

Arydeva's Four Hundred Stanzas
Chapter 5
Verses 103-104
Geshe Yeshe Thabkhe
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Our teacher the Buddha said the following in sutra:

Don't do any destructive actions (or sins)
Do only perfect good
Discipline your own mind
This is the teaching of the Buddha.

When we are saying not do destructive actions, that means not doing anything that is harmful to others, verbally, mentally, or physically. This is explained in the first level of practice, of spiritual development, where the practitioner on that level avoids any harmful actions of body, speech, and mind, and through doing that they achieve their goal of being reborn in a fortunate life, as a human or a deity. The second line, where it is saying do perfect good/virtue, means to consider all beings other than yourself with great affection and see them with empathy. Then you have a kind of affectionate love for all beings. This line includes both the practices of the next two levels out of the three levels: the intermediate level and the highest level. At the intermediate level what it would mean would be to achieve a kind of impartiality, equanimity where you have reduced all your attachment and hostility toward others so that you don't make a kind of emotional distinction, you treat (all) with impartiality. For a person on the highest level, you are completely reorienting yourself so that you are no longer preoccupied with yourself and not paying attention to others, but you switch that orientation so that you are only preoccupied with others and you are not caught up with yourself. When you engage in these kinds of practices, when you are not harming others and you are controlling your attachment and hostility, and you are only thinking of others, this is how to discipline your mind. Through these practices you discipline your mind. The last line says, this is the teaching of the Buddha.

The teaching can be divided into two parts, or you could say there are two kinds of teaching when we talk about the Buddha's teaching: verbal and realized teaching. What the verbal teaching is talking about, the teaching that you learn from others and you then explain to others, that's the level of the verbal teaching. The level of the realized teaching is what you put into practice, come to actualize. This usually refers to the three trainings. The first training is in ethical discipline, avoiding or abstaining from destructive actions and cultivating virtuous actions, constructive actions. Also included in that is the second of the three trainings, meditative stabilization, that is practicing meditative concentration and so forth. The third level of realization is where you are developing the wisdom that knows the selflessness of persons and phenomena.

There is an expression in Tibetan, (I'm) not sure if the English captures it, where you are upholding or meeting with the teachings, what that means to meet the teaching means that you are actually... for the verbal, it means learning then explaining to others. For the realized teaching it means that you are putting those teachings into practice. When we talk about practice, it has to do with our mind. The mind is involved with the different afflictions like attachment and hatred, anger, jealousy. If we just let those happen at will, that is not what we are talking about by practicing the teachings. Practicing means to change your mind, seeking to reduce these afflictions, so that you don't let your mind go under the control of them, and your mind actually transforms. It improves. We are learning methods from the Buddha to transform our mind. This means, in the first case, if we just leave it up to ourselves, we would be just thinking about

ourselves and not really caring about others, whatever we do as long as we help ourselves we don't really care about harming others. We are doing the opposite of that to transform our mind. We naturally have this inclination to be attached to certain people that we associate with, and are hostile toward those we consider others, "us" and "them". If we are doing the opposite of that, that transforms our mind. We cultivate the opposite of that. And then finally if we are just preoccupied by ourselves all the time, if instead of that we change our attitude to be preoccupied with others, that is how we transform our mind.

In order to transform our minds, we have to make effort at both method and wisdom. Here "method" is referring to where we are cultivating what we call constructive or virtuous states of mind, like love and non-violence and impartiality, these kinds of virtuous states of mind. We have to make effort at that. On the other side, where we are involved with wisdom...these non-virtues and destructive states of mind come about through our misconceptions, not knowing how things actually are. So then if we cultivate this learning, the wisdom side, learning how things actually are, trying to understand how things actually are, then we are reducing that kind of ignorance, not-knowing.

