
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, bringing our mind inward from external distractions. Let us try to keep a focused mind in a virtuous state and develop a motivation such as, ‘In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. For that purpose I will listen to the Dharma teachings and put them into practice to the best of my ability’.

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

1.2.3.5. WHY THE BODHISATTVAS CAN COMPLETE THEIR DEEDS

1.2.3.5.5. WHY THE BODHISATTVAS CAN TAKE SPECIAL PHYSICAL FORMS [OR MANIFESTATIONS]

Question: Why do bodhisattvas have mastery of most bodhisattva activities from the time they generate the first ultimate altruistic intention?

Answer:

*Why should anyone who takes birth
Through constant control of the mind
Not become a ruler
Of the entire world?* 123

This refers to bodhisattvas who have obtained the first ground, which in turn refers to a bodhisattva who has attained the path of seeing. Of the five paths, it is on the path of seeing that the first ground is obtained.

Paths and Grounds

Bodhisattvas on the first two paths, which are the path of accumulation and the path of preparation are referred to as the ordinary bodhisattvas, while bodhisattvas on the three later paths, the path of meditation, the path of seeing and the path of no-more-learning are referred to as the superior beings. So when a bodhisattva attains the path of seeing they become a superior bodhisattva, realising emptiness directly. Enlightenment is achieved when the path of no-more-learning is obtained.

The first ultimate altruistic intention, refers to ultimate bodhicitta, which is attained on the first ground on the path of seeing. As we have previously learnt, the bodhisattva on that level has obtained the ability to manifest in a hundred different realms, the ability to see and hear the Dharma from a hundred buddhas and so forth.¹ There are certain superior achievements that a bodhisattva gains from that point onwards. That is what is being referred to here.

The Five Paths

The commentary gives an explanation of the causes for achieving this attainment, however we can go further back to the initial causes. According to the explanations given in other teachings, these causes refer to the causes that are developed at the beginning of the path. On the **path of accumulation** the bodhisattva is training in achieving what we call the wisdom acquired from listening. When the wisdom realising emptiness acquired from listening is developed to the extent that it turns into the wisdom realising emptiness that is derived from contemplation, then the bodhisattva obtains the **path of preparation**.

When the bodhisattva further develops the wisdom realising emptiness to the point where it becomes a direct meditative perception of emptiness through the union of calm abiding and special insight, then that is the point when the bodhisattva attains the **path of seeing** and has a direct realisation of emptiness.

On the earlier paths of accumulation and preparation the activities the bodhisattva engages in are accumulating extensive vast merit and wisdom. This is the main cause for a bodhisattva entering the path of seeing, when he becomes a superior bodhisattva who has obtained the great miraculous feats.

We can take the causes back further, to before achieving the path. The understandings gained by an ordinary being serve as a cause to become the qualities that are needed to become a bodhisattva. Therefore when we refer to earlier causes we can refer to the very basic causes that we have within ourselves right now. We already have some intellectual understanding of emptiness, that is derived from the teachings that we have heard, and we also have some basis of love and compassion within ourselves. What we have now as an ordinary being, is further developed to become the causes to generate real bodhicitta and to develop an actual realisation of emptiness.

Therefore at a very early stage every single cause that we create counts; every small amount of merit that we accumulate, every understanding that we gain now, and every small negativity that we are able to avoid now, all serve as a cause to achieve further realisations. When we relate the teachings to ourselves in that way, then we can see the importance of both nurturing whatever small qualities we have now, and trying to avoid any negativity that we can. That then becomes the cause to achieve further realisations, all the way up to enlightenment.

When we relate the teachings to ourselves in this way then we can begin to feel that there is some worth in our existence, not just as a human being, but as a human being with the basis to achieve further realisations. As mentioned earlier, as human beings we definitely have some good qualities, so we can really begin to feel that we are fortunate.

Bodhisattvas who have attained the grounds can, through their constant mental control, take rebirth in worldly existences as they wish. Why then

¹ See teaching of 9 November 2004, where the qualities of the grounds were discussed in detail.

would they not become rulers of the entire world with dominion over the welfare of sentient beings?

