
Study Group – Aryadeva’s 400 Verses

ལྷན་འབྲེལ་གྱི་འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ལྟར་གྱུ་མཁའ་བཞུགས་མོ།

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As usual we can sit in an appropriate posture and set our motivation, such as, ‘In order to liberate all sentient beings from all suffering, and lead them to ultimate happiness I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I listen to the Dharma and will apply it in practice’. It would be very good to have that attitude in mind.

It is most important to remind oneself that the whole purpose of listening to teachings and studying the text is so that it can be put into practice. If we have that attitude from the very beginning, and remind ourselves of it throughout our studies, then that leaves a good imprint, from which we can benefit.

1.2.1.2.3. HOW TO ABANDON CONFUSION

This is subdivided into two which are:

1.2.1.2.3.1. Recognising the root of disturbing emotions

1.2.1.2.3.2. Recognising the antidote which eliminates it

As these two sub-divisions suggest, first there is identifying the actual root of all delusions and then having identified that, showing the means of how to eradicate that root by recognising the antidote.

1.2.1.2.3.1. Recognising the root of disturbing emotions

Question: The different characteristics of desire and anger have been described but what are the various characteristics of confusion?

The answer is the root verse:

As the tactile sense pervades the body 135
Confusion is present in them all.
By overcoming confusion one will also
Overcome all disturbing emotions.

As the verse indicates, the way in which confusion is the root of all delusions is described with the following analogy: the tactile or body sense is said to be a sense which pervades the whole body, and if this tactile sense is withdrawn then all the senses in relation to the physical body are also withdrawn. Similarly confusion or ignorance pervades all the delusions and so therefore once ignorance itself is severed, then all the other delusions are also severed. Another analogy that can be used is that it is like getting rid of a poisonous plant. Merely cutting off its branches will not stop the plant from growing; the only way to stop the plant from growing is to uproot it. That is true also for the delusions: unless the root of the delusions is uprooted they will continuously prevail within oneself. We can see for ourselves that even though we may be quite successful in overcoming desire on one day, on the next day we fall prey to our desires and maybe a few days later we might again fall victim to our desires. That is because desire has not been uprooted from our mind.

In the body the tactile sense organ pervades all other sense organs such as the eye and acts as a basis without which none of the others could exist.

As explained here just as what we call the tactile sense

pervades the whole body likewise confusion pervades all of the delusions within oneself.

The text further reads:

Confusion, which is the disturbing attitude ignorance, misconceives dependent arising free from inherent existence as truly existent.

That is how ignorance misinterprets reality. What is being described here is how ignorance serves as a root of all delusions and thus pervades all of the delusions.

It similarly is present in and pervades all disturbing emotions such as desire and anger.

Although all phenomena are dependent arising and lack inherent existence, which is the actual mode of existence, ignorance misconceives the mode of existence, which is of interdependent arising, and perceives it as having an inherent existence. To that extent it is a misconception. Ignorance obscures the mind from seeing the actual mode of existence, which is of interdependent origination or dependent arising.

As the text further describes:

Misconceiving things distorted by confusion as inherently pleasant or unpleasant one thinks of them as desirable or repugnant.

As described in their respective definitions both attachment and anger are an exaggerated view based on the qualities of the objects. Attachment is an exaggerated view of the attractive qualities of the object being viewed, thus leading to the arousal of desire. Whereas anger is the exaggerated view of the negative qualities of the object, thus leading to the development of an attitude of repugnance towards the object. Both of these exaggerated views are based upon the initial misconception of viewing the object itself as being inherently existent.

One must understand that these exaggerated views arise on a fundamental misconception. The very root or fundamental misconception is the misconception of ignorance which sees the object as being inherently existent. Thus by seeing the object itself as being inherently existent any qualities that are attributed to it are also viewed as being inherently existent. So the attractive qualities of an object are also seen as being inherently existent, and the same is also true with anger, where the negative qualities of the object are also seen as being inherently existent.