So when we say "disciplining the mind", we are talking about how the mind is always under the control of something else. Our mind is under the influence or other power of our afflictions, like attachment or hostility. What we are talking about in disciplining the mind is, we need to distinguish which states of mind are virtuous or non-virtuous and seek to increase those that are virtuous and reduce those that are non-virtuous. If we proceed in this fashion, always seeking to correct our mind in a virtuous or constructive direction and control the non-virtuous direction, eventually our mind becomes only virtuous or constructive. That is the bodhisattva ideal. A bodhisattva is only able to direct the mind toward doing good. When they engage in something that would normally be considered non-virtuous for other people who don't have a disciplined mind, because they have a disciplined mind and only constructive intentions, those actions which would normally be considered destructive become constructive. If we then examine our mind, always examining our mind and are able to control our mind, not doing any destructive actions and doing only constructive actions, then we are able to transform and improve ourselves to such a point that we are only doing constructive actions, physically, verbally, and mentally. On the other hand, if we just let our minds and let ourselves do whatever pops into our mind and don't examine, then our minds can lead us in a very destructive non-virtuous directions. When we work at disciplining and directing the mind in a virtuous direction, then the mind is like a wish-granting jewel. We are able to accomplish great things with it. Whereas if we let it go in a non-virtuous direction, then there is nothing that is more destructive than a mind that is going in a non-virtuous direction.

There is a verse here that sums this up from the 5th chapter of the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*: the analogy is that of a mad elephant for the untamed mind.

Untamed, mad elephants do not inflict as much harm in this world as does the unleashed elephant of the mind in the Avici hell and the like. (ch 5, verse 2)

What this means is, if we let our minds go freely wherever the mind wants to lead us, and lets us go in a harmful direction, then the harm that it does is so much greater than that of a mad elephant let loose around the country destroying houses, etc. In India this happens. What the unleashed elephant of the mind does then, if you let your mind get involved in physical, verbal, and mental actions that are destructive, these actions or karma then have a result of (you) being reborn in terrible situations where we undergo a terrible amount of misery, like the Avici hell.

There is another verse that expresses this same meaning: the 7th and 8th verses in chapter five:

Who diligently constructed the weapons in hell? Who devised the floor of heated iron? And from where have those women come?

The Sage declared that all of that has arisen from the evil mind, so there is nothing else in the three worlds more formidable than the mind.

Here again it is talking about just letting the mind go in a destructive direction and engage in actions that are destructive, and as a consequence of those, you experience the sufferings in these various hells. So that means that these hells were created by our non-virtuous actions, in particular the “evil mind” means the destructive emotions and thoughts. It is the afflictions. Once we are under the influence of those, there is nothing else in the three worlds more formidable than the mind.

There is a later verse that I didn't find: what it is saying is, when you are using your intelligence or wisdom to distinguish what is a constructive action and what is a destructive action, and you are controlling your mind by guarding it with mindfulness and introspection, then the person who does that, a disciplined person, to that person I bow with my hands together. This is from Shantideva's *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.

If we examine suffering, discomfort, unhappiness, there are two types. One comes about through physical things like not having enough to eat or being in a difficult place to live, or having some natural disaster befall us. There are also the sufferings that come about through the mind. In part mental suffering is brought about through how we think. If we are able to distinguish thoughts and what is a constructive and destructive thought, and direct our mind toward constructive thought, not only do we reduce our mental suffering but we are also able to greatly affect our physical suffering. So it is really up to disciplining our mind. When we are talk about disciplining the mind, a good example is when someone really makes us angry. The way thought works then is that we just keep thinking more and more about it, getting more and more miserable about it. But if instead we say, “Well, I don't have to think about it”, and not think about it, and when you feel it comes back and that anger again, you want to start thinking about it, ...it is kind of like a game you are playing. Don't let yourself go there. Keep on not letting yourself go there. In that way, gradually the anger will die out and you won't be influenced by those thoughts. Mental discipline is where you are really trying not to produce these negative emotions, destructive emotions, but if you do produce them then you try not to go under their influence. This won't be easy right from the beginning. You don't immediately get the knack of it. Gradually you become accustomed to it. Gradually you are able to distinguish what is a destructive thought, and then gradually you are able to first let go of the thought and gradually they won't be produced. The mind gradually improves in this way. Whereas if you don't pay attention to your states of mind and let your mind do whatever it wants, not distinguishing between constructive and destructive states of mind, gradually it becomes very hard to influence your mind with this kind of mental discipline. . Then there is even a danger that the mind becomes so disturbed that people become mentally ill, mentally impaired by letting things go. You have to be able to engage in some mental discipline. Now we are going to begin the text, but you can motivate yourself for listening to this by thinking, I will apply myself to these two directions, method and wisdom. That is, being warm hearted, kind to the best of my ability and then applying myself to develop the wisdom that knows how things are. In order to do that, I will listen to these teachings today.

