

Geshe Yeshe Thabkhe
TBLC Sunday Class
Aryadeva's Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way
Chapter 6 vs. 135 & 136
October 19, 2014

There is a verse from what is known as the Collection of Indicative Verses. This is
*I the Tathagata the teacher reveal to you the path that stops the
pains of existence,
You must follow it.*

[Sutra quote incomplete and needs checking, I didn't quite catch it.]

What is the buddha saying here? When it says, "I the Tathagata the teacher reveal to you the path that stops the pains of existence," he is saying he has experienced directly the way of eliminating all suffering and attaining all happiness. And then he says, You must follow it, which means he has taught it according to his experience and it is up to the individual to put it into practice.

So there is an analogy here of getting an illness and what we do in that circumstance. When you are seriously ill and are in pain, you have to depend upon a doctor. The doctor prescribes a medicine, but then we have to actually take the medicine. It is not the fault of the doctor or the medicine, it's the fault of the person who is sick if they don't take the medicine.

The Buddha then gives us the path, then, or the method to eliminate our suffering and this is how the Buddha helps us. As it says in another sutra quote, "The sages do not eliminate suffering by laying on hands or transferring their knowledge directly to others, or eliminating any kinds of wrongdoing by washing it away with water. The buddhas teach the truth of reality and in that way liberate beings." So when it is saying "not transferring knowledge to others" it is talking about taking your knowledge and somehow having it enter into others. They reveal the truth means that they explain the truth in such a way that we can come to realize that truth ourselves. Again, the indication is that it is our responsibility; it depends on our own effort.

What is being said here is that we have this wisdom, or intelligence, within us that has great potential, and so we have to realize that potential and bring that wisdom to fruition. It is like turning on a lamp, or light, within us and that illuminates what it is that we should cast aside—any faults we should cast aside—and whatever good actions we should take up. In reference to karma, for instance, which actions we should take up. The ability to distinguish right and wrong is an ability within us. And because of this, the responsibility for our own freedom from suffering depends upon ourselves. We have an individual responsibility for overcoming suffering ourselves.

When the Buddha says you have to be your own refuge, what he is saying is that we have this potential within ourselves—this wisdom or intelligence within ourselves—and it is just like a lamp: it can give light to what it is that we must adopt and discard, and the nature of reality. All of that we have in our own minds, and the ability to eliminate all faults and attain all knowledge. And as Buddhists we say it is the same potential the Buddha realized, and therefore it is called—some call it the Buddha lineage within. We have this potential to become enlightened ourselves. So then it is

a matter of...it's not like somehow the buddhas and bodhisattvas are different from us. What they have done is undergone a lot of hardship and made a lot of effort to realize this potential within themselves. So that is what is referred to when the Buddha says we are our own refuge.

Even though we have this potential within ourselves, we are always looking for other methods. Basically, we have to eliminate our own faults and attain our own good qualities. The process then starts with thinking. We have to think a lot and transform our minds. Based on this thinking, we can engage in karmic actions that are virtuous. But what we do is that we have a tendency to forget about the inside—this thinking and transforming of our minds—and we look on the outside for methods of happiness. In that way, then, we never achieve our goal. So then we have to rely on this inner transformation.

