

English Dharma talk
May 20, 2017
By Geshe Pema Tshering
Land of Compassion Buddha Edmonton
<http://compassionbuddha.ca>

A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Bodhicaryavatara) – Class 13

By Shantideva

In Chandrakirti's Supplement to the Middle Way, he talks about how all the troubles in cyclic existence can be traced to the view of the transitory collection. b/c of grasping to this self as inherently existent on the basis of the aggregates, then one commits all kinds of errors that lead to suffering.

This chapter 6, stanza 120

Having seen with intelligence that afflictions and faults without exception arise from the view of the transitory collection
And having realized the self is the object of that
Yogis refute the self

So when we see that our negative emotions and all kinds of faults arise from this view of the transitory collection, then we want to refute the object that is held by this view. So we can understand anger arises from this kind of grasping at the self.

Similarly when one generates jealousy, this disturbs the mind. E.g. when we see something good happening to others, we can generate this mind thinking oh, he or she is so fortunate; this thing good is happening to them but not to me. As a result, the mind becomes tight, and unhappy. So you can see that as soon as such a negative mind arises, one's mental peace is disturbed; therefore, whenever the 6 root afflictions are generated in mental continuum, we become disturbed and unhappy. Where do the root afflictions come from? If we examine the origin of the root afflictions, we'll see they come from the view of the transitory collection – a mind that adheres to an independent self.

This view of the transitory collection is the source of all disturbing emotions / unhappiness. It grasps to a self that is self-sufficient, independent, that does not rely on other factors. So yogis can understand that this view is the trouble-maker. So they try to refute the object that is held by this view.

So we need to refute such a self – a self that does not exist b/c it's independent self, which doesn't exist in reality. How do we do that? It's not sufficient to just verbally refute the existence of such a self.

We need to investigate what the self is. E.g. if you're feeling angry then you should check who is getting angry? E.g. if you recall that someone has said something nasty to you, that can cause your mind to get quite angry. You should check who am I? so try to

locate this “I”. at that time, you may have a palpable sense of self and look within the 5 aggregates, or less technically, look within your body and mind – from the top of the your head to the bottom of your feet – try to pinpoint this I. try to locate it.

When you don’t find an “I” within a body, you might think maybe “I” am my mind. So you think perhaps the self lies within the mind. Of course the mind is not something quite tangible; it’s always in constant flux: sometimes happy mind; sad mind. Try to investigate is the “I” the mind? When we’re happy, check is the “I” the happy mind? If the “I” is equivalent to the happy mind? What happens when the happy mind fades away? What happens to the I? if you’re feeling unhappy / angry and so on, and you get a sense that “I” am not happy. You think “I” am equivalent to the unhappy mind. What happens when that fades? The “I” is not as concrete as you think it is. When you try to pinpoint the “I”, you might have difficulty doing so.

This is how to investigate “selflessness”. You need to analyze for yourself the nature of the I. if you think an independent I exists, then you need to find it. By going through this investigative process, you’ll be able to arrive at this conclusion that such a self cannot be found. So there’s no other way for you to give rise to this conviction. Just by talking about it, refuting a self, you won’t be able to come to this conclusion.

In the Middle Way texts, a convenient example is given to illustrate the unquantifiability (? Recorder doesn’t know if that’s the word) of an independent I. Consider a chariot, which is made of many parts: handles, wheels, etc. if you get this sense there’s a concrete chariot existing among these parts, then try to find this chariot. Is it in this component? That component? Try to pinpoint where the chariot is. You’ll not be able to pinpoint something and say that’s the chariot. You may think that’s the collection of the parts: if we pile the parts, we’ll be able to find the chariot. But if we look carefully, we won’t be able to find it.

When you try to pinpoint the chariot among its parts, you won’t be able to do so. Does this mean the chariot doesn’t exist? No! It still exists. It can still carry people from 1 point to another; perform its function. However, such a chariot does not exist the way you think it exists.

How does the chariot exist? Since it cannot be located when you look for it among its parts? The chariot is simply imputed in dependence on its parts. So the chariot is simply a label on the parts of the chariot. When you look for the “I”, you’ll find “I” is similarly unfindable among the parts. You can look among the body and mind but you won’t be able to find the I. the I does exist but only in dependence on the parts. You have the body, the mind, the collection of the body and mind. The “I” is just a label upon this collection.