Chapter 5, verse 103

Page 135

*A Subduer has (perception of) that
Which should and should not be done or said.
What reason is there to say
That the Omniscient One is not all-knowing?*

This verse, if you look on page 313 in the outline, is explained:

C. Not answering fourteen questions is no suitable proof for lack of omniscience

What it is talking about with these fourteen questions is, in the time of the Buddha there were many different philosophical views, tenet systems. One person asked the Buddha, "Is there an end to the world or not an end to the world, is there both an end and not an end, or is there neither an end or not an end.

He was asking that about whether there was an end to the world, or what happens to the Buddha after death, or is the self permanent or not. The Buddha didn't answer these requests. Then the person decided that the Buddha was not omniscient because he didn't answer these questions. If we examine what the questioner feels, (he) feels when giving questions that there is a self that is permanent, unitary, independent. He was firm in that view and the Buddha could see that. The Buddha determined that what the person was looking for, is there a future life or not. If you say, sure ...if the Buddha said he would be reborn into a future life or exist in the future after his death, it would confirm or strengthen this person's extreme view of permanence or that things are static, or eternalism. He would think, this self that I know exists permanently and the Buddha is telling me it will be around in my next life. This idea of permanence is that the self of yesterday is the same self of today and will be tomorrow, that we are somehow static. And this idea of independence: that the self exists not needing to be in relationship to other things, and unitary, all on its own. The Buddha could see that this person would become more extreme, and so didn't answer.

Also if he had answered that there is no permanent self, no self that is independent or unitary that will exist in the next lifetime, the person would take this to the other extreme of nihilism and would see the self as totally non-existent. So seeing the potential for these two extremes in this person, the Buddha remained silent. So it is not that the Buddha didn't answer because he didn't know the answer. It is because a Buddha knows the dispositions and ways of thinking of all beings, so he could see the way this person thought. The profound truth that the self is impermanent and there is no such thing as a unitary self, if he taught the truth of selflessness, then this person would have plunged into another extreme view of nihilism. So the Buddha, understanding this, remained silent.

A Buddha knows exactly what should or should not be done or said in a certain situation. How can you say that not answering was a sign that he lacked omniscience...in fact the fact that the Buddha remained silent showed that he is omniscient.

Assertion: Surely he lacked omniscience since he did not answer fourteen questions such as whether the self and the world are permanent and so forth.

Answer: Rather than disproving, it establishes his omniscience

“A Subduer directly perceives the right and wrong time for temporary and ultimate actions, what actions should not be done, what is not beneficial, what is harmful, as well as all that should or should not be said.

Since the Buddha possessed such perception, he did not give an answer to these questions, which were based on a belief in the true existence of persons and phenomena. It is not feasible for a basis of attribution whose existence has been negated to have an attribute. He did not answer, because he saw that they would not be receptive vessels for the profound, were he to teach selflessness. Thus there is no reason to say that the Omniscient One is not all-knowing. Indeed this substantiates his omniscience. “

If there was a suitable vessel, he certainly would have taught selflessness.

The precious garland verse here then sums this up: “Asked whether the world had an end or not, the Buddha was silent.”

That means that he knew if he said something, it would be misleading to that person.

“Because he did not give this profound teaching

To worldly beings who were not receptive vessels,

The all-knowing one is therefore known

As omniscient by the wise.”

He didn't give the teaching to someone who wasn't a receptive vessel...the teachings on selflessness, emptiness, impermanence. If he gave these teachings to someone who holds to the self as unitary, not dependent on anything else, he knew then that the person would think the self didn't exist at all, so he was silent. Because he understood that this person was not a receptive vessel for this profound teaching, his silence is not a reason somehow proving that he wasn't omniscient but was proving that he was omniscient. There is analogy here: a certain king wanted to penalize a rich Brahmin. The king understood that the Brahmin had so much money, spending on living very well, in a richly furnished house. He thought he would punish him unless he quickly sent his family's well. The Brahmin's daughter replied, “Wealth attracts wealth and one elephant attracts another. Please send us a well.” Of course you can't send a well, but the king was trying to fool him. Well attracts well, one elephant attracts another. “Please send us a well. In this way they avoided punishment. Similarly, a Buddha acts for the welfare of sentient beings by skillful means.”

The Brahmin's daughter was being very skillful with the king, to reply in this way.

