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## Study Group – Aryadeva’s 400 Verses

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As usual we will set our motivation for receiving the teachings, 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’.

### **1.2.3. Actual mode of training in the deeds**

This has five sub-divisions.

1.2.3.1. Physical and verbal conduct in acting for others' welfare

1.2.3.2. Specific attitude

The first and second sub-divisions include how to benefit others through one's body, speech and mind.

1.2.3.3. Faults of deficient compassion

1.2.3.4. Faults of not appreciating bodhisattvas and suitability of cultivating appreciation

1.2.3.5. Why they can complete their deeds

#### **1.2.3.1. PHYSICAL AND VERBAL CONDUCT IN ACTING FOR OTHERS' WELFARE**

This refers to the way bodhisattvas engage in benefiting others through both their physical actions and their speech.

Question: How do bodhisattvas act to benefit sentient beings?

Answer: They act according to those beings' mental dispositions.

*A spiritual guide who wishes to help* **108**  
*Must be attentive toward students.*  
*They are called students because*  
*Of not knowing what will benefit.*

This verse explains how a spiritual guide (meaning a teacher or a lama) will benefit other sentient beings. In the beginning the manner of helping their students is by being generous with material needs, as well as being kind in their speech, saying such things as, ‘How are you doing? Is everything going well?’. By checking in such a way the lama is serving the student physically by giving material needs, as well as by verbally asking to make sure that they are okay and so forth.

Normally, the six perfections combined with the four means for gathering students constitute the activities of a bodhisattva that benefit sentient beings. The first two means of gathering students, being generous and uttering kind words to other sentient beings, are specifically mentioned here.<sup>1</sup> Initially, kind speech is a means to gather students. It is a specific kind of speech in accordance with worldly concerns, which is checking up

on the students' welfare and so forth. Along with the worldly aspect, there is also teaching Dharma with kind words. Here, however, uttering kind words refers to the general well being, from the worldly point of view.

A doubt is raised here concerning why the lama is serving the students rather than the other way around. The doubt asks: ‘Is that appropriate? Isn't it the case that the students should serve the lama?’ What is explained here is that the students don't initially have the wisdom or intelligence to know that serving the lama is meritorious and beneficial for themselves. As the commentary mentions:

They are called students because they do not know what actions are of benefit and need someone else's advice.

What is being addressed here is the fact that the students do not initially have the wisdom to know what actions are to be adopted or what negativities should be abandoned. Therefore they are called students because they don't have that knowledge, and need advice from a teacher.

The explanation given here is in accordance with how a lama or teacher subdues a student. First, to draw the student near, the lama is generous. Then through kind words the teacher allows the student to develop more trust and faith in the teacher. Once faith is developed, then the teacher can guide them with the teachings and lead them into the actual practice of the teachings. The analogy given in the commentary is that it is just like a wild elephant that is initially subdued with sweets and edible things. Once the elephant comes near and eats what is offered, they use the rope to tie the elephant and then a hook to tame it. That is the means of subduing a wild elephant.

The main points that are made here are good for us to contemplate and remember: the bodhisattva's activities in benefiting others consist mainly of showing good physical conduct, being kind to others and also using kind words.

#### **1.2.3.2. SPECIFIC ATTITUDE**

This is sub-divided into five headings:

1.2.3.2.1. Analogy showing one must be compassionate towards a recalcitrant person

1.2.3.2.2. Stages of guiding trainees

1.2.3.2.3. Being particularly compassionate towards those with very strong disturbing emotions

1.2.3.2.4. How to act for others' welfare according to their capacities and inclinations

1.2.3.2.5. The effect of strongly developed compassion

##### **1.2.3.2.1. ANALOGY SHOWING ONE MUST BE COMPASSIONATE TOWARDS A RECALCITRANT PERSON**

Even though the heading refers to a person, it basically means a disciple.

Even if students are recalcitrant, one must endeavour to overcome their disturbing emotions.

I don't know whether the English word recalcitrant has the same connotation as the Tibetan word *ngong me kor*, which has the connotation of not seeing one's own faults.

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<sup>1</sup> The other two are: Leading others to practise the Dharma, and Practising what you teach to others.

