
Study Group – Aryadeva’s 400 Verses

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual we will sit in a comfortable position while we generate a positive motivation in our mind, such as, ‘I will receive the teachings in order to benefit all sentient beings. By listening to the Dharma and putting it into practice as best as possible, may I achieve enlightenment’.

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

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

Assertion: Since a king whose punishments are mild does not become famous, while one who punishes harshly is famous even after his death, it is appropriate to give harsh punishment.

Answer:

Though a king is famous after his death 94
It will bring no benefit.
Do you, being worthless, and those who
Cook dogs not have notoriety?

The doubt refers to generally accepting that since the king maintains his fame even after death, it therefore seems that anything contributing to that fame, such as giving harsh punishments, is appropriate. As the common people seem to remember harsh punishments and severe rulings, that adds to the fame of a king, even after his death. That being the case, then the doubt arises that if one can become famous and maintain one’s fame, and since harsh punishments can contribute to that fame, then it may seem appropriate to punish harshly.

If posthumous fame brought some benefit, that would be all right, but even though a king is famous after his death, it brings no benefits, such as the elimination of ill deeds.

As the commentary explains, fame cannot remove ill deeds or negative karma. If it could help to do that, then maybe it is worthwhile considering punishing harshly. But that is not the case. There are different types of fame such as genuine ‘good fame’ and ‘notorious fame’. The deeds contributing to good fame will be those that lead one to a higher rebirth, which can be considered as being a fame that is of a good quality. Notorious fame, robbing others through taxes and so forth, is of no benefit or use. The causes that you have engaged in to accumulate that kind of bad fame are definitely a cause to be reborn in the lower realms. There is no question about that.

If fame could wash away the stains of wrongdoing, why would you, because of your worthless actions like seizing others’ wealth, and those who cook dogs, because of their awesomeness to dogs, not enjoy great fame?

What is being referred to here is that if your notorious deeds, which have accumulated the fame of creating wrong deeds or negative karmas, were a means to wash away the negative deeds of others, such as those who cook dogs and so forth, then the fame that you have accumulated through your good deeds will not be a means to wash away your negative karma or deeds. Therefore the wise will not see the deeds that contribute to your fame as being a fame that is worthwhile obtaining. The wise will definitely see that as something to be shunned.

1.2.2. Refuting arrogance because of caste

This refers the son of the king being naturally born into the caste of the king. Merely being in that caste is regarded as a reason for arrogance. This is subdivided into three:

- 1.2.2.1. Refuting arrogance because of being a king’s son
- 1.2.2.2. Refuting arrogance merely because of being royal caste
- 1.2.2.3. Refuting that one becomes royal caste through the work of protecting everyone

1.2.2.1. REFUTING ARROGANCE BECAUSE OF BEING A KING’S SON

Assertion: A prince of royal caste is fit to rule while others are not, therefore pride is appropriate.

Answer: It is not.

When all power and wealth 95
Are produced by merit,
It cannot be said that this one
Will not be a basis for power and wealth.

The assertion refers to the fact that the monarchy can only be inherited by the king’s son, namely the prince, because he is in the same caste. It is not like a lineage that can be passed onto anyone. Therefore from a worldly point of view, it can be seen as appropriate to feel proud about being born into the king’s caste. However the text refutes that reason.

The main assertion here is that it is only a prince who is fit to have the authority of a king, with the ability to punish or give status to others and so forth. The assertion here is that such activities are only fit for a prince. However the root text refutes this, saying that such activities are not only an activity of a prince.

It is not merely due to being born as a son of a king that one receives that authority, but rather because of the merit that one has accumulated from previous lifetimes. Without having created the merit, one would not be have that sort of status and ability. Therefore the real contributing factor to having power and authority is merit rather than caste.

Therefore it is not appropriate to claim that it is only fit for a prince born into that particular caste to have that authority over others. Rather, it is because of his merit, and as anyone could accumulate that merit, they too would have that authority and power and so forth. That is the main contributing factor. These are qualities that any being who has accumulated the merit can share equally with the prince. Thus it is not appropriate for the

prince, or anyone born in the king's caste, to feel proud of that status. Of course, this also refers to the obvious fact that all of us have equally been kings many times in the past, although we do not carry anything from that [laughter]. Also, someone may be a king one day, but it could all end by the next morning, and a king and ruler in the morning could be imprisoned by evening.

1.2.2.2. REFUTING ARROGANCE MERELY BECAUSE OF BEING ROYAL CASTE

This is subdivided into two.

1.2.2.2.1. There have not always been distinct castes, meaning that there has not always been a distinct caste system.

1.2.2.2.2. Since there are four castes, a royal caste existent by way of its own entity is not ascertained.

1.2.2.2.1. THERE HAVE NOT ALWAYS BEEN DISTINCT CASTES

Assertion: Since the practice of kingship is only explained to those of the royal caste but not the other three and thus the royal caste alone should rule, pride because of caste is appropriate.

Answer:

*In the world caste is determined
With regard to the main means of livelihood.
Thus there is no division among
All sentient beings by way of caste.* 96

The assertion states that of the original four castes not even one of them, including the royal caste, can be ascertained as being existent from its own side, from its own nature.

The assertion or the doubt again refers to the royal caste as being the superior caste, which alone has the authority of ruling. Here the authority of ruling refers to the particular activities that only a king is fit to do, such as being the ruler of all the subjects in that nation. The ultimate decision about the kind of punishments to be inflicted is said to be in the king's hands. Another authority that only a king has is rewarding those for whatever virtue or good deeds they have done, and presenting prizes. These are some of the main activities of a ruler. The assertion here is that it is only a king who has the authority to engage in those kinds of activities of rulership. Thus, pride in caste is appropriate.

However, as the root text and the commentary explain, there is no certainty in the caste system itself. The reason as explained here is that the caste system is not something which is of its own entity. Rather it was created in India by the people of the first eras in relation to different types of livelihoods of the people of that era.

As the commentary explains:

Humans of the first era were born miraculously from mind and were endowed with luminosity. They had miraculous powers and could travel in space. They lived on the food of joy and did not have male or female sexual organs. Later, as they began to eat coarse food, they gradually developed different shapes determined by their male and female organs, and birth from the womb occurred.

It is from that time onwards that birth from the womb started to occur. As explained earlier, the godly beings of the earlier era did not need to have to labour or worry about their food because they had a miraculous, spontaneous food, and they didn't have to depend on coarse food.

When they first began to depend on coarse food it was spontaneously produced right after it was consumed, because the merit was still high. However, that natural ability slowly started to diminish, and the beings began to hoard their food so that they would have something for the next day. While some hoarded or collected food, others, out of greediness, wanted to take it away from them, which is when stealing started to occur. This implies that if you have nothing to keep, then there would be nothing that others could steal.

Then, because of hoarding, stealing and so forth began. To protect against stealing, a man in his prime was appointed by the majority of the community to guard the fields. Those who agreed to do this work were known as the royal caste.

What is being explained here is the fact that initially there was no royal caste system at all. There was no necessity because everyone was equal. Whereas when the times began to degenerate, there was a need for someone to be in charge, so the people of that era appointed someone as their king. From then onwards the royal caste system developed. The main point being made here is that before that era there was no royal caste, or any other caste for that matter.

Then the commentary goes on to explain the other caste systems, the next of which is the Brahmin caste.

Those who wished to subdue their senses left the towns to do ascetic practices and were called Brahmins.

When things started to disintegrate, there were some who decided to abandon worldly life and lead an ascetic life. The Tibetan word *dram se* has the connotation of those who leave a life of worldliness for a more subdued life. Thus they leave normal worldly activities, and go off to lead a more ascetic kind of life. They were then known as *dram se*. In India these people were called Brahmins, and that is how the Brahmin caste system developed.

Then there is the 'official caste'.

Those who carried out the king's orders were called the official caste,...