When we look into it, we see from our experience that the attractive or appealing qualities of an object appear to us as existing from the object’s own side, regardless of anything that our mind imputes upon it. Therefore, out of ignorance, the object (and its qualities) is viewed as existing inherently, in and of itself, and from its own side. Thus it is explained that those sentient beings who have not given up either grasping at true existence or grasping at the self, as well as those who have not abandoned the imprints of grasping at the self, will view objects as being inherently existent. Because the object itself is viewed as being inherently existent, then other qualities about it are exaggerated as well. As the teachings say, for a sentient being there is always an appearance of inherent existence. For those who specifically have abandoned grasping at the self or grasping at true existence, the appearance of true existence or inherent existence is still there, however the belief in true existence does not exist anymore. The reason why the belief is not there is because they have abandoned grasping at true existence. But because the imprint of grasping at true

existence is still left upon the mind, that causes their mind to still see things as being truly existent. Thus only an enlightened mind that has completely eradicated the very imprints of grasping at true existence will not have even the appearance true existence.

It is very important to develop a really good understanding of these points about the lack of inherent existence, and thus gain an understanding of emptiness or selflessness. As Nagarjuna's *Root Wisdom* mentions, even a doubt about the validity of emptiness which is the lack of true existence, will shatter the very foundation of samsara. As Nagarjuna has mentioned, it is really true that when one gains a conceptual understanding, or even just a glimpse into the concept of emptiness, that can really work at eliminating our misconceptions. Based on that understanding one can start working on eliminating the very root of our delusions, and thus the root of samsara.

As described earlier, attachment is an exaggerated view of the qualities of an object. So the stronger the exaggeration is, the stronger the attachment is to the object. When an object appears to us as being attractive then, for as long as we entirely believe in the attractiveness of that object, we will have a strong attachment. Even without an understanding of emptiness we can recall from our experience that if we see someone in the distance who appears to be very attractive, then desire may arise in our mind, even though we haven't had close contact with the object yet. However if we get closer to the object we begin to see faults in the person. Then that initial strong attachment and desire will start to wane and reduce, because we begin to notice that they are not as attractive as we thought initially. It could be because of the distance, because of their make-up, or something else but when we come close to them the attractiveness is not there. So even from this obvious experience we suddenly realise that what appeared to be entirely attractive and beautiful is not really true.

An understanding of selflessness or emptiness goes beyond even that. It actually explains how the very appearance of the object we have, is not true; how its whole appearance is actually an illusion and not true. Whether an object appears to be attractive or repulsive it appears to us as being inherently existent, and existing from its own side. Onto that false appearance we add further exaggerations. It is said that for as long as we have the appearance of the inherent existence of objects and believe in that, then to that extent we create karma in relation to those objects. As is explained in the teachings from the time someone sees emptiness directly they will not create any new throwing karma, which means the karma to be reborn again in samsara.

As is explained in the teachings, although there may still be an appearance of inherent existence to someone who realises emptiness, there is no belief in it, so they will not create any new karma to be reborn into samsara. With this understanding we can begin to see how the process of eliminating the causes for samsara works.

This understanding will then help us to gain a deeper understanding of the twelve interdependent links. The first of these links is the ignorance of grasping at true or inherent existence, which is indicated as the fundamental or root cause of samsara. With this explanation one comes to understand how that ignorance is identified as being the root cause of all the other delusions.

As the commentary further explains:

Thus one must understand how the mode of

apprehension entailed in the conception of true existence is present in the modes of apprehension of anger and desire. All other disturbing attitudes and emotions depend on the disturbing attitude ignorance, which is principal.

I want to emphasise the use of the term 'principal', which is called so, because by overcoming confusion through meditation on dependent arising and inherent existence, all other disturbing attitudes and emotions will be overcome as well.

As a conclusion the commentary further emphasises:

Therefore make an effort to understand emptiness as the meaning of dependent arising.

From this explanation one understands how ignorance is the principal or the main cause of all samsara. It is also explained in the root text of the *Madhyamika* that all delusions and all experiences in samsara come from the initial misconception of holding onto the transitory collections.

Of course the older students have heard this on many occasions. However just as a summary, what is being explained in this verse is that without overcoming ignorance there will be no cessation of the causes to be in cyclic existence or samsara. Therefore in order to attain liberation, as well as enlightenment, one needs to overcome the principal cause, which is ignorance, by gaining the wisdom realising emptiness which serves as the direct antidote. That is the essence of what needs to be understood.

1.2.1.2.3.2. Recognising the antidote which eliminates it

The root verse which corresponds to this sub-heading reads as follows:

When dependent arising is seen 136
Confusion will not occur.
Thus every effort has been made here
To explain precisely the subject.

These last two verses are verses that are often quoted in other texts, because they serve as very important explanations of how to bring about the cessation of all suffering. