

Notes for Sravasti Abbey Thursday class—June 27, 2019

From Yeshe Gyaltsen's *A Necklace for Those of Good Fortune*, p. 48-50:

[Discussion of the category of virtuous mental factors]

QUALM: With regard to virtue, are the eleven [virtuous mental factors] which have been explained here exhaustive?

RESPONSE: In general, virtues are taught to be of five types:

- (1) virtues by way of entity
 - (2) virtues by way of relation
 - (3) virtues by way of subsequent relation
 - (4) virtues by way of motivation
 - (5) virtues by way of ultimacy
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- (1) The eleven explained above – faith and so forth – are specified as being virtues by way of **entity** because they are generated in the entity of virtue from their mere establishment without relying on other factors such as motivation. Hence, here I have indicated the eleven principal virtues.
 - (2) "Virtues by way of **relation**" are minds and mental factors that are concomitant by way of the five similarities with the eleven – faith and so forth.
 - (3) "Virtues by way of **subsequent relation**" are imprints of virtue.
 - (4) "Virtues by way of **motivation**" are, for instance, physical and verbal actions motivated by faith.
 - (5) "Virtues by way of **ultimacy**" are explained to be thusnesses, because all obscurations will be purified if one meditates within observation of thusness; therefore, they are designated as "virtues" but are not actual virtues.

[Discussion of non-virtues]

Similarly, non-virtues are also taught to be of five types:

- (1) non-virtues by way of entity
 - (2) non-virtues by way of relation
 - (3) non-virtues by way of subsequent relation
 - (4) non-virtues by way of motivation
 - (5) non-virtues by way of ultimacy
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- (1) Non-virtues by way of **entity** are mostly the [root] afflictions and the secondary afflictions.
 - (2) Non-virtues by way of **relation** are minds and mental factors that are concomitant with those afflictions.
 - (3) Non-virtues by way of **subsequent relation** are imprints of non-virtue.
 - (4) Non-virtues by way of **motivation** are the physical and verbal actions motivated by those afflictions.
 - (5) Non-virtues by way of **ultimacy** are [phenomena] included within cyclic existence. Since these are the sources from which superiors generate despondency, they are called "non-virtues by way of ultimacy." Nonetheless, it is not definite that everything included in cyclic existence is an actual non-virtue.

From *Samsara, Nirvana, and Buddha Nature*—Vol. 3 in the Library of Wisdom and Compassion series by The Dalai Lama and Thubten Chodron, p. 66-69

Attachment

Attachment is a mental factor that, based on distorted attention that exaggerates the attractiveness of a polluted object (an object under the influence of ignorance), wishes for and takes a strong interest in it. The object could be a material object, a person or a place, or it could be praise or an idea. Attachment functions to produce discontent and to perpetuate the cycle of existence. Looking at our own experiences, we can see how true this is.

This is a general description of attachment; there are many degrees and variations of attachment. Some instances of attachment that arise in daily life are greed that wants more than our fair share, attachment to our ideas that leads to the stubborn insistence on being right, attachment to reputation, praise, pleasing sensory experiences, and so on. We also become attached to people, which leads to having unrealistic expectations of them or of our relationships with them. This in turn leads to disappointment and friction in those relationships, and feelings of bitterness or betrayal when the relationships don't continue as expected.

Covetousness is a coarse form of attachment. As one of the ten nonvirtues, covetousness easily leads to actions that directly harm others, such as stealing or unwise sexual relationships. Other afflictions derived from attachment are miserliness that doesn't want to share our possessions, haughtiness that is attached to our good fortune, and agitation that distracts the mind to desirable objects during meditation.

Attachment and aspiration are distinct mental factors with different functions. Although both are attracted to their object, attachment is based on distorted attention that exaggerates its attractiveness or projects good qualities that are not there. Seeing the object inaccurately, attachment clings to it and does not want to be separated from it. We become attached to people, money and possessions, love and approval, good food and other pleasurable sensory experiences, and so on, and are certain that the good qualities we see inhere in that person or object. If our perception were accurate, everyone should see the person or object as we do and desire it as much as we do. Clearly that is not the case.

Aspiration also focuses on its intended object and takes a strong interest in it, but it is not necessarily based on exaggerating or projecting the object's good qualities. The aspirations seeking a good rebirth, liberation, and full awakening are based on realistically seeing the beneficial qualities that are present. In his *Abhidharma* text, the Tibetan scholar Chim Jampelyang (ca. 1245-1325) clarified that the aspirations or desire for a fortunate rebirth, liberation, or awakening are virtuous; they are not attachment.

