
Study Group – Aryadeva’s 400 Verses

༄༅། །བསྐྱབས་འཇགས་པའི་བརྒྱུ་པའི་སྐྱེ་བའི་ཚོགས་ལེན་པའི་བྱས་པ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

10 October 2006

As usual we will sit in a comfortable and upright position, and generate a positive 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 put them into practice as best as I can’.

1.2.1. Refuting arrogance based on power and wealth

1.2.1.3. CONSIDERING WHAT IS RELIGIOUS AND IRRELIGIOUS

1.2.1.3.2. REFUTING THAT IT 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

Assertion: Since an intelligent king protects his people out of attachment, he is irreproachable.

Answer:

*This example shows the ruler on whom
The people rely as reprehensible. 87
The excellent see attachment to existence
As mother of all those in the world.*

As the commentary explains:

Being a ruler on whom the people rely for protection is a source of arrogance and all kinds of recklessness and is therefore reprehensible. The wise Exalted ones who see things without error regard attachment to existence as the mother of those in the world because it produces them.

The assertion or the doubt is in relation to the status of a king. Because of his status, in a worldly sense he appears to be ‘the protector’ or the main leader of all (ministers, as well as subjects). Even those following religion seem to be under the rule of the king. In that sense it seems that the king is the most superior, and the protector of all. Therefore the doubt may arise, as the king is a protector of all he must be irreproachable.

However, that would not be the case for the Exalted ones who see all reality, including the faults that can be seen in a king. As explained here, the king is involved in a lot of negative activities, which cause the creation of a lot of negative karmas. The king’s status is therefore reprehensible.

The analogy used in the root text to explain the reprehensible status of the king is, attachment to existence is like the mother of those in the world, because it has produced them. What this is referring to is that attachment itself is analogous to a mother: just as a mother produces children, so attachment to worldly existence is the cause for rebirth in cyclic existence. Recognising that attachment to worldly existence serves as a mother producing those to be re-born in cyclic

existence, the wise or Exalted ones, who are noble beings understanding reality, purposely see attachment as a fault. Therefore the wise eradicate it, meaning that they abandon attachment to worldly existence.

1.2.1.3.2.3. The reason why it is not a religious activity is because it is a basis for pride and carelessness [or lack of conscientiousness]

This is again dealing with the doubt that the king’s activity could be a religious activity. Here the text is refuting that doubt on the basis that the king’s status serves as a basis for pride and carelessness to arise, so therefore it could not be a religious activity.

Assertion: Because of his compassion, a king’s protection of his people is his religious practice.

Answer: That is not so.

*The sensible do not acquire kingship. 88
Since fools have no compassion,
These merciless rulers of men,
Although protectors, are irreligious.*

The sensible, who have not foolishly turned away from good paths like ethical conduct and are not attached just to power and wealth, do not acquire kingship.

The doubt is that a king may seemingly appear to have compassion and to protect his people. From a worldly point of view the king’s compassion and protection may be seen as a very noble deed and thus a religious deed. But the explanation in the text is that this is not so.

Fools, who are ignorant about actions and their effects, have no compassion. Kings, these merciless rulers of men, although they are protectors, are irreligious and a source of conceit and recklessness.

The main point being made in the commentary is that although from a worldly point of view kings may appear to be religious, because of their seeming compassion and protection of their subjects, in reality their activities, which are filled with conceit and pride, are actually quite foolish ones. The king’s activities are the activities of fools, because they are counter to developing the paths and the realisations on the paths.

Because of the recklessness and conceit, the king’s actions, rather than being religious, are contrary to the Dharma, because they strengthen delusions in the mind and therefore go against the paths and the grounds leading to enlightenment. Therefore the king’s activities are definitely an irreligious activity rather than a religious or Dharma activity.

As the commentary further explicitly mentions, these kings are actually merciless rulers of men, because of their deluded state of mind. Their main activities are merely trying to strengthen their power and wealth, or conquer other countries, or, as mentioned earlier, punishing subjects who don’t listen to them. Therefore all of their activities are focussed on either strengthening their own power or accumulating wealth, which is only focused on benefit for this lifetime. Therefore the activities of a king are completely irreligious and their seemingly compassion is in fact, completely contrived. In

fact they are actually merciless beings.

Therefore those who are really wise will completely shun and avoid the state of kingship. It is only fools who would want to go after such status and power, which only becomes a means to create more negative karma and thus strengthen their position in samsara. Therefore it is only foolish beings who would want to have the power of kingship. A king who is foolish in that way does not have compassion.

