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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

1 August 2006

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As usual, we can sit in a proper posture and set our motivation, such as, ‘In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will listen to the teachings, and try to put them into practice as best as I can’.

It is very useful to initially train our mind in setting a proper motivation. If you try to take some time in your practice to set your motivation, then it becomes the basis for the success and fruitfulness of your practice. The bodhicitta motivation is based on developing love and compassion, which is focussed particularly on sentient beings who are suffering. The wish to free beings from all suffering is what we call compassion, and the wish for them to have happiness is what we call love. Generating this motivation is the real basis for developing the bodhicitta attitude, which is accompanied with the wish to achieve enlightenment. When enlightenment is obtained, that becomes the ultimate means to benefit sentient beings. If we initially train our mind to develop this sort of motivation then our practice becomes a very sound one. It is definitely very beneficial to meditate on the motivation itself.

Of the two chapters that we have already covered, the first chapter dealt with the contaminated aggregates being in the nature of impermanence. The main point of that chapter is that the aggregates, in particular our physical aggregate, or body, are in the nature of being impermanent. On a subtle level our body is changing from moment to moment, and on a grosser level we go through the aging process and ultimately face death. In that way we contemplate the nature of our bodies as being impermanent.

In the second chapter the verses deal with how the contaminated aggregates in general, and the body in particular, are in the nature of suffering. As explained extensively in the chapter, we contemplate the body as being in the nature of suffering. From the very moment we are born we experience so many different types of sufferings in relation to our body, and throughout life, there are different levels of suffering that we experience. Thinking about these points and then contemplating on them in detail is important.

Now we come to the third chapter, the main point of which is how the body is naturally impure. We have an erroneous view of the body as being pure and clean, and with that mistaken view, attachment to one’s own body and the bodies of others arises. That erroneous view is one of the main obstacles to developing renunciation, so therefore it is very important to see the real nature of the body as being impure.

### **1.2.1.2 THE INAPPROPRIATENESS OF DESIRE BASED ON THE DIFFICULTY OF FINDING A WOMAN WITH A BEAUTIFUL APPEARANCE**

This particularly relates to the misconception or doubt in one’s mind where one thinks, ‘Oh, but if it is a very beautiful woman then it would be appropriate to be attached to her’. This heading was covered earlier.

### **1.2.1.3. REFUTING DESIRE FOR A WOMAN WITH GOOD QUALITIES**

The next misconception that may arise within ordinary beings is that even though it may be inappropriate to be attracted to the mere appearance of a beautiful woman, if they had very good qualities then that would be a good reason for a man to be attached to a woman, or for a woman to be attached to a man.

This heading is divided into two:

1.2.1.3.1. Inappropriateness of desire for a woman with good qualities

1.2.1.3.2. Neither desire as a consequence only of good qualities nor the converse necessarily pertains

#### **1.2.1.3.1. Inappropriateness of desire for a woman with good qualities**

Doubt or assertion: Although desire for a woman in general is inappropriate, it is reasonable to be attracted to a woman with good qualities, good behaviour and so forth.

Answer:

*If those with good qualities seem attractive                      56*  
*And their opposite the reverse*  
*Which is true, former or latter?*  
*For neither alone persists.*

It is true that these good qualities do exist in beings. If we are talking about women, then there are definitely women who are really kind natured, and who are of what we call very good conduct.

In relation to the doubt raised above, the verse explains that while those with good qualities seem attractive and a cause for desire, the opposite, those with faults, seems to be the reverse, and is a cause for aversion. This indicates that if one gives a reason of good qualities and so forth as a cause to be attached to a woman, then the reverse would also be true, i.e. that which is unattractive would be a cause for aversion.

If that is your line of reasoning then, since it is the case that even in the one object there are times when you see qualities and times when you see faults, it would be completely absurd to have attraction and aversion to the same object. Therefore one cannot assert that there is an entirely, absolutely attractive object that always has good qualities, or the opposite, which is that an unattractive object always has faults.

Within the one object one sees qualities that appear attractive, to which one develops attachment, and that very same object could later appear to have faults which leads to aversion. Therefore which instance should one trust, the one with qualities or the one with faults? In reality neither are trustworthy. When you see

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attractiveness, attachment develops and due to that, one exaggerates the qualities, while due to aversion one exaggerates the faults of an object. Thus, neither of these instances should be relied upon; rather one must overcome both attachment and aversion towards the object.

