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## Study Group – *Aryadeva's 400 Verses*

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*Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga*

*Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*

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Please sit yourself in a comfortable position and generate a good motivation.

The different types of motivations that one can generate are:

1. Engaging in spiritual or Dharma practices with the intention to merely gain some benefit in the present life.
2. The motivation to practise the Dharma in order to obtain a better rebirth in the next lifetime, so that one can continue to engage in Dharma practice. This is an advanced motivation.
3. Even more advanced is the motivation to obtain a good rebirth for practising Dharma so that one can obtain liberation from samsara.
4. The highest motivation is to generate the motivation to practise the Dharma in order to achieve enlightenment for the benefit for all sentient beings.

When the advice is given to generate a good motivation, it relates to the state of mind one needs to have before engaging in the practice, as well as during the practice and towards the end of the practice. If one already has what is called a contrived motivation of bodhicitta, meaning that it is generated with an effort, it is not necessary to generate a further motivation. One can just keep that good motivation of bodhicitta within one's mind prior to engaging in the practice, maintain it during the practice and towards the end of the practice. When it is advised to check one's motivation, and generate a good motivation it refers to someone who either does not have a clear motivation, or who has an inferior one.

The motivation to practice Dharma in order to benefit oneself in this life is not a bad motivation in itself. If one can gain some benefit for oneself, by refraining from harming others, then doing a deed with this attitude is of course not bad. However if one has a mere thought to benefit oneself only in this life, then whatever one engages in does not become a cause for one's future spiritual lives. Therefore in relation to thinking about future lives, it is said that the motivation to benefit only this life is inferior; one can transform it to an advanced motivation which is to benefit the next life.

Just wishing to obtaining a good future life is not sufficient either, as it is inferior compared to wanting to attain liberation for oneself. The state of being free from the sufferings of entire cyclic existence is the state of liberation.

The motivation to achieve liberation merely for oneself is inferior to the motivation of wanting to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. The

earlier motivations become an obstacle to developing the later more superior motivation. The lamas give advice to check one's motivation in relation to these different levels of motivations, and thus encourage us to generate the superior motivation.

What we call a contrived bodhicitta motivation is, of course, a superior motivation that one develops initially in order to engage in any kind of Mahayana practice. With a sufficient amount of practice, the contrived bodhicitta motivation will develop into a spontaneous bodhicitta motivation, which is even better. Initially when we haven't trained our mind it seems quite difficult to develop and maintain such motivations, therefore we need to be reminded, and to check our motivation again and again. However as we become more familiar with these different types of motivations and their benefits, then it naturally becomes easier to develop them.

It is a matter of becoming more aware and more familiar with these different types of motivations. The Lam Rim teachings mention that one needs to develop what is called a special virtuous state of mind, and within that virtuous state of mind we invoke the merit field. Then one engages in the practice of meditation and so forth. It says in the Lam Rim that what we call a special virtuous state of mind is developed in relation to generating the right type of motivation. Therefore as we familiarise ourselves, those states of mind should become easier to develop.

Normally we leave our mind in the state with which we are more familiar, which is focussed on worldly activities. Because we are so used to focusing on external worldly objects, which are merely to benefit our temporary needs, it seems inevitable that we do so, and we have a natural tendency to think about the temporary benefits just for ourselves. We think in that way because of the mindset with which we have been conditioned, but as we become more familiar with the superior motivations mentioned earlier, it will become more natural to develop them within our mind.

When I mentioned that the motivation to benefit this life is inferior, this is not to underestimate in any way the value of doing good deeds without a particular belief in future lives. There are those who live a very moral life, being very generous and helping others even though they don't have an understanding about future lives - some people are naturally very kind and generous to others. I am not saying that this is not valid. Furthermore I personally would not be able to say that leading a moral life and being generous without the particular intention to benefit future lives would not bring a good result for the future lives; I feel it can definitely bring good result for future lives.