To clarify the main point being made here: a king is referred to as a fool because of not having the wisdom to know the consequences of cause and effect i.e. creating positive karma generates a positive effect and creating negative karma results in experiencing a negative effect. If one does not have the wisdom to understand that, then one is engulfed in the ignorance of that reality. Therefore in that regard, not having the wisdom to know the consequences of one's actions, and their results is completely foolish.

Furthermore the king has arrogance. Anyone who is ignorant of the real consequences of actions and their results, as well as having an arrogant mind, has no room for real compassion in their mind. Therefore the verse and the commentary on the verse explain how, rather than having compassion the reality is contrary to that - the king does not have compassion.

Then, as the commentary reads:

...although they are protectors [in a worldly sense, they] are irreligious and a source of conceit and recklessness

Here, the actual explanation is that kings have what is translated here as recklessness. Actually in the Tibetan the meaning is more like violence inflicted on others. So the reason why they are irreligious is because of their source of conceit and violence towards others. Therefore it is not proper to claim that the king has compassion and is thus following a religious practice.

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

This is sub-divided into two.

1.2.1.3.3.1. Why not everything stated by sages is valid

1.2.1.3.3.2. Showing that the happiness of the people is not assured by taking social treatises to be valid

1.2.1.3.3.1. Why not everything stated by sages is valid

The English word 'sages', as used here, is a translation from the Tibetan word *trang song*. The syllable *trang* has a connotation of being honest, while *song* has the connotation of reaching a certain level in their practice. So the practice of those called *trang song* is supposed to be based on honesty and morality; they are meant to have good moral ethics and a honest mind. Also the very word *trang song* has the connotation of those who live in isolated places and who practice austerities. Therefore the Indian sadhus are also referred to as *trang songs* or sages.

Assertion: Treatises by sages state that even if, owing to the code of the royal caste, a king acts violently, he has not performed an ill deed.

Answer:

*Sages' activities are not all
[Actions] that the wise perform,
For there are inferior,
Mediocre and superior ones.*

89

There are statements that are found in certain treatises composed by sages of the past. As the commentary explains:

Not all the activities described in treatises by sages are performed by wise sages, for there are different kinds: inferior, mediocre and superior sages.

This refers to a treatise of a sage, which says that even if a king acts violently, he has not performed an ill-deed. That sort of statement doesn't necessarily have to be taken at face value, because it wouldn't necessarily have been composed by a great learned and experienced sage. There are different levels of accomplishments within the sages: there are some who are quite inferior. Even though it is in a treatise composed by a sage, it cannot be taken at face value and quoted, because it is clearly not a statement made by a great and learned sage. If it is found in one of the treatises, this would be clearly a statement made by an inferior sage. Based on those reasons, the quote that a king's violent activity is valid, even if he performs an ill deed, is definitely from an inferior sage's treatise.

In general, treatises stating doubts about whether a king's activities are virtuous or not and leave it as a doubt, would be considered as a statement from a treatise composed by a mediocre sage.

A clear statement that a king's activities that involved violence are definitely an ill deed would be a statement that is found in treatises by superior sages. The most superior sage is the Buddha.

Therefore because there are different treatises which have different statements in relation to the same topic, ranging from the very inferior to the superior, your quotation is definitely from an inferior sage's treatises and cannot be taken as valid.

1.2.1.3.3.2. Showing that the happiness of the people is not assured by taking social treatises to be valid

Assertion: Because past kings who took these social treatises to be valid looked after their people well, these treatises must be valid.

Answer: It is not certain that people will be happy by following these social treatises.

*Virtuous rulers of the past
Protected the people like their children.
Through the practices of this time of strife
It is now like a waste without wildlife.*

90

Former virtuous and kind rulers, such as universal monarchs who protected the people like their own children, increased happiness and prosperity. But those who rely on the practices of this time of strife nowadays devastate the world, making it like a waste without wildlife. Therefore treatises incompatible with religious practice are not valid.

The assertion refers to past kings who took social

treatises to be valid, and looked after the people, because they relied on those social treatises. It is seen that they have taken care of their subjects, so it therefore follows that the treatise on which they relied must be valid as well. That is the assertion or doubt being raised.

