
Study Group – Aryadeva’s 400 Verses

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
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As usual, let us sit in a comfortable position and generate a positive motivation such as, ‘In order to benefit all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and for that purpose I am going to listen to the teachings’.

1.2.1. Refuting Arrogance based on power and wealth (cont.)

1.2.1.1. ABANDONING HAUGHTINESS FOR FIVE REASONS

1.2.1.1.5. Inappropriateness of arrogance because of having the merit of protecting all beings

Assertion: Pride is appropriate because a king has the merit of protecting everyone like his own children.

Answer:

Those in each caste prefer their own work; 81
Thus a living is hard to find.
If you become non-virtuous
Good rebirths will be scarce for you.

At present when people are strongly involved in the five degenerations, most are untrustworthy and engaged in non-virtue, because in each caste, such as the Brahmin caste and so forth, people prefer their own work and it is therefore difficult to make a living without any problems.

This refers to degenerate times, where one does not have much choice about the type of work one does. This is the case even for Brahmins, who are very particular and only work in clean jobs. They are so particular that they have a tradition of not accepting food prepared by other castes; if it was prepared by someone not in the Brahmin caste they would pretend to accept it, but not eat it. However in degenerate times when food is scarce, Brahmins have to perform jobs that they normally wouldn’t do, in order to sustain themselves.

When you seize a sixth part of their merit you become non-virtuous because you also seize a sixth part of their ill deeds. Since good rebirths will therefore be scarce for you, arrogance is inappropriate.

This refers to earlier times when in return for protecting subjects, one sixth of the harvest was taken by the kings. What the subjects are able to earn is relative to whatever their merit allows them to gain. So when one sixth of their earnings is seized, it is as though the king is taking one sixth of their merit.

The very merit that you claim is the merit you seize from others.

Also, it is not only merit but ill deeds that are part of the one sixth that is seized. Therefore there is nothing to be proud of there.

The main point is that taking one sixth part of merit from the subjects ultimately becomes a non-virtue for the king.

Therefore, since good rebirths will be scarce for you arrogance is inappropriate.

The analogy is of a leper who instead of taking medicine wants to drink milk and eat fish. The meaning of the analogy is that a physician treats a leper with medicines and advice about restrictions in diet. If the leper does not take his medicine and eats harmful foods (apparently these are milk and fish) he is making an already bad situation worse. The patient is contributing to his illness by not following instructions, so there is wrongdoing by the patient.

It is similar for the king. Not only does a king perform many ill deeds, but to these he adds the wrong actions done by others.

The reference in the commentary, ‘since good rebirth is scarce for you’ refers to the analogy of the leper. The king has not only engaged in, and accumulated misdeeds in this life, but he also has misdeeds from previous lifetimes. Therefore there is no question that a good rebirth in the next life is out of the question. Rather it will be rebirth in the lower realms, and on top of that he takes on the misdeeds of others.

The main point to be understood is that the king not only engages in misdeeds himself, but also influences others to engage in misdeeds such as killing. So on the king’s orders many others engage in negative karma. That is a definite cause for the king to be reborn in lower realms. As that is the real situation of the king, being proud and arrogant is quite inappropriate.

As personal advice for ourselves, it should be understood that not only should one try to minimise one’s own negative karmas, but we should also prevent ourselves from influencing others to perform misdeeds. Just as a king can influence so many people, we too, can influence others. In our own limited environment it is important to purify our negative karma, and it is equally important not to influence others to create negative karma. That is very important.

Therefore, as the text indicates, in a situation where the king is creating negative karma, there is no room for the king, (or ourselves) to feel pride or arrogance.

1.2.1.2. IT IS INAPPROPRIATE FOR A KING TO BE PROUD

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

Answer: That is not so.

Those who act at others’ insistence 82
Are called fools on this earth.
There is no one else at all
So dependent on others as you.

In relation to the king’s situation, we may think that it is quite feasible for the king to be proud because he has so many subjects, and seemingly independent, as he does not have to rely upon others. In that way we may think that it is appropriate for a king to have pride.

Someone who does not do work that must be done and which he can do, but acts only at the insistence of others is called a fool on this earth. Since a king’s actions depend on the requests and insistence of others, there is no one else at all so dependent on

others as you. Therefore it is unjustified to feel proud.

