
Study Group – Aryadeva’s 400 Verses

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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It is good to begin by focusing your mind inward, keeping it free from distractions, and generate a good motivation to receive the teachings. You can think, ‘By receiving these teachings may I be able to develop the wisdom to achieve enlightenment for the sake of liberating all sentient beings from samsara.’

1.2.2.2.3. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF GRIEVING OVER A DEAD PERSON (IN THIS CASE A SON) IN FRONT OF OTHER PEOPLE

The doubt that was answered in verse 18 is whether in order to mourn a loved one it is appropriate to inflict sufferings upon oneself to show one’s grief. This verse indicated the inappropriateness of harming oneself in mourning, even for the sake of conforming to public expectations.

1.2.2.2.4. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF GRIEVING FOR A DEAD RELATIVE TO ENSURE A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH SURVIVING RELATIVES.

Qualm/objection: Even though I may agree that self-torment is of no benefit, nevertheless in order to ensure a good relationship with surviving relatives, I must endure that suffering.

Answer: That is inappropriate

People in this world wander, [19]
Full, as it were, of suffering.
Why fill with suffering
People who already suffer?

This verse deals with the doubt as to whether it is appropriate to endure suffering if it is to maintain a good relationship with relatives. The verse refutes that doubt by indicating how beings who are born in a male or female body in samsara undergo many types of sufferings again and again, just by the mere fact of being born in samsara. As if there was not enough suffering already, why add extra suffering? In other words, what point is there in enduring extra suffering in addition to the many sufferings that are already being experienced in samsara.

The analogy given to portray this unnecessary added suffering is, ‘like rubbing salt onto a sore wound’. Having a sore wound is bad enough, but if salt were to be rubbed into it even greater pain would be experienced. Likewise enduring the suffering of mourning is just an extra suffering on top of the already existing sufferings experienced in samsara. So why inflict that extra suffering upon oneself? It is far better and more worthwhile to use one’s time and energy to develop methods for removing all the sufferings of samsara and obtain liberation.

1.2.2.2.5. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF ATTACHMENT TO BEING WITH RELATIVES AND SO FORTH

This is subdivided into two:

1.2.2.2.5.1. Actual explanation

1.2.2.2.5.2. Inappropriateness of attachment to lasting friendships

1.2.2.2.5.1. Actual explanation

Qualm/objection: Even though parting from a close one causes suffering, it is nevertheless appropriate to be attached to a close one because, having met, being together gives joy and happiness.

Answer: That is not appropriate.

If meeting is a joy to you [20]
Why is parting not also a joy?
Do not meeting and parting
Both seem to go together?

In order to overcome that doubt, the main point being raised in this verse is in relation to the Buddha’s quote, ‘the end result of all meeting is separation’. The explanation of the verse is that if one considers meeting and being together with a close one as joy, then since the end result of being together is separation, why not consider separation as a joy as well? In retrospect, if one cannot accept separation as a joy, then it would be foolish to regard meeting and being together with a loved one as a source of joy and happiness, because it will end in separation. Thus one should not be attached to meeting and being together with a close one.

Because separation and meeting are inter-related, separation is a natural outcome of a meeting. When one comes into existence, then the other will naturally follow. The very fact that there is a meeting means that separation will follow sooner or later. If one can accept the fact that separation comes as a natural result of a meeting, then there will be less suffering when it happens. Failing to notice or acknowledge and understand this brings sorrow in one’s mind.

The analogy given in the text is, whenever there is an auspicious sign, naturally an inauspicious sign will follow. Also, a poisoned meal may be tasty when consumed, but it will bring great discomfort and suffering later. Becoming ill and feeling discomfort afterwards is a natural consequence of eating poisonous food.

Thus for those who experience the obvious suffering of separation, it is important to meditate on impermanence. The suffering that comes from separation is experienced when one fails to understand that meeting is an impermanent phenomena. The impermanent nature of a meeting is that it naturally changes into separation.

The reason why we fail to understand this is because we have the erroneous view of seeing things as being permanent. When things meet, whether it is a meeting with other beings or meeting with fortune and the like, it is experienced with an erroneous view of permanence. There is a mistaken view that it will last for a long time. So, when the change that becomes a separation actually occurs, it is a shock for the mind, and cannot be accepted. The mind becomes very heavy and sad, and it becomes very difficult for one to bear that mental suffering. This comes about because of not being able to understand the

impermanent nature of things.

