

---

# Study Group – Aryadeva’s 400 Verses

༄༅། །བསྐྱེད་པོ་ལྷན་སྐྱེད་པའི་བྱུང་བའི་ཚོགས་ལེན་པའི་བྱུང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

*Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga*

*Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*

31 October 2006

---

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

## **1.1. Showing the greatness of buddhahood, the resultant attainment (cont.)**

### **1.1.3. Not answering fourteen questions is no suitable proof for lack of omniscience**

This outline arises after having explained the qualities of the Buddha. Someone raises the question that the Buddha could not be omniscient, because he didn’t answer fourteen questions that were put to him. The text explains how that is not a reason proving that the Buddha is not omniscient, and in fact it proves the Buddha’s omniscience.

Assertion: Surely he lacked omniscience since he did not answer fourteen questions such as whether the self and the world are permanent or impermanent and so forth.

Answer: Rather than disproving, it establishes his omniscience.

*A subduer has [perception of] that* 103  
*Which should and should not be done or said.*  
*What reason is there to say*  
*That the Omniscient One is not all-knowing?*

The fourteen questions are:

- Four questions in relation to whether or not the self and the environment are permanent. Are they: 1) permanent? 2) not permanent? 3) both permanent and not permanent? 4) neither permanent nor not permanent?
- Four more questions in relation to whether or not there is an end to the cyclic existence.
- Four questions in relation to whether or not the Buddha remains after passing away.
- Two questions, as to whether the body and life force are the same or different.

When these questions were put to the Shakyamuni Buddha, he did not give a verbal answer. This is taken to mean that he did not know the answers, and hence cannot be regarded as being omniscient.

What is being explained here is that the very fact the Buddha did not answer is proof that he is omniscient.

A subduer directly perceives the right and wrong time for temporary and ultimate actions...

In every action that the Buddha does, there are times to act and times not to act. So even non-action is out of consideration for the benefit of others, and becomes a means to benefit others. What this connotes is the fact that the Buddha knows exactly the mental dispositions of sentient beings, and therefore acting or not acting indicates that he

knows exactly how to engage with sentient beings in order to benefit them. Likewise with the Buddha’s speech: knowing the mental dispositions of sentient beings, the Buddha knows exactly when to say something and when not to say something. When there is a benefit for the listener, the Buddha will say what is appropriate, but if there is no benefit, then the Buddha says nothing. Therefore what he says depends on whether or not there is a benefit to the other. As the text goes on to say:

...what actions should not be done, what is not beneficial, what is harmful as well as all that should or should not be said.

Therefore what is being explained here is that by not answering those fourteen questions, the Buddha was acting to benefit other beings.

Since the Buddha possessed such perception, he did not give an answer to these questions, which were based on a belief in the true existence of persons and phenomena. It is not feasible for a basis of attribution whose existence has been negated to have an attribute.

What this is explaining is how the Buddha knew that the questions were asked on the basis of person and phenomena having true existence. If the Buddha were to answer that person and phenomena do exist, then, to the mind of the questioner, that would assert that there is true existence of person, which would lead them to the extreme of eternalism. If the Buddha were to say that there is no person or phenomena, then that would lead them to completely negate the existence of person and phenomena, thus leading them to nihilism. Whatever answer the Buddha gave on that particular occasion would have contributed to the person who asked the questions following one of the two extremes. Therefore at that time the most appropriate response was for the Buddha not to answer, which saved them from falling into either of the extremes. As the commentary explains, that is why the Buddha did not answer those questions.

We can see that there is very sound, but intricate logic and reasoning here. The very argument used to show the Buddha is not omniscient, is used as a reason to prove that the Buddha is, in fact, omniscient. That is how the logic and reasoning becomes profound. As the Precious Garland also says:

Asked whether it had an end  
The Conqueror was silent.

Because he did not give this profound teaching  
To worldly beings who were not receptive vessels,

The All-knowing One is therefore known  
As omniscient by the wise.

The first line, ‘Asked whether it had an end’, refers to whether the environment, or the world has an end. ‘The Conqueror was silent’, means that the Buddha Shakyamuni, the Conqueror, did not give an answer. ‘Because he did not give this profound teaching to worldly beings who were not receptive vessels’, indicates that they were holding onto the wrong view that the world, or environment, as well as the beings who live in that environment are truly existent. Because of strongly holding onto that wrong view they were not receptive vessels, and they would have not been able to receive the teachings on selflessness of person and phenomena. ‘The All-knowing One is therefore known as omniscient by the wise’ means that because the Buddha did not answer, that in itself becomes the proof to the wise ones,

who know how the Buddha interacts, that the Buddha is omniscient.