Question: If Buddha does not say what should not be said, did he not say, referring to Devadatta, “What of this boy who wears one piece of cloth and has taken the bait?”

Not understanding the context, you would think the Buddha was very rough, despising his cousin, but in fact Devadatta was always trying to do the opposite of what Buddha said and lead them in other directions.

Answer: Although he said this, it was not to harm others but to turn them away from ill deeds. He saw that unless he deflated Devadatta, many transmigrators would be harmed.

What this means is that the followers of Devadatta would go in a non-virtuous direction. So what he intended in these words was to deflate Devadatta.

Verse 104

Outline, pg 313

II. Explaining how to practice the Bodhisattva deeds, the cause of Buddhahood

A. Special features of the motivation for training in these deeds

What this verse is showing that mind is the principle of the three doors. The three doors mean the body, speech, and mind.

Mind should be understood as paramount or foremost in all activities of the three doors.

*Without intention, actions like going
Are not seen to have merit and so forth.
In all actions, therefore, the mind
Should be understood as paramount.*

Actions is talking about actions of body and speech, physical and verbal actions. These physical and verbal actions are dependent upon the mind, dependent on how we are thinking.

It is really talking about motivation. If we are saying something with a harmful intention, then the action itself, what we say, we consider non-meritorious or destructive. If we say the same thing, but with a virtuous intention, even though it is the same thing being said, that will be a constructive action. It depends upon our motivation. The same is true of physical actions. If we are going somewhere with an intention do harm, thinking they did this, they did that, and I am going to get even, then that going will be a destructive action. If we are going, the same action, with virtuous thought, then that same action will be virtuous. So in all actions therefore, the mind, intention, is paramount.

If we have neither a constructive nor destructive motivation, then it is a neutral action with a neutral result. For example, if we are just walking with neither motivation, it is neutral. So we can imagine if someone is building a house, if a person goes to do that thinking, "This would be very helpful to people, I need to work hard on this," then everything that person does involved in building the house becomes virtuous action. On the other hand, if the person thinks, "Oh I am just going to pass the time, why am I doing this, or I just need to make money," then whatever we do involved with building that house, becomes a non-virtuous action. If you have neither, then it is considered a neutral action. So whatever career, or work we have to do, if we think of it as being helpful to humanity or society, if we think like that, then from the perspective of the Mahayana teachings, then that is considered practicing Buddha's teachings. It is an activity that emulates the bodhisattva way of practicing the teachings. So you always have to be thinking, I am doing this in order to be helpful to others. Practicing the teaching doesn't just mean meditating, praying, contemplating. It means this: trying to always to be motivated so that our actions are constructive. Whatever small things we do, we need to have a kind-hearted motivation while we do that and then it becomes the practice of the teachings.

Questions:

Frank: What if someone has a good intention, for example wants to give something to a homeless person, and then the homeless person goes and buys alcohol or makes something worse, what is Geshe-las interpretation of that kind of mind?

GYT: It depends upon what you know when you are giving the money to the homeless person. If you know that the person is just going down the street to spend in the nearest bar, then you should consider giving what this person really needs, for example, clothing or a warm place to stay. That would be virtuous giving. But if you had no idea what this person would do with the money, and they go down the street and make it worse, it doesn't make your giving non-virtuous. It is just that you didn't know what the person was going to do with the money. You don't know what the person is going to do, therefore the action has to be virtuous as you are giving with the

intention of helping. It must be virtuous with that intention. What they do with it is beyond the scope of your knowledge.

Nancy: About the Buddha remaining silent in order not to create a more harmful view in the person in the verse: if we have so many wrong views and it is so easy to solidify them, I sometimes wonder how the Buddha would know how to teach so much to so many?

GYT: The Buddha's mind, omniscient mind, can be likened to a light. If you turn on a bright light, you are able to distinguish everything that is in the room and so you don't miss anything. We all have this potential like the Buddha, to be able to completely..the mind is able to become completely illuminating, so that there isn't anything that you don't know. The Buddha has that kind of ability. He knew everything, as clearly as turning the light on in the dark room. In that way, he knew what would happen if he gave the answer to that person. But this was just one particular instance. He gave the answers to those same questions on many other occasions. He changed his answer or didn't answer according to the disposition of the person listening. We are familiar with a similar example in ordinary life, when a child asks a question and we change our answer so that he can understand it. We don't give the complete answer, as we are talking to a child.