If someone does not see their own misbehaviours as faulty and thinks that they are doing fine, then when they are told to change, they may become a bit rebellious about that. The meaning will be discussed later, but the main point relates to how, without a gesture of kindness from the lama, the student may become rebellious towards the lama at certain times. In that case the lama is patient and does not give up, but is persistent in taking care of the students.

*Just as a physician is not upset with  
Someone who rages while possessed by a demon,  
Subduers see disturbing emotions as  
The enemy, not the person who has them.* 109

The analogy refers to a possessed patient who rages at his doctor. Although the patient's condition is translated as being 'possessed', the connotation of the original Tibetan word is also 'being unstable in the mind'. We do definitely see examples of patients who have either a sickness that affects the stability of their mind, or who could be actually possessed. In either case, they may be rebellious and not appreciate help from a doctor. They may even be physically violent towards the doctor. There are definitely cases where we can see that. A physician with a kind heart would understand the situation, and not be upset with the patient. Rather they would try to help further. Of course if the physician didn't have kindness in their heart and was impatient, they might well become upset. A physician with a kind heart, who understands the sickness and the situation of the patient, does not become upset with the patient, however, but looks into how to help them.

The meaning of the analogy is:

Similarly, subduers see that because they make sentient beings unruly, the disturbing emotions in a trainee's mindstream are at fault and not the person who has them.

Here, subduers, refers to the ultimate Subducer, Buddha Shakyamuni and all enlightened beings, as well as the bodhisattvas. When the buddhas and bodhisattvas benefit sentient beings of a wicked nature who have unruly minds, they see the delusions as being at fault. They have a complete understanding that it is due to delusions that the sentient beings act in that way, and that serves as a means for even more kindness and more compassion for sentient beings to arise, and they extend their help accordingly. Also, because of their skilful means, buddhas and bodhisattvas are able to extend their help to beings who are unruly, or whose minds are disturbed, or who have strong delusions. Even though the sentient beings may not immediately appreciate their help, buddhas and bodhisattvas nevertheless extend their help with their skilful means. That is how the buddhas and bodhisattvas benefit sentient beings. As the commentary adds:

Those who wish to take care of trainees must learn to act like this.

We can definitely see how, even to this day, lamas benefit their students in very skilful ways, and through this the students naturally begin to develop a strong faith. There

are students who are really amazed about the extent of the lama's kindness and skilful ways of guiding and teaching. When the students have benefited in that way, then slowly and gradually they develop faith. It is also very important for us to think along these lines and try to put this advice into practice.

What we can take from this advice is to try and develop patience with others who seem to have very strong negative minds. We can develop patience by seeing that in reality it is the delusions within the other person's mind that cause the person to act in that way, rather than the person's intrinsic nature. If we can think along those lines and remind ourselves of this, then we can develop patience and not retaliate. Teachers and lamas, of course, use skilful means to benefit others in this way.

The great master Shantideva mentions in his work *Bodhicharyavatara* that it is a kind physician who does not become upset by seeing a patient affected by a disease that has altered their mind. Rather than becoming upset with the patient they will seek a means to cure the patient. Similarly, rather than becoming upset buddhas and bodhisattvas have great compassion, and they endeavour to help to cure us of our delusions, because they see delusions as the cause of problems and not our own nature.

#### 1.2.3.2.2. STAGES OF GUIDING TRAINEES

This refers to the ways and means of guiding disciples.

*That for which someone has  
Liking should first be assessed.  
Those who are disinclined will not  
Be vessels for the excellent teaching.* 110

This verse explains how a spiritual guide should teach their students in a gradual way.

A spiritual guide teaching students should discuss whatever practice, such as giving, appeals to a particular trainee. Having first taught this properly, an assessment should be made. One should only discuss the profound later...

If the profound teachings were given first, then the students' minds are not yet suitable to receive them. The mind is very easily distracted, therefore the mind should be slowly trained so that it becomes a suitable vessel to receive the profound teachings later on.

Those whose minds are disinclined because of being deterred by discussion of the profound at the outset will not be receptive vessels for the ultimate teaching. The miserly dislike talk of generosity.

