

TBLC Sunday Class
October 10, 2010

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Text: Ruth Sonam, trans. and ed., Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way with Commentary by Gyel-tsap*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2008. Chapter XI Refuting Truly Existent Time.

We're looking at the vs. on page 66:

*Those who are born only to die
And whose nature is to be driven,
Appear to be in the act of dying
And not in the act of living.*

So, when one is born, then we feel we are starting to live...and then we feel at the end of our life, when our life is over, that that is dying. But if we look at..in those terms we see a life ahead of us. Once we're born we have a future or life ahead of us and then we're living until at the end, that we consider—we're past. So now we are in the present. But in fact, when we're born and in our youth we don't think about our death, but we do have to think of our death. If you look at it in terms of cause and effect, it's an unfolding—birth is what is bringing about death. So we have to consider death and think about it.

Then the line here, the second line says “whose nature is to be driven”...the idea here is that we are always under the power or influence of something else, so that we are constantly going towards death, caused by various conditions along the way which are, in particular, here: aging, sickness, and decline. So we are like an animal being led to slaughter. We're thinking that we are living. But there's no point that you can feel “Oh, I'm living” or something like that.

So, we appear to be in the act of dying. We sort of feel “I am living” but in another way of looking at it, whatever we are doing is, in fact, working on dying. Every moment, our death is getting closer. So every moment we are working on dying, and it seems there isn't any living.

What we call living is actually this constant process of various causes and conditions coming together and bringing about effects on a momentary basis. It's a constant unfolding of cause and effect. And many causes coming together and expire every moment. It's very much like our minds—our minds are never, in fact, still. There's a constant change—a process of change in our minds. So then, if you look on page 71:

*No matter whose life, it does not
Differ from the moments of mind.
This people certainly do not perceive.
Thus it is rare to know the self.*

This process,...if we look at it, if we could see it we would see how all these causes and conditions are always coming together and causing their effects and that whole thing having to repeat itself every moment. But it is very very rare for someone to actually see that or

perceive/know that. So then it is said that it is very rare for us to know ourselves. To know our self means to know the self or know what our situation is.

So we have this idea of living. or, how do we say it, “I’m living”...but in the Tibetan it sort of means—in between production and cessation there is staying, abiding. But this is always changing. Another way of saying it is there is always flux, and we are giving this a name “staying” or “living”. And we think I’m the same person as in the past and I’ll be the same in the future. [not exact there.] We have this idea of being static, a static person staying from past to present to future. But we are just making it up, you could say. We are under...constantly changing. Geshe-la is pointing out that electricity is like that...light appears to be steady, but is constantly changing. If an object falls from a height it will eventually fall to the ground. We’re like that...and so it’s like calling that “living” but we are constantly moving toward...going towards dying.

What this is telling us is that we constantly have to cultivate an awareness of this state of flux, whether it is regarding ourselves or the objects around us/the things that we use/the objects in our lives that we are using. We constantly have to remind ourselves that they are changing/they are in a state of flux. If we act against our tendency to think things are static...in the beginning maybe if people tell us we are going to die, we might be afraid, but if you are constantly developing an awareness of this change, you will make your life meaningful and avoid doing things that are harmful and cultivate those things that are helpful, so that by the time where you actually reach the state that you know you are going to die then you are not afraid that time. So on page 79 it says:

*Whoever with certainty has
The thought, “I am going to die,”
Having completely relinquished attachment,
Why would they fear even the Lord of Death?*

At that point...[couldn’t hear...sounded like, “we’ll be an object of praise” but I don’t think I heard that right??]

So, now the topic that we are talking about are the three times—past, present, and future. We are investigating how do things come about, how they abide, and how is it that they disintegrate. So we will continue with that—ch. 11, p. 228.

What you should keep in mind, with the first verse in this previous discussion, is that the view in this discussion here—[the context is]—from proponents of permanent time, someone who says time is permanent. And so what they are thinking is that not only are they thinking in terms of permanent time, but also the past and present and future as being substantially existent or existing in their own right, having their own self-existence.

