
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 an upright and comfortable 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’.

1.2.3. Actual mode of training in the deeds (cont.)

1.2.3.2. SPECIFIC ATTITUDE

1.2.3.2.5. THE EFFECT OF STRONGLY DEVELOPED COMPASSION

This is sub-divided into two:

1.2.3.2.5.1. When the strength of compassion is thoroughly developed, those who cannot be trained are rare

1.2.3.2.5.2. Faults of not giving encouragement for others’ benefit

1.2.3.2.5.1. When the strength of compassion is thoroughly developed, those who cannot be trained are rare

As the heading suggests, this section explains that when compassion has developed to a certain point then benefiting others is definitely possible, and it is only on very rare occasions that there is no benefit. This is explained with an analogy.

Just as for an experienced physician 113
A sickness that cannot be cured is rare,
Once bodhisattvas have found their strength,
Those they cannot train are extremely few.

As the commentary reads:

A bodhisattva with a well-developed capacity for maturing sentient beings is like an experienced physician who only rarely finds a disease incurable and beyond treatment.

We can understand the point of this section very clearly through the analogy of a physician who is very well trained and skilled in his practice. Not only is it very rare for him not to cure a patient, but it is also very rare for the physician to give up on the patient. Rather he will look after the patient and use every means to try to cure them. Similarly, a bodhisattva with a well-developed capacity for compassion has the ability to nurture sentient beings under their care and benefit them.

Similarly, one should understand that when bodhisattvas who are able to discern superior and inferior aptitudes and are skilled in the four ways of gathering students have found their strength, those they cannot train are extremely few.

What is being related here is that, because of the bodhisattva’s capacities, such as knowing the mental disposition of the disciples, there are very few beings that they cannot train. As mentioned here, bodhisattvas are

also skilled in the four ways of gathering students, which are, as I mentioned before: being generous; uttering kind words; leading others to practise the Dharma; and practising what one teaches. When a bodhisattva is skilled in these four means then that definitely becomes the means to not only gather students, but also to be able to help and guide them. As the commentary mentions, with all these capacities and qualities, it is very rare that a bodhisattva will not be able to benefit their students.

It is good to remember that this description of the capacities and qualities of a bodhisattva refers to a bodhisattva who is still a state of training. If in the training stage one obtains such immense qualities, then by that measure one can gain an inkling of just how vast the qualities of a fully enlightened being are. Thus a very strong faith in the Buddha develops. With normal education we can see how the earlier stages of study are well structured. Knowing this we can predict the results that will be obtained by an intelligent student who is able to study in that way. The qualities that they will obtain can definitely be seen just from the structure of their studies. It is the same with seeing the qualities of a bodhisattva.

A further analogy is given to explain how knowing the mental disposition and capacity of the disciples can serve as a means to benefit the disciples.

It is like the following analogy: While all the other physicians did not realise it, the Master Nagarjuna recognised that desire for a woman had caused the mental illness of a king’s son and was able to pacify it.

Normal physicians who were looking for a physical cause for the son’s illness were not able to find what was causing the illness. But Nagarjuna, with his capacity for clairvoyance, was able to actually see what was really causing the king’s son’s illness. Even though the symptoms were physical, the cause was actually mental - a very strong desire for a woman. Having determined that, a cure was then developed.

What this analogy is explaining is that ultimately we can only really benefit others through reading their mind, i.e. through clairvoyance. Then we are able to really help to soothe mental as well as physical sufferings. Clairvoyance is the way bodhisattvas benefit sentient beings. An analogy from the *Lamp on the Path* by Atisha is that just as a bird needs two wings to soar into the sky, those who are guiding and helping other sentient beings in the Dharma must have clairvoyance to be able to know their mind, and be able to teach according to the students’ capacity. As it has been explained, this is really essential.

1.2.3.2.5.2. Faults of not giving encouragement for others’ benefit

This subheading relates to a question as to whether it would be a fault if, having seen that others will fall into lower realms, a bodhisattva doesn’t act to teach them and guide them away from this fate. It may seem like a form of laziness, but for a bodhisattva it is much more than that.