What the teachings are indicating is that there are particular causes for obtaining a good future life with the eight freedoms and the ten endowments, which is a life that is suitable to practice the Dharma. One of the particular causes for attaining a precious human rebirth which has all these conditions to practice Dharma is by engaging in virtuous deeds accompanied with

aspirational prayers. The virtuous deeds are the practice of generosity, moral ethics and so forth. When done with the motivation to attain a good future life by making stainless prayers to attain a good future rebirth, it then becomes the cause for a precious human rebirth.

There are examples that emphasise the point about obtaining good results by engaging in virtuous deeds in this life, even without any intention to benefit future lives. We can see people who have an enormous amount of wealth and no financial problems even though they may have no interest in the Dharma. On the other hand we also see people who may be very interested in the Dharma, but who don't have much wealth and have difficulties supporting themselves. These are the results of the past; those who have the Dharma but no wealth are perhaps those who made prayers in the past but were not very generous. In this way we can see that depending on the causes there are definitely differences in the results that are obtained.

#### **1.2.1.1.5. Refuting that it does not cause the brave ones to fear<sup>1</sup>**

This heading has two further sub-divisions:

1.2.1.1.5.1. Unfeasibility of only cowards fearing death

1.2.1.1.5.2. Unsuitability of doing negative deeds to safeguard one's life

##### **1.2.1.1.5.1. Unfeasibility of only cowards fearing death**

*If you consider future goals [8]  
But not your waning life,  
Who would call intelligent  
Such selling of yourself?*

What this verse is referring to is the misconception that many hold, which is that it is only cowards who fear death, and that brave heroes never fear death. According to this view, we Buddhists may be the ones who are cowards. According to the worldly viewpoint those who give up worldly activities that gain wealth and fame, and who dedicate their life to engaging in spiritual practice are cowards. They are so afraid of death that they don't want to put any effort towards material gains, and instead dedicate their life to spiritual practice. This may be seen as a sign of being a coward according to a worldly point of view.

The explanation of the verse in accordance to the sub-heading says that it is only cowards who fear death. Thus those who are brave do not fear death. In order to gain fame and wealth and subdue enemies some may even bring harm upon themselves in combat and so forth. As not fearing death would be considered a sign of bravery, they risk their own lives just for some worldly gain such as fame or material gains.

The qualm arises, can it be accepted that it is cowardly to fear death, and brave if one doesn't fear death?

The answer is that it is not acceptable.

What we derive from the meaning of the verse is that one who uses their life just for material worldly gain such as wealth, fame and so forth is selling their precious life for a temporary gain. It is as if they are exchanging their life for temporary worldly gains, while their life is slowly being exhausted moment-by-moment. Although it may be considered as a great achievement by like-minded worldly beings, intelligent beings who have the wisdom-eye of Dharma will not consider that as being a worthwhile activity – for them it is a total loss.

We can use more contemporary examples. In our world we see suicide killings where people give up their life to destroy many other lives. The person who commits that act thinks there will be some gain from doing it, but where is the gain? When we look at it even from an ordinary perspective we see it as being foolish, don't we?

Because they have taken their own life, where is the gain for this life? If there is no gain for this life, what about future lives? In this case there will be no gain for the next life, because they have created so much negative karma by taking their own life and the lives of so many other beings as well. Spending our life to merely secure some material gain is a bit more subtle version of the same thing.

When we work for some personal gain in this life such as wealth, fame and so forth it is done with the intention to benefit our future. Ultimately, however, our future in this life is to experience death. So, how can our material gains benefit our future after death? The meaning of the verse is that although one is exchanging one's precious life just for these temporary gains now, one can use one's life for a much greater purpose.

