
Study Group – Aryadeva’s 400 Verses

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As usual we sit in a comfortable position and generate a positive motivation such as, ‘In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. For that purpose I will listen to the teachings and try to put them into practice as best as I can’.

1.2.3. Showing other means to give up ill deeds

This is subdivided into two.

1.2.3.1. Refuting the appropriateness of arrogance because kings have great possessions and, when the time is right, can distribute great power and wealth such as riches to many people.

1.2.3.2. Refuting that it is therefore appropriate for kings to be conceited.

1.2.3.1. REFUTING THE APPROPRIATENESS OF ARROGANCE BECAUSE KINGS HAVE GREAT POSSESSIONS AND, WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT, CAN DISTRIBUTE GREAT POWER AND WEALTH SUCH AS RICHES TO MANY PEOPLE

This sub-division is in relation to further doubts about the appropriateness of the king being arrogant.

Assertion: Through the power and wealth of kingship it is possible to distribute possessions and so forth to a great many people when the time is right. Therefore pride is appropriate.

Here the doubt is whether the king can be arrogant, based on the fact that by having riches and many possessions he would be able to do good, such as giving to the poor and others. Also, because of riches the king may have a sense of pride thinking, ‘Because of my riches I am able to subdue others’. Basically this means that by being generous and so forth one will be able to influence others, and by thinking in that way a king may feel that he has reason to be proud. Even if that were the case, the verse says that this is not a reason for the king to feel arrogant.

*A king’s ill deeds cannot be
Distributed like his wealth.* 99

*What wise person ever destroys
Their future for another’s sake?*

While it is true that the king can distribute possessions that accumulate over a long period...

It is an accepted fact that the riches and so forth of the king have been accumulated over a long time, even from before he inherited them. It is also true that due to that wealth one can influence others.

...a king cannot distribute the ill deeds created in connection with them as he can power and wealth.

While it may be true that the king can distribute the wealth that he has accumulated over a long time, he has

also accumulated a lot of negative karma in relation to that wealth, to his greed and to the way the wealth was collected. While the king may be able to distribute his wealth amongst others, he cannot distribute the negative karma that he accrued in relation to his wealth, because karma is not something that he can distribute and share with others.

Because of the fact that the negative karmas the king has accumulated cannot be distributed, or shared with others, the negative consequences of the negative karma he has created have to be experienced by the king himself.

...what wise person would destroy the future lives on account of something trivial for someone else’s sake?

Anyone with a wise mind would not give up a long-term goal, such as the results for future lifetimes, for trivial things such as wealth and fame in this present short lifetime. The really wise ones would not engage in pursuing that path.

The main point being made here is the fact that it is not wise to accumulate a great amount of negative deeds for the sake of a small benefit. The king may claim that his riches and wealth and so forth are accumulated for the benefit of others, but the negative karma that the king has to accumulate when acquiring that wealth far exceeds the small benefit that he can do for himself or others. Even if he does share with others, the benefit to them is minimal in relation to the negative karma that he has created for himself. This is personal advice that we have to relate to our own life. Sometimes we might get some small benefit but we end up creating so much negative karma, which is not very good for us in the long term.

In relation to the main assertion or doubt raised earlier, that it is appropriate for the king to feel proud because of his wealth and so forth, the commentary explains here that it is in fact a state of shame rather than pride when a king accumulates so many negative karmas.

The analogy in the commentary is that it is like sacrificing a buffalo to the gods and then sharing the meat with others. Through ignorance this is seen as a good deed, but rather than accumulating merit, the negative karma that is created in sacrificing that buffalo cannot be shared. The main point being made here is that the negative karma that one accumulates has to be experienced by oneself alone, even if one accumulates it with an intention to benefit others.

1.2.3.2. REFUTING THAT IT IS THEREFORE APPROPRIATE FOR KINGS TO BE VERY CONCEITED

Assertion: Since one lives with great power and wealth pride is appropriate.

Answer:

Pride caused by power and wealth 100
*Does not remain in the hearts of the wise,
Once one has looked at others
With equal or superior power.*

After all the earlier reasons indicating that under no circumstances is pride in the status and wealth appropriate, the king might still feel that it is appropriate to maintain a sense of pride.

Regarding pride caused by the power of wealth and kingship and so forth, which thinks, 'I am better than others', one must look at those with equal power and wealth as well as others much more mighty than oneself who have superlative powers and wealth.