We can see those who meditate on impermanence and practise it in their daily life do not experience great loss and sadness when things change, and neither do they experience strong excitement when good things happen. So, there is a stable mind in which there is an acceptance for whatever happens, whether it be good or bad, or whether it comes and goes out of existence. That kind of stable mind is definitely a mind that is calmer and more peaceful and joyful. When we see that, then it becomes obvious that meditating on impermanence and putting it into practice definitely has benefits for the mind.

The suffering that is experienced because of failing to gain some sort of understanding and awareness of impermanence is very obvious, especially when it comes to the suffering of separation. The suffering is very obvious, whether it's a separation from parents or one's spouse, or one's children. That sort of suffering whether it comes from a natural consequence such as death, or because of some disagreement in the relationship, is really a very strong suffering. We may not really be able to relate to this kind of suffering sometimes if we haven't experienced it ourselves. But when we actually experience it ourselves, then we can get a real understanding of the agony it brings to one's mind. When we look around, we see so many examples of suffering as a result of problems within the family, relationships and so forth, either because of the fear of separation, or when separation actually occurs. So if we don't prepare our mind now to be able to deal with a situation like that, then we will experience the same kind of suffering that others experience. When we look around and see that there are so many others experiencing suffering, it is obvious that the same type of suffering will definitely fall upon oneself. Rather than just ignoring it, and looking at it as a spectator when others are suffering, one should use that as an example and ask oneself, 'How will I deal with separation when it happens to me?'

Then we come to the main point mentioned in the verse: the more awareness we generate about the nature of separation, the less suffering we will experience when a separation occurs. That is something which we must definitely prepare for now, because it is definitely going to happen. Separation will happen sooner or later, and one will definitely have to experience it one day. Therefore it is worthwhile and appropriate that we devote some time and energy now to prepare for what will be experienced in the future.

1.2.2.2.5.2. Inappropriateness of attachment to lasting friendships

Qualm/objection: The time spent together is long, so therefore it is appropriate to cherish being together now.

Answer: The periods spent together are not long.

When the past is beginningless [21]
And the future endless,
Why do you notice being together
But not the separations, though they be long?

That kind of erroneous view can arise for example with relationships. There are those who think that they have

had a very long relationship with someone, such as for twenty or thirty years, but when that comes to an end, they lament and experience great suffering.

Whatever length of time may have been spent together at this present time, it is very short in relation to the past in samsara, which is actually beginningless, and the future continuum of the mind is endless. Therefore, 'How can you assert or assume that the time that you spend together now is a long time when in fact, it is actually just a moment in comparison to the past and future?'

1.2.2.2.6. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF ATTACHMENT TO THE SEASONS' MARVELS

Qualm: The suffering of separation and so forth vanishes when one experiences the good times of the seasons, such as nice scenery, beautiful flowers, enjoying watching the moon or sunsets.

Answer:

Time, [consisting of] instants and so forth, [22]
Is certainly like an enemy.
Therefore never be attached
To that which is your enemy.

In Australia we talk about the different things that happen in the different seasons. When we think in that way, we have the erroneous view of being attached to the different times, thinking that one can overcome one's sufferings and so forth by experiencing the marvels of the different seasons. That view can cause a strong attachment, particularly in relation to the experiences of the different times and seasons that occur in this life. However having such a strong attachment can be a hindrance to one's passing over to the next life. If one overcomes attachments to things such as one's wealth, belongings and relationships and so forth, but is attached to the seasons and times and marvels of this world, which are connected to the experience of joy in this life, then that can be a hindrance to obtaining a good rebirth for the future life. Therefore this verse particularly emphasises the point of overcoming those attachments that are related to the time and the seasons.

The erroneous view is that even though there are other sufferings, one can overcome that by experiencing the seasonal good times. The second part of the verse indicates how to overcome that wrong view. To overcome attachment to what we call the marvels of different times, we must consider how a good time is in itself a factor that shortens our life, because each moment that we spend marvelling something is a moment gone from our life. In other words, in each second we enjoy something, we are actually moving closer to our death. Therefore in that regard time is an enemy that is robbing us of our precious life. Therefore marvelling something is not only a waste of time, but it is also actually a big obstacle to our own practice. Contemplating in that way can overcome attachment towards having a good time.

1.2.3. Advice to make effort to practise the path to liberation, giving up attachment to bad actions

This heading is divided into two-subdivisions:

1.2.3.1. Inappropriateness of relying on punitive action regarding what must be done

1.2.3.2. Advice as to the appropriateness of giving up bad actions and to live in seclusion from the very start

1.2.3.1. Inappropriateness of relying on punitive action regarding what must be done

Qualm/objection: Though all that has been said earlier is reasonable, separating from one's family is very hard. Because I cannot bear to be separated from my dear loved ones, I am not able to go into the forest to meditate.