The response to this doubt is that earlier kings, such as the universal monarchs, did definitely protect the people like their own children and increased their happiness and prosperity, because of the fact that they relied upon valid treatises. They were, in fact, religious kings in the real sense, because they relied upon valid, authentic treatises, which explained the ways and means of genuinely taking care of subjects out of real compassion and love. Therefore, because the treatises that were relied upon by kings of the past were sound, valid treatises, the actions and activities followed by the kings who relied upon these treatises are authentic.

We can say the kings themselves acted out of real compassion. The kings of the past, for example, King Srongtsen Gampo in Tibet is said to have based his monarchy upon the moral values that are known as the ten virtues of the gods and humans. Therefore the values that guided him were based on the ten virtues as we know them from the teachings nowadays. If a king's rule of the country was based on the ten virtues, they definitely ruled out of real concern and compassion for their subjects. Therefore their activities were consistent with the valid treatises that they were relying upon.

The great kings of the past ruled upon the basis of the ten virtues. Based on the understanding of the wisdom of knowing karma - the consequences of cause and effect - they promoted the ten virtues amongst their subjects. Because that was the basis of the government, the people created virtuous merit and karma naturally. With people naturally living in a happy state, prosperity, wealth and so forth naturally increased, and happiness naturally increased. Therefore under that kind of monarchical rule, people were genuinely happy.

In relation to the rulers of these days the commentary reads:

But those who rely on the practices of this time of strife nowadays devastate the world, making it like a waste without wildlife.

This refers to the fact that the moral values of those who rule based on the ten virtues, or abiding of the law of karma, have been shunned. Therefore slowly, slowly we can see how throughout time, the effect of the rulers becoming more selfishly based. They have ruled more out of self-interest for power, gain and wealth, rather than out of a real sense of genuine care and concern for the subjects. As a result we can see that there have been more wars, and more calamities and mishaps. Therefore delusions have become much more prevalent within the subjects as well. In this way we can see that there has definitely been a degeneration in times, as we see the rulers of these days basing their rule on mostly unethical codes, rather than moral and ethical codes.

Some kings rule without relying on authentic religious sources and they rule for their own benefit. They may

quote some treatise, but they are not really authentic treatises. In that way we can see how degeneration has taken place. Therefore the very activities of the kings are reason enough to show how that the very treatises on which they rely, if in fact they are relying on any treatises, are not sound, valid treatises. In this way the doubt expressed above can be removed.

The definition of a valid treatise is a treatise that proclaims a means of benefiting the mind, and benefiting oneself. In other words, a valid treatise is unfailing and infallible. Treatises that are infallible through reasoning, or through the experience that one gains from them are valid treatises. Whereas treatises that may indicate something when one refers to it, or which have no real logical basis, or which, when practised, result in experiences that do not accord to what is being explained, are not valid treatises.

1.2.1.3.4. VIOLENCE TOWARD ENEMIES IS IRRELIGIOUS

Assertion: Treatises state it is not irreligious even if a king harms his enemies when occasions to do so arise.

Answer:

*If a king who seizes the occasion
To harm is not doing wrong,
Then others, too, such as thieves
Have not done so in the first place.* 91

This doubt arises in relation to certain treatises that seem to encourage subduing enemies. They contain passages saying that in an event that an enemy arises, and if you have the power, then you must overcome the enemy. Basically these treatises justify an irreligious activity as moral and justified.

If a king who seizes the occasion to harm an enemy or anyone else that has acted improperly by beating him with sticks and the like is not doing wrong, others too, like thieves, have not done wrong in the first place - a thief finds an occasion to strike at someone rich first, and the king later finds an occasion to strike back.

The doubt refers to the case where if a so-called enemy arises, and it is not seen as immoral if the king were to harm that enemy, because an opportunity arises to strike. In that case a thief, who finds an opportunity to rob a rich person, could also be stated as not being immoral.

The main point here is in relation to a statement made in a treatise that one should strike when the occasion arises. What is being refuted is the justification to strike back when an occasion arises. This is the same as saying that a thief should take something when the occasion arises. Can that also be considered as being proper or moral? Of course it would not be accepted even in a worldly sense. If the thief's act of taking something when the occasion arises is not immoral, then why would we punish a thief? Such reasoning can not be followed.

1.2.1.3.5. DYING IN BATTLE IS NOT A CAUSE FOR A HAPPY TRANSMIGRATION

Assertion: By defeating the enemy in battle one acquires wealth and pleases the king, and if one dies for him in battle one will go to a high rebirth. Therefore a king

should take pleasure in warfare.

Answer:

*If giving all one has for liquor
And so on is not an offering,
Why consider it an offering
To give oneself in battle?*

92

If giving all one has for liquor, gambling and women is not an offering that pleases the excellent and if it is also unmeritorious, why consider giving one's life in battle out of anger and greed, an offering to please the excellent? For what reason would one take a high rebirth through this? Is it not feasible.

Apparently there are treatises and certain worldly beings who claim that it is definitely desirable to go to war and even die in war. If one goes to war and is able to vanquish enemies and fight bravely, then one will receive medals and prizes when one returns. Even if one were to die in war, that too would be fine. One would have had a worthwhile death, because through dying in the service of the king one will have a good rebirth. Those are the sort of treatises that seem to encourage people to go to war and fight. Not only are people encouraged to go to war with the promise of getting medals, or a gift, or wealth and so forth as a token of appreciation later on (if one is able to survive), but if one were to die in battle good things are promised after death. Saying that they would have good rebirths after death overcomes their fear.

The actual analogy given in the root text itself is that it is similar to those who give everything they have – wealth and so forth – for addictions such as intoxicants, gambling or women (such as going to prostitutes and so forth). In instances like this where people completely give in to these addictions, they may spend all their wealth and become impoverished from that. Let alone the noble or wise beings praising such behaviour, even ordinary worldly beings would see that as being unmeritorious, or an ill deed. Even worldly beings shun such people. Would such activities such as spending all of one's money on liquor or gambling or going to prostitutes, for example, be considered as meritorious or a good deed in a worldly sense? No-one would agree, would they?

So the main reason why this would not be considered as a good deed is because there is an indulgence, a very excessive desire or attachment, that is involved. Those who indulge themselves in liquor, gambling or women are considered as being immoral and as committing an ill deed. Why? Because their actions are based on excessive attachment and greed. It is exactly the same for those who go into battle. They go out of anger and greed. Therefore how could that be seen as noble when the very basis of the reasoning is exactly the same as in the earlier case. Therefore going into battle has to be considered as being immoral. How can the deed of going into battle become a cause to be reborn in high rebirths? It cannot be so.

1.2.1.4. IT IS APPROPRIATE FOR A KING TO FEEL DISTRESSED

Assertion: It is reasonable to like being a king, because a king is the guardian of all his people.

Answer: That is not so.

*You, the king, guardian of the people,
Have no guardian yourself.
Since your guardianship does not
Release you, who would be happy?*

93

As the commentary explains:

Since a king is the guardian of his people, they follow his instructions, giving up unsuitable activities and engaging in suitable ones. However you, the king, have no guardian and, living in a morass of corruption without any guardian, your actions are arbitrary. Because you have guardianship yet have no mentor, the causes of suffering in bad rebirths hold you fast and have not released you. Therefore who would be happy about gaining kingship? It is unreasonable to be happy.

This doubt arises in relation to a worldly thought that many will have: the king's position of protector is a desirable situation, because he is the protector of all. To overcome this doubt the text goes into an explanation of how in reality, the king's position is not a desirable one, because he is himself without a real protector. The fact that the king is a protector for his subjects is not denied. Of course, in reality, the king has the responsibility and to a certain extent the guardianship of his people, and the people likewise follow his instructions. To a certain extent, people following his instructions may avoid unsuitable activities and engage in suitable ones. That is a fact which is undenied in general.

However there is no real pride in being a protector of others, when there is no real protector for the king himself. 'Because of the fact that you have no guardian yourself' also means that the king, being superior out of his pride or status, may not accept any other superior being or person over him. Therefore the king will not have a mentor. Without having a mentor and no one to look up to himself, there is nothing to prevent the king from engaging in misdeeds and corruption and so forth, and thus misbehaviours. Therefore, being mentorless and protectorless becomes a fault for a king, because he may act in a corrupt way, without conscientiousness.

The main point here is showing the absurdity of the situation where a protector of others, having no protector himself, is led or influenced into engaging in deeds that will result in being reborn in lower realms. That being the case, who with a wise mind would desire a state of being like a king. No one with real wisdom would actually want to be a king.

1.2.1.5. IT IS APPROPRIATE FOR A KING TO HAVE EXCESSIVE ATTACHMENT TO HIS KINGDOM

Note that there is a misprint in the translation of the text book. We will go over this outline in the next session.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

© **Tara Institute**

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