The essence of the teachings can really be applied here. When one contemplates how both aversion and attachment arise, one sees that it is not only because of the external condition - how the objects appear - but because one has a faulty state of mind, an erroneous view, to begin with. This is how we can understand the three poisons on a deeper level.

Attachment and aversion arise as a result of the fundamental erroneous view that we have, which is ignorance. This shows that attachment and aversion do not arise merely in dependence on external conditions, but rather due to an underlying misperception that we have of the object. The faulty state of mind called *tsul-min yi-che* in Tibetan, which can be translated as belief in the improper, is a state of mind that perceives the object contrary to its actual nature. Thus it exaggerates the qualities or faults of the object, which leads to the development of attachment or aversion to the object.

One contemplates in this way how both attachment and aversion arise because of the ignorance that one has in one's mind, and then one can understand further how that ignorance is developed. That understanding can enhance one's understanding of the importance of developing what is called the right view, or the view of emptiness. Without overcoming ignorance, it will not be possible for one to overcome attachment and aversion. Therefore the view of emptiness or selflessness becomes vital, as it is the direct opponent for overcoming ignorance.

Furthermore, as one understands the functioning of one's mind, how one feels attached to objects that seem to have special qualities, and how one develops aversion to objects that seem to have innate faults, that should help us to understand our relationship with others. If one can see how one's faulty state of mind exaggerates the qualities or faults of one's partner, then one will not go to the extremes of being either excessively attached, or developing hatred, because one understands it is all in relation to one's own attitude.

This can also help to further develop one's patience in a relationship. If the other is excessively attached, or develops aversion to oneself, then one has to practise patience in order to sustain the relationship. It is also important to understand how real compassion and love works. We can see that what we call love in a worldly sense is really very much related to how we perceive the object. If the object seems attractive then one has a sense of love and compassion; one wishes for the object to be happy and one wishes for them not to experience any suffering, but only for as long as they seem to satisfy us. As soon as the object disagrees with us then one's love is replaced with anger.

We can see here how our worldly sense of love and compassion is actually very superficial. That is because the main fault in a worldly sense of love and compassion is that it uses oneself as a reason for developing love and compassion. 'For as long as they are good to me then I love them; if they are not good to me, then I don't love them anymore'. Whereas with true unconditional love and compassion the reason would be others, 'Because the other wants happiness and does not want suffering, I have to have love and compassion for them'. When you use the other as a reason to develop love and compassion then that is a true sense of love and compassion. When it is only in reference to one's own needs then it is superficial. It is important to contemplate these points.

When one says one has love and feels compassion for others it is really important to investigate one's mind. Where do those feelings arise from? If it is from some ordinary, worldly point of view then one should see that it is actually arising from a self-cherishing, self-grasping mind: 'Because they seem to be agreeable to me, then I love them and have compassion for them'. If one really looks into one's love and compassion and sees that it is arising from a self-cherishing mind, then it is not yet true unconditional love.

If one does not investigate with an unbiased mind where the attitude of love comes from, then one fails to understand the so-called love that one feels for the other is actually coming from the self-cherishing mind. That is where love and attachment become mixed up. What one thinks of as love is actually attachment. Whereas the real love that was mentioned earlier is based not merely on how the other appears to you, and relates to your satisfaction and feelings, but it is based on using the other as a reason for love. If one starts to feel a concern for others, wishing them to be happy and free from suffering, because the other is suffering, or because the other needs happiness, then that is when love and compassion becomes true unconditional love and compassion. It is definitely the case that most worldly love actually arises from what is called a self-cherishing mind, so what we call worldly love is in fact attachment. In worldly love you do have a sense of caring for the other, and you do wish them to be happy and free from suffering, but if it is merely based on reasons in relation to just oneself, then it is not sustainable. This is the main point.

There is also a difference in the degree of what we call love, attachment and aversion. When we are attached to someone there is some sort of real love that is mixed with the attachment, and because there is some sense of love there, one can benefit others. Even with attachment there is a sense of caring and you can actually help others to a certain extent. However, because aversion is an angry state of mind, it is entirely based on a harmful intention. In the moments when one feels aversion to another, there is no benefit that one can give, because aversion is based on an intention of wishing harm upon the other. There can be no benefit with anger or aversion within one's mind, whereas with attachment one can benefit others to a certain point.