What that means is that someone is running for president, right, then they are going to be the future president, so we are already talking about them as the president then. And then when they become the president there is no denying that they exist as the substantially existent president then. And when they are past president—we refer them to the ex-president....

they are still president. In this sense, then, they substantially exist as president in their own right. So then the discussion is really about that.

So when you are thinking about time, we usually think about time from the Buddhist viewpoint is that it is imputedly existent. We are all gathered together here and so we call it “class time” and label it “class time.” But from the perspective of somebody who sees time as permanent or self-existent, then time is some kind of different entity that is involved in the production of class time—a separate entity from class time that helps to [create] the class time that is produced. [that sentence needs an edit]

If we

Remember what was being said in the first verse. It was that if we look at a pot—the future pot is at the time of the cause, the causal state of the pot where the lump of clay and so forth are all together

present is when it is produced and the past is the pile of shards. So then it becomes very problematic when you are trying to say that the 3 times exist in their own right, because then, relative to the future pot, the present pot and the past pot are also future. So then they’d all be future. And if they all existed in their own right as future, then they’d all be existing together, they’d all be there at once and there wouldn’t be any way to posit past present and future. On the other hand, if relative to the future pot the present and the past pot are future and therefore don’t exist, there wouldn’t be....they would both be future. If they had a self-existence as future then there wouldn’t be any present or past, because they are only existent relative to the future pot....if everything had self-existence as future. This is not a problem for anyone who thinks in terms of dependent arising. When we think of it from a Buddhist viewpoint, the past present and future work very well together. If we think about the sprout of the seed, there is this sprout that comes about based on causes and conditions and turns into the sprout. So it’s very easy to understand and hold this whole process of

sprout to be coming into existence and then going out of existence. It’s very easy to assert that and understand that, from the viewpoint of it being a d.a. The problem comes when you think of the past present and future as having own self-existence.—already being there. The being there at the time of the cause.

Karen asks question about why the 3 times collapse into one [if they time is substantially existent].

Josh explains: The future pot is the one that is yet to be...and then the present is yet to be relative to the future pot. The future pot is causal. Think of it like the seed, relative to the sprout, the seed is yet to be.

Yet to be means future relative to the seed. If you take it out of the pot. Or the president who is running for office is yet to be present. ...[missed]

The present and the past are future relative to what we are calling future. So if they exist in their own right as future, then all of those things have to exist together at the same time. And therefore, establishing time as past, present and future would fall apart, right? They’d all be there together.

You have to keep in mind this idea of relative to. What we call pot in the present, relative to that then what’s before, what’s already passed is past and what would be happening in the

future would be future. So you have to think about that, too. You have to think about something that is yet to happen and something that has already happened..

[Missed a sentence where he transitioned to talking about time in causal terms] In this scheme where the future pot is first, it's the causal state, then relative to the pot itself that would be past. So the future pot would be past relative to the present pot. And the past pot, which would be shards, would be future in relation to the present pot. Before you have the effect you need the cause.

So now we are going to start the second verse.

So to understand the assertion here you have to look back. We're on 228 and look above.

If the future of the future existed by way of its own entity, it should be future. In that case since all three times would have to be future, there could not be any past or present. If that were so, the future itself would not exist, since it could not be posited as future in relation to anything.

Then the person who heard this refutation is coming back with:
The past pot is not altogether....there is no error.

Is everybody able to follow that part?

“No!!”

You've got this idea of the future of the future—if it existed by way of its own entity, there could

what they are coming back with is “no, that's not true that there wouldn't be any

then you can say that that's the future president. He at that time...in Tibetan it's a bit easier understand. He's still the president. There is some self-existent president there in the way of being president

he's existing in the manner of being the future president.

So when they are debating each other...you have to remember we are trying to understand what it means to be substantially existent.

in one way it doesn't make a lot of sense, in another way it does. For us, when we are saying that Obama during the debates is the future president...From their viewpoint (holding things as self-existent) then that person debating is the president, but he is showing how to be a future president. AND then when he is the president, he is showing the way of being a president.

Does “showing the way” help? Each time he still exists as the president.

Kathy says, but when he was debating and we didn't know who would win, we didn't think of him as the president.

Josh: We're talking about someone who posits self-existence. They say he's president all the way through.

Kathy: That's messed up!

