

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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As usual we sit in an upright, comfortable position and generate a positive motivation such as, ‘In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to attain enlightenment. So for that purpose I will listen to the Dharma and put it into practice as best as I can’.

CHAPTER 4: EXPLAINING HOW TO ABANDON ERRONEOUS CONCEPTIONS OF OURSELF BY SHOWING THE INAPPROPRIATENESS OF CONSIDERING CONTAMINATED THINGS AS ‘I’ AND ‘MINE’

This chapter explains how to abandon erroneous conceptions of oneself by showing the inappropriateness of considering contaminated things as ‘I’ and ‘mine’. In general ‘I’ refers to the self of the person, and ‘mine’ refers to other existent phenomena, such as the aggregates and all external phenomena. More particularly ‘I’ is called the possessor and ‘mine’ refers to what is being possessed. Therefore the ‘I’ as a possessor is the actual being or person, and what is being possessed is referred to here as being mine.

The erroneous conception of the self of person, is viewing the ‘I’ itself, as having inherent existence, or having its own characteristics. Since neither the ‘I’, nor what is possessed by the ‘I’, mine, exists by its own characteristics, and neither ‘I’ nor ‘mine’ exist inherently, this chapter (and others further on), shows how to overcome that misconception. They show how a conception of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ is an erroneous view, because they do not exist in the way that we see them.

There are two main headings:

- 1 Explaining the material of the chapter
2. Presenting the name of the chapter

1. Explaining the material of the chapter

This section is presented under two main headings:

- 1.1. Briefly showing how to refute the referent object of pride
- 1.2. Extensive explanation

1.1. Briefly showing how to refute the referent object of pride

*Who that is wise about worldly existence
Would be arrogant, thinking “I” and “mine”?
For all things belong equally
To all embodied beings.* 76

The antidote to overcome manifest conceptions of a self is explained in this chapter, while destroying the seeds of conception of a self is explained in the later chapters. The *seed of conception* is explained as *that which serves as a basis for producing further conceptions of a self*. This had

been explained in earlier teachings¹, however just to mention it again, the seed is the basis that produces further conceptions of the self.

Moreover, since the kings are very proud, the conceptions of “I” and “mine” are explained mainly with reference to them.

So the manifest level of the ‘I’ and ‘mine’ is being dealt with in this chapter, and the example that is used is the king, because kings can have great pride and arrogance.

Generally all phenomena are said to be classified into self and others. However, here the ‘I’ and ‘mine’ refer particularly to the possessor and that which is possessed by the ‘I’ (that which is directly used by what is called the self).

By considering oneself praiseworthy, arrogant pride arises, thinking, “I am the owner”, which is a conception of the self, and, “These things are mine.”

Because of a great sense of natural pride and arrogance a king thinks, ‘I am the owner’, which comes from the grasping at the self. The misconception here, which is called the grasping at the self, should be understood in relation to the pride of the king. When arrogance is developed as in, ‘I am the owner’ and ‘These things are mine’, that conception arises from the misconception of grasping at the self. This is because the king has the view of the self as being an independent self, not depending on anything else. This misconception of a self-sufficient independent self then leads to pride and arrogance, which arises as, ‘I am the owner and the subjects and so forth are mine’. So the secondary misconception of ownership arises from the primary misconception of viewing the ‘I’ as being an independent self-sufficient ‘I’.

The misconception that these things are mine also arises through viewing the objects that are possessed as being self-sufficient independent existing phenomena. Because of that misconception, further misconceptions such as, ‘These things are mine’ arise with an arrogance and strong sense of attachment.

This does not occur in the excellent who think correctly about the state of worldly existence.

What is being explained here is that from this sort of misconception, which is based on grasping at the self, followed by thinking, ‘I am the owner and these things are mine’, will not occur for excellent beings, who have the correct understanding of worldly existence.

The erroneous view of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ which ordinary beings have, is what leads one into samsara. Because of the grasping, attachment arises, and from attachment one creates karma. Likewise with anger: when one does not meet with the conditions that one wishes for then aversion arises, which is the reverse of attachment, and one creates karma. So due to attachment and aversion one creates karma, which become the causes to circle in samsara over and over again. Therefore ‘the excellent’, who are noble beings that have that correct understanding of selflessness, will not adopt this erroneous view.

Generating such pride might be appropriate if a certain person could have control over certain things throughout their lives.

¹ See for example 9 September 2003

What is being explained here is, if holding such an erroneous view was in accordance with reality, then that would be a worthwhile view to hold on to.

However, all things, such as different places, are the same as that through the power of previous actions they will eventually be used by all ordinary embodied beings.