Pains of existence here is referring to how we can overcome the pains of existence through following abstaining from the 10, and cultivating the 10 virtuous deeds. And that is avoiding the pains of existence of either cyclic existence in general or the suffering of the three miserable types of rebirth. What is being mentioned here is that we have to do our best to follow, like when you think about the 10 non-virtuous deeds, you are abstaining from killing stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech (saying things that would cause division between those who are in a cooperative relationship), hurtful speech (saying things to be of harm to others), senseless speech (purposelessly saying things out of attachment, and those of the mind—covetousness (where you are attached to others' things—so you have to give up your wanting others things), harmful thought (malice, and finally wrong views. When you are abstaining from wrong views that means you abandon the disbelief in the cause and effect of karma. The opposite, then is when you are saving life, generosity, sexual propriety, speech that is truthful, mediating, helpful or meaningful, and then, for the three of mind: abandoning your attachment, helpful thought, and finally correct view, where you have the correct view of cause and effect of karma, of karmic actions, where you are generating a knowledgeable belief in the cause and effect of actions. We tend to think of this kind of practice is very small, insignificant, not worth wasting our time on—but really this is a very advanced practice For instance, after a bodhisattva has realized emptiness and has arrived at the first level of the 10 levels of the bodhisattva path, the second level is where the bodhisattva engages in just these 10 virtuous actions and abandons the 10 non-virtuous actions. They are perfecting ethical discipline. So this is an advanced practice, although we tend to belittle it. We don't even consider how it is going to bring about a fortunate rebirth. If I abstain from the 10 non-virtuous actions—not having harmful speech or being malicious, etc.—if we avoid such activity we will be happier in this life as will those around us....let alone bringing happiness to us in future lives.

If we then have an attitude where we value abstaining from 10 non-virtuous deeds and cultivating 10 virtuous deeds, what this does is that it brings a lot of joy into our lives because we can get up in the morning and say, “Oh! I'm alive” You are happy to be alive. “Now I can use this for doing good and not doing any harm.” And then you do whatever you can to avoid hurtful speech or harmful thoughts generated from having anger or hostility, and avoiding covetousness, which is generated from attachment. And you have different activities you engage in motivated by the afflictions. So if you abstain from them, you reduce the afflictions. Then, since you are not under the influence of these afflictions—p —it makes it so your mind is happy and peaceful. So if you look at these in this way, as methods for achieving this, then

what happens is that you are bringing joy to your life. You are getting up each morning and happily engaging in your life.

It's through practicing abstaining from the 10 and cultivating the 10 that we are going to then be having a fortunate rebirth in our lifetime—as a human or a deity. But if we consider that kind of lifetime, even if we are reborn as a human we won't necessarily

If we then understand that and become focused on completely liberating ourselves from cyclic existence, from samsara, we set our mind on attaining liberation. What is it that is holding us into samsara? Basically it is this thought of “I,” “I,” “I.” We think of ourselves over others and we don't really think about others.

Once you think of “I” you have become attached to that which is “Mine” and that kind of attachment, we feel like...it is like we are stuck to things. The attachment is so strong that we are totally stuck to our things, like glue. We have that kind of relationship to our things and our self. If we can cultivate the view of selflessness...when we have that attachment to self, we then have a hostility toward that which is other. We bifurcate things and become very partial and biased. So to overcome this, we cultivate selflessness. Through this we reduce these feelings of attachment to our things and to our existence and it allows us also to not be so partial. We become more impartial. So then, in that way, we approach this goal of liberation from cyclic existence.

Then when we add to that the practice of cherishing others, if instead of the practice for achieving full enlightenment would be, instead of being so preoccupied with or cherishing ourselves, then we become oriented toward others and cherish others. This is the practice that allows us to proceed toward full enlightenment.

Then we tend to think of others with a strong feeling that they somehow....If we take someone we dislike, the feeling becomes very strong, as if that person somehow had their own—was somehow by their own nature somebody to dislike. What we are doing is forgetting they are just like us. They had to come in to this life helplessly under the power of karma and afflictions, just like ourselves. Then if we think of others in this way, as being like ourselves under the influence of the same forces in being reborn, this helps us to reduce this partiality I was talking about.

So then, we should listen to today's teachings thinking that we are going to study and hear these teachings today and then reflect upon them, and also put them into practice. And in so doing, I will be able to achieve liberation and finally the goal of full enlightenment.

We are starting on verse 135 on page 156 of the translation.

