

---

## Study Group – Aryadeva’s 400 Verses

༄༅། །བསྐྱབས་ཅོམ་བཞི་བརྒྱ་པའི་སྐྱེ་བའི་ཚོགས་ལེན་པ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

*Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga*

*Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*

20 June 2006

---

Sitting in a comfortable and upright position, we generate a motivation to listen to the teachings. We can generate a motivation such as: ‘In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to obtain enlightenment. Therefore I will listen to the teachings so that I can put them into practice to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings’.

### 1.1.3.2.2. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF CONSIDERING BEING AFFLICTED, OR HARMED, AS BEING PLEASURABLE

*When beings with bodies are constantly [40]  
Afflicted by hunger and so forth,  
It is not at all proper to call  
Being afflicted pleasurable.*

Like the earlier verses this one is an attempt to overcome the erroneous view we have of clinging onto contaminated worldly pleasures as being real pleasure and happiness, which is the main obstacle to developing renunciation. We are constantly experiencing the various types of obvious sufferings such as hunger, thirst and extreme heat and cold and so forth, as well as the subtle sufferings. Even when we are constantly afflicted by these normal and obvious sufferings in life, we still hold onto the view that our body is pleasurable. This is the erroneous view that prevents us from developing real renunciation.

When we really look into the situation further, and deeply investigate, we find that even the so-called pleasures that we experience are in reality not real pleasure at all; they are only contaminated pleasures. That will then give a sense of not completely putting our full trust and reliance on this contaminated body and the pleasures that are derived from it. With a firm foundation of understanding on this, one can then develop a sense of renunciation.

However, the fact that we do not experience real pleasure is not denying the fact that we do temporarily experience some happiness or pleasure, which will be explained in detail in a later verse. The main point here, however, is that any contaminated pleasures that we experience are not real, lasting pleasures. In fact, when we investigate further, even the pleasure that we do experience is actually based on suffering. As it is in the nature of suffering it is not a real or reliable source, which is the main point that is being made in this verse.

The two lines ‘When beings with bodies are constantly afflicted by hunger and so forth’ indicate that with this contaminated body, even on a very obvious level, we experience so many different types of suffering, such as hunger, thirst, feeling too cold or too warm. If we reflect further on the condition of our body, it seems to be quite

obvious that it is in the nature of suffering. For example, the body relies on food: if we don’t get our meals on time, what kind of experience do we have? Even if it gets a little bit late for our lunch we suffer. If we start feeling thirsty and we cannot get a drink what kind of uncomfortable experience do we go through? Being hungry is hard to bear. We immediately try to find some food to feed our bodies. Likewise with thirst, we need to have water or some other drink in order to quench our thirst, otherwise the body starts to cry out, and we feel very uncomfortable.

If the body’s nature was pleasurable, it would not have to rely on these external conditions. The very fact that the body cannot maintain itself without the constant input of contaminated substances to maintain it, shows the fact that the body itself is not completely reliable. It cannot be sustained by itself, and needs to depend on all these external conditions. As soon as we don’t have them, we immediately experience suffering. So therefore it is not at all proper to call being afflicted pleasurable.

While our bodies suffer in this way it is not at all proper to consider our physical body and the rest of the contaminated aggregates as being pleasurable; as it is in the nature of suffering, it is not pleasurable. Actually, it is quite easy to understand the verses literally. For our practice it is not enough just to understand the verse; we have to think about it further and try to use it in our meditation. Normally we might think: ‘Oh, the suffering of hunger and thirst is experienced only by impoverished or poor people who do not have food, like the people in Africa’. But in fact, we all suffer from hunger and thirst. As soon as we get hungry, we are experiencing the suffering of hunger, and as soon as we feel thirsty we have the suffering of thirst. It is not something which is reserved only for the impoverished or poor, is it? Thirst and hunger are something that all who have a contaminated body experience equally.