As explained here, the bodhisattvas who have attained the grounds refers to the arya bodhisattvas who have reached the first ground and upwards through their constant mental control. This means that they have been able to control the mind to avoid earlier negativities and so forth, and remain in constant contemplation. Through their constant mental control they are able to take rebirth in worldly existences. This means that they are able to manifest anywhere where they are needed to benefit sentient beings, and be reborn there to assist in the welfare of sentient beings.

Having constant mental control enables bodhisattvas to take rebirth in worldly existence at their wish, has a connotation of bodhisattvas intentionally taking rebirth in worldly existences or samsara. So the bodhisattvas who are reborn in samsara are not there due to forces out of their control, but they have voluntarily taken rebirth in samsara. That being the case why would they not become rulers of the entire world with dominion over the welfare of sentient beings? This is a rhetorical question, because bodhisattvas do have the ability to become rulers of the entire world. If it helps other beings why would they not want to be rulers of the world?

As the commentary further reads:

By taking birth as lords of the four continents and so forth, they accomplish the well-being of others. They are like a wish-granting jewel or swish-fulfilling tree, and a fine pot of treasure.

The quality of a wish-granting jewel is that it has the ability to grant whatever prayers or wishes that are made to such a jewel. Referring to a bodhisattva as a wish-granting jewel means that a bodhisattva is able to bring about benefits in accordance to the needs of sentient beings.

The main points that we can derive from this explanation is that bodhisattvas are able to engage in such extensive deeds through constant control over the mind. We need to try to take the importance of controlling the mind as the essential advice for ourselves, as that serves as the basis for achieving all other qualities.

Control of the mind is achieved through meditation, and that is why meditation is emphasised at all times. Engaging in meditation and slowly subduing the mind is a means to control the mind. As the teachings indicate the controlled mind is a happy and peaceful mind, and an uncontrolled mind is a mind of unhappiness, chaos and suffering. Therefore the importance of meditation cannot be underestimated, because it is the means to develop a controlled mind.

Of course one of the main obstacles to controlling the mind is all the negative thoughts and emotions that arise in the mind, which mainly come from previous imprints of negativity within our own mind. Therefore in order to remove the obstacles to meditation we need to engage in purification practices. The purpose of purification is to purify the negative karmic imprints within oneself, and as we purify the negative karma then we are also

naturally engaging in accumulating merit and virtue. In that way, as we purify we gain merit, and as we gain merit we purify. So purifying and gaining merit enhance each other. That is the manner of practising.

It should be understood that the Tibetan word *jang* is used for both purification and the accumulation of virtue and merit. How it should be understood is that *jang* could be translated as 'endeavour', so we endeavour to purify and we endeavour to accumulate merit. So, the same word is used in different contexts of avoiding negative karma and accumulating positive karma.

1.3. Proof of resultant omniscience

The omniscient mind or dharmakaya is achieved as a result of the various practices of a bodhisattva. This heading explains the proof of omniscience or dharmakaya mind.

Question: What is the result of doing bodhisattva deeds?

Answer: The inconceivable features of a fearless supramundane buddha's power is the result of bodhisattva deeds.

Even in this world among excellent things 124
Some are seen to be most excellent.
Thus realise that certainly also
Inconceivable power exists.

The teachings explain in great detail the incredible miraculous powers of the body, speech and mind of the enlightened Buddha.

In order to explain this verse the commentary says:

The Mimasakas [a non-Buddhist school] and others, who lack conviction with regard to this, say that the Tathagata is not omniscient because of being a person, like any common man on the road.

The reasoning that the non-Buddhist schools such as the Mimasakas present is a syllogism: the Tathagata (the subject) is not omniscient (the predicate), because of being a person (reason). The commentary explains that 'This is inappropriate', and as a counter measure the author asks:

Are the subject and the predicate to which your reason is applied one or different? In the first case, the Tathagata is unsuitable as a subject, because subject and predicate are one, just as a pot cannot be its own attribute. In the second case the Tathagata is also unsuitable as such, because the subject and predicate are different and resemble in all respect a pot and a woollen cloth.