This is a really vivid example of how not to force others to do things for which they are not ready. If someone is very miserly, then persisting with talking about how someone who is very miserly has to be generous would be hard for them to accept. However, if you talk about generosity as being a cause for wealth to someone who has a strong inclination of wanting to have wealth, then that is a suitable approach.

Similarly if you initially tell someone who is not able to maintain their ethics, 'You must keep your ethics. You must be moral', then it is very hard for them to accept or

even hear that. However if you tell someone who has an inclination to obtain a good rebirth in the next lifetime, that the cause to obtain such a rebirth, would be to observe ethics, then that would be something which would be accepted.

It is similar if you say, 'You should be patient' to someone who gets very upset and angry easily. It is very hard for them to accept that. However if you know that someone likes to have good features and look beautiful, and you say, 'If you practice patience you could be very beautiful' that sounds much nicer, and much more acceptable.

Actually, this is very sound advice that we should keep in our mind, particularly those who teach and guide others. It is actually very important advice. What is being indicated here is that just because something is right in the teachings, that doesn't necessarily mean that we have to initially mention it all explicitly. It seems that we have to find tactful means to convey the message to others.

#### **1.2.3.2.3. BEING PARTICULARLY COMPASSIONATE TOWARDS THOSE WITH VERY STRONG DISTURBING EMOTIONS**

A bodhisattva is particularly compassionate to one who, despite having been stopped from doing wrong a hundred times, again and again engages in improper actions.

*Just as a mother is especially  
Anxious about a sick child,  
Bodhisattvas are especially  
Compassionate toward the unwise* 111

We don't have to really look far for examples; we can use ourselves as examples for this! The main point being made here is with respect to the manner in which a bodhisattva helps those who have been told over and over again how they should avoid doing certain negative things that are wrong, and how to adopt positive actions. As mentioned here, a bodhisattva has more compassion for such beings.

The analogy used here is of the kindness and compassion a mother has for her sick child. For example, in general if she has five children, her compassion and love for all is equal. However if there is one with a particular illness, then she would naturally have more concern and compassion for that sick child.

As the commentary reads:

Similarly, bodhisattvas are especially compassionate toward the unwise.

What is being explained here is that the bodhisattva's compassion is of a stronger degree for those who are unwise. Here, 'unwise' refers to those students or disciples who are naturally inclined to engage in negativities because of their strong delusions and who are not naturally able to engage in virtue. The bodhisattva's compassion for them is much stronger, because they see the grave state of suffering that such people inflict upon themselves.

An analogy is:

A Candala woman greatly feared that the king would put her sixth son to death because of his wrong deeds.

This analogy shows how a mother of six children had equal compassion for all, but had very strong concerns for the sixth one who, having done wrong deeds, was going to be sentenced by the king. As he was likely to be sentenced to death, the mother had incredible concern for this child. Shantideva explained of how a bodhisattva has much more compassion for those who do wrong deeds, compared to those who are virtuous. The explanations given in the commentary also explain that vividly.

#### **1.2.3.2.4. HOW TO ACT FOR OTHERS' WELFARE ACCORDING TO THEIR CAPACITIES AND INCLINATIONS**

This refers to the fact that generally, students are categorised into three different levels or capacities. They are the very dull, the mediocre and the very intelligent, and this sub-heading describes how to benefit each according to their capacities. This explanation is actually practised in the monasteries. When the teachers are giving explanations of a text to the students, they always keep in mind that monks are students who are of these three capacities. Those who are quite dull may not be able to understand the profound meanings of the explanations of the text, and there are those who are of mediocre capacity and the very intelligent. So the teacher will then teach in such a way that all levels of students will be able to get something from the teaching, and when the teaching is over they will have something to keep in their mind. This is actually very beneficial and useful advice that we should remember.

When we do the Mandala Offering the last verse says 'Please release a rain of vast and profound Dharma, precisely in accordance with the needs of those to be trained'. Of course the teacher then has to act in accordance with the request to teach according to the disposition of the students.

Actually there is a very profound meaning here, showing that a bodhisattva's deeds in helping sentient beings do not discriminate between beings. It is not as though the bodhisattva only wants to help those who have an intelligent mind and who are thus able to follow a high level of teaching. That is not the connotation here. Rather the bodhisattvas help beings of all capacities – from the intelligent to the dull. A bodhisattva will help even a dull sentient being in accordance with whatever they can handle.