So here we are going through the descriptions of how to abandon attachment. Attachment is talking about this firm, like glue, state of mind where we are firmly attached to everything. And then also how to abandon hatred, or hostility. Now we are at the point of how to abandon confusion. “Confusion,” here is talking about ignorance. But it is a misknowledge, a misunderstanding. There is a way things exist and we are superimposing a way that doesn't exist upon that. It is called confusion because what it causes us to do is to be mistaken about things, about how they exist. We take their existence in a wrong way. So this first verse is recognizing this kind of confusion the root of the

So the verse goes:

**135. As the tactile sense [pervades] the body
Confusion is present in them all.
By overcoming confusion one will also
Overcome all disturbing emotions.**

Here the “tactile sense” is talking about the feeling of touch, which is something that is present from the top of our head to the sole of our feet. All the other senses and sense organs or sense faculties are dependent upon that because either you are hearing, smelling, tasting—they are all dependent upon the sense of touch, the physical sense organ of touch.

So then, here if we go to the commentary, it says:

In the body the tactile sense organ pervades all other sense organs such as the eye and acts as a basis without which none of the others could exist. Confusion, which is the disturbing attitude ignorance, misconceives dependent arising free from inherent existence as truly existent.

Here, when we talk about the sense organs, it is taking the tactile sense, which pervades the others and acts as the basis for your others, such as the eye and ear. This is basically talking about our body. But if this sense organ didn't exist, the others wouldn't. So the same is true of confusion. [If we didn't have confusion, we wouldn't have the other afflictive emotions.]

When we talk about misconceiving dependent arising free from inherent existence as truly existent” in fact everything is an aggregation of many parts coming together in a dependent relationship and then we label that or impute to that whatever that object is. In reference to ourselves, we are a collection of many different parts that are aggregating and then we impute to that, “I” and then the same happens with a house, for instance. It is a collection of many different parts and we merely impute to the many parts that this is a house. There are rooms, foundation, roof, etc. Those make up the basis for the imputation of house, but we are not satisfied with that kind of existence of ourselves or house. Instead we feel that somehow there is a self that exists on its own, without any dependence. This is the way we think about selves and houses. We think there is a findable self or house, but if we look, is the house the same as or different from its basis of designation, we cannot come up with anything. Its the same with the self. We cannot come up with anything that is the same as our body and mind or different form it, but that is not how we think. The way we do think is that there is some kind of a self that can exist on its own, a self-existent self that doesn't need to depend. We don't see things as existing in a dependent way at all. We are superimposing that and based on it, we have some kind of feeling that it has inherent attractiveness or repugnant quality to it. We project that on to all things and people, and it is through that that we then get involved in attachment and hostility. If we can overcome that with an understanding of their dependence and their emptiness of existing in the way we are instinctively imputing them to exist [then we can overcome our attachment.] And because it is through our attachment that we have hostility, so we eliminate our hostility as well.

To go on with the commentary:

It similarly is present in and pervades all disturbing emotions such as desire and anger. Misconceiving things distorted by confusion as inherently pleasant or unpleasant, one thinks of them as desirable or repugnant.

So then, we think of people, things—something other than our self—as pleasant or unpleasant. It is the seeing them as pleasant or unpleasant—they seem to have this quality as something that exists from their own side, that it is really there and exists there from its own side, that it is objectively there. If it were objectively pleasant or unpleasant, then everyone would see it that way, but such is not the case. This goes to show you it doesn't have this kind of objective existence like we think. So, you think of things as [inherently pleasant or unpleasant]—we think somehow that is there from its own side. And based on that we see them as desirable or repugnant.

Thus one must understand how the mode of apprehension entailed in the conception of true existence is present in the modes of apprehension of anger and desire.

Things seem to have these qualities from their own side. The conception of true existence means we see them as existent from their own side. So these afflictions of hostility and attachment have this same way of thinking about things that is present in confusion.

All other disturbing attitudes and emotions depend on the disturbing attitude ignorance, which is principal.

So we can see, then, that the other afflictions then have the same way of engaging their object that confusion does. So, confusion is present in them as well.