The reason why we went through this discussion for how to find the self – not being to find the self and so on, b/c stanza from Chandrakirti’s text: by realizing the self is the view of the transitory collection, yogis refute the self. When we are able to realize there is no independently existing self, no self that exists by its own side, then we can get rid of

all afflictions and faults. We can discard anger, attachment, pride, jealousy and so on. And we'll be able to also avoid the faults that are brought about by the afflictions, including birth, aging, sickness and death, and mental disturbances and so on.

To summarize, we should understand we want to get rid of problems from the source. So our suffering can be traced to the 3 poisons: anger, attachment and ignorance. When we check the way these afflictions relate to the I, we'll see they actually grasp to an I, in an unrealistic manner. The I adhered to by the negative emotions doesn't really exist that way. I doesn't exist in the way it appears. When we generate say a strong desire, thinking I want this / that, and very strong grasping to an independent self, then we should remember the I doesn't really exist the way it seems. This can cause our mind to be relaxed. Correspondingly, our negative emotions will become weaker. Our mind will experience greater mental peace.

If we try to explain this topic in great detail all at one go, it may become quite confusing for you. Once in a while, I'll talk about this and you can reflect; we can do this again and again. You'll gain familiarization with this profound topic eventually. We shouldn't try to spend all our time explaining this all in one go. There's a danger you can't appreciate what's said.

Root text.

Stanza 53

In a section entitled: having gone for refuge, practicing according to the advice of the 3 jewels

Prior to this section, we looked at how we understand the fact that we could have created many unskillful actions in the past. There is a need to engage in confession to purify those negativities. It is inappropriate to think I will confess my misdeeds later, not now. This is because death can happen any time. So by reflecting on one's precarious position, one generates a sense of dread and fear. And one then becomes motivated to go for refuge to the 3 jewels so one requests the 3 jewels for protection. The 3 jewels can't take away our misdeeds; our suffering. What they can do is teach us how we can practice so they can reveal the path to us and by engaging in the practice of the path, we'll be able to remove our fear, insecurities. This is the section we'll look at now.

Formerly your words I have transgressed
But having see these terrors all around
I come to you for refuge praying:
Swiftly drive away my fear!

The first line says: formerly your words I have transgressed. This means in the past, we have created negative actions. E.g. in the earlier part of life, 20 years ago, 30 years ago, perhaps we have created negative actions. So sometimes these were created intentionally; other times, out of lack of conscientiousness / carelessness. I have created

the 10 non-virtues of body speech and mind. As a result, I have transgressed your advice. Here, I acknowledge that I have committed these mistakes. I realize that I'm not in a good place. I want to do something about this. I come to for refuge; please help me to get rid of these mistakes. Please drive away my fear.

If we don't check, we may think I'm living an immaculate life. I don't do anything harmful; however, if we check, we'll probably check we're not so saintly after all. If you examine your actions from the time you wake up in the morning all the way to when you go to bed at night, you'll see there are some negative actions committed. E.g. with one's mind, one can engage in covetousness, malice or wrong views. In terms of speech, did I engage in harsh speech, tell lies, divisive speech, how about idle gossip? Check body: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct. If we investigate carefully, we'll likely find not 1 day passes without us creating some negative action.

The Kadampa Geshes have said: our misdeeds and downfalls are like rainfall. So we should not allow any negativity to remain without us confessing them. This means every day at the end of the day, we should review what has happened during the day and if we find we've created some unskillful actions, we should engage in confession. If you can avoid negative actions altogether, that's ideal. However, if we can't avoid them, before we sleep, we have to try to confess them and purify them. This means we should engage in some kind of recitation and so on such that you purify the negative actions we've done with the 4 opponent powers complete.

At the end of the day, we should try to review what we've done during the day. If you can't remember all you've done, you can at least think: whatever negative actions I've done – I confess them. Bring to mind the Buddha and think I confess all unskillful actions I've done today. Whatever there are, I confess them to you. Please help me purify them. With that thought, you can recite om mani padmes or 100 syllable mantra and sincerely try to purify your mistakes. So by engaging in such a regular practice then you'll be able to reduce the amount of negative karma that you have. Although you won't be able to completely purify all negative karma, you'll be able to constantly reduce it and keep that in check.

Stanza 54: e.g. given:

For if, alarmed by common ailments,
I must implement the doctor's words,
What need to speak of when I'm constantly brought low
By ills like lust and faults hundredfold?

