
Study Group – *Aryadeva's 400 Verses*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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We have this great opportunity to gather together again this year and continue. So first of all I'd like to greet everyone with *Tashi delek!*

The reason why I say that it is auspicious that we have gathered together again is because we are here to exchange knowledge of the Buddha's teachings. The Dharma presents methods to discard negative emotions and acquire positive beneficial attitudes, which is a means of subduing the mind. Therefore this gathering, where we learn and discuss the means of doing that, is really beneficial. Discarding negative states of mind is based on cultivating positive attitudes, which is basically an attitude of wishing to benefit and be kind to others. Based on a compassionate and loving attitude of wishing to benefit others we can slowly work at removing the negative states of the mind within oneself. That is why I say that having this opportunity to jointly engage in the Dharma is most auspicious and beneficial.

It is important that we think along these lines on a continuous basis so as to encourage ourselves. To further recognise how important that basis of love and compassion is, we must remind ourselves that the wish to benefit others is likened to a very valuable priceless object, which indeed it is. If we were to lose this attitude of love and compassion, then what kind of life would we have? It would really be an empty life without much meaning. For as long as we nurture and hold on to this attitude of love and compassion, to that extent we will have a happier and healthier life. That is because to the extent that we develop love and compassion and based on that, extend some benefit to others by being kind to them, or showing a kind attitude, or good behaviour, others will also like us. They will befriend us and we will be accepted and considered as a friend wherever we go. Therefore just as it is as of benefit for others, it is also of practical benefit for ourselves. Therefore we must maintain and develop this priceless attitude.

We must also understand that learning the Dharma is not a means to merely acquire knowledge. Rather the main purpose of learning is to subdue the mind. That is something that we need to understand and continually remind ourselves. Subduing the mind basically means overcoming the negative attitudes in our mind. These attitudes are based on self-cherishing, which is thinking only about oneself all the time, making oneself as the centre and always considering everything else as being less important in relation to oneself. The stronger that self-cherishing attitude is, the weaker the attitude of cherishing others and benefiting others will be.

Let us consider the state of mind where we have lost the

attitude of benefiting and helping others. What kind of outcome will that bring to us? First of all we find that there will be feelings of being neglected or not being loved by others. Instead of feeling lost and uncomfortable and negative we should look into the reasons why others are neglecting and abandoning us. We must look into our own mind and see whether we have an attitude of only thinking about ourselves while neglecting others. If we really look into the main reason why others abandon us, we will find that that the very attitude that we criticise in others is something that we have within ourselves. The more self-cherishing and self-clinging that we have the more the attitude of others towards us will be similar.

It is very important that rather than thinking negatively about others, we investigate and look into ourself and the kinds of attitudes we hold. Therefore we must look into the benefits of cherishing others and really develop a sense of love and compassion towards others, while overcoming the self-cherishing attitude – the mind that clings only to the self. In order to try to train our mind it is good to do this sort of analysis or meditation on what is the most beneficial. For example, we can see two groups of people: one group are those who are nurturing, and who have a loving attitude towards others; they have compassion and cherish others. The other group of people are those who are self-centred and who only think about themselves; their life is based on self-centredness. If we put ourselves in the middle of these two groups and analyse them, and if we were given the choice of joining one of them, then which group would we be inclined to join? Would we join the group of people who have a compassionate and loving attitude towards others, or would we join the group of people who are self-centred and who think only about themselves? If our natural choice was to join the group who exhibit love and compassion and kindness towards others, then that means that we see the value and benefit of such an attitude. Questioning and analysing in this way should give us enough reason to really develop that attitude of loving-kindness towards all others, and thus overcome our self-centredness and self-cherishing.

Having analysed in such a way, on further analysis we will come to realise that the good attitudes of love and compassion in these people didn't come about just by itself. Love and compassion are not qualities that arise without any training or development of the mind. So we think, 'If I were to naturally choose that group then I must follow suit. I must also develop the attitude of love and kindness in my heart. That is something I must do'. Developing our attitude in this way gives an outline for the motivation for practising Dharma and is the whole basis of the Dharma. So, as I normally remind you, the motivation of developing loving-kindness is very important, and we need to remind ourselves to generate and maintain that motivation.