What this refers to is the fact that even though a majestic being such as a king may hold the view of 'I' and 'mine', they could not possibly use all possessions just for themselves. The reality, is that everything is used commonly by all beings, and no one person can claim anything as being theirs, only to be used by themselves. There is nothing which can be owned and used entirely by one person. Everything in the universe is used commonly by beings who dwell in the universe. As the commentary states, 'For example, forests and houses are common property'.

Relating this explanation to the verse, we come back to the main point. As mentioned earlier, this presentation is an attempt to overcome what we call the manifest pride that is generated in beings such as kings and so forth, in fact in all those who are arrogant. Contemplating how there is nothing that can be claimed as being solely possessed by oneself, and how in reality everything is shared common property, definitely minimises and reduces a sense of pride, in particular the feeling that things are mine and belong to me.

One can also apply further understanding in relation to what is explained here, which is that things do not exist from their own side but are interdependent. That can also help to reduce the manifest level of pride. We can clearly see how a very powerful king could think, 'I own a lot of possessions, I own this country' and so forth. That very strong sense of manifest egotistical pride can definitely be tackled by this realistic approach of contemplating on how things are shared and common property.

When we use this explanation in a practical sense in our life we find we can relate it to personal experience. We do find, don't we, that there is a difference between viewing something as being entirely mine, possessed by myself and belonging to me, as opposed to an object that one considers as common property. With common property there is less sense of possessiveness, isn't there? Whereas for a particular thing that one regards as being 'mine' that sense of possessiveness is a lot stronger. That is something that we can see from our own experience.

When we take this as practical advice, it actually becomes very good advice about reducing a strong sense of attachment to things. As mentioned earlier the stronger the sense of ownership one has for something the stronger the attachment one has to that object. Whereas if one could consider things that one has as being common property, which can be used by anyone, then that reduces strong attachment to things.

It is the same in a family. If someone keeps things aside saying, 'This can only be used by a particular person', then whoever claims that object would have a strong attachment to it, whereas there is not that strong possessiveness or attachment to an object that is considered as being common property. Therefore this is actually pointing out a practical way of reducing attachment to objects.

1.2. Extensive explanation

There are three sub-divisions.

- 1.2.1. Refuting arrogance based on power and wealth
- 1.2.2. Refuting arrogance because of caste
- 1.2.3. Showing other means to giving up ill deeds

1.2.1. Refuting arrogance based on power and wealth

This is sub-divided into five categories.

- 1.2.1.1. Abandoning haughtiness for five reasons
- 1.2.1.2. It is inappropriate for a king to be proud
- 1.2.1.3. Considering what is religious and irreligious
- 1.2.1.4. It is appropriate for a king to feel distressed²
- 1.2.1.5. It is inappropriate for a king to have excessive attachment to his kingdom³

1.2.1.1. ABANDONING HAUGHTINESS FOR FIVE REASONS

This has five sub-divisions.

- 1.2.1.1.1. Inappropriateness of arrogance because the name of the king has been given to a servant
- 1.2.1.1.2. Inappropriateness of arrogance because of having the power to give and collect wealth
- 1.2.1.1.3. Inappropriateness of arrogance because of enjoying whatever objects one wishes.
- 1.2.1.1.4. Inappropriateness of arrogance because of being the guardian of people.
- 1.2.1.1.5. Inappropriateness of arrogance because of having the merit of protecting all beings.

1.2.1.1.1. Inappropriateness of arrogance because the name of a king has been given to a servant

Assertion: Since all world enterprises are under the king's control, pride is appropriate.

Answer:

*Society's servant, paid with a sixth part,
Why are you so arrogant?
Your becoming the agent of actions
Depends on being placed in control.*

77

In the first place how did the king come the king? He was selected by the people. It was actually the people who chose the king to work for them. So in fact the king is actually a servant of the people.

As the commentary explains, referring the earliest eras on this planet,

After the crops of wild rice, which were not planted by the people of the first era, declined and land was apportioned...

What the commentary is explaining here is how the world of this era came into existence. The first beings who inhabited this earth were beings of a pure race, who were like godly beings. They had a natural radiance of light from their body, so they did not need the light from sun. Nor did they have to rely on contaminated food, because they survived on what is called the food of concentration; they were high beings who did not have to rely on gross food. Also, there was no distinction between male and female. They were equal, with no sense of difference or discrimination. Then, as time passed by things started to slowly degenerate, and one of the first things that occurred was that people started to develop a fondness for each other, and then a bit of attraction to each other, and that led to a slow transformation in their appearance, which is when the different male and female organs began to form.

² The text says 'it is inappropriate' but this is a misprint or mistranslation.

³ This translation is a correction of what is in the text.