By overcoming confusion through meditation on dependent arising empty of inherent existence, all other disturbing attitudes and emotions will be overcome as well. Therefore, make effort to understand emptiness as the meaning of dependent arising.

Here, what is being indicated is that, although we have this instinctive feeling that things exist from their own side and have these qualities of attractiveness and repugnance somehow from their own side, we can overcome that kind of misconception of things by depending on dependent arising. Dependent arising means you can see that things are an aggregation of many causes and conditions, many parts, and the mind imputes to that name or concept that is a dependent imputation. Everything exists in that way. Because it is dependent, it lacks any existence in its own right, from its own side. So dependent arising comes to this meaning of it being empty of this inherent existence or this existence from its own side/objective existence. So if we can come to that understanding, and also we see that emptiness itself—it is basically the mutual compatibility of emptiness and dependent arising. Through understanding emptiness, it has the meaning of dependent arising. Through understanding dependent arising, you understand that the meaning is emptiness. So you see the mutuality, both eliminate objective existence. In this way, we eliminate or overcome all the afflictions. So then the example is:

For instance, by cutting down a poisonous tree, everything useless associated with it ceases.

Once you cut down the principal thing—here the confusion or ignorance with regard to the nature of things—then it's like cutting down a poisonous tree. All the bad smell and problems associated with it are eliminated by cutting down the tree itself.

We go on to the next verse, which is “Recognizing the antidote that eliminates confusion.” And it begins with a question:

Question: What is the means to get rid of confusion, which is the root of futility?

And then the Tibetan goes right to the commentary:

If a sprout, action and so forth existed by way of their own entities, they would not depend on the seed nor on ignorance, but they do.

When you have a sprout, then it needs many causes and conditions to come about. In addition to the seed, there is water, the condition of the soil, and so forth. So a sprout is dependent on all these different factors. But if it existed by way of its [own entity] ...[missed typing something]

and the same by way of compositional activity in the 12 factors of dependent arising, it wouldn't need ignorance to come about. It would just exist without depending on ignorance. But it couldn't exist by way of its own entity or essence.

With the help of many different kinds of reasoning one must understand that the existence of a sprout and so forth is exclusively a dependent existence and not an existence by way of its own entity.

So you have to use different reasonings thinking about how a sprout cannot exist somehow on its own. Then, when you go through all these different kinds of reasonings, you come to an understanding of it as having a dependent existence, as opposed to having an [independent existence.]

At this point then, the verse appears in the Tibetan. If we look at the verse it says:

**136. When dependent arising is seen
Confusion will not occur.
Thus every effort has been made here
To explain precisely this subject.**

So, when it says “dependent arising is seen,” it means you are depending on study, and thinking about it, and once you have used various reasons to think about dependent arising and how things come about based upon causes and conditions, or imputing terms and so forth, it is through this that one comes to overcome this perception of things as having an existence from their own side, as somehow existing in their own right. Confusion will not occur once you have this direct experience of emptiness using the reason of dependent arising, so every effort has been made to explain this subject.

Here, if we look at the commentary:

When dependent arising free from existence by way of its own entity is seen by direct valid perception, confusion will not arise, and because confusion has ended, all other disturbing attitudes and emotions too will end.

Here, “dependent arising free from own” means when things are seen as having a dependent existence, dependent upon causes and conditions and imputing terms and concepts—to see it means by direct valid perception. This means first you study and come to an intellectual understanding, then you reflect and deepen your understanding, and through meditation come to a direct perception of it.

That confusion of ...will be completely eliminated. Once that is eliminated [the other afflictions are eliminated].

Thus here in the *Treatise of Four Hundred* every effort is made specifically to explain how emptiness means dependent arising.

To understand emptiness here means to see that they are dependent arisings. When we are talking about dependent arising as the way of understanding emptiness, it is important to understand that it is the king of reasons for things as being empty, the king of reasons for emptiness. So when we think about dependent arising, the most important thing is to apply it to ourselves. Once you understand it with respect to the self, it is easy to extend that understanding to things other than the self. The reason it is called the king of reasons is that all the other things that establish things as being emptyeventually get back to this, or are founded upon this, reason of dependent arising.