*If some within a bodhisattva's sphere,
Lacking encouragement, go
To bad rebirths, that one will be
Criticised by others with intelligence.*

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As the commentary explains:

If a bodhisattva possessing the special ability to train sentient beings encourages trainees within his or her sphere of influence, they will not go to bad transmigrations. If some, lacking encouragement, go to bad rebirths, the promise to help all sentient beings will have been impaired.

As explained here, the main query is whether it would be faulty if a bodhisattva, who has the ability to teach and see the state of mind of others, sees that some will be reborn in bad rebirths because of their lack of Dharma practice, but doesn't then engage in teaching them. If the bodhisattva did not act to help other beings by teaching them, then the fault is that the promise to help all sentient beings would have been impaired. Therefore that bodhisattva would be criticised by others with intelligence. It is definitely a fault in a bodhisattva if he does not engage in helping sentient beings.

Thus one should encourage people by teaching them appropriate practices. It is like the following analogy: A leader who does not assist those in his care will be criticised.

It is very clear that a person would be criticised by others if they take on the responsibility of leading of others, but do not then extend their care to anyone in that circle who is facing problems, or difficulties such as illness.

1.2.3.3. FAULTS OF DEFICIENT COMPASSION

If there is a lack of compassion then that would be a fault.

*How can one unwilling to say
That compassion for the oppressed is good,
Later out of compassion
Give to the protectorless?*

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The main points being made here are that compassion is extremely important, and that compassion must always be present. It is explained in the teachings that compassion is extremely important in the **beginning**, because it is the basis for the development of bodhicitta in the mind. It is due to compassion for other sentient beings that one aspires to achieve enlightenment. That is why, compassion is extremely important at the very beginning, because it serves as the very reason for aiming to achieve enlightenment.

In the **middle** of one's practice in the Dharma, compassion is also important. Even after having developed bodhicitta, it is possible that one can become discouraged, because the number of sentient beings is as limitless as space. Furthermore these limitless numbers of sentient beings are of different mental capacities and dispositions, including some who are unruly, quite tough and difficult to tame. Faced with this it would be very easy to give up one's intention to achieve enlightenment, if one lacked compassion. Therefore towards the middle, compassion is important.

At the **end**, even after having achieved the goal of enlightenment, one will engage in benefiting the numberless sentient beings out of compassion. That is how it is explained that compassion is extremely important in the beginning, the middle and the end.

The commentary states:

If out of jealousy a bodhisattva who is a beginner is unwilling to admit that it is good to act compassionately toward other sentient beings who are oppressed by suffering and its causes...

Basically the specific meaning here is that it is a fault if through lack of compassion, and out of jealousy, one were not to engage in the act of benefiting others. A bodhisattva who is lax in developing compassion toward sentient beings from the beginning will not be able to give them protection and so forth later on. The main point being made here is that if a bodhisattva does not train well in compassion from the very beginning, then later on they will not be able to sustain practices such as being generous to others and serving them in various different ways, not just once or twice, but numberless times over a very long period of time. Bodhisattva have to train in benefiting other sentient beings for many aeons, so if there is any lack of compassion from the very beginning, then their practice of benefiting others could not be sustained. Therefore it is extremely important to develop strong great compassion from the very outset and to maintain that compassion.

We can relate the faults of not having a sustained concern or compassion for others to ourselves. In our regular activities, we can see that even though initially we may have a good intention to help someone else, after some time we find that it starts to become too demanding and too difficult. What is really happening is that our compassion and concern is waning. We are not able to maintain that concern for the other, and so it seems to become more and more difficult to help and benefit them. Thus we become discouraged. We may back out from initial involvement or we may slowly back out and not continue. That is a sign of our waning compassion. Compassion is even more important for bodhisattvas, who have made promises to benefit other sentient beings, to maintain their ability to help others and not give up. Thinking along those lines it is necessary for us to make an attempt to slowly develop our compassion as best as we can.

Because compassion is so extremely important for practice, there are many techniques for developing compassion, such as *tong len* – the giving and taking practice. These are practices that are tailored to train our mind in developing compassion. Once we train our mind well, then the compassion can become more and more firm and stable, and when it is developed, genuine compassion can be maintained.

The lack of compassion is further explained with the analogy that:

It is like stealing a blind man's things or killing for a pair of boots.