### 1.1.3.2.3. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF CONSIDERING PLEASURABLE A COMPOSITE OF VARIOUS INCOMPATIBLE FACTORS WHICH IS LIKE AN ENEMY

*Though powerless, the combining of [41]  
All the elements produces [the body];  
Thus it is not at all proper to call  
What is incompatible pleasurable.*

This verse is presented to show the fragility of the body itself. To come into existence this contaminated body depends on many factors, the main ones being the four elements. One may think that if all these conditions are intact within the body then the body should experience well-being and pleasure. This verse is presented mainly as a means of overcoming that doubt. The reality is that there is no such thing as the body being completely in harmony and well-being all the time. In fact, the basis for the body to not be well is always present.

The term ‘though powerless’ means that any one of the elements in itself is powerless to produce the body. All four elements have to come together in order to produce the body. The earth element is the one which stabilises our body or makes it firm. From the time of conception

where the sperm and egg meet, it is the earth element which stabilises the fertilised egg and allows it to develop. Just as a fruit needs warmth to ripen, it is the fire element within the body that allows the foetus to mature. Then the wind element allows the body to expand and grow. The water element is that which binds the different parts together. So from the very moment of conception the four elements contribute to the development of the body.

Although it is the combination of all four elements that allows the body to sustain itself and grow, the four elements are imbalanced. It is not as though the four elements are compatible with each other and in perfect harmony. There is always the tendency for either one or the other of the elements to be a bit out of balance. For example, when the fire element increases too much then that causes fever, and the different diseases that arise from the fire element to be experienced. Likewise if the wind element increases too much, and is out of balance with the other elements, then we suffer from the diseases related to that factor.

It is only seldom that all the elements are in harmony. The short periods of time when they are in harmony is what we consider as having good health. But there's always the basis for them to go out of balance; even the slightest factor will throw one of the four elements out of balance, which will then produce what we call ill-health, and then we experience suffering. The main point here is that the body itself is dependent on all four elements to be able to sustain itself, and since the four elements themselves are not compatible, our bodies are always prone to experience suffering, and therefore our body is in the nature of suffering.

In order to use this verse in our meditation practice, it is of utmost importance that we reflect on the meaning of the verse. As it is explained here, in order for us to survive we have to rely on this body, and in order for this body to be able to survive, it has to depend on the four elements. If the four elements were always in perfect harmony, then one would feel at ease, but in reality although the body depends on them the four elements are not in harmony. The analogy given in the commentary is that if different types of opposing animals such as a horse, a jackal, a snake, a bird, a deer and a child-eating crocodile are put together they are never going to be in harmony. By nature, they are creatures which prey on each other, and we could therefore never expect them to be in harmony. Likewise the elements within our body can never really be in harmony. The very fact that water opposes fire, and so forth means that the reality of our body is in its very nature a basis for suffering.

This further emphasises the point that one cannot totally rely on this contaminated body, and that one needs to develop a strong wish to abandon the causes for such a contaminated body by developing renunciation. As another analogy of how the four elements are not in harmony, one could use an example of four individuals, who never get along, having to live together. No-one would consider such a room or house to be a

comfortable, happy place. Why? Because these four individuals cannot get along; if you put them together, the outcome will definitely be quite disastrous, won't it? It's like that with the body: the four elements within our body are like four individuals who are not in harmony. Therefore, the body naturally experiences the result of being uncomfortable and is always in a state of unease.

#### **1.1.3.2.4. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF CONSIDERING BEING DESTROYED OR HARMED PLEASURABLE**

*When there is never that [42]  
Which will relieve cold and so forth,  
It is not at all proper to call  
Being destroyed pleasurable.*

Following on from the previous verse (41) the doubt may arise that the extremes of the external elements such as extreme cold or heat can be overcome by applying an opposing force. Therefore one may have a doubt that it is still possible for the body to experience pleasure when one overcomes the cause of suffering.

The meaning derived from this verse (42) is that just because one has the sensation of temporarily overcoming harmful agents such as extreme cold by applying an opposing agent such as heat, one cannot call the body pleasurable. With temporary relief from an earlier suffering it seems that we are experiencing pleasure. For example, when one experiences heat after experiencing extreme cold, the first moment will be pleasurable because of the fact that it is removing the earlier extreme suffering of cold. In reality, however, it is just replacing one suffering with yet another suffering.