Understanding dependent arising with respect to the self, when we investigate that, we have to understand that there has to be a basis for us talking about any object and its emptiness. This is like when you talk about empty space, you talk about the empty space within something. You cannot talk about emptiness without any basis. So what we are talking about here is the five aggregates. “Form,” is our body, our physical form. “Consciousness,” is referring to the sense consciousnesses, really, seeing hearing, feeling, etc. And then when we talk about “compositional factors,” there are many different mental processes. Those aside from the sense consciousness are mentioned within compositional factors. There are 51. 49 are mentioned within the compositional factors and then two are singled out. One is feeling, which encompasses pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings, and neutral feeling. Because we all want happiness and don’t want suffering, then it becomes a very essential aggregate to be concerned about, as does the aggregate of discrimination, which is the foundation of all philosophical views and perspectives. It is where you distinguish this is this, that is that. Then you have the compositional factors, which includes karmic action—which is really talking about intentional actions, which are also included here. So are various mental processes—anger, intelligence.

So we have 5 aggregates, and then based on those we say, “I” “me”. So then, if we looked at each of these five and asked, “Which one is me?” None of them is me. Then when you think, well does “me” exist as something categorically different from these five, then you cannot find some kind of me that exists separately from them. What does exist is a me that is designated upon the five. Based on these five we impute “me.” And this is enough for it to exist; this is how it exists—as a dependent designation. But if you look, there is no findable I or me to be found. Once you have

this understanding of dependent arising in that way, then you can extend that to others and anything else that exists—as having imputed existence, as existing as a dependent designation. But there is nothing that exists separate from its parts. All these parts—like the five aggregates—are not the thing itself, but based on them we can designate, “I.”All things, then, exist in that same way as being dependent designations and not able to be found within their bases of designation.

Nagarjuna says [in the Fundamental Treatise on Wisdom]: [IS THIS THE RIGHT QUOTE? I COULDN'T TYPE FAST ENOUGH]:

*Whatever is a dependent arising
Is explained to be emptiness.
Being a dependent designation
Is the Middle Way.*

He is sayingThrough dependence, then, you are eliminating that it exists from its own side, on its own. It has a dependent existence. So that is what is implied by “designation.” It has an existence dependent upon terminology. This is the middle way.....

So then, we have to apply a method of cultivating a view of how things are empty, a view of emptiness. In order to do that, you have to start with a feeling about how the “I” appears. If you use your imagination to remember a time when you were very happy or very angry—this helps to bring up a sense of our self as existing in its own right. There is a way that the self appears there that is described as existing from its own side as “me,” “me.” Then you have to examine if the me actually exists there, then it has to be identical to the five aggregates or somehow diverse, separate and different from them. So then you look from the top of your head to the soles of your feet and eliminate that these body parts and look for the I. Then you look through the components of mind: is the pain feeling I? Is the pleasure feeling I? or neutral feeling? Then you go through feelings: Is my anger me? Is my attachment me? And you go through all the different mental processes that are enumerated. Then, you keep going through that—are the different sense consciousnesses me? As you eliminate these, then you see it must be something other than them, as a separate entity, categorically different from the five aggregates. Once you have done this, you might fall into a nihilistic attitude that the self completely does not exist, but then you have to bring to mind that the self does exist as a dependent arising. The self does exist as a mere designation based upon these five aggregates. So that understanding of dependent arising comes to help you to understand that there is an “I” that exists in a dependent way. A dependently existent I couldn't be an I that exists from its own side. So you are going back and forth from an understanding of emptiness as [the reason for things being dependently existent and dependent arising as the reason for emptiness]. You are tacking back and forth between these two and in that way, you come to understand that there is no self. This feeling of a self as existing from its own side—there is no such self.