The manner of refuting the non-Buddhist schools view is presented with the assumption that the non-Buddhist schools view the subject and the predicate as being inherently existent. That being the case as the commentary further explains:

Similarly because of being asserted as inherently existent, if the reason and the thesis are inherently one, they should be inseparably one, and if they are inherently different they should be unrelated.

What is being explained here is that if the subject and the predicate are inherently one then a syllogism relying on

them to give a reason is absurd, because they are inherently one. If they are inherently separate then that also is an absurdity, because then there is no connection whatsoever between the subject and the predicate. You cannot use the subject to explain the predicate because they are inherently independently separate, which means that there is no relationship whatsoever between the two. In that way the argument of those who lack conviction is being refuted on the basis of the assertion that the subject, the predicate and the reasons are all viewed as being inherently existent.

So a counter question or syllogism is put forth:

Furthermore, the subject, the sound of the Vedas, is not permanent, non-produced, self created or valid because of being sound like a madman's utterances.

What this refers to is that these non-Buddhist schools adhere to the belief that the sound of the Vedas is actually permanent. Therefore according to the non-Buddhist school they are non-produced and furthermore they are self-created and that's why they are valid. The counter syllogism is that the sound of the Vedas is not permanent, and furthermore is non-produced, and is not self-created or valid, because of being sound like a madman's utterances. This syllogism is used to counter the very reasoning that that the non-Buddhists gave, which is that the Buddha is not omniscient because he is an ordinary being. The counter syllogism that the sound of the Vedas cannot be valid is based on their reason that it is valid because it is permanent. However the sound of the Vedas is not permanent and is non-self-produced and so forth, so it cannot be stated as being valid, just like the sound of a madman's utterance cannot be considered as being valid.

Furthermore the text says that using your sort of line of reasoning you could say:

You are not Brahmins because you have hands like fishermen.

The non-Buddhists say that the Buddha is not omniscient because they see the Buddha as having the features of an ordinary being. The response here is that if that is the case then you cannot be Brahmin because you have hands and arms like fishermen. What is being indicated is that if you follow your line of reasoning then many other assertions that you make about yourself cannot be valid.

There are also other counter reasons that are presented in other texts such as: Is one's mother a suitable object for sexual copulation, because she is similar to your own wife? This would obviously be an absurd logical assumption. There are many other examples that use the line of reasoning of similarity to assert whether something is suitable or not.

The real reason why the Buddha is omniscient is:

Therefore, just as the excellent features of an effect are seen to arise through the special features of its cause, the existence of omniscience too can certainly be accepted.

The analogy that is given here is that:

Among exceptional and excellent things, some which are particularly excellent are seen even in this world.

Within our worldly existence, amongst excellent things there are certain things that are even more excellent. We have many examples in our worldly existence of certain things that are the supreme amongst the supreme. So in that way we can therefore say that within beings, because of particular causes the result can be a particular type of incredible being, such as an omniscient being - the Buddha.

The particular examples that are given are:

- When text was written the caste system was dominant, and even today the caste system is very much prevalent in India. Within the caste system the purest and best caste is the Brahmin caste.
- The most enjoyable and most pleasant state of existence within samsara is called the peak of existence.
- Amongst the various mountains, the most supreme is known as Mount Meru.
- Kings are prevalent in the world and among the various kings the most supreme king is known as the universal monarch.

These examples are prevalent in this world system. There is the caste system, and what was commonly accepted at that time was that the Brahmin caste was the most supreme; because there are different places where one can take rebirth in samsara, being reborn in the peak of existence is considered to be the best rebirth within samsara; because there are different types of mountains, the most supreme is Mount Meru; and since kings are prevalent in the world, the most supreme king is the universal monarch. Therefore the use of these analogies reflects what is commonly agreed and accepted by beings in the world.

As the commentary further explains:

Thus you should realise that the superlative awareness, the inconceivable power of Tathagatas, definitely exists, because of the stores of merit accumulated by bodhisattvas over three countless eons.

The **first countless eon**, where bodhisattvas accumulate merit, is from the first moment that a bodhisattva enters the path of accumulation, up to the path of seeing. At a certain stage of the path of seeing the bodhisattvas attain the first ground.

From the first ground up to the seventh ground is the **second countless eon**.