Pride will initially arise when a king has the notion that he is the greatest, has many subjects, and is ruling over others and so forth. However in reality there are other kings who are equal to him, or who are even superior to him. When one has that conceited mind of pride then one should look upon those who are either equal, or superior, to oneself in order to overcome that pride.

Having done so pride will not so remain in the hearts of the wise, who know how to analyse in detail the way things are.

As is explained here, when one looks into one's situation with wisdom, then pride can be reduced when one sees oneself in comparison to others.

The concluding lines of this chapter are that in order to benefit others one must overcome pride. Therefore one must respect all others, like teachers, with a sense of humility, and have a general sense of respect towards all in that way. If one practises in this way then it becomes a cause for all good qualities to arise in one's mind. One can make others happy and joyful by practising humility and paying respect to others. In general, respecting others is the ultimate way to give joy to others.

The analogy given here is of the Brahmin Vasudhara's wife, who was proud of her beauty. In order to overcome that pride the Brahmin put her into the retinue of the king's queens. Her initially strong sense of pride in being the most beautiful was immediately reduced when she was amongst other beautiful women.

As a summarising stanza Gyaltsab Je, the author of the commentary, added this verse

Thinking about impermanence and uncleanliness of the body,
Understand the faults of attachment to it.
Make effort to achieve unsurpassable enlightenment
And give up pride in both 'I' and 'mine'.

This verse summarises the earlier chapters as well as this fourth chapter. Thinking about impermanence and the uncleanliness of the body refers to the points made in earlier chapters on the extensive ways of thinking about how the contaminated body's nature is impermanent as well as unclean. Having understood the faults of that the body, attachment towards it needs to be overcome. Furthermore we need to give up the sense of pride in 'I' and 'mine' and in that way make an effort towards achieving the unsurpassable enlightenment, the ultimate state of buddhahood.

2. Presenting the name of the chapter

This is the fourth chapter of the Four Hundred on the Yogic Deeds showing the means to abandon conceptions of the self.

The outline that we are in began with was:

3.2.1.¹ *Explaining the stages of the paths depending on conventional truths*

This was subdivided into two:

3.2.1.1. Showing how the aspiring altruistic intention is generated after trainings in the attitude of a person of intermediate capacity by elimination of the four errors.²

This was then subdivided into the first four chapters, which we have now completed.

3.2.1.2. Explaining how to generate the deeds having generated the practical altruistic intention.³

As the outline structure indicates, the first four chapters relate to the faults of the body: first of all overcoming the erroneous view of permanence with the explanation of impermanence; secondly overcoming the erroneous view that the body is clean by explaining the uncleanliness of the body; thirdly explaining that the body is selfless by overcoming the erroneous view that there is a self.

These explanations are explicitly in relation to the practices of the medium scope. However implicitly they also explain how to develop an altruistic or a bodhicitta intention. Overcoming the erroneous views in relation to the body are explicitly explained as a means to develop a renunciation of cyclic existence, the immediate result of which is develop renunciation, then abandoning cyclic existence and obtaining liberation for oneself. Implicitly what should also be understood here is that while one relates an understanding of the nature of suffering to one's own situation, when one focuses upon others one sees how they, too, are in the nature of suffering just like oneself. Then, based on that, one develops love and compassion, and based on that, an altruistic intention develops to free them from all suffering and lead them to enlightenment. This is how the teachings implicitly teach how to develop the altruistic intention. As explained here in this teaching, and in the commentary, one should use that understanding in all other circumstances when it comes to the teachings of the medium scope or the small scope, but particularly the medium scope.

We can relate all three scopes of understanding to the twelve interdependent links⁴. In relation to the **small scope**, the twelve interdependent links show how through ignorance and karma and so forth, one is lead into the lower realms, and when one contemplates on the twelve interdependent links in reverse order in relation to the small scope then that becomes a means to free oneself from the lower realms, and in particular from the

¹ To make things easier the numbering of each chapter begins with 1. Thus 'Presenting the name of the chapter' is actually 3.2.1.1.4.2. The numbering of this heading and the two following sub-headings refers back to the overall structure of the text.

² This was given on 14 March 2006 as 'Showing how to generate wishing bodhicitta by training in the meditations common to the medium capable being, which is abandoning the four misconceptions'.