Josh: Yes, this person (who is asserting self-existence) says he IS the president at that time.

Diana: [sorry I missed the details]
asks a question regarding....does it change the argument if it is before or after the election?

You have to bear in mind that we are talking about another system—proponents of permanent time. From their point of view, it doesn't matter. AT the time of the cause, it already exists there—and at the time of the effect.

Kathy: it's hard to refute it when we don't even believe it in the first place.

But we actually perceive it that way. That's the way things appear to us.

Karen asks question I can't hear

Yeah, he's president. We can get into the way these people think. Didn't he seem like the president during the debates? We can get into it that way...

[They say that...] At the time of the clay and water [causal conditions], the pot exists there. The Buddhists say, then show me, show it. Can you find it there? They say, yes, it substantially exists there as a pot.

Here, if we look at the commentary—jump over the verse there of 252, on page 228.
If at the time of the future pot, the disintegrated pot existed in the future as an entity which had not yet come into existence, it would follow that the past pot was future because of being, by way of its own entity, that which had not yet occurred at the time of the future pot.

The past pot, remember, is the shards.....But it is saying that the past pot already exists by way of its own entity, it would be future so there would be no past.

It follows that there would be no past. This would necessarily be so, for how could anything that truly existed as future in nature become past?

If something, in its own right, is future how can it change to be past? It exists as future in its own right so it cannot become past. So there would be no past. So it is contradictory for a future thing to become past.

There couldn't possibly be past, there could only be future in its own right relative to the present pot.

It is contradictory. Moreover by virtue of this reasoning, if the future in relation to the pot is asserted as truly existent it must be accepted as being only future, which undermines the contention.

This other one, the next verse is:

*Because of being future in nature
A future functional thing
Is thus present
And cannot be future.*

If, according to proponents of permanent time, future things exist,

“future things” means exists in their own right as future.

it follows that the future pot is present because of already being in the nature of a future substantially existent thing.

If it already exists as the future pot then it has already been produced and is produced. It doesn't have to be produced because it already has been... it has already come into being at the time of the future, so therefore it would already be presents. What has already gone out of existence is passed

so if it has already been produced, it's present. So that future pot is already present there.

if something exists as a seentity

It cannot be future because it has already come into existence and the definition of future is that it is yet to be.

They are saying that at the causal state the pot already exists there [missed it]

If something existed as a substantially existent entity—to repeat that—it must be present since it has been produced and has not disintegrated. The definition of the present is thus. If this is accepted, then it cannot be future.

You have to keep in mind that in our mind, the future pot hasn't come into being there, but from their mind it exists there.

It is good to keep in mind that they are thinking about their position. Because people make prophecies it must be that the future exists in the present. And, of course, we have historians that tell us about the past....

From our viewpoint, at a causal state a thing has to come into existence—the effect state. But that is not the way they see things.

So from their viewpoint, things are permanent. What they are saying is that if something exists...the future pot already exists, and the past pot and the present pot.. there is something

going through all these three times that is permanent. [a substantially existent something that goes through all three times]

What is being established here, if you look at the outline on page 322, is the consequence that impermanence is impossible if all three times are substantially existent. From our viewpoint, things come into existence...in a causal state all these things come together and the thing is produced and we call it “pot” and then it is destroyed. But from their viewpoint things substantially exist.

They already exist there. So the verse is saying that if the future, past and future truly exist there, what does not exist there? How can there be impermanence in one for whom all three times exist.

in the commentary, it is saying. The Vaibhasika are also a Bst system where they assert the existence of the three times and so forth. Exist by way of their own character means truly existent.....

If we read the commentary then, it says:

If, as asserted by Vaisesikas, Vaibhasikas, and so forth, things exist by way of their own character...

Existing by way of their own character—this is the heart of what they are proposing. Unlike ourselves, ..we think that things arise based on causes and conditions, and then when it disintegrates it goes out of existence. But in their viewpoint, things exist by way of their own character. They have a self-existence, they exist by way of themselves. We say that they exist dependently, but they say they have self existence. However you want to say it...They don’t need anything else, a dependent.

exist in the future, exist in the past and exist in the present, what part of a thing could ever not exist? How can there be impermanence for a proponent of substantially existent time? It follows that there cannot be any impermanent things, for if all three times are substantially existent, whatever exists at an earlier time must be accepted as existing later and whatever exists at a later time must be accepted as existing earlier.