Because the earlier suffering from cold was more extreme we experience the first moment of warmth as being pleasurable. If that were real pleasure, then the more heat that we experience, the more pleasure we should feel. But the reality is that if we remain in the heat for too long then it again starts to become quite unpleasant, and so we experience suffering again. Likewise when we go into cold from extreme heat, the first moments we experience would be of pleasure. That is because the second experience is removing the earlier extreme suffering of heat. But then if we stay in the cold, we will again experience suffering. Therefore, just because intense suffering can be removed with another later experience, which is experienced as pleasure, that in itself is not proof that the body has a nature of pleasure. In reality, that pleasure that we experience is actually in the nature of suffering. Therefore the real condition of the body is one of suffering.

#### **1.1.3.2.5. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF CONSIDERING THE DOING OF TIRING ACTIONS CONSIDERING THEM AS BEING PLEASURABLE**

Doubt: Since conventionally one uses the expression 'Devadatta is lying down comfortably', real pleasure does exist.

*When on earth no action is [43]  
Done without exertion,  
It is not at all proper to call  
Performing actions pleasurable.*

---

This verse is presented as an answer to the above assertion. The indication here is that the normal conventional view is that someone who is lying down looking very comfortable is experiencing real pleasure, and so we think that there must be real pleasure. The first two lines imply that whatever the action of any ordinary being who lives on this planet Earth there is always some effort which goes into it. There is always some effort involved in whatever one is doing, whether it is sitting, standing up, making a cup of tea, or lying down. They all require some effort - nothing which is done without some effort.

Whatever actions worldly beings do, there is nothing which is done without some effort or exertion, which implies that there is some unease. On the subtle level one may not immediately notice it, but whenever there is effort there is always some unease, which implies that it is discomfort, and thus it is a suffering. This however, should not be applied to the Dharma activities we do, where even though there is suffering it is said that one should endure that suffering.

In the worldly sense, if we look further into the small details of what it takes to experience even what we would normally consider pleasurable, for example, doing something to have a good time, we find that there is some exertion and unease involved in that as well. Lying down, standing up, going around, working, engaging in recreation activities and so forth all require some effort, therefore on a subtle level there is an unease, which is suffering. So it is not painless, as there is always some suffering involved. That being the case, it is not at all proper to call actions pleasurable, when in reality any action that is performed requires some effort and some unease.

**1.1.3.2.6. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF CONSIDERING PLEASURABLE THE CREATION OF THE CAUSES OF SUFFERING FOR THE SAKE OF A LITTLE PLEASURE.**

Doubt: If there were no pleasure, it would not be feasible to experience suffering for the sake of pleasure, but since suffering for pleasure's sake is seen, pleasure does exist.

*In this [life] and in others, always [44]  
One should guard against ill deeds.  
Calling them pleasurable is not at all  
Proper when there are bad rebirths.*

This is an answer to the doubt where one feels that if there were to be no pleasure at all, then it would not be feasible to experience suffering for the sake of pleasure. But since we do voluntarily experience suffering in order to get some pleasure, it must be the case that there is some pleasure. When we relate the first part of this doubt to our own lives, it seems that in whatever job we do we endure a lot of suffering. We all have so many complaints and we know that it is not easy. However we endure a lot of suffering at work with the intention of gaining pleasure. In order to get a pleasurable result, we have to sacrifice ourselves by doing jobs that we are not happy with, where we experience hardships and so forth. It is really true isn't it that we exert ourselves and

involuntarily experience suffering with an intention of experiencing some pleasure?

The explanation of the verse is that those who do not know about the consequences of karma, engage in ill-deeds for the sake of a little pleasure. However as a result of engaging in the causes for obtaining pleasure all of those deeds would be considered as being ill-deeds, and the result of that would be suffering in this life, such as exerting ourselves, rising early for work and meeting with all the unfavourable circumstances during work. All of that is suffering, so even in this life, one has to experience the result of suffering. Furthermore there are cases where, for the sake of pleasure in this life, one may face the consequence of death.