Because of that initial attachment to each other, their natural radiance started to diminish, and then the ability to sustain themselves on the food of concentration started to wain. Then they started to have to look for something to sustain themselves. Nevertheless their karma was still quite good and there were crops that they could eat. These crops were actually quite miraculous in that after they were reaped in the morning, they were ripe again by evening, so it was like they had a ready crop that grew spontaneously. However that also started to diminish, and they had to start accumulating for the next day, the day after and so forth.

Meanwhile, because they were attracted to each other and there were these distinct separate organs, there was sexual intercourse, and because of this reproduction occurred, and they started having babies. Then they had to make shelters, whereas earlier didn't need shelters because they were able to sustain themselves. With the need for shelter the beings started to become busier and busier, and more and more possessive of their things. They had to have houses which they had to protect, they had to start to accumulate their wealth and harvest, they had to start dividing the land and claim, "This is my land where I grow my crop; you can not take my crop, and you can not come onto my land", and that is how disputes started to arise. Also because of attachment there were disputes and arguments over relationships, and this is how times slowly became more and more degenerate, with more and more problems.

As things started to get out of hand with disputes and so forth they all came together, and had a meeting. They decided to elect one of themselves, who was a bit stronger and more powerful than the rest, to be the leader to bring order. Having decided to elect a leader, they realised that, as his main job would be to rule and bring things into order, he should not have to do extra work to support himself, so they decided to offer him one sixth of their harvests.

...people began stealing each other's harvests. For protection they gave one sixth of their harvest as payment to the person they appointed to guard their fields and called him the king.

This is the explanation of how the first king came to exist on our planet in this era - he was appointed by the people. After that the hereditary system developed, but the first king was an appointed king.

How then can it be appropriate for you, the king, to feel arrogant when you are the servant of a community of many people, paid with a sixth of the harvest? It is inappropriate to claim proudly...

This is further explaining, how, in accordance with the explanation in the verse, because the king was appointed by the people and thus paid by the people to be its leader, he is actually like the servant of the community. 'So that is why it is totally absurd that you feel proud when you are actually a servant of us'.

It is inappropriate to claim proudly, "I control all activities". Your becoming the agent of an action depends upon your being placed in control and appointed agent by the people.

This explanation relates to the fact that it is inappropriate for the king to feel arrogant, and, in particular, to feel that, 'Everything belongs to me. I am the possessor, and everything is mine'. Firstly, in reality, the king was appointed to that position by the people, who elected him

and appointed him as king. So the very term and the very position is given by the people. Secondly, the ministers, servants and so forth are actually the ones who decide whether or not the king is an appropriate person to rule. If the subjects, from all the ministers and officials down to the servants and so forth, anonymously agree that the king is unsuitable to lead then the king will not have any power, and nor will he be able to exercise any power. So, because of these facts, it is inappropriate for the king to feel, with a sense of arrogance, that, 'Everything is mine and belongs to me'. With that understanding then the strong sense of pride and arrogance can definitely be reduced.

What is being directly tackled here is that false sense of pride as in, 'I am powerful', 'I am the owner' or 'I am the leader, and the subjects, and so forth, are my subjects and belong to me'. What is being pointed out here that the very status that you have of being in power, or regarding yourself as king is something that is totally dependent on the nomination of the people. It is not something that independently arose from your being. The king does not independently exist from his own side. In other words there is no inherent king from his own side. Rather, from the very beginning he has been totally dependant on the people who elected him, or named him as king. As mentioned earlier, if the subjects anonymously disapprove and agree not to have him, then the king can be deposed.

The analogy used here is,

For instance, it is inappropriate for a servant to feel proud when his master delegates a task for him.

When a master asks a servant to do something they willingly carry on that task without any sense of pride. They know that they have to do it because the master ordered it. In fact this analogy shows that it should be understood that the king is like the servant of the people. There should be no pride or arrogance in just being the servant of the community.

1.2.1.1.2. Inappropriateness of arrogance because of having the power to give and collect wealth

Generally another reason for a king to feel proud is because he feels that he has the power to give and take things back at his will. In fact it is inappropriate to have that view.

Assertion: Pride is appropriate because a king controls the giving and getting of wealth.

Answer: That is inappropriate.

*When those in his care receive their due, 78
They think of their master as the giver.
When the master gives what is to be given,
He thinks with conceit, "I am the giver."*

As the commentary states.

When those in the king's care receive their annual wages due for service rendered, they think of themselves as inferior and of their master as the giver.

This is referring to that fact that anyone receiving their due, their monthly wage or whatever, for whatever they are worth, receives it with humbleness, because anyone receiving what they are owed does not develop a sense of pride in receiving it. That being the case for those who receive wages, the master, in the case of king, or any other master, thinks, with conceit and arrogance, 'I am the giver' when he gives those in his care the wealth that is due. It is inappropriate to feel proud of being a benefactor just

because of paying employees their wages.