What is being explained here is that someone who lacks compassion would steal a blind man's things for very trivial reasons. Anyone in their right mind would consider such an act as very bad and very cruel. Stealing the possessions of a blind person, of all people, is considered to be particularly cruel. Likewise, killing someone for their shoes is also considered as an extremely grave misdeed. Such misdeeds prevail because of a lack of compassion, and we can see how the lack of compassion can lead to such grave misdeeds. Furthermore with a lack of compassion one cannot benefit others fully. Therefore it is important for us to really recognise from the very beginning how compassion is extremely important, and thus train in developing compassion in our mind as much as we can.

These analogies are quite a vivid representations of the faults of the lack of compassion. If a blind person had a meagre meal then snatching away their food would be a shameless act, because the blind person cannot see and therefore cannot prevent it. Stealing from them really shows the extreme of lacking compassion. Likewise with the extreme example of killing someone for their shoes: that is really something that can definitely happen because of a lack of compassion.

1.2.3.4. FAULTS OF NOT APPRECIATING BODHISATTVAS AND SUITABILITY OF CULTIVATING APPRECIATION

1.2.3.4.1. Faults of not appreciating bodhisattvas

1.2.3.4.2. Suitability of cultivating appreciation

These sub-divisions can also be understood as being similar to the faults of not relying properly on a guru. As we know from the *Lam Rim* there is a difference between the disadvantages of not relying on a guru and the faults of not properly relying on a guru. The fault of not relying properly on the guru comes from not appreciating the qualities of the guru. This lack of appreciation of the qualities of the guru then leads onto acquiring the faults of not properly relying on the spiritual guru. That is how the connection comes.

1.2.3.4.1. FAULTS OF NOT APPRECIATING BODHISATTVAS

Question: What are the faults of hating a bodhisattva who is governed by compassion?

Answer:

When those [beings] suffer loss 116
Who are indifferent toward
One who stays in the world to help
transmigrators,
What doubt about those who are hostile?

A bodhisattva who is governed by compassion has developed their compassion to the point where their whole being is completely imbued with it; everything that they do is influenced by that compassion. The worldly analogy that we use is that it is like someone who is completely obsessed with attachment; their whole being is imbued with that attachment and whatever they do is influenced by it. A bodhisattva is so completely imbued and influenced by compassion that they have no choice but to help other sentient beings.

It is a great loss for those who, through indifference, do not appreciate and render service to one who is

motivated by the wish for all sentient beings without exception to attain the final state of nirvana in which the aggregates do not remain...

The main point being explained here is that while a bodhisattva's goal is to obtain the ultimate state of nirvana, all their actions are to benefit other beings. It would be a fault if one were to have an attitude of indifference, which means not making any effort to serve, pay respect and so forth, to a bodhisattva. One is letting oneself down by not paying respect and so forth. If indifference towards a bodhisattva is a fault, then how much greater is the fault of intentionally developing negative attitudes of hatred and so forth towards the bodhisattva. It would be a great misdeed.

1.2.3.4.2. Suitability of cultivating appreciation

This heading refers to the activities of a bodhisattva. As mentioned previously, a bodhisattva will engage in great deeds over many aeons to benefit other sentient beings. Having realised that, then it is appropriate to appreciate the deeds that are difficult to perform, and the limitless qualities of the bodhisattvas.

This section therefore has two sub-headings:

1.2.3.4.2.1. Suitability of appreciating deeds difficult to perform

1.2.3.4.2.2. Considering their limitless qualities, one should appreciate them

1.2.3.4.1.1. Suitability of appreciating deeds difficult to perform

It is proper to rid oneself of animosity toward bodhisattvas and develop strong appreciation for them, since they do what is most difficult.

One who to all lives has the five 117
Super-knowledges [appears] as inferior
With a nature like the inferior –
This is extremely hard to do.

As explained in the commentary:

A bodhisattva who has attained forbearance as well as the five kinds of super-knowledge [which is another translation of the five kinds of clairvoyance] which will not decline throughout all future lives...

The five kinds of clairvoyance are:

1. The clairvoyance of the gods' eyes;
2. The clairvoyance of miraculous feats;
3. The clairvoyance of hearing of the gods;
4. The clairvoyance of knowing other peoples' minds;
5. The clairvoyance of remembering past events, of past lives and so forth.