³ This was given on 14 March 2006 as 'After having generated the wishing bodhicitta how to train in the path'.

⁴ These were listed on 28 March 2006.

sufferings of the lower realms. In the **medium scope** the twelve interdependent links are explained not only in relation to how one is led into the lower realms, but also into the higher rebirth of cyclic existence. With that understanding of how the twelve interdependent links lead an individual into cyclic existence, one then contemplates the reverse order of the twelve interdependent links, which then becomes a means for an individual to develop renunciation, and to be free from cyclic existence. In the **great scope** one uses the understanding of the twelve interdependent links to understand how all suffering beings are led into samsara through the means of the twelve interdependent links. Contemplating the twelve links in reverse order in relation to all sentient beings then becomes the means to release oneself and all other sentient beings from not only cyclic existence, but from the very imprints of cyclic existence, thus leading to enlightenment.

Of course I have mentioned this many times previously, but just in case people need to be reminded of these main points, we can see that how contemplation on the twelve interdependent links becomes a really profound way of developing what we call love and compassion, and thus serving as a basis to develop bodhicitta. Even though the twelve interdependent links are specifically explained in the medium scope, when we contemplate that explanation it becomes a very profound way bringing about a true sense of the suffering of cyclic existence, even at a very subtle level. Whereas if we contemplate only immediate suffering at a more superficial level, of people suffering from hunger or thirst or an immediate danger or physical or mental hardships, then when we see others who are not suffering in that way, we may become complacent and think, 'Oh, they are not really suffering'. Whereas if we contemplate in relation to the twelve interdependent links then our understanding of the suffering of oneself and other sentient beings becomes much more profound.

The importance of really contemplating the twelve interdependent links cannot be underestimated; otherwise our compassion may become very superficial. If we may think that suffering refers to hunger, thirst, poverty and so forth we have some sense of pity towards those suffering in this way, but at the same time we might envy people who have a lot of wealth, who are beautiful, who seem to have things going well, thinking, 'Oh that's a desirable state'. So on one hand while we are trying to develop love and compassion for some we may actually envy the status and the wealth and beauty of others. Then our love and compassion becomes really superficial, rather than deep and profound.

3.2.1.2. Explaining how to train in the deeds having generated a practical altruistic intention

'Practical altruistic intention' can also be translated as aspirational bodhicitta. As mentioned earlier, the first four chapters implicitly explain aspirational bodhicitta, which is the very strong motivation or intention to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of sentient beings. The bodhicitta is still on an aspirational level, as one has not yet actually promised to engage in the deeds. That

aspirational bodhicitta is therefore just a noble intention.

Having generated aspirational bodhicitta the text now explains how to implicitly engage in the deeds of the bodhisattva. On the actual path to enlightenment it is explained how aspirational bodhicitta is developed during the meditative equipoise of a bodhisattva, whereas the engaging bodhisattva attitude is manifested in what is called the post-meditative state.

An understanding of aspirational bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta can actually be implied in whatever practices we do. For example, in the Tara practice, the opening lines are, 'To benefit all sentient beings I need to attain the state of mother Tara', which is when one can develop aspirational bodhicitta, for the sake of all sentient beings, and for that purpose wishing to attain the state of mother Tara. The next lines say, 'For that purpose I will engage in the practice of making offerings and so forth for the practice of mother Tara'. This indicates the engaging bodhisattva attitude.

This major heading is subdivided into four categories, each of which is a main chapter heading.

3.2.1.2.1 The actual meaning, which is the main topic of the fifth chapter.

3.2.1.2.2. Explaining the means to abandoning the disturbing attitudes and emotions which prevent the deeds, which is the main topic of the sixth chapter.

3.2.1.2.3. Abandoning attachment to sense objects on which disturbing emotions focus, which is the main topic of the seventh chapter.

3.2.1.2.4. Showing the methods of fully training the students mind stream making it receptive to the development of spiritual paths, this is the main topic of the eighth chapter.

CHAPTER 5: THE ACTUAL MEANING

The outline in the translated text book does not indicate the two main sub categories of this chapter, however according to Gyalsab Je's commentary, they are:

- 1.⁵ The explanation of the material of the chapter
2. Presenting the name of the chapter

1. The explanation of the material of the chapter

This is subdivided into four.