The main point being made here is in relation to the king. Just as those who work for the king would not develop a sense of pride and conceit in receiving their wages, because they are rightfully receiving what they worked for, likewise the king, from his side, should not feel conceit and pride in giving wages, because he is giving it to those who have worked for it, and to whom the wages are due. In other words there is no sense of pride in giving to those who are the right recipients. If the king did not give the due wages then it would be a debt, because he owns the people what they are entitled to receive as their pay. The main point being made here is that just as those who receive a payment do not have any conceit, likewise the king who gives that should not feel any conceit or pride in doing what is the normal outcome of work, which is that it be rightly done, and that payment for that work be rightly given.

So no sense of pride and conceit need be developed on either side. The receivers, such as the king's ministers, servants and other workers and so forth, do not have conceit and pride when they receive their wages, and likewise it is inappropriate for the king to feel pride in giving, because in reality it is not giving but just what rightly belongs to the other.

1.2.1.1.3. Inappropriateness of arrogance because of enjoying whatever objects one wishes

Assertion: Pride is appropriate because a king is free to enjoy all objects.

Answer: It is not appropriate.

*That which you wrongly regard, 79
Others [consider] a source of suffering.
Living by working for others,
What causes you pleasure?*

The commentary states,

What wrongly appears as a cause for superlative happiness to you king is seen as a source of suffering for those with discriminating wisdom and disciplined senses.

What is being explained here is that what seems to be happiness is actually a completely misconception, because it is in fact actually just suffering. It rightly appears as suffering to those with discriminating wisdom and disciplined senses. Therefore, what you think of as being happiness is in fact not really happiness or joy.

Further, as the commentary explains,

Since you have experienced uninterrupted suffering in the process of protecting large communities of people and must live by working for others, it is not a cause only for happiness. How can this cause you pleasure when it is a source of many problems?

This is referring to the misconception of the king himself, who has a sense of ownership and enjoyment at his disposal, whenever he likes. The pleasure that he himself thinks he has is, in fact, erroneous, when his obligations and all the actual work he does are considered. This also relates to the misconception we have of the riches of the king, and, in fact, of all those who have similar status to a king, and who have riches. We see them as having all the enjoyments, when in reality, besides the actual pleasure itself not being real happiness and actually being suffering, there is all of the suffering from the worry, and so forth, of protecting large

communities of people, and constantly working for the welfare of others. Dealing with so many difficulties, problems, wars and so forth, are all part of the responsibility of kings. So in comparison with the responsibilities and anxieties and frustrations of that workload, the seeming enjoyments are nothing. When that is realised by the king, as well as by those of us who view the position of the king, then the conception of it as being joy and pleasure is removed.

The analogy given here is that it is 'like craving for women and liquor and so forth'. Again, those who have attachment and crave for sexual intercourse, as well as those who are addicted to that, and to liquor and so forth, give up everything for their addiction, and it seems pleasurable to them, but in reality they suffer much more.

A further analogy is that it is similar to feeling glad at being appointed to punish thieves. Actually, punishing others for one's living, is not a really desirable job to have.

1.2.1.1.4. Inappropriateness of arrogance because of being the guardian of the people

Assertion: Pride is appropriate because a king is the protector of his people.

Answer: Pride merely because of that is inappropriate.

*When a ruler seems to be the protector 80
Of his people, as well as protected,
Why be proud because of the one?
Why not be free from pride because of the other?*

As the commentary explains,

A king may feel proud because he protects his people but it also seems the ruler himself is protected by the people, since he could not be the king unless they protected him. In that case why be arrogant because of the one?

What is being explained here in practical terms here is that the king may take pride in being the ruler, and thus being the protector of his subjects, but in reality the king himself has to be protected by the people. To begin with, without his personal guards and so forth, the king would be in danger, and furthermore on a wider range the subjects are the ones who put the king in his position, and they are therefore the protectors of his sovereignty, his status and so forth. While it may seem obviously inappropriate for the subjects to have a sense of pride in being the protectors of the king, why should the king have arrogance and pride over being the protector for the subjects, when both are actually equal in protecting each other.

The main point is the absurdity of the situation. If it is not feasible for the subjects to take pride in being the protector of the king then why should the king take pride in being the ruler or protector of his subjects, when they are equal.

The analogy is that it is just like a husband and a wife. They have an equal responsibility for looking after each other and there is no sense of pride about that. If that is the case between friends or partners, then the analogy fits the meaning of the king and his subjects in that there should be no pride in protecting each other.

*Transcribed from tape by Jenny Brooks
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Edited Version*

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