The last caste system was the 'common caste':

... those put to menial work like ploughing the fields were known as the common caste. Thus, in the world, caste was determined with regard to the main means of gaining a livelihood.

As the commentary further explains:

There is no innate division among sentient beings based on castes distinct by way of their own entity.

And the analogy is:

It is like pots distinguished by their different contents.

As with the analogy, the caste system was only developed gradually as the social structures of the time degenerated. It is not really something that is distinct from its own side; it is like different pots which have different contents, while still maintaining the same entity of being pots.

Thus the caste system came about gradually, which in itself indicates that from the very beginning there is no intrinsic caste system which came about independently from its own side.

Thus it is very wrong to accept statements in treatises by sages that say even if a king uses violence it is not irreligious.

Some treatises explain that using violence is acceptable, but to then assume that it is therefore religious is wrong. That is not so; it is still an irreligious activity.

Although this explanation of how they developed the caste system came from an earlier time in India, we find that even though they may not claim to have castes, there naturally seems to be a caste system, which naturally developed in other nations, except perhaps for the Brahmin caste. For example, in those countries which had kings as rulers, there was naturally a hierarchy. It was only those who were born to a king and queen who became rulers. Likewise there was an aristocratic class of the ministers or other noble families who worked directly under the king. Then we had what we call to this day the working class. So we can see that the distinction between the people came about naturally.

1.2.2.2.2. SINCE THERE ARE FOUR CASTES, A ROYAL CASTE EXISTENT BY WAY OF ITS OWN ENTITY IS NOT ASCERTAINED

Assertion: Since there are four different ancestral lineages among humans, there are castes which differ by way of their own entity.

Answer:

*Since it was very long ago
And women's minds are fickle,
There is no one from the from the caste
Known as the royal caste.*

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As the commentary explains:

It is very difficult to find anyone whose caste is certain because of being born from parents of pure caste.

The reason why it is very difficult to find a pure caste is because:

Since the division into four castes occurred very long ago in the world, and women's fickle minds have turned toward other men, there is no one who definitely belongs to the caste known as the royal caste.

What is being explained here is that because the original caste system developed so many thousands of years ago, it is unlikely that anyone today could claim that they are from a very pure caste. As time goes on, there are inter-caste marriages and so forth, so therefore the caste system has been mixed and therefore it is hard to find someone of pure royal caste. Also a king might have many queens. Actually to be of really pure caste, a prince would have to

be the son of a king and a queen, which means that the queen would have to have been a daughter of another king and queen. Throughout history, as we have noticed, a king might have a son by queens who did not have the authentic lineage of a princess. Also, children may have different fathers, or not be sure who their real father is. In this way we can see how it is hard to determine a pure caste from a pure lineage going back to earlier times. So there is already a flaw in the caste system. Therefore in this way we can see how, as time goes on, it is very difficult to find a really pure caste.

Therefore pride on account of one's ancestry is unjustified.

Therefore being proud just because of caste is inappropriate, because the caste system itself is not certain to be pure. I remember someone mentioning to me about how her daughter was pregnant, and it had not been determined who the father really was. She told me how, in earlier times, having a child without identifying the father was not considered very proper. However times have changed and she said, 'Actually I don't particularly mind who the father is. Whether he has one or two or three fathers, I don't care. The fact is that my child has a child and that is okay'. So it seems that in earlier times if a woman were to bear a child, the father had to be identified and would have to be their legitimate husband. If that was not so, then it seems that it was considered as being immoral or not in accord with the norms of the society. I think that may be one reason why some abortions took place - out of embarrassment or shame or an inability to deal with the pressure and so forth. That is actually quite a pitiful state of affairs.

1.2.2.3. REFUTING THAT ONE BECOMES ROYAL CASTE THROUGH THE WORK OF PROTECTING EVERYONE¹

Assertion: If one does not become royal through caste, one becomes a member of the royal caste through one's work of protecting everyone

Answer:

*If even one of common caste
Through his work could become royal caste,
One might wonder why even a commoner
Should not become Brahmin through his work.*

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The doubt being raised here is in relation to the earlier doubt, which is that there is a flaw in the caste system. If someone were to work hard, then through their ability to protect others they could achieve royalty. Thus they might become proud of that. The doubt basically is that even if one were not to become a king because of one's caste, one could join the royal caste system, thus becoming royalty, because of having the ability to protect all the subjects. That is the assertion that is being raised.