- 1.1. Showing the greatness of buddhahood, the resultant attainment
- 1.2. Explaining how to practice the bodhisattva deeds, the cause of buddhahood
- 1.3. Proof of resultant omniscience
- 1.4. Showing why those with poor intelligence fear the great vehicle

1.1. Showing the greatness of buddhahood, the

⁵ For convenience the numbering of each chapter begins with 1. This heading is actually 3.2.1.2.1.1.

ultimate welfare of all sentient beings, what need is there to mention the benefit of activities such as his teachings?

As explained in the commentary, the force of that admiration stills the suffering of the hells and produces virtue in their minds in accordance with the attainment of liberation. It seems quite amazing and unimaginable that this could take place even in the hell realms, but what we should understand here, is that even beings born in the hell realms may have strong connections with an enlightened being. Those born in the lower realms, such as a hell realm, may have virtuous imprints from past lifetimes in which they have made strong prayers or connections with enlightened beings or bodhisattvas. Then, even though they are born into the hell realms due to past karma, and have to experience the negative consequences of that past karma, they still have the imprints on their mind to make a connection and thus benefit from enlightened beings. It should be understood that when we do our practice and prayers, they can be limitless if we include all beings in our scope. It is hard for us to know now which beings we have a connection with, but when we make prayers to benefit all sentient beings then it is possible even to benefit beings who are born in the hell realms in the future.

As explained in the commentary, if the mere appearance of the Buddha in remote areas such as the hell realms can bring so much benefit for the beings, then there is no question of the great benefit that the Buddha extends to those beings of intelligent mind through the teachings and so forth. The Buddha's activities are explained in more detail in other sources: there are the Buddha's deeds through speech, through physical activities and through the Buddha's mind. The manner of how the Buddha benefits other beings through his body, speech and mind is inconceivable and unimaginable. Just the physical appearance of the Buddha can bring so much benefit, not to mention how much we can benefit from receiving and hearing the Buddha's teachings. Therefore thinking about the qualities of the Buddha in that way should instil great faith in our mind, and turn our mind to receiving the benefits from the buddhas.

1.1.2. Their effect

Just as ordinary people are 102
Terrified by the words 'Lord of Death',
So the words 'Omniscient One'
Terrify the Lord of Death.

The effect here is the effect of having generated faith in the Buddha. As it explains in the commentary those who trust the Buddha will gain freedom from all fears, even the fear of death. As I normally explain, in accordance with other advice, the mere memory of the Buddha at the time of death can free oneself from the lower realms.

The words 'Lord of Death' terrify ordinary people.

This passage of the root text indicates that ordinary people are really terrified when they hear the word 'death'.

Simply hearing the words 'Omniscient One' endows whoever hears them with the good fortune to attain

nirvana, thereby terrifying and subjugating Death as well.

What is being explained here is that just as ordinary beings will be fearful of the mere mention of death, similarly whoever hears the words 'Omniscient One', 'Buddha', or 'Enlightened One' with good fortune has the power to attain nirvana. As nirvana is the ultimate state of overcoming death the words 'Omniscient One' thus have the effect of overcoming what we call death.

The main point here is that ordinary beings experience fear whenever death is mentioned, or when they think about death. The analogy uses the symbolic figure of the Lord of Death. Just as ordinary people are frightened by death the Lord of Death has a fear of the mere mention of the Buddha, or the Omniscient One, because the Lord of Death is not able to overpower the Omniscient One. Rather it is the reverse. By relying on the Omniscient One, or the Buddha, one has the power to completely subdue death.

The commentary further quotes from a sutra where it says:

Those who hear my name will attain nirvana in any of the three vehicles.

This passage indicates that whatever sentient being hears the Buddha's name, will attain nirvana. Here the word 'nirvana' is used in a generalised form, but when it mentions any of the three vehicles then it refers to either self-liberation or the ultimate state of enlightenment, therefore the ultimate state of all the three vehicles.

This understanding brings more weight and purpose to the recitation of the name of the Buddha as in, OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA. If we recite it loud enough for other beings to hear, then it has the effect of leaving a profound imprint on oneself and others' minds. When we have this understanding, that serves as a great, great purpose.

1.1.3. Not answering fourteen questions is not suitable proof for lack of omniscience

This refers to doubts that others have about the state of buddhahood, or the Buddha being omniscient, because the Buddha Shakyamuni did not answer certain questions he was asked.

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Edited Version

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