The question arises, if the self does not exist, “You, Buddha, taught that [there are former and future lives.] If there is no self then how could such things exist?”

In response to that, the Buddha says we are not talking about the self as completely non-existent, but that there is no self that exists...by way of its own entity, a self-existent self. There is a self that exists as a dependent designation. What happens is, when we die, we won't be able to take our body with us, and all the different mental functions that we come to identify as being ourselves, those all disappear—all the

course mental functionings. And what happens is that the mind becomes more and more subtle until it comes to a subtle mental stream. There is a continuity of mental experience from one moment to the next. And at death this subtle form is the basis of designation of our sense of “I.” It forms the basis for designation the sense of “I.” This subtle mental mindstream or continuity of mind continues to the next lifetime will take on a physical form and will be the basis for our taking a new lifetime.

At the point of death, then, it is important not to have the fear that you will become completely non-existent. When you are dying, it is natural to feel “I am becoming non-existent.” In a sense you are. The sense of I preoccupied with all the activities of this life is disappearing, because you are losing orientation toward to the activities of this lifetime, but you have to be careful not to fall into a feeling of becoming non-existent. You can reflect [I did some virtuous things in my life, and I didn’t do a lot of harmful things.] I have done some good in my life, and based on this you can have some confidence you will take a fortunate rebirth. So you have to concentrate as much as you can on virtue and any of the good things you have done in this life. With that kind of confidence, your preoccupation of this life will disappear and a continuity of consciousness will continue into the next lifetime.

At the point of death, then, for a person who has advanced practice, they are able to be involved in reorienting themselves in cherishing others over themselves. They can have confidence and joy to go to the next lifetime. The same for those in the intermediate level of practice, they can have some confidence they have cultivated an understanding of emptiness, and worked to reduce their partiality toward those who they associate with themselves and against those they associate with other. Then they can die with confidence. And those in the initial level of practice, who engage in virtue and abstain from non-virtue, can think they have done enough to have a confident joy, “I will be able to take a fortunate rebirth in my next lifetime.”

So at the point of death you have to have some kind of confidence that you have done something. If you have cultivated some love and compassion and not done any time, then you can confidentially rely on that at the point of your death. So in this lifetime, now we have to take advantage of these teachings. It doesn’t have to be love and compassion. If we avoid harming others through following the instructions of the 10 non-virtuous deeds and cultivating the 10 virtuous deeds. The point of those is not just to hear and intellectually understand them. That would be like a fruit with a skin that is not palatable, but the inside is sweet—you have just reached the outside without coming to the essence. The sweet part is to take the essence and put them into practice. The teachings are for the sake of putting them into practice, so that is how we can make the best use here of coming to study the teachings.

Michael: Is the subtle mindstream that proceeds from one lifetime to the next, can it be consciously perceived in this lifetime?

Geshe-la: The short answer is that it is very hard. It is not something we would be able to understand. At birth, there is some feeling of this, but what happens is that it is a rough, coarse wind energy and the body is formed based on this. Then the mind comes in dependence upon the coarse body. So you have coarse and subtle levels. You don’t have an awareness of this subtle level of the mind. What it takes is for the body to go. When the body goes, then there is a point in between that and thinking of the future life, where you start considering where you are going. Basically we are talking about a mental state empty of anything (thought, feeling). It is similar to the

understanding of emptiness, so accomplished practitioners can use that. It has that quality of being free of coarse experience, but it is not emptiness. It is when your body has ceased, so it is hard to get to that once we have this coarse body.

There are instances in our experience when the mind becomes more subtle: when you go into a dream state. If you have surgery and undergo anesthesia. It's not like you have no conscious awareness, it is very subtle. It isn't the subtle mind we are talking about, but it is more subtle.

Anne: Is this subtle mind still dependently arisen? If so, on what?

Geshe-la: It is a dependent arising because it arose in dependence upon the dissolution of all the coarse minds. We were talking about wind energy, which also becomes very subtle, and it depends upon that as well.

Dedication.