As the commentary relates, it is very true that there is no reason for the king to feel proud. If anyone had the ability to do something, but only did it when they are told to do so, then they are quite foolish. Why do they have to wait for others to instruct them in what they know? It is similar for a king or any leader. The very position of the king is that they are waiting for public work to be assigned so they can take the initiative. Leaders constantly depend on feedback to know what is to be done, therefore they are completely dependent on others. When a king sees that reality there is no room for him to feel proud.

The analogy is:

For instance, it is not appropriate for someone who catches and frees dogs and monkeys for others to feel proud.

To explain the analogy more specifically, when dogs or monkeys are captured and taught to do tricks, and perform for others, they have no pride in those tricks, because someone else has trained them. Their tricks are not seen as an inborn quality of the performing animals themselves. It is the same with the king's position.

1.2.1.3. CONSIDERING WHAT IS RELIGIOUS AND IRRELIGIOUS

This has five subheadings:

1.2.1.3.1. Establishing that violent action towards others by a king is irreligious

1.2.1.3.2. Refuting that it is a religious activity

1.2.1.3.3. Not everything stated by sages should be taken as valid

1.2.1.3.4. Violence toward enemies is irreligious

1.2.1.3.5. Dying in battle is not a cause for a happy transmigration

Dying in battle is also something that was brought up in questions on Wednesday nights. It is not a cause for a happy transmigration, and we should understand that.

1.2.1.3.1. Establishing that violent action towards others by a king is irreligious

This has three subheadings

1.2.1.3.1.1. Inappropriateness of pride because the protection of the people depends on the king

1.2.1.3.1.2. Punishment of wrongdoers by the king is unsuitable as a religious activity

1.2.1.3.1.3. Refuting that punishment of the unruly by the king is not an ill deed

1.2.1.3.1.1. Inappropriateness of pride because the protection of the people depends on the king.

Assertion: Pride is appropriate because the protection of his people against harm from others depends on the king.

*Claiming that "protection depends on me", 83
You take payment from the people,
But if you perform ill deeds,
Who is equally merciless?*

As the commentary further explains

Who is as merciless as a king who performs ill deeds? None. Claiming that protection of his people depends on him, when his people do not make large payment,

he takes by force and himself performs many ill deeds such as killing.

That is the situation of the king. To counteract the misconception that pride is appropriate because the king protects his people, it clearly mentions here that the so-called protection is entirely dependent on the dues that the king receives. As long as he is paid there seems to be protection, but as soon as the people do not pay the king he engages in force to punish them, even to the extent of killing. Therefore, the king is engaging in grave misdeeds.

The analogy mentioned here in the commentary is that

He is like a bad physician who, greedy for money, does not relieve pain at once but only gradually.

This analogy refers to a story where a butcher was grinding bones when one of the splinters from the bones lodged in his eye. When he went to see a physician, rather than relieving the cause right away by taking out the splinter, the doctor actually treated it with some medication and kept asking him to come back. In that way the treatment was prolonged so that the physician could get more money from the butcher.

How this story is analogous to the meaning in the verse is that just as physician who prolongs treatment so as to get more money would be seen as cruel and commits a great misdeed, similarly it is the king's duty to provide protection for his subjects, because of the payment that he receives from them. As mentioned previously the subjects give a sixth part of their earnings to the king in order to receive protection and guidance and so forth. If, rather than taking on his duty willingly, and honestly providing that protection and work for his subjects, the king abuses that trust, and feels proud about it, and actually does wrong deeds in relation to his subjects, then that is actually a great misdeed.

Therefore as mentioned here the analogy is that the king is like a bad physician who, greedy for money, does not relieve pain at once but ekes out the treatment. So you can see how the analogy fits with the king's situation.

1.2.1.3.1.2. Punishment of wrong doers by the king is unsuitable as a religious activity

Assertion: If wrongdoers are not punished, it is detrimental to others. Therefore, to protect other people it is proper to exact punishment.

Answer: That is not so.

*If people who do ill deeds 84
Should not be treated with mercy,
All ordinary childish people
Would also not need to be protected.*

If it inappropriate to be merciful toward people who have done great wrong such as killing, ordinary childish people would also not need to be protected with compassion.

What is being related here is that if one asserts that the king has the right to punish the wrongdoers, because they have to be dealt with severely for their wrongdoings, then as all would have equally engaged in wrongdoings, is there any other ordinary being who would not fall into the scope of compassion?