The analogy refers to a king who wanted to penalise a rich Brahmin, telling him that the Brahmin that would be punished unless he quickly sent his family's well. Knowing that the king was giving them an impossible task to do, so that they can be penalised, the Brahmin's daughter gave a very cunning answer so as not to be punished. Then the further question is:

If Buddha does not say what should not be said, did he not say, referring to Devadatta, 'What of this boy who wears one piece of cloth and has taken the bait?'

At face value, that remark seems hurtful to Devadatta, but as the text says:

Although he said this, it was not to harm others but to turn them away from ill deeds.

The Buddha sees that there is a danger of pride arising in Devadatta's mind. If that is not stopped he could engage in negativity, and accumulate a lot of negative karma. So in order to save Devadatta from creating further negative karma, the Buddha said what he did in order to stop him from engaging in those negative deeds. The particular incidents of negative karma that Devadatta would have engaged in, would have created a schism, thus leading many followers of the Buddha astray and onto a false path. That would have created so much negative karma for Devadatta, as well as those he misled also creating negative karmas. Therefore, the Buddha had to say what he did in order to prevent a grave misdeed. The text is saying that even though the Buddha's words are unpleasant, they are entirely virtuous because they are said with the intention to benefit the other. Therefore even words which may sound harsh on the surface are in fact only to benefit and not to harm.

## ***1.2. Explaining how to practice bodhisattva deeds, the cause of buddhahood***

This has three subdivisions.

1.2.1. Special features of the motivation for training in these deeds

1.2.2. Merit of generating the altruistic intention

1.2.3. Actual mode of training in the deeds

### ***1.2.1. Special features of the motivation for training in these deeds***

Even by itself, the heading implies a very profound teaching that we can benefit from. This is subdivided into two.

1.2.1.1. Showing mind as the principal of the three doors

1.2.1.2. Showing how even that which is non-virtuous in others becomes supremely virtuous in bodhisattvas by the power of their attitude

#### **1.2.1.1. SHOWING MIND AS THE PRINCIPAL OF THE THREE DOORS**

Mind should be understood as paramount or foremost in all activities of the three doors.

The three doors indicate body, speech and mind, and of the three the primary one is the mind, which is the defining factor of motivation.

*Without intention, actions like going  
Are not seen to have merit and so forth.  
In all actions, therefore, the mind  
Should be understood as paramount.*

104

This is because actions like coming and going are not seen to be meritorious or unmeritorious except through the power of the virtuous or non-virtuous intention motivating them.

The text is quite explicit in explaining how whatever actions we do depend entirely on our motivation. On the physical level, actions such as standing up, sitting down, walking can be virtuous or non-virtuous. Depending on the motivation one has in one's mind, the actions that one does on the physical and verbal level can be either meritorious, or non-meritorious, or even neutral, when there is no particular motivation. Let us take prostrations as an example. The teachings indicate that the physical activity of just prostrating in front of a holy object is in itself a meritorious act that we create on a physical level. Becoming a virtuous act is dependent on the motivation. With a mental state of knowing that bowing down to a holy object is meritorious, the physical action of prostration becomes meritorious or virtuous. Without an intention or motivation the actions of lying down, stretching out on the ground and standing up cannot, in themselves, be virtuous or non-virtuous.

To give another example of how physical activities can be virtuous or non-virtuous, take, for example, the very fact of deciding to come to the teaching. From the motivation of wishing to go to the teaching so as to learn and therefore to benefit others, all the activities that precede coming to the teaching, such as walking down from your room, coming in and taking a cushion can be said to be virtuous, because it is all done with a virtuous motivation to receive the teachings. On a negative side, from the moment that one decides to engage in the act of stealing, for example, all of the preceding actions prior to the actual theft, would also be said to be non-virtuous actions, because of the motivation that is involved. It is the same with all other activities.

As mentioned previously with prostration, without any proper motivation the act of just stretching oneself on the ground cannot be said to be virtuous just by itself. It only becomes virtuous in relation to the appropriate intention in the mind. This can apply to whatever actions we engage in. When we do certain virtuous actions like, for example, circumambulating a holy stupa, it is said that just the mere fact of going around becomes virtuous because of the power of the holy object. If on top of that, however, one has a good motivation then the merit that one accumulates is even greater. If we check up our motivation in whatever actions we do, then it can actually become a very appropriate way to accumulate merit. Hence in whatever actions we do we should try to be mindful of the motivation. It is the same with travelling to go on a pilgrimage and so forth.

#### **1.2.1.2. SHOWING HOW EVEN THAT WHICH IS NON-VIRTUOUS IN OTHERS BECOMES SUPREME VIRTUOUS IN BODHISATTVAS BY THE POWER OF THEIR ATTITUDE**

In this outline one must understand that 'others' refers to ordinary beings. Actions that would be considered as non-virtuous when done by an ordinary being become virtuous actions when done by bodhisattvas, who have obtained the grounds due to the power of their motivation.