One that may sound a little out of place is the clairvoyance of miraculous feats. This is not indicating a clairvoyance which in itself is a miraculous feat. Rather, what is to be understood is that as a result of a particular kind of clairvoyance, one gains an ability to perform miraculous feats.

A bodhisattva who has obtained the forbearance of Dharma has obtained on a particular level on the path, as well as the five kinds of clairvoyance. Compared to an

ordinary being, such a bodhisattva has unimaginable abilities that they use to benefit other sentient beings. The capacities they have are superior compared with those of ordinary beings.

A bodhisattva with such qualities as having obtained the forbearance of Dharma as well as the five kinds of clairvoyance has the attributes to attain further higher levels. However, a bodhisattva uses those abilities and qualities as a means to benefit sentient beings. He or she may even take a lower rebirth such as dogs or other animals in order to benefit the beings in that realm. We can understand how the bodhisattva is almost making a sacrifice for the sake of others. If we had qualities that we could use to obtain even higher qualities, then we would put all our time and energy into obtaining those higher qualities. However a bodhisattva, out of their great compassion, uses the qualities that they have obtained for the service of other sentient beings, even taking a lowly rebirth such as an animal in order to be able to help the beings in that realm. There are many stories relating to how bodhisattvas have helped other beings in lower rebirths in that way. This is how the bodhisattvas' great activities are to be understood.

The analogy is:

It is like the bodhisattva who saw that many dogs would be harmed in the future and took rebirth as a dog to prevent it.

This is how one can understand the great limitless activities that a bodhisattva engages in so as to benefit other sentient beings. As explained here in the commentary, in order to benefit other sentient beings a bodhisattva even takes rebirth as a dog.

1.2.3.4.1.2. Considering their limitless qualities, one should appreciate them

One should develop faith in bodhisattvas by considering their boundless qualities.

*The Tathagata said that the merit
Gathered constantly through skilful means
For a very long time is immeasurable
Even for the omniscient.* 118

As the commentary explains:

Through their ability effortlessly to accomplish difficult feats for sentient beings, the merit created constantly by their three doors and accumulated over an extremely long period of countless aeons is as limitless as space.

The three doors are understood as the doors of body, speech and mind. Through their body, speech and mind the activities and the efforts in which the bodhisattvas engage are as limitless as space. What is being explained here are the boundless qualities of a bodhisattva. As the text explains, the bodhisattvas engage to benefit a limitless number of sentient beings, with a limitless amount of knowledge, qualities and abilities, for a limitless period of time.

That being the case, even an omniscient mind is not able to fathom the qualities of the bodhisattvas deeds. As the text says:

It is said to be immeasurable even for the omniscient.

What is to be understood is that this phrase is a means of illustrating the extent of the qualities of a bodhisattva. Of course, we do not take it literally, as there is nothing that an omniscient mind does not know. It is because it knows all existence that it is omniscient! However Buddha himself has mentioned it in the sutras as a means of showing the qualities of a bodhisattva.

It would be appropriate to contemplate this, in order to further generate and develop our faith, and an appreciation of the qualities of the enlightened beings and bodhisattvas. When enlightened beings engage in the practices as a bodhisattva, they engage in deeds to benefit sentient beings, even to the extent of taking a lowly rebirth. If they were to take a very grand, high manifestation or remain in their natural manifested state, then it would not be possible for ordinary beings like ourselves to relate to them. Therefore a bodhisattva appears in an ordinary guise in order to lead us and guide us and teach us the Dharma. The kindness and the skilful means and the great abilities of a bodhisattva are something that we can relate to. So in that way, contemplating the limitless deeds, as well as the limitless ways and manners in which they benefit sentient beings, will develop our faith.

We should also note that, as the teachings mention, it is hard to detect where a bodhisattva could be. Therefore it is very important that we be careful about that. As Gyaltsab Rinpoche has mentioned in one of his works, the obscurity of a bodhisattva is similar to a fire-pit that is covered up by earth. On the surface, it may look like normal ground, but if one were to fall into the pit or put one's hand into it, one would definitely be burnt. It is explained that we are not able to notice where bodhisattvas are. So if we are not careful, we could engage in great misdeeds in relation to bodhisattvas. That could mean that there could also be bodhisattvas amongst us here, so we must be careful!

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