Furthermore, Vasubandhu said that objects giving rise to afflictions are polluted. Since buddhahood and the Three Jewels are unpolluted, they cannot induce afflictions in others' minds. If someone thinks, "When I'm a buddha, everyone will respect me," he suffers from attachment to reputation, not attachment to buddhahood.

Craving is a form of attachment and is usually seen as nonvirtuous. However, “craving” can refer to other forms of attachment that may be temporarily useful. For example, in the case of someone who is miserly and doesn’t want to part with their possessions, the craving to be wealthy in a future life can motivate him to counteract his stinginess and become generous in this life. Even though this craving seeks happiness in saṃsāra, it is a step up from craving the happiness of only this life and thus is considered virtuous. For someone who lives an ethically corrupt life, desire to be reborn as a deva can induce him to relinquish harmful behaviors and keep precepts. Craving for the bliss of samadhi in the form and formless realms can inspire someone to cultivate concentration in order to be reborn in those realms. These types of attachment are useful in those specific situations. However, for someone intent on liberation, those same cravings are hindrances because they are enamored with saṃsāric pleasures.

Ananda says that based on the craving for liberation—our highest spiritual aspiration, which is certainly virtuous—the unwanted forms of craving can be eliminated (AN 4.159, AN 2.145). The post-canonical Pali text *Nettipakaraṇa* speaks of virtuous and nonvirtuous forms of craving and confirms that virtuous craving leads to the end of craving. For example, one monastic learns that another has become an arhat, and with desire to attain arhatship too, she practices diligently and becomes an arhat, one who has abandoned craving. Similarly, a monastic motivated by arrogance thinks, “I am as capable as that person who attained arhatship.” This propels him to make effort and he becomes an arhat, someone who has abandoned arrogance. This is similar to the idea of taking attachment on the path in Tantrayana. Here attachment is employed to make manifest the subtlest mind and use it to realize emptiness and destroy all obscurations, including attachment.

However, how do we reconcile these examples with statement of Nagarjuna, the great second century Indian sage who spread the Madhyamaka (Middle Way) view (RA 20ab)?

Attachment, anger, confusion,
and the karma that arises from them are nonvirtuous.

“Attachment” here refers to selfish desire for material possessions, praise, good reputation, and pleasant sensory experiences. Such attachment often leads to nonvirtuous actions, while aspiration for the happiness of future lives can lead to virtuous actions. Anger and hatred, however, can never be the motivating factors for virtue; they always lead to nonvirtue. Here confusion refers not to the self-grasping ignorance that is the root of saṃsārā, but to the ignorance that does not understand karma and its effects. While self-grasping ignorance can also precede virtuous actions, the ignorance that has a skewed view of ethical conduct will lead to mental, verbal, and physical nonvirtuous paths of action.

Similarly there are different ways to be “attached” to a beautiful statue of the Buddha. One person wants a beautiful statue to inspire his daily meditation practice. Another person wants the same statue to show off to his friends or sell for a profit. These different motivations will bring different results in the present life and in future lives.

In short, “attachment” may have diverse meanings in different contexts. This is illustrated by the four types of clinging mentioned in the teaching *Parting from the Four Attachments* that Manjushri gave to the great Sakya lama, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo:

If you cling to this life, you are not a true spiritual practitioner.
If you cling to saṃsarā, you do not have renunciation.
If you cling to your own self-interest, you have no bodhicitta.
If there is grasping, you do not have the view.

The first line indicates clinging to the happiness of this life, which is invariably an obstacle for Dharma practice. The presence or absence of this type of attachment is the demarcation between an action that is Dharma and one that is not. The second, clinging to cyclic existence, prevents us from embarking on the path to liberation, although it could lead to happiness within saṃsarā as exemplified by the person who is attached to the bliss of samadhi and is born in the form or formless realms.

Clinging to our self-interest prevents us from entering the bodhisattva path, although it could support the attainment of arhatship—for example, by a person who craves to be free of saṃsara and seeks his own liberation alone. The most deeply ingrained attachment is grasping inherent existence, which prevents the attainment of both liberation and full awakening.

The Tibetan term *chags pa*, may also be translated as “attachment” and is sometimes used to indicate strong affection and care. In this sense, buddhas are “attached” to sentient beings, indicating that due to their strong compassion, they will never abandon sentient beings and will continuously work to lead them to temporal and ultimate happiness. This feeling of closeness and care that buddhas have for sentient beings is very different from attachment in the minds of sentient beings.