If, by doing the work of the royal caste such as protection of the people, even people of common caste could become royal caste, one might wonder why even those of common caste should not become Brahmin by doing Brahmin work such as reciting the

¹ In the text book there is a misprint. This heading is categorised as c, when it is actually 3.

Vedas. Thus it is wrong to think that one belongs to the royal caste because of one's work.

What is being explained here is the absurdity of assuming that someone could be of a royal caste just because they have the ability to do the same things that a king does, such as protecting others. The main point is that if merely by doing the work of those of a particular caste system was to determine that one belonged to that caste, then, as mentioned here, even someone from a common caste could also do the main work of the Brahmins, such as reciting the Vedas and doing pujas. Would they then also become a Brahmin? Of course that cannot be so.

The analogy used here is:

For instance, though one speaks of a boat going to "that bank" and coming to "this bank," neither this bank nor that bank exist by way of their own entity.

This analogy is also used to show how things are merely labelled, and that they do not exist from their own side. The caste system, as mentioned earlier, was initially established by way of the social norms of the society. But it is not as though caste was something that existed from its own side from the very beginning. As the analogy explains, when we refer to 'this bank' or 'that bank', it is all in relation to which point of view you are looking from. When you are on this side of the river, then the bank over there becomes 'that bank'. However if you go to the other side, then the side of the river that you earlier called this bank, becomes 'that bank'. So there is no inherently existent 'this' or 'that' bank that always remains that way. So this is also the analogy showing that all existence, and in particular the caste system, is like that.

This analogy can be understood on a subtle level in relation to the explanation of a lack of inherent existence, and it can also be related to a normal general sense where things began. In relation to the caste systems, as mentioned earlier, there was a time when there were no castes, but then the caste system began at a certain period in time. Therefore it operates in relation to the norms of the people who established it.

The river bank analogy is actually a very vivid analogy of how 'this' and 'that' are terms that are nominally used for defining certain purposes. But when we look into it, there is no real 'this' or 'that' that can be determined as being always 'this' and always 'that'. This analogy is used to explain the subtleties of how things do not exist from their own side. If we refer to inherent existence we can refer to the subtleties of the emptiness or lack of inherent existence of things, or we can relate it to even the general sense of how things do not exist from the very beginning.

The main point of the whole chapter is using the king as a particular example of how, using all the various different reasons, it is inappropriate for the king to be proud. The chapter goes through all the various doubts or reasons why one would normally think that the king himself, or others, might think that it is appropriate for the king to be proud. The chapter gives various reasons why that is inappropriate. The very last reasons that were given

referred to the actual caste of royalty itself, questioning whether they are real royalty or not. So having pride based on a notion that one is of a royal caste is questionable. Therefore one can see that there is no real basis or sound reasoning for a king to be proud.

The chapter talked about the caste system. If we relate that to our normal world at this time, we do find that there are many who were once rulers but who later have to do all kinds of ordinary work when they fall from power. They have to engage in normal activities that the working class engage in. Likewise, those from the working class may gain power later on and become rulers. So we can see that status rises and falls. When we think about it in that way and relate it to our own life, and our own personal practice, we can see that since there is no stability in status or power or any kind of social standing, then there is no real reason for oneself or others to feel proud in that way. For example, imagine that soon after a king is enthroned, someone claims, 'Oh, the king was not his legitimate father, he actually had another father'. If someone could prove that and they could actually depose that king, saying that he was not fit to be a king, then the whole pride of being enthroned as a king would be completely wasted.

We don't have that many more sessions left this year - I think there are nine left. So basically for October and November will we have the teaching sessions and then the first two weeks in December will be a discussion and then an exam week. After that we will not have any teachings until next year.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version*

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