As teachers that is something that we need to understand and practise. It is not as though we put aside students saying: 'These are dull students. We don't want to teach them now, I only want to teach the intelligent students'. We should not discriminate in that way.

*They become students of some  
And become teachers of others,  
Through skilful means and knowledge  
Giving understanding to those who do not  
understand.* 112

As the commentary explains:

Since people's dispositions, interests and capacities differ, when bodhisattvas act for their good, they teach some what is of benefit after first becoming their students.

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This explicitly explains how bodhisattvas, through their skilful means, benefit sentient beings in many and varied ways. In some situations, they may even become disciples of others and in other cases act as teachers and guides. Manifesting as disciples of certain teachers would be a means to specifically benefit beings who have the knowledge and the ability to teach, but who may be having a problem with their pride. So in order to overcome their pride, the bodhisattvas would manifest as disciples and then slowly guide the teacher to overcome their pride.

This shows the very skilful ways and means that a bodhisattva uses to help some beings. If the bodhisattva just told the teacher, 'You need to work with your pride, so I will teach you, because you need to learn something from me', then because of their pride the teacher would never consider coming and listening to the bodhisattva. Therefore a bodhisattva's only means of helping them is to manifest as their disciple and then slowly begin to benefit the teacher, who becomes more acquainted with the 'disciple', and then slowly begins to see their qualities. As he sees these qualities, the teacher would slowly begin to notice that the 'disciple' has even more qualities than themselves. Then they will naturally begin to become more subdued, and will then maybe begin to listen and learn from the bodhisattva.

If the bodhisattva were to manifest initially as just another teacher, they would not have been able to subdue and help the teacher with the problem. This shows how bodhisattvas use skilful means in order to subdue other beings. Even if it takes time that will not discourage the bodhisattva. Serving and acting as a disciple will slowly, slowly enrich the teacher and help them to overcome their delusion of pride. As mentioned earlier, if the bodhisattva were to initially announce to them that the teacher has to learn something from them, the teacher would not have listened. This is how a bodhisattva is able to subdue through their skilful means. As the commentary mentions:

...when bodhisattvas act for their good, they teach some what is of benefit after first becoming their students.

The explanation in the commentary follows exactly the first two lines of the root verse itself. Becoming students of some, and teachers of others means that:

They act as spiritual guides to those who feel inferior and teach them by pointing out their special attributes. Through all kinds of skilful means and knowledge in training, they make sentient beings who do not understand the suchness of phenomena understand it.

The analogy which is given to explain that meaning is:

It is like the following analogy: A good physician will prescribe different diets to his patients, such as rich food or bland food.

This is of course a very vivid example. Depending on the sickness or the disturbed element that the patient has, the doctor may prescribe different diets at different times. When for example, the person is suffering from a disease

that contribute to a lot of stress and they are very weak in their body, then the doctor would prescribe rich foods, which would be grounding and nourishing and give them strength. Nowadays, for example, we hear a lot about high cholesterol, and if this is the case, the doctor will prescribe foods that have less fat. We talk about using diet food that is either rich in some kinds of things, such as minerals and proteins and so forth, or diet food that is low in fats and so forth. That is what is prescribed nowadays, and in ancient times doctors had similar techniques.

Therefore what is being described in this analogy is how the doctor may prescribe different kinds of foods for the same patient. That is not to punish or in any way torture the patient, but rather to benefit them. Depending on their sickness, they prescribe either a rich diet or a bland diet. Even if it is the same patient, the different advice is appropriate at different times. Likewise bodhisattvas act for other sentient beings, in dependence on their mental capacity and so forth.

More explicitly, the meaning of benefiting other sentient beings is specifically in relation to teaching the profound view, which is emptiness. Initially, when the being is not ready, they do not have the capacity to comprehend the teachings on emptiness, so it is not beneficial to teach that. However when their mind has ripened, then the teachings on emptiness become appropriate and can be taught. That is how a bodhisattva will guide sentient beings, just like a doctor prescribes the different kinds of diets at different times.

We don't have too much left in the fifth chapter, so we might finish it soon.

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Edited Version*

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