That’s the definition of permanence—whatever exists at an earlier time must be accepted as existing later...

It’s important to understand that from their viewpoint, if things substantially exist by way of their own character then basically what they are talking about is permanence.

When we use the word “permanent” it doesn’t mean eternal, all it means that it doesn’t need to depend on causes and conditions in order to stay. It doesn’t need to depend upon causes and conditions. So then from a Buddhist viewpoint—what we are talking about is Aryadeva’s [couldn’t hear]...if a thing exists now, in the future, and the present—it doesn’t undergo any change. What exists at the later time exists in the earlier time. For a Prasangika, then, everything comes into existence based on many causes and conditions

but it only stays for a moment and it is already going out of existence at that same moment. It then follows that the causal change where it completely goes out of existence. WE see it as continuing because it’s former moment seems very similar to its present moment. So we

have this sense that it is staying, but it is already disintegrating in the second moment. So when we are thinking about time, what we are thinking about is how we view ourselves. We think about ourselves as—I'm the same person today that I was yesterday and I'll be the same tomorrow. We have this static look at things. Through investigating the three times in this way, we come to see how things are impermanent. To say that something is permanent means that it doesn't undergo change.

If you take our view of time and the p view of time and you look at it from a causal perspective...then at the time of the cause the future thing is yet to be and then when it is it exists just for a moment, and then it goes out of existence in the second moment. Relative to today, yesterday is past and for us it is completely gone. And if we look at tomorrow, it is yet to come into existence, so it doesn't exist. The present is something that—even though things are in a state of constant flux, we are just thinking of it as the present. It's actually constantly in flux and there is nothing we can nail down as present. Geshe-la wanted to make that point

We're not saying that there isn't anything like yesterday and tomorrow—that the 9th and 11th don't exist. They are functional things, yesterday and tomorrow. But unlike the proponents of permanent time—from their viewpoint, yesterday exists today and tomorrow exists today. They have their own existence. It's not so difficult to understand this when you think about yourself. I'm the same person I am today as I was yesterday. How do you feel about yourself, as opposed to intellectually, you can understand you're not the same person. Right? That's what these people are asserting—how they feel!

Question: How does one remember the past?

We can bring to mind something in the future and something from the past—which is basically what memory is. If we just talk about past things, we talk about that as memory. But the idea is that we can remember what we did yesterday and think about it today—so the past has some meaning to us now. But if it existed in its own right. If we had a great meal yesterday, we could go and get it again today. There is nothing there that we can find.

Karen: How do you restore your mind from seeing that its not meaningless. I know that is not where he is headed.

Nowadays, we are very attached to things. So the idea is that thinking this way, it helps us become less attached. In the beginning, we are holding tight to things. but if you think about how it is disintegrating moment to moment, then you loosen your hold. Attachment is like oil...you adhere to the thing. You're adhering to things. And so then you start to let go and not be attached. And what happens is that you start seeing things—gold and dirt come to be the same to you. Self and other—you don't come to make such distinctions. When you loosen your attention, you develop a more balanced view.

Jim: What is Geshe-la's opinion....

Fear is something that you have to look at—in terms of fear of death. From the viewpoint of someone who is practicing the dharma, fear of death is not unhelpful because you provide for your future life. But fear of death, if you haven't thought about impermanence in

this way, and you hold on to things...death is something you don't like to hear. Even the sound death is something you don't like to hear. And then as you get closer, you hold onto your things and get more and more afraid...we feel that we are going to be totally annihilated at death. The annihilation of the self that we are fearing. It's not that, when you start cultivating this idea of impermanence, then you start to accept that it is just change. Everything is constantly in a state of flux and you're going to have to give up this body. If we just became non-existent then there'd be nothing to worry about. But something continues to exist, so then—if you are thinking about impermanence, then when the time to give up body and mind happens, then some people are very accepting and happy to go. So that is what you are aiming for, to have that kind of feeling about your death.