As explained in other teachings, there are three non-virtues of body<sup>1</sup> plus four non-virtues of speech<sup>2</sup>. These seven non-virtues are said to be an exception for the bodhisattvas who

<sup>1</sup> Killing, stealing and sexual misconduct.

<sup>2</sup> Lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, idle gossip.

have obtained the grounds, which means the bodhisattvas who have reached the first ground and upwards. When they engage in one of these the seven physical or verbal activities, it is a means for them to accumulate merit rather than creating negative karma. This is because of the power of their motivation and intention to benefit others. So even if they were to engage in one of these seven activities it would be only for the benefit of others, therefore it would be a means for them to accumulate merit rather than negative karma.

The last three non-virtues are covetousness, harmful intention and wrong views, and there is no exceptions with them. They cannot be virtuous at any time. Therefore in relation to the motivation, the attitude in the mind, determines whether actions are virtuous or non-virtuous.

*In bodhisattvas, through their intention, 105  
All actions, virtuous and non-virtuous,  
Become perfect virtue because  
They are in control of their minds.*

As the commentary explains:

Since mind is foremost in all activities, virtuous actions such as giving or even such actions as killing, which in others would be non-virtuous, all become perfect virtue in bodhisattvas who are in control of their minds...

The main point is that there is no question that the activities that are normally considered as virtuous such as giving, generosity and so forth, are virtuous for bodhisattvas. Not only that, but even actions such as killing, which are non-virtuous in others, become perfectly virtuous for bodhisattvas.

This is because they have gained the ability at will to engage in virtue and not to engage in non-virtue.

The main point being made here is that bodhisattvas have complete control over their mind at all times. In the beginning, during the causal instance, as well as during the actual engagement of the activity, the bodhisattva is able to maintain a virtuous frame of mind. Whereas if we take ourselves as an example, then we find that even though the causal motivation may be virtuous, we may become distracted during the activity. Then delusions such as anger, or jealousy or attachment may arise during the performance of an action, for which we initially had a good motivation. Therefore even though the causal motivation is virtuous, the motivation during the activity can become non-virtuous. The reason why we are not able to maintain our motivation is because our minds are so easily influenced by delusions and thus distracted. Even though we may initially have a good motivation, it's hard to follow it up or carry it through all the way.

Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, have complete control over their mind at all times. During the causal time, as well as the actual time of performing the action, and at all times in completion, their mind remains in a virtuous frame. Therefore all becomes virtuous. Of the two motivations, the causal motivation and the motivation of the actual time of performing the action, it is said that the motivation at the actual time of performing the action is of greater importance.

According to the commentary the analogy is:

It is like the following analogy: A bodhisattva called Mahakaruna, who was a captain, used a short spear to slay a pirate captain who intended to kill a group of five hundred bodhisattvas on board.

The story is of how, in the past, a bodhisattva was travelling in a boat as its captain, along with five hundred bodhisattvas, who were manifesting as 'traders' being taken across the sea in order to trade. During the voyage, a pirate captain boarded the boat, intending to kill all five hundred on board and take their belongings. The bodhisattva captain, called Mahakaruna, knew that through his omniscience, so in order to protect the pirate captain from going into the hell realms, as well as to protect the lives of the five hundred traders on board, he killed the pirate. Out of his great compassion Mahakaruna knew that by killing the pirate captain he would be saved from the great misdeed of killing the five hundred traders, and it would also protect others. Knowing that it would be for the best and for the benefit of the pirate captain, and out of great compassion, he engaged in the deed of actually taking the life of the pirate captain. It was a skilful means that was enacted out of great compassion and without even an atom of malice. It is said that his actions became a cause to stop being reborn in cyclic existence for 500 years.

Because of these kinds of circumstances, and for the sole benefit for others, it is said that actions such as killing are permitted for bodhisattvas who are on the grounds.

### **1.2.2. Merit of generating the altruistic intention**

This has two subdivisions.

1.2.2.1. Merit of generating the first ultimate altruistic intention

1.2.2.2. Specific merit of causing others to generate the altruistic intention

#### **1.2.2.1. MERIT OF GENERATING THE FIRST ULTIMATE ALTRUISTIC INTENTION**

Question: When are such bodhisattvas known as 'ultimate bodhisattvas'?

Answer: After they have attained the first of the ten grounds.

*The merit of bodhisattvas with 106  
The first intention far exceeds  
That which would make all beings on earth  
Become universal monarchs.*

Ultimate bodhisattvas are those who have developed ultimate bodhicitta in their mind. Of course those who have studied the Madhyamika would know that that ultimate bodhicitta is only obtained on the first ground. The merits that are obtained are from having obtained the first ground.