Answer:

*Fool, because you fear separation, [23]
You do not leave home.
Who that is wise does under punishment
What must certainly be done?*

Allowing fear of separation from one's family and loved ones, which hinders oneself from going into seclusion in order to practice the Dharma, is like being a fool. Fear of separation from one's family arises out of attachment. When one does not accept the reality of separation it can be seen as being like a punishment; when death occurs where one will definitely have to be separated from one's loved ones, wealth and everything else. Rather than leaving it to involuntary circumstance when death takes away everything, which is like a punishment, it is best to give up one's attachments to one's home, relatives, loved ones and so forth now, and go into seclusion to practise the Dharma. That would be an action taken up by the wise ones.

It is clear that if one fails to generate an awareness of impermanence, then this erroneous view will definitely prevail. We will always be led into believing that we can hold on to our dear loved ones, our wealth and so forth. By being attached to these objects, one will not accept the fact that one will have to separate from them. The point emphasised here is that death will definitely separate us from all of the objects that we are attached to. If we can voluntarily train our mind in detachment towards the object that we are normally attached to now, then that in itself is a preparation for death. Then at the time of death, one will not experience great suffering. Therefore be wise and train in cultivating detachment now. In general, one's practice can be as simple as generating a kind mind and showing love and concern to others. Then, based on that, one can listen to Dharma teachings, which leaves positive imprints in our mind. We can then put the wisdom one has gained from listening into practise and lead a righteous life. That is the best way to prepare for death so that we don't experience great suffering at the time. Then when the actual separation occurs, we will be able to deal with it.

1.2.3.2. Advice as to the appropriateness of giving up bad actions to live in seclusion from the very start

Seclusion or isolation can refer to an actual place, as mentioned in the instructions on preparing to develop calm abiding. An appropriate place is a quiet place that is free from dangers, distractions, noise and so forth. Such secluded or isolated places are actual places where one develops calm abiding and so forth during retreats.

However the main seclusion being emphasised here is a seclusion of one's mind and seclusion from physical misdeeds. Secluding or isolating one's mind from distractions and conceptual thoughts, and isolating one's body from negative physical actions (what we call bad behaviour) can be practised anywhere. Even living in the environment where we are now, where we are surrounded by other people and a busy life, one can still practise secluding one's mind from conceptual, negative thoughts, and seclude one's physical body by refraining from bad physical behaviours. This can definitely be practised. Therefore one does not need take seclusion or isolation in the literal sense of an isolated place, otherwise one may think, 'If I'm in a city, then I am not able to practise'. That is not the case.

In fact, being in a secluded place is not sufficient if one's mind is continuously distracted. The main point here is to have isolation within one's mind. If someone goes to an actual secluded place to engage in the practice of meditation, they may be practising the physical seclusion where their body is not engaging in normal worldly activities, but if they allow their mind to be continuously distracted, then their mind will not be in seclusion. If their mind is continuously wandering into the town and city, then their mind is in the city. Therefore real seclusion has to be a seclusion of one's mind, keeping it free from engaging in worldly distractions.

Qualm/objection: I will first take care of my worldly affairs by bringing up my son, teaching him all the skills so he can take care of my affairs, and then I will be ready to go into seclusion and meditate.

Answer: That is not appropriate.

*You may think you must obviously [24]
Go to the forest once this has been done.
Whatever you do must be left behind.
What is the value of having done it?*

Having reflected on the meanings of the earlier verses, one comes to the point where one feels that one must definitely go into seclusion to meditate and practise, but then one thinks, 'Before doing that I need to have my affairs in order. If I have a son, I need to raise him well and teach him all the right ways of dealing with worldly activities. Then I will be able to place my affairs in the hands of my son, and then I'll be free to go off and meditate and practise the Dharma'.

The verse refutes that, indicating that it is not appropriate to have such a view. Even though you may plan so that you can go into seclusion when you have settled all your affairs, such as bringing up your son and so forth, all of those worldly affairs that need to be taken care of have to come to an end. In other words, there is no real lasting effect of completing anything worldly. Therefore since all worldly activities themselves come to an end, and all the gains from worldly activities also have to come to an end at the time of death, there is no real value in obtaining the gains from worldly activities.