The 1st half of this talks about how a person, unwell, experiencing a disturbance in the body, winds and so on, this person will be alarmed by his sickness. He will faithfully follow the doctor's instructions so he can recover. We are in a position where we have far worse ailments in the sense that we have afflictions: attachment, anger, ignorance and because of them, we experience great suffering, not just here now but also in future lives due to the karma we've created unskillfully. This means we need to all the more be

conscientious and engage in curing our sickness according to the instructions of the Buddha. If a person with a common ailment will implement the doctor's words, then what need to mention a person like me, who has this great disease of the 3 poisons and terrible sufferings, need to listen to the advice of the Buddha and implement his advice.

Stanza 55 explains that the sickness of the 3 poisons has many shortcomings. The medicine that can destroy such a sickness is rare. This is because the 3 poisons can cause very serious ripening results in the future. The medicine / antidote that can destroy the 3 poisons is rare. Now that we have the opportunity to meet this medicine, to use it, we should appreciate its importance.

And if, by one of these alone,
The dwellers in the world are all thrown down,
And if no other remedy exists,
No other healing elsewhere to be found.

It's explained that by one of these afflictions alone, these 3 poisons alone, the inhabitants of the world can be brought to ruin. E.g. anger can destroy everyone in the world. The medicine that can counteract anger or any of the 3 poisons can be found only in the teachings of the enlightened beings. As we've mentioned early on, the practitioner's job is to work on afflictions and eliminate them. The remedies are rare. Now that we have the fortune to encounter this medicine, we should understand its great importance.

This first half of stanza 55 talks about how by just one affliction alone, all the beings in the world are brought to ruin. You can think about these lines in the following way. Anger is something pervasive in the sense that all human beings have anger, all animals have anger in their minds. We can understand that anger brings unhappiness. As soon as anger arises in the mind, you become disturbed. But how many beings can effectively manage their anger? In other words, they know anger is not good; but how many can rid their anger? How many know and are able to apply an effective method to manage anger? Very very few. Such methods are in Buddha's teachings, but very few people have access to these methods.

If you think about it, the Buddha's teachings haven't been available in the West until recently. For a long time after Buddha taught Dharma, his teachings didn't spread to the West. For centuries, they weren't available to the West. Now that they are and we have good fortune to encounter them, we should realize how fortunate they are.

Next stanza (56) explains why it's appropriate for us to practice Buddha's instructions according to the advice of what we call the supreme physician:

Than words of the all-knowing doctor,
Which uproot our every ill,
The thought to turn on him deaf ears
Is abject and contemptible stupidity.

What this means is we have now this very precious opportunity to apply the techniques that are taught by the Buddha. If we waste this opportunity we do not try to learn these techniques, then we'll lose the opportunity totally. If we do that, then we are very ignorant; very stupid.

Stanza 57: how it is necessary to practice and the example of this chasm is given:

If along a small and ordinary cliff
I need to pick my way with special care,
What need to speak of that long-lasting chasm
Plunging to the depths a thousand leagues?

Here the example of walking on this cliff is given. If we have to walk along a small and ordinary cliff and danger we fall off the cliff and into some water, we'd be extremely careful. So here, if we are in danger of falling into great suffering due to our sicknesses of anger, attachment, and ignorance, of course we need to be more careful. When I was small, if we have to cross some kind of river or fast-flowing water and no bridge, then we need to be extremely careful. If we try to cross this river, we need to step very cautiously. We have to make sure our steps are firm and dig our feet into the bed of the sand and not just step over carelessly. Step by step, we check if it's safe for us to proceed. Similarly, when we have to proceed in a dangerous place, if there's danger we fall into great suffering due to our afflictions, we must be very careful. Knowing there's such danger, we try to apply advice of Buddha to avoid a terrible situation.

58 explains: we need to strive to antidotes to afflictions from now on (today)

"Today at least, I shall not die."
So rash to lull myself with words like these!
My dissolution and my hour of death
Will come to me, of this there is no doubt.

This stanza talks about impermanence. We've already mentioned this point in previous stanzas. So every day we should review our actions and at night before we go to bed, we should try to purify any negative action that we've created and we should generate the thought may all my unskillful actions be purified and recite the 100-syllable vajrasattva mantra.

59: we should not be lazy meditating on the path, b/c no reason for us to be unafraid of suffering.