I can also definitely see your development towards having a kinder mind, and that is something that I feel happy about. I can see that you have developed an awareness of karma, which is basically an ability to differentiate between negative and positive karmas. I'm

not saying that you may have developed deep-rooted, infallible faith in karma, as that is not something which is easily developed. Nevertheless, I see that you have a good understanding of karma and live your life accordingly. Because of the understanding you have, you are able to think, 'I should minimise engaging in negative deeds as much as possible and engage in positive deeds, and in this way bring about positive consequences for myself and others'. That is something which I definitely see that you are adopting, and that is a really good basis. The understanding and abiding by the law of karma, is said to be the basis or the very foundation of leading a Dharma life. That is something which is really important to maintain.

Recently, when I visited my own teacher, Khensur Urygen Tseten, one of the first things he asked me was, 'How's your development of the Dharma going? Has your mind become kinder?', and my response to Khensur Rinpoche was, 'I feel that my mind has become much happier now, so I suppose that must be a sign that my mind has been becoming a little bit kinder'.

Part A Showing how the aspiring altruistic intention is generated after training in the attitudes of a person of intermediate capacity by explaining elimination of the four errors

The first four chapters mainly dealt with overcoming the four erroneous views, which is also something that His Holiness emphasised in his recent teachings in India. Studying this would have helped those who attended his teachings understand the points he made. The means of overcoming the four erroneous views that hinder the development of right attitude or view are the main practices of the medium scope. Overcoming these erroneous views is the means to overcome the obstacles to developing the bodhicitta mind and the actions of a bodhisattva. The first chapter covered overcoming the erroneous belief in permanence. The second chapter is on overcoming the erroneous belief of seeing the contaminated aggregates as pleasurable. The third is overcoming the erroneous belief of the contaminated aggregates being clean, while the fourth chapter is overcoming the erroneous belief of seeing the contaminated aggregates as having a self.

To actually give a more specific summary of the chapters presented so far in the *Yogic Deeds of Bodhisattva* or the *Four Hundred*, the first four chapters explicitly present the four noble truths, by explaining the means of overcoming the four erroneous views, while implicitly they also show the means of overcoming the obstacles to developing bodhicitta.

Part B Explaining how to train in the deeds, having generated the practical altruistic intention.

The fifth chapter explained how to overcome particular obstacles to developing the bodhicitta attitude. The main subject matter was the actual explanation of the state of the bodhicitta mind, including an explanation of the

bodhisattva's deeds and the bodhicitta attitude. The sixth chapter specifically goes into overcoming the obstacles to engaging in the bodhisattva deeds. If you understand this summary of the chapters then it becomes a good means to integrate it into your meditation practice.

CHAPTER VI: EXPLAINING THE MEANS TO ABANDON DISTURBING ATTITUDES AND EMOTIONS WHICH PREVENT THE DEEDS

The sixth chapter explains how to overcome particular delusions in order to develop a bodhicitta attitude. It is subdivided into two:

1. Explaining the material of the chapter
2. Presenting the name of the chapter.

1. Explaining the material of the chapter

Presenting the material of the chapter is sub-divided into two categories.

- 1.1. Refuting the contention that contaminated actions and disturbing attitudes and emotions are eliminated by tormenting the body with ascetic practices
- 1.2. Explaining the means to abandon disturbing emotions

1.1. Refuting the contention that contaminated actions and disturbing attitudes and emotions are eliminated by tormenting the body with ascetic practices

As the heading itself suggests, this section refutes the idea that contaminated actions and disturbing attitudes (the delusions) are eliminated by enduring severe ascetic practices, which is a view that others hold.

The refutation is not suggesting that we don't need to practise ascetic practices, rather it is refuting asceticism as the main means for overcoming delusions, and therefore a means to obtain liberation. That is what is being refuted here.

One must understand that when delusions and karma are explained, they should be understood in the context of the twelve interdependent links. Three of the twelve interdependent links, are identified as delusions, and they are to be abandoned. Two of the twelve interdependent links are identified as karma. One must also understand that whilst all delusions are to be abandoned, not all karmas are to be abandoned. If it is a delusion, then one can assert that it is something to be abandoned entirely. Whereas with karma, there are certain karmas that are beneficial, such as the karma to be reborn in higher rebirths, i.e. as a human being or in the god realms. Those kind of meritorious karmas are not seen as an object of abandonment. However there are those karmas that are a cause to be reborn in the lower realms and these are definitely to be abandoned. There is no question about that. We can therefore conclude that all delusions as well as karmas that are causes to be born in the lower realms are to be abandoned, whereas the karmas that are classified as meritorious karma are not to be abandoned. Even though they are still causes to be

reborn in samsara, they can nevertheless be utilised for one's practice. Therefore they are not entirely abandonments as such. Also, when we consider the classification of karma into virtuous and non-virtuous karma, non-virtuous karma is definitely to be abandoned, whereas virtuous karma is not.