So there is suffering even in this life as a result of engaging in the causes to experience some fleeting pleasure, not to mention the sufferings in future lives. Therefore engaging in negative activities for the sake of pleasure is the action of the unwise. Those who are wise, would never consider engaging in ill-deeds for the sake of a little pleasure. Therefore, engaging in deeds to seek some fleeting, temporary pleasure could not be considered as being proper. How could one consider it proper?

Further examples of how the pursuit of temporary pleasure or happiness include acts of stealing, cheating others, engaging in drug abuse or drug trafficking and so forth. These are actions which bring negative, unpleasant results, even in this lifetime, not to mention the negative consequences that are going to be experienced in the next lifetime. If engaging in such ill-deeds brings negative results for this life and for future lifetimes could one still consider that as being desirable or favourable? It cannot be considered at all proper.

Understanding that reality, one should guard oneself from ill-deeds at all times. Just as we guard our possessions against theft and make sure that we never lose our things in robberies or thefts, we should guard our virtuous deeds. Guarding oneself from engaging in negative deeds is something that we should pay much more attention to, as it is of great importance to us. Taken on a very practical level the advice given here is something that we should definitely consider and cherish. The advice about the negative consequences of stealing and so forth is something which is really quite obvious isn't it? The negative results and negative consequences of stealing and so forth are obvious to anyone in this life. We need to pay attention to following such advice starting from the very practical to the more profound deeper levels.

**1.1.3.3. From the start there is no real pleasure in riding and so forth**

Doubt: One sees that those intent on pleasure ride horses and elephants, considering it a discomfort to walk on their own two feet. Therefore pleasure does exist.

---

The root verse which serves as an answer is:

*There is never any pleasure* [45]  
*For humans in riding and so forth.*  
*How can that which at the start*  
*Does not begin, in the end increase?*

The riding of horses or elephants is seen to be something that produces real pleasure. One should consider the fact that on a subtle level there is some discomfort right from the very beginning of the act, whether it be riding, or eating, or drinking or any other kind of worldly activity. When we start riding a horse, slowly it starts to feel uncomfortable. In fact if you ride for too long, you might even get sores on your backside. From my own experience, having ridden to Lhasa on horses from the province where I come from took many months. Once you have ridden for a certain period of time, the whole body starts to ache. The body becomes all tense and tired from having sat on the horse, then one starts feeling pain on the backside as well. So then you get off the horse and start walking with the horse for a while, before you get on again. Just getting off the horse and walking for a time is such a relief. It is the same with any other worldly activity such as eating or drinking; as soon as we engage in an activity to the point of excess it starts to become very uncomfortable.

The main point here is the fact that there is some discomfort from the very beginning, and that when that same action is prolonged for a certain time, it starts to feel very uncomfortable and unpleasant. On a very subtle level there is already discomfort at the start. To emphasise this further, how could suffering increase if it had not already been there at the beginning? The fact is that in order for suffering to increase, it had to have been there from the beginning.

In reality, that which from the very start was a small incipient cause of pain is mistaken for pleasure. What is actually the cause for pain is, in the initial stages, mistaken for pleasure and we grasp onto that pleasure. But in reality it is an initial cause for pain, so therefore in its very nature it is suffering. As mentioned earlier, as the activity starts to increase it becomes more noticeable to the point where we start to feel uncomfortable, and at that stage we call it suffering. The fact remains that in the initial stage the cause of suffering was already there.

Furthermore, what we consider as pleasurable starts with a small cause of suffering in the beginning, whereas what we call suffering does not start with a cause of pleasure. Therefore what we consider pleasure is not real, but what we call suffering is actually more prevalent. So therefore in all of the three times, the beginning, the middle and the end, the contaminated body is always in the nature of suffering.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright*  
*Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett*  
*Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*  
*Edited Version*  
© **Tara Institute**

Verses from *Yogic Deeds of Bodhisattvas* used with permission of Snow Lion Publications.