Who can give me fearlessness,
What sure escape is there from this?
It's certain that I'm going to die,
So how can I relax, my mind at ease?

If we feel afraid that itself will not undo the mistakes we've committed in past. If we want to effectively get rid of the source of our fears, we have to actively do something about them. We should not have this attitude of wanting others to purify our mistakes for us. We shouldn't think, this is scary, someone please help me resolve this. We need to rely on ourselves: we created the negativities; we need to rely on ourselves to purify those negativities and protect ourselves from suffering.

60: not attach to possessions b/c they are unreliable.

Of life's experience, all seasons past,
What's left to me, what now remains?
By clinging to what now is here no more,
My teacher's precepts I have disobeyed.

In the past we might have eaten very good food; worn very good clothes and so on. However, those experiences are just a memory. Those past experiences can't provide concrete benefit to us now. If in the process of obtaining good food and good clothes so on in the past, we have created negative actions, committed misdeeds, then we are going to suffer in the future. Therefore, by disobeying our teachers' advice and committing negative actions for the sake of obtaining material possessions, experiencing sensual pleasure, then we've done something very meaningless. Those actions should not have been done.

We should understand this stanza is spoken to the ordained people. Monks get their food by begging for alms; their robes are offered by others; this advice is given to the ordained people telling them they should not be attached to material possessions.

However for lay people related to the household, you need to take care of your family members, children and so on, you should not behave exactly as the ordained people because by virtue of you being a householder, you have a lot of work to do.

Having said that, we should refrain from negative actions. We need to work to support our family and so on; in the course of that work, we need to avoid unskillful actions. If we create huge negativities, we will be in trouble. In a daily basis, engage in confession and purification practices. Although we can't cleanse ourselves completely of negativity, we can reduce the amount that pollutes our mind so there's hope we are less negative if we engage in daily purification.

61: it is not appropriate for us to be attached to friends and others

And when this life is left behind,
And with it all my kith and kin,
I must set out on strange paths all alone;
Why make so much of all my friends and foes?

As before, this advice is given to the ordained people b/c ordained people do not have these responsibilities with respect to supporting their family, taking care of children and so on. From that point of view, they live alone. So no need to be attached to people. However, for lay people, who have responsibilities with respect to parents, children, family members and so on, not wise for them to ignore responsibility. So you need to go to work, make money and so on. Do what you must do but avoid actions that involve great negativity. If you create those grave negative karmas, hard for you to purify them completely in an easy manner. Do what you do, if you make mistakes, engage in confession. Be careful how you lead your life.

Advised we don't cling for loved ones and for their sake, create negative actions. So how should we go about fulfilling responsibilities to parents, children and so on? Instead of this grasping attitude, we should think about e.g. our parents have shown us great kindness; to repay that kindness, we go to work, make a living so we can support them and repay their kindness. Similarly, for children, instead of clinging possessive attitude, we think I'd like to nurture children and educate them so they can grow up in a healthy manner. If we have such motivations for relationships with parents, children and so on, instead of creating negative karma, then we can create great virtue. By adjusting our attitude and mentality, we actually have great opportunities for creating virtue.

62: explains we should strive day and night to become liberated from our misdeeds.

How instead can I make sure
To ride myself of evil, only cause of sorrow?
This should be my one concern,
My only thought both night and day.

Explains that we should be very concerned about how to avoid negativities; how to rid of misdeeds; this is because we don't want suffering. Suffering comes from negative karma. So if we can have our way, we would want to totally avoid suffering. If suffering were to arise, we'd want to get rid of it as soon as we can. This means we need to work on our negative karma, b/c that's the source of suffering. So if in your work, you need to tell lies for one reason or another, then you need to start thinking how you can avoid telling lies in the course of your work. If your work involves killing, then you need to start thinking how to avoid doing that and still be able to do your work. So the stanza is saying: your one concern both day and night is both how you can avoid misdeeds and get rid of nonvirtue.

Sometimes we are not able to avoid creating unskillful actions, engaging in misbehavior and so on. We must be conscientious about practicing confession. Whatever negativities we've created them we must be diligent in confessing them.

I forgot to say: this section we're in explains the 3rd of the 4 opponent powers: this third power is called power of applying the antidote. This section actually begins from stanza 54 and goes to 60.

So after that third antidote, then we have this power of resolution. We generate determination not to create the negative action again. 4th power starts from stanza 60