***If desire increases through pleasure
And anger increases through pain,
Why are those with pleasure not ascetics?
Why are the ascetics those with pain?*** 126

As the commentary reads:

Since the source of all trouble lies in cyclic existence, which is caused by contaminated actions and disturbing emotions, Bodhisattvas who act as close friends to transmigrators encourage trainees to put an end to such actions and emotions.

What is being specified here is contaminated karma, which as mentioned before, are the karmas to be abandoned. That is what is being explained. Basically this assertion is presenting the view of a non-Buddhist school, called Jainism, which practises great austerities in relation to mortifying their body, such as intentionally inflicting pain on the body by piercing it with thorns and so forth. They also go around naked as a means of practising austerity. These are the kinds of practices that are being negated by the verse. The Jains claim that Buddhist practices are not an authentic practice, because they don't practise austerity, whereas, 'we Jains practise austerity', they say.

If [you claim] that is so, it is unreasonable to give the ordained buildings five hundred masonry courses high and food of a hundred flavours. Since these are pleasurable they increase desire.

What this refers to here is the non-Buddhist schools' claim that if you are saying that one must overcome the delusions, it is not proper that the Buddha has allowed you dwelling places that are reasonably comfortable to live in, good clothing that covers you well, as well as foods 'of a hundred flavours', indicating foods which are tasty and good. It is not proper that this is permitted to you, since these conditions will increase desire because they are pleasurable.

What they are saying may seem quite reasonable. The first line in the verse says, 'If desire increases through pleasure'. This is refuting the Jains' claim that pleasures increase desire, so therefore anything that gives pleasure should be avoided. The commentary further presents their argument:

From the outset, one should therefore avoid things like visual form that arouse desire. Those who undergo overt suffering by mortifying their bodies with heat and cold, letting their hair become matted and so forth are called ascetics, overcoming contaminated actions and disturbing emotions.

After claiming that Buddhist practices are not ascetic, they go on to explain that their way of practising is an ascetic practice, and that should be the practice to adopt.

The non-Buddhist schools say that pleasure leads to desire. Therefore, they claim, anything that seems to give

rise to any pleasure should be completely abandoned in order to overcome desire. The refutation of this assertion is as follows:

If pleasure from one's body and possessions increases desire, and pleasure as well as its causes should be avoided, physical and mental pain which increase anger should be avoided too.

What is being explained here is that if you claim that anything that increases pleasure is to be abandoned because it increases desire, then anything that causes pain should also be abandoned, because pain gives rise to the delusion of anger. Therefore that should be avoided as well. In other words, 'The austerities that you practise, including inflicting pain on yourself, are a cause for anger to arise, so why do you practise them?'. The commentary goes on:

Why are those who have pleasure not ascetics and why are the ascetics those who fast and experience the pain...

and so forth.

As the text explains, those who overcome the contaminated actions and disturbing emotions are called real ascetics, not those who torment the body. That is the standing statement or reasoning that a Buddhist would give in response. As the commentary further explains, the Supramundane Victor (which refers to the Buddha) knowing the disposition of beings' minds, and seeing that some beings mind are afflicted by strong desire while in other beings the main delusion that is afflicting them is anger, gave different practices to overcome those delusions. As the commentary reads:

The Supramundane Victor gave certain individuals twelve rules of training to prevent desire. To prevent anger he permitted the angry to have fine food, clothing and so forth.

There are twelve rules for ordained Sangha with respect to their clothing, food and shelter. In relation to the robes, fine clothes are to be avoided and only patched clothes should be worn. Thus, different folds in the robes represent patches. Furthermore, clothing that has been discarded by others can be adopted and worn, which is another way of decreasing attachment to clothing. There are also rules in relation to how clothes should be worn. Also, ordained Sangha should not keep more than the three robes, and they should be made of wool or cotton, and no other kind of expensive material like silk and so forth should be used.