That being the case, rather than spending so much time and energy in trying to settle worldly affairs, which have no real valued end result, and which have to be left behind anyway, it is far better to put one's time and

energy into engaging in the practice of the Dharma from the very start, and practise detachment. Furthermore, worldly activities involve trying to subdue one's enemies and trying to please one's friends or close ones, which is never-ending. One can never completely please one's close ones and so-called enemies can never really be subdued. As soon as one enemy is subdued, another enemy arises. Therefore, one can spend one's whole life trying to subdue one's enemies and please one's friends, trying to settle what can never be settled.

Another fact is that even though one's plan is to complete all one's worldly activities so that one has time to go out to meditate and practise in seclusion, in reality death could happen at any time. It is a fact that death does not have a specific time and can occur at any given time. When death will occur can never be predicted for any one person and it could happen at any time. So even though one may have a plan in one's mind, death may already approach before being able to accomplish that plan, which means that one would not have had the time to practice the Dharma in seclusion. Therefore this verse is emphasising that one should overcome that erroneous view of settling one's worldly affairs first before going into seclusion. Rather, one should start from the very beginning.

The analogy that is given portrays the similarity of our actions to washing spoiled fruit in order to use it. If it is spoiled, then no matter how much you wash it you will still be unable to consume it, so why waste energy in trying to clean it. It is better to throw it out when one notices that it is spoilt and no good, isn't it?

1.3. The benefits of meditating on impermanence

Doubt: Having a sense of strong attachment to the 'I' and 'mine', there is a fear that arises from actually committing oneself to go into seclusion.

*Whoever with certainty has [25]
The thought, 'I am going to die,'
Having completely relinquished attachment,
Why would they fear even the Lord of Death?*

This verse overcomes an erroneous view or doubt, which is that having considered the great importance of going into seclusion, one hesitates to go because of the fear of attachment to what we call the self or 'I', and to the belongings, which are what is called 'mine'. Reflecting on the reality of death can also overcome the fears that are related to the attachments of what is called 'I' and 'mine'.

The best antidote to overcome the fears in relation to 'I' and 'mine' is to meditate on impermanence, particularly on death and impermanence. Reflecting on all the earlier indications about death: how death is certain, but the time of death is uncertain and that death can occur at any time, one then will naturally come to terms with accepting death. When one reaches that point, then that will naturally overcome the fears in relation to the self and everything else that is related to the self, i.e. belongings. The fear of death itself is a strong attachment to what is called a self, so when one comes to terms with accepting death, that naturally has the effect on being

able to let go of what we consider as our self. Meditating on death and impermanence will naturally reduce attachment to the self in relation to the body and the belongings; one will overcome the fears in relation to the self and belongings, which includes attachments to relationships and so forth. Thus one will develop the courage to be able to go into seclusion and meditate, giving up one's home and so forth. By doing so one will overcome not only the fears that are related just to the self and to belongings, but death itself and what will happen after death.

These are the crucial points that are summarised in this chapter, which is to contemplate and meditate upon death and impermanence. As one meditates on death and impermanence, then the mind becomes fearless and more courageous, and able to face any kind of circumstance that involves practising the Dharma, whether it be going into seclusion or whatever else necessary. When death itself is experienced, it is said that there will actually be fearlessness in one's mind. In fact, instead of fear, there will be a joy, which the teachings indicate is similar to the joy of a child going back home.

In summary the explanation in the text places emphasis on the importance of meditating on death and impermanence by recalling the various types of meditations that help to bring that awareness of death and impermanence, such as thinking about the certainty of death and the uncertainty of its timing. Nothing but a spiritual practice of the Dharma helps at the time of death. So when we contemplate death in these various ways we develop a firm ground or basis on which to generate all the realisations on the path. Then the text quotes from Geshe Potowa who said that 'since the path to generating insights is blocked until an awareness of death and impermanence has arisen in the mind, continually meditate on coarse and subtle impermanence'. So Geshe Potowa is emphasising the point that without an awareness of death and impermanence, it is impossible to gain other further realisations along the path. Therefore it is crucial to develop that awareness in one's mind, which then serves as the basis to develop other realisations.

It is customary in Sanskrit or Tibetan texts to have the chapter's name at the end. Therefore the concluding lines in the actual root text are:

*This is the first chapter of the Four Hundred on
the Yogic Deeds, showing the means to abandon the
belief in permanence*

The commentary likewise explains that this concludes the first chapter on generating awareness of impermanence. The main obstacle to generating an awareness of impermanence is a the wrong view or belief in permanence. Therefore this chapter has dealt with overcoming the erroneous view of permanence. That concludes this chapter.

Next week will be a discussion evening, so please engage in a meaningful and good discussion. After that there will be the exam, so prepare for the exam so you can do it well.