##### **1.2.1.1.5.2. Unsuitability of doing negative deeds to safeguard one's life**

This sub-heading arises from the qualm that may arise from the previous point: if it is not acceptable to give up one's life for temporary worldly gains then in order to protect one's life, is it acceptable to engage in negative deeds? Since it is important to sustain one's life, is it permissible or worthwhile to engage in negative deeds to sustain one's life? To counteract this qualm the next verse says:

*Why do you do ill deeds, [9?]  
Pledging you as security?  
Of course, like the wise, you must be  
Free of attachment to yourself.*

Qualm: If one should protect one's life then is it permissible to engage in non-virtuous deeds to protect one's life?

Answer: It is not permissible.

The meaning of the verse is that if one engages in negative deeds, then that is similar to offering oneself as collateral in order to gain some temporary benefit. Through engaging in negative deeds now we are treating ourselves as collateral, because we have to repay with much more severe consequences later. If we engage in negative deeds, then although we may gain some temporary benefits and temporary pleasure now, we

<sup>1</sup> On the 28 March 2006 this was given as 1.2.1.1.5. Refuting that is not the cause of fear for a brave person

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have to face much greater negative consequences in the future. For example, there are those who engage in wrong livelihood such as stealing. Now if someone has to steal in order to survive because they are starving and desperate, then that is understandable and could be acceptable.

However individual people engage in theft and robberies and steal just for the sake of gaining more wealth; that is clearly engaging in negative deeds out of excessive desire and attachment. In this life they may get some benefit, but even in this life they may face some negative consequences if they are caught. The consequences in the future life will definitely be very heavy. An example used in the commentary is, if one goes to a bar to drink, it is as though one is offering one's own body as collateral for the temporary pleasure of drinking. If someone engages excessively in drinking, becoming an alcoholic, then they are actually giving up their own life for the sake of some temporary pleasure.

The meaning of the second part of the verse is that unless one is wise like a foe destroyer who has abandoned attachment, then engaging in such negative deeds out of attachment will have negative consequences for oneself in the future.

One should consider one's desires and attachments as if they were another entity within oneself that has no compassion or love for oneself. One's desires and attachments do not bring any true happiness or true gain to oneself; they just bring about more suffering. Out of attachment to alcohol, someone who consumes alcohol excessively can completely destroy themselves, bringing so much suffering in this life and future lives. Therefore when we think of the attachment or desire within our mind we can relate to it as being like an entity which has no compassion for us. Thus we should not place any trust in the desires within our own mind.

The main point is that even though one may reason with oneself that one is engaging in desires to sustain one's life, the excessive desires that we may use as our excuse are, in fact, a means of bringing more suffering to oneself. They may seem to offer happiness, but they just bring more suffering in the future.

Let us take a drug dealer as a vivid example of someone who engages in a non-virtuous activity with the intention to sustain themselves. As far as they are concerned, they are in a trade that they feel will sustain and give them a good life. In some countries they are risking their own life, because if they are caught they will be put to death. In some other countries, if they are caught they will be imprisoned for life. So even though their initial intention was to do something to sustain them, in fact it becomes a cause to be doomed in this very life, either by being put to death or leading a very miserable life in prison for the rest of their lives. These are very clear examples of how excessive desire leads to non-virtuous deeds that bring about undesirable results and suffering for oneself. Therefore the main point made here is that we must be very diligent and careful in choosing what we want to do

in life to sustain ourselves, and make the right choices for our livelihood.

This is actually very practical advice about choosing a right livelihood, in which we don't endanger ourselves and our livelihood in this life. A drug dealer with a certain type of mind-set will take risks knowing that they may be caught and so forth, but they disregard that and the consequences they may face. They believe they can get away with it, can make good money, and everything will be fine. For someone who is more diligent and who can think out things more carefully, the dangers and the consequences if things go wrong would be clear. It is usually the case that initially things don't seem to go wrong but later on they do. So in that way we see that the ultimate result is more suffering for people who engage in such wrong livelihoods. Therefore this kind of advice is showing us how to choose what is best for our life, which is a very practical advice.

The next heading is 1.2.1.2. Contemplating and meditating on subtle impermanence.

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