Food must be acquired through alms, which means going out to beg for one's food. The second rule in relation to food is to eat one's food at one time, meaning in one sitting, which refers to eating one meal a day. To further emphasise that, the rule is that meals should not be eaten after noon.

In order to overcome strong attachment to dwellings, the rules prescribe that the Sangha dwell in forest areas (which means in the forest or in the wilderness). Secondly, their dwellings should not have a proper roof, which means living out in the open and finding natural sources to protect oneself from the elements. The third

rule is to dwell in areas like cemeteries, or isolated places, which is in order to increase one's practice and to abandon attachment to dwellings. These are the four rules in relation to dwellings.

In relation to seating, one should not sit in a position leaning against anything i.e. one should avoid comfortable chairs and sit where one can avoid leaning on anything. This is to overcome laziness, and just leaning back and relaxing. This is prescribed in order to overcome a particular attachment to one's sitting place. Also Sangha should sit in isolated places. The list of these twelve rules is clarified further on. You could actually go ahead and read them.

To refute the accusation of the non-Buddhist schools that Buddhists do not practise austerity, first of all the refutation is based on the actual mortification and inflicting of harm on the body itself, which is not in itself a practice of real austerity. Mortifying the body is a practice of ignorance, rather than a practice to overcome delusions. That being so, then the Buddhist refutation also goes on to explain that, 'It is not as though we Buddhists don't have ascetic practices. In fact the Buddha laid down rules as a means to overcome attachment to dwellings and clothing and so forth, and these are ascetic practices in themselves, which are not easy to practise. These are not extreme as your practices, they are however practices that strengthen detachment. They are moderate practices, which become a means for overcoming desire and attachment. So we Buddhists do have ascetic practices'.

As the commentary further explains:

To prevent anger he gave the angry fine food, clothing and so forth. Therefore only the Shakyas who conquer disturbing emotions should be called ascetics.

What is being explained here is the skilful means of the Buddha and it is actually quite profound. In order to combat and overcome strong desires in those with strong desire, and thus practise detachment, the particular rules in relation to food, clothing and so forth were presented (as was explained earlier). Depriving someone, whose main delusion is anger, of food and clothing will just disturb their mind even further. Rather than being a means to overcome their delusion, it will actually increase it. So therefore as a skilful means to subdue the minds of those who are afflicted with anger, the Buddha prescribed fine food and clothing that would nourish the body, to the point where the mind can be subdued, and they can slowly overcome that strong aversion or anger in their mind, and thus help to subdue their mind. Thus as a summary it is claimed here that the Shakyas, meaning the followers of Shakyamuni Buddha, are the ones who are practising austerities in the real sense.

The presentation in this text follows that the advice that I give to people in relation to partners who are living together, or any other relationship that one has, which I've shared with you before. If your partner, for example, were to come home one day quite upset with something that may have happened during the day, they might be

quite agitated and upset. When you see them coming back in that state of mind, it would be very unskilful to start pestering them with questions like 'What happened?' or 'Tell me what went wrong?', when all they really want is to be quiet and have some peace of mind. So to really help calm them down, the best thing is to welcome them home, smile at them and say, 'What can I serve you?' and go and make a cup of tea for them, or maybe offer to make a delicious meal. After offering tea, a delicious meal and so forth, their mind will naturally calm down and then, without having been asked, they might start relating what is wrong and share their problem. But if you were to ask them questions right away, that would be considered as pestering, which could just agitate their mind even further. So therefore I normally advise that in relationships a more skilful way to react when one notices that they are unhappy or sad or agitated in some way is to offer them food to make them relax. That would then be a good way, so that one lives in harmony.

The commentary presents this analogy:

Just as one gets sugar and so forth by crushing sugar cane, all kinds of happiness in this life and in the future are gained by crushing the disturbing emotions.

The analogy being used here is deriving sugar from sugar cane by crushing it. That analogy is used to explain how the delusions are the very root of unhappiness. So therefore just as the sugar cane is crushed to derive the sugar, likewise the very root of the delusions is dealt with and the delusions are thus eradicated from the mind, leaving real happiness and peace - what we call liberation. It is not by inflicting more pain and more harm upon oneself that one eradicates the delusion, but rather combating and dealing the delusions themselves, so that one can overcome and uproot them from the very core. That is the real way of dealing with the delusions.

1.2. Explaining the means to abandon disturbing emotions

We will cover this second heading next week.

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Edited Version*

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