As the commentary goes onto say

A king should be especially merciful to wrongdoers.

This is in relation to the description in the teachings where one focuses on beings who are doing great ill deeds and engaging in negative karma. Because of their activities they are creating the cause for their own suffering so they definitely become an object of compassion. In Tibetan there is a common saying for people who are doing great misdeeds: there is a natural tendency to call them an object of compassion. Whereas those who are suffering in a particular situation, are more an object of pity or love. Therefore there is this general spoken reference of how people who commit wrongdoing are actually an object of compassion.

The commentary further states in relation to this particular instance:

A king should be especially merciful to wrongdoers, otherwise although not called a brigand he will be one.

Even though a king would never be publicly considered as a thief, in reality he would be a thief if, having received payment from his subjects, he harms, punishes and mistreats them, rather than protecting them. After having received payment to protect them and help them, if he does not give what is deemed necessary for that payment, then in reality he is like a thief.

A king must protect them just as he must protect his own body and wealth.

Even though wrongdoing is a source of problems and so forth, nevertheless the king has the obligation and duty to protect even wrongdoers, in the sense of dealing with them in an appropriate way, and not inflicting harm and severe punishment on them. Rather he should protect them in an appropriate way. Therefore having love or care for his subjects has the connotation of protecting them even from misdeeds or misguidance. He has to develop measures for preventing them from doing wrong things in the first place.

1.2.1.3.1.3. Refuting that punishment of the unruly by the king is not an ill deed

Assertion: A king who punishes wrongdoers to protect everyone is not a wrongdoer himself because he is engaged in helping the good.

*There is nothing that will not serve
As a reason for happiness. 85
Reasons such as scriptural statements
Will not destroy merit.*

The assertion is that the king who punishes wrongdoers to protect everyone is not a wrongdoer himself because he is working for the good of the people and helping others. So the punishment inflicted by the king is not considered to be a wrongdoing. That is the doubt being expressed in this assertion.

As the commentary states:

There is nothing that through attachment to wrong ideas will not serve as a reason for happiness. Those who enjoy killing fish and pigs think, "This is the traditional work of my caste", and feel happy.

That is a misconception that people can hold in terms of being proud or even happy about their wrongdoing.

Some deleterious Brahmin treatises say that animals were created by the lord of the nine transmigrations to provide sustenance, and killing them is therefore not an ill deed. Reasons such as scriptural statements, false arguments and the like will not dissipate or destroy the limitless ill deeds of those who exert themselves to kill and who hold such views.

As explained in the commentary there are those who rely on false treatises. With wrong reasonings they hold the view that there is no ill deed in killing animals and so forth. They state that because animals are given by god for the purpose of sustaining humans, there is no ill deed in killing them. However that argument does not take away the demerit or the negative karma of that deed: the negative karma of killing is still created. In fact, because these acts are not seen as a wrongdoing or ill deed, the negative karma created will be limitless.

The analogy is that

It is like thinking ones undigested meal has been digested and eating more food.

This corresponds to a story about a greedy man consuming food, who enjoyed it so much that he wanted more. He had already eaten quite a lot and it was still undigested so he asked a Brahmin whether it would be okay to have more food and drink. When the Brahmin responded, 'Yes that's fine. You can have more food', that gave the greedy person the leeway to even eat more, because he thought, 'Now I have got good reason to eat more. The Brahmin said it is okay'. But because he had taken yet more food while the earlier meal had not been digested properly he actually got quite ill as a result.

How this analogy relates to the meaning of earlier explanation in relation to the negative karma created, is like this: Ordinary beings have already accumulated negative karmic deeds in the past, in addition to that which is already prevalent in the mindstream. If one relies on faulty treatises then that will then be an influence to create even more negative karma on top of the negative karma already created.

1.2.1.3.2. Refuting that it is a religious activity

This is further divided into three.

1.2.1.3.2.1. Refuting that protecting the people by punishing the unruly is a religious activity

1.2.1.3.2.2. Analogy showing that when an intelligent king protects his people out of attachment it is not a religious activity

1.2.1.3.2.3. The reasons why it is not a religious activity is because it is a basis for pride and carelessness.

1.2.1.3.2.1. Refuting that protecting the people by punishing the unruly is a religious activity

We should understand that this refers to a particular type of irreligious king, and that these examples do not relate to a religious or Dharma king.