Furthermore, as Dharmakirti mentions in his text, because attachment is an erroneous state of mind it exaggerates the qualities to the point where one does not see faults even if they exist. The qualities are exaggerated to the point where they completely overpower the faults, so therefore the object appears entirely attractive and favourable to oneself.

With an exaggerated view of the qualities of the object one develops excessive attachment, but as soon as one starts to see the faults of the object then one immediately feels disturbed and thus develops aversion. The analogy that is given in the commentary is that it is like the joy one feels while enjoying a good meal, and the unhappiness one feels when going to the lavatory. This is very true. You know that when a delicious meal is presented to us we are really happy and enjoy it, but once we go to the toilet and see what comes out it is not so pleasant. However the natural consequence of eating delicious food is to produce what we have to go the toilet for.

Relating that to the very attractive, very beautiful, entirely pleasant object which we saw earlier, we start to feel uncomfortable and unhappy as soon as we begin to see some faults. If the other disagrees with us, then we start to feel aversion to the object. This is how attachment and aversion pervade our mind.

#### **1.2.1.3.2. Neither desire as a consequence only of good qualities nor the converse necessarily pertains**

Doubt or assertion: It is only good qualities that are a cause for attachment.

It does not follow that only a woman with good qualities, because she conforms to one's ideas, is a cause for desire, for one sees that a fool's desire arises not only toward those with good qualities but also toward those with faults.

Answer:

*A fool's desire does not arise  
Only for those with good qualities.  
How can reason prevent  
Those involved in it without reason?* 57

If that were the case then attachment would arise only to those with good qualities, but a fool is attached to any woman they are attracted to, regardless of whether they have good qualities or not.

The meaning of the last two lines of the verse is:

How can the desire of those involved in it without good qualities as reason be prevented by reason of the absence of such good qualities.

The analogy that is given here is of a sexually abnormal Brahmin woman who cried because she did not experience the pleasure other women enjoy. There is a long story behind this but we won't go through that. The conclusion or moral of the story is that if you see faults in an object then it is easy to overcome attachment to that object, but if you only see good qualities in an object then it is extremely difficult, or it seems to be impossible, to overcome attachment to that object.

What is being emphasised here is that we should understand that regardless of whether others have qualities or faults one should maintain one's good feeling towards them, especially if they are friends. One should accept the fact that there will be both qualities and faults in the object. Trying to find a friend or partner who only has good qualities is quite impossible in samsara. Therefore from the very start we must accept the fact that whoever we befriend will possess both qualities and faults, and then rejoice in their good qualities and try to develop patience with the faults. Then we can maintain a good relationship. It's quite strange how we want to choose friends who never get angry; while we are allowed to get angry ourselves, our friends are not allowed to. How absurd is that?

#### **1.2.1.4. THE INAPPROPRIATENESS OF DESIRE FOR A WOMAN EXCEPTIONALLY ATTACHED TO ONE**

Assertion or doubt: Women commit suicide when their husbands die, but men are not like that. Therefore it is reasonable to form a relationship with a woman who desires one.

Answer: A woman does not desire one alone.

*As long as she knows no other  
She will remain with you  
As with disease, women should always be  
Kept from opportunity.* 58

The meaning of the verse is that if she has not experienced the taste of other men she will remain with you and be loving, but once she experiences the taste of others she may reject you.

Now of course this relates to both men and women. It is very true that for as long as both seem to satisfy the each other, they are loving towards each other, and the relationship lasts. However as soon as either the man or the woman starts to wish for further experience and begins to develop a relationship with someone else, then the relationship is harmed, and the partners become more distant.

If one has a chronic disease then one always has to be on guard and careful with one's diet and medication and so forth. Similarly one always has to be on one's guard in one's relationship, because at any moment one's partner could go off with someone else. When they start to come home a bit late, then one starts wondering where they have gone. One is on the lookout, trying to listen from others where they could have been, and one starts to check on who they are with. Then when they get home, there will be many questions asked of them.

The next session will be discussion night. I have heard that you are doing your homework very well. That is very good. Have a good discussion as well.

*Transcribed from tape by Jenny Brooks  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
Edited Version*

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