As the commentary explains:

If the accumulated merit through which one becomes a universal monarch ruling the four continents is great, there is no need to mention that the merit required for all beings on earth to do so would be greater. The merit of a bodhisattva who has generated the first ultimate altruistic intention far exceeds the merit that would make all beings on earth become universal monarchs.

This is in relation to how much merit one has to accumulate just to be reborn as a universal monarch, which is a king ruling the three worlds. The merit that one being has to accumulate in order to achieve that status is said to be extremely great. But the merit that is acquired by a bodhisattva who obtains the first ground is far greater than the merit that all beings would have to accumulate in order to achieve the state of universal monarch, which gives an indication of how unimaginable it is. If you think about the

actual benefits of being a bodhisattva on the first ground, you could come to understand the extent of the merit that he or she has. The result of the merit to be reborn as a universal monarch is experienced in one lifetime. For as long as one has the karma to live as a universal monarch, then one enjoys the status and the riches and all the associated good things. But it is still limited to one lifetime as a universal monarch. Whereas the merit that a bodhisattva on the first ground accumulates is not exhausted. This is because the more one engages in virtuous activity, the more one accumulates merit. Therefore rather than exhausting merit, one continually adds to the merit on that level.

As explained in the commentary:

It is like the following analogy: A king issued an edict which made it easy to know what was permitted and not permitted. This brought the king wealth and his subjects security and so forth. Some failing to differentiate between the attributes of conventional and ultimate bodhisattvas, claim that if they are common beings, they cannot be fully qualified bodhisattvas.

Such claims and false understandings are a grave mistake because they lead to the creation of negative karmas.

#### **1.2.2.2. SPECIFIC MERIT OF CAUSING OTHERS TO GENERATE THE ALTRUISTIC INTENTION**

This section further explains how, there is not only great merit in developing the altruistic intention within oneself, but if one were to serve as the cause for others to develop that intention, a great amount of merit would be accumulated.

Question: How much merit is there in inspiring others to develop the altruistic intention of the Great Vehicle?

Answer:

*Someone may build a precious Reliquary, as high as the world; It is said training others to generate The altruistic intention is more excellent.* 107

As the commentary explains:

It is said that the merit of one who builds a reliquary for the Buddha's relics, as vast as the three thousand great thousand world systems and as high as the world "Beneath None," made of the seven precious substances such as gold and lapis lazuli and adorned with every kind of ornament is surpassed...

What is being explained here is that generally, erecting a reliquary, or stupa, which contains the relics of the Buddha, is incredibly meritorious. The analogy that is given here is of one person erecting a stupa reaching to the highest in the three worlds. From the lowest world where it begins, it is as vast as the whole world spreading out. Not only is it of such enormous size, but it is also adorned with all the precious jewels and many other offerings. The merit that is accumulated from that offering is inconceivably great. However,

...because it is more excellent, the merit of one who trains others to develop the altruistic intentions is far greater.

Therefore, as explained here, the merit that one accumulates from teaching and guiding others in the Mahayana path, and leading them to develop the altruistic intention is far greater than the merit that one accumulates from building a huge and beautifully adorned stupa.

The practical analogy given here is that if a man were to die and had two good friends, and if one were to look after the body of the deceased person, giving it proper funeral rites, and the other friend takes on the responsibility of looking after the deceased's wife and children and so forth, then the one who takes the responsibility of caring for the deceased's wife and children will naturally have far greater merit than just having taken care of the deceased person's body. That is quite obvious, because by looking after the surviving family he is helping the lineage to go on. So in that way it is seen to be a greater deed.

Likewise erecting a monument, and enshrining the relics of the Buddha, and making offerings is definitely a great meritorious deed, but that in itself will not immediately benefit other sentient beings to a great extent, nor does it help to keep up the lineage of the Buddha's teachings. Whereas the activity of guiding and teaching others, and inspiring them to develop the altruistic intention, is a practical means to keep up the lineage of the Buddha's teachings, prolonging them so they can benefit many other beings in the future. In that way we can see the extent of the benefit.

The significance and unimaginable benefit of guiding and teaching others with a bodhicitta intention, especially those who have already developed bodhicitta in their mind, is said to be unimaginably great. Bodhisattvas serve as a representative of the buddhas who have come in the past, and also the buddhas who have come to this world in our era, by helping the disciples who have not yet been liberated by the present buddhas to proceed on to the path to liberation and enlightenment. Therefore in all the past, present and future activities of the Buddha, the bodhisattva or anyone who gives teachings that inspire the development of bodhicitta in others, really becomes the greatest means to uphold the virtuous activities in the doctrine of the past, present and future buddhas, and is helping the teachings to remain for many eons. In this way we can see that that is of really incredible and great benefit. It is also good for us to contemplate in this way, thinking about the great benefits.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright*

*Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett*

*Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*

*Edited Version*

*© Tara Institute*

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