Assertion: Since protecting his people is a cause for high rebirth and therefore religious practice a king needs no other religious practice.

Answer: that that is not so.

*If giving proper protection is
A ruler's religious practice,
Why would the toil of artisans too
Not be religious practice?*

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If it is a ruler's religious practice when, as a king paid with a sixth, he gives proper protection to his people and is acknowledged to do so, why would the work of artisans who toil to make weapons and moats for others' protection not also be religious practice?

The assertion is that as protecting people is a cause for higher rebirth and therefore a religious practice, a king needs no other practices. This is referring to how the king, because he engages in practices of protecting others, is doing a virtuous deed. To refute that misconception the text mentions here that a king is basically doing something for which he is paid.

The protection and so forth that he is doing for others is not so much out of a great concern, love and compassion for his people, but rather because he is paid to do his job. He is merely fulfilling his requirements for the payment that he receives, which is a sixth of the earnings of his subjects. So if the king's activities, such as protecting his subjects and ruling them, are to be considered as a virtuous deed even when he receives the payment for them, so why couldn't we also consider people who make, for example, weapons, moats and so forth for money, which also protects people, as doing virtuous deeds? They are also doing deeds which seem to protect the subjects.

The analogy given here is:

The king is like a man hired to protect the town.

The main point in relation to the analogy is that when some are paid to carry out the punishment of others, such as executioners and so forth, what they are in fact doing is actually harming others. If the king can be considered as doing virtuous deeds for something that he receives payment for anyway, then we could also assert that others who do their job or fulfil their obligations for payment, even if they are harming others, would actually be doing good deeds. But that would definitely be against the logical reason of what we call the workings of karma. Therefore the king in reality is no different from someone who makes weapons and so forth, or who imposes punishments on others and so forth.

The Textbook

It seems that the translation in the text book that you have is actually very accurate and good. Apparently the main source for this book is a teaching that was given by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, from which the commentary was written, and some extra explanations added.

The way this book came about was related to me by a translator who used to translate for Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, and who now lives in New Zealand. When he recently came to visit me he told me about this particular translation of the text.

Apparently Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey only gave a complete teaching on *The Four Hundred Verses* on one occasion. He was requested a few times to teach it again

but he said, I won't be able to go through the whole teaching again', and after quite a few requests were made he said, 'I can give the main points'.

Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey said, 'I can give you the essence of *The Four Hundred Verses*, so that you can keep that as a main point of reference. Apparently this was related to Dr Barry, who was one of Geshe Dhargyey's students. The main essence of the *Four Hundred Verses* is that it indicates that 95% of the humans in the world, because of their deeds and so forth, will go to the lower realms. Not following that 95% is the essence of *The Four Hundred Verses*. Dr Barry was quite shocked when he first heard that, but when he thought about it more in detail he felt that it was actually very sound advice. We can see this when we go through each verse, and realise that that basically the essence is that the text is explaining how so many ordinary beings are engaged in so-called normal activities, which are based on wrong deeds and negative karma.

The Five Degenerations

In verse 81, which was covered earlier, there was mention of degenerate times. Actually, five types of degenerations are explained in the teachings. These are:

1. Degeneration of delusion: The sign of the degeneration of delusions is that even with very gross delusions, not to mention the subtle ones, it manifests immediately when there is the slightest condition for the gross delusion to arise, thus causing the mind to be afflicted. That is the sign of the degeneration of delusion.

2. Degeneration of karma: Because delusions arise so easily they influence one to engage in acts that cause negative karma or non-virtue to be created very rapidly. That would be the sign of the degeneration of karma.

There is also another interpretation which says that the second degeneration is the degeneration of sentient beings. The sign of degeneration of sentient beings is found in the verse in the *Guru Puja*, where it says that even when countless Buddhas have come, there are those beings who have not been liberated. They can be considered as degenerate beings for not being tamed or liberated.

So there are two ways of presenting the second degeneration.

3. Degeneration of views: The sign of degeneration of view is not seeing what is to be abandoned and what is to be taken up. The presence of ill deeds with a worldly distracted view would be the sign of degeneration of view.

4. Degeneration of life span: The earlier prevalent delusions and negative karma and so forth contribute to the very short life span of beings. That is a sign of the degeneration of life span.

5. Degeneration of time: When all the earlier degenerations are present then that is called the degeneration of time.

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