The last three grounds, the eighth, ninth and tenth ground, are **the third countless eon**

We can see how even bodhisattvas are at different levels all the way up to what is called the last continuum. The tenth ground of a bodhisattva is when they reach the stage that is called the last continuum of a sentient being. The next stage is an enlightened being, a buddha, which

is the most superior of all. When compared to the earlier stages the qualities that are achieved after attaining buddhahood are incredible and inconceivable. You can see how that all these different stages that we call attainments are superior to the ones preceding them, and the most superior of all is the enlightened state.

Therefore, as explained here, within the mental continuum the most superior mental continuum is the mental continuum of a buddha's mind, which is an omniscient mind.

As the commentary further explains:

Moreover you should accept this proof of omniscience established by reasoning without depending on scriptural citations.

What is being established here is, as we can see, a logical way of explaining how omniscience does actually exist. Furthermore when we relate that to other states of mind, for example the understanding of emptiness, we see that the realisation of emptiness begins with a conceptual understanding of emptiness. That conceptual understanding of emptiness, when further developed and refined, then becomes the direct clear understanding of emptiness. An understanding of emptiness at a conceptual level is not a direct perception, because it is mixed with a generic image. However when that crude understanding of emptiness is further developed, it can turn into what we call the clear and direct understanding of emptiness. So that proves that the mind progressively becomes clearer and more mature. That is how an understanding of emptiness is then related to all other realisations, and the mind itself becomes clearer and clearer, all the way up to becoming an omniscient mind.

1.4. Showing why those with poor intelligence fear the Great Vehicle

If it is possible that as the development of a mind progresses one can attain a state of omniscience, and an omniscient being is considered a valid being, then this question arises: Why are most people afraid of the Great Vehicle and uninterested in attaining buddhahood?

Answer: It is because of their weak conviction.

Just as the ignorant feel afraid 125
Of the extremely profound teaching,
So the weak feel afraid
Of the marvellous teaching.

Having explained that buddhahood is possible, and that buddhahood is an omniscient mind, then the next question or doubt that arises is that if that is so, then why are people so afraid of the Great Vehicle.

The response to the question mentions a weak conviction, which can refer to not having the ability to conceive that such a superior goal can be achieved. Because of not being able to conceive of such a goal the conviction is weak. Furthermore such people are ignorant.

As the commentary reads:

The ignorant, whose minds are untrained, feel afraid of the very profound teaching of dependant arising

free from inherent production with the feasibility of all actions and agents.

There are disciples and students of three different levels of ability: the very inferior level, the mediocre and the intelligent level. This explanation refers to beings of inferior intelligence who do not have the capacity to really grasp the meaning of the teachings, and whose minds are untrained. We can refer to them as being untrained in the understanding of reality. Such beings therefore feel very afraid of the profound teaching of dependent arising. What can be understood here is that the teaching of dependent arising is a profound explanation. The understanding that is gained from dependent arising is an understanding of emptiness, and the understanding of emptiness is when one gains the understanding of interdependentness. Like purification and gaining merit, which were mentioned earlier, emptiness and dependent arising enhance each other. Beings who are ignorant, or who have weak conviction, or who are untrained, are afraid of the profound teaching of dependent arising and emptiness, which, as mentioned here, are free from inherent production.

As the commentary further explains

Similarly those whose conviction is weak feel afraid of the marvellous profound and extensive teaching of the Great Vehicle and of the superlative power of a buddha.

The summarising stanza from Gyaltsab Rinpoche reads as follows:

Having considered the faults of cyclic existence well,
Enter this profound and extensive Great Vehicle
Of which those with poor intelligence feel afraid,
And make bodhisattva deeds your quintessential practice.

This is quite clear so no further explanation is needed.

2. Presenting the name of chapter

This is the chapter on the Four Hundred Deeds showing the bodhisattva deeds.

This concludes the commentary on the fifth chapter showing the bodhisattva deeds from the *Essence of Good Explanations, Explanation of the 'Four Hundred on the Yogic Deeds of Bodhisattvas'*.

We have covered the fifth chapter well. The sixth chapter presents the main obstacle to engaging in bodhisattva deeds, which is the delusions.

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Edited Version

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