating an intention to harm the object.

The three main objects are oneself, one's friends and one's enemies. So harm to oneself, or one's friends is a reason for one to feel angry, while benefiting our enemies is another reason to feel anger. In relation to the three types of objects one has further reasonings which are: others have harmed me in the past, are harming me now and will harm me in the future; in relation to friends, others have harmed my friends in the past, are harming my friends now and will harm them in the future; and in terms of one's enemies, they have helped my enemies in the past, they are helping my enemies now and they will help my enemies in the future. These are the nine reasons to become angry. It is said that the negative delusion of anger is not present in the higher realms, because they don't have the reasons described above.

¹ The other three are pride, doubt and deluded views.

understand the reality of certain things, then that can cause a lot of suffering to arise in the mind.

On a very practical level if someone accuses us of not knowing anything and being completely stupid that could really offend us, and we could get very upset and angry with that wouldn't we?

As the commentary concludes

Therefore persevere in getting rid of the disturbing emotions.

Having identified each of the delusions and understood how they serve as causes for us to experience various types of sufferings one must then use one's full ability and might to overcome them. As an analogy, if we know an enemy is coming to attack us in a worldly sense we would prepare ourselves by wearing armour and carrying a sword to defend ourself in battle. We would be prepared because we recognise the danger that the enemy poses. Likewise we must recognise that the delusions are harmful entities that harm our peace of mind, and that we must battle to overcome them.

1.2.1.1.3 ANTIDOTES TO ANGER AND DESIRE MUST BE APPLIED INDIVIDUALLY

Question: Do anger and desire occur together the way confusion occurs with both of them?

Answer:

The respective verse from the root text is:

Just as it is seen that bile 129
Does not occur with phlegm,
One sees that desire, too,
Does not occur with anger

This explains how the delusion of ignorance arises simultaneously with other delusions so that, for example, when anger arises ignorance is also manifested at the same time. When either anger or attachment is in the mind then ignorance is also manifest. However anger and attachment cannot arise at the same time in the continuum.

As the commentary explains:

Just as it is seen that bile and phlegm do not occur together, one sees that desire and anger, too, do not occur simultaneously in manifest form in one mental continuum.

The meaning what we derive from the explanation is that according to medical explanations phlegm and bile do not occur at the same time. That is said to be because of the element that is in union with each kind of sickness. As explained in the texts, when there is an excess of fluid in the body then that causes phlegm to be prevalent, whereas when there is heat in the body that is a cause for bile to be affected. The very nature of the elements that produce phlegm and bile (water and fire) is that they oppose to each other, and cannot exist in unison without harming each other. That is the main point. Of course water and fire can be in close proximity but they cannot be together without affecting each other. Likewise within our body phlegm and bile do not occur at the same time.

That is the analogy that is used to explain the main point,

which is that desire and anger do not occur simultaneously in a manifest form in one mental continuum. That is, in one person's mind in one moment of the mental continuum, anger and desire cannot arise simultaneously.

We can also understand from the very definitions of anger and desire that attachment is a mental factor that desires the object, wants to possess the object and exaggerates the qualities of the object. Whereas the anger focusing on an object is a wish to be able to avoid that object, not wanting to be near that object, and wanting to harm the object. That being the case, wishing to have an object and wishing to avoid it cannot arise at the same time.

We can see from our own experience with objects that if we have a strong wish to have it then attachment arises. Whereas when anger arises we wish to avoid an object and have an aversion to it. So we can see how the wish to possess some mistaken thing, and the wish to avoid something changes from moment to moment. Without even having to think about it desire immediately arises in our mind when we see something that appears attractive to us. Whereas when we see something we don't like aversion arises in our mind immediately. In this way aversion and anger arise spontaneously in our mind at different times, but as explained here, they don't arise at the same time.

When we relate this to our own experiences, we can think of a person who is very attractive and who seems very pleasing and nice, but at another time one does not want to be with that person and does not want to see them. Sometimes we want to be close to them and at other times we avoid them. We can see how this goes on throughout the course of our life.

This state of indecisiveness prevails in our life. When we are very attached to a person, we really want to live with them, and be with them, and we think we can actually have a good life with them. But then when we start to see their negative qualities and begin to develop some aversion towards them, then if one is already married we might think that we want to divorce them. So there are times when you may go through such indecisive states, 'Oh, I want to live with them, no, I want to divorce them. Should I live with or should I divorce them?' If we actually investigate what goes on in our mind, we can see that there are so many interesting things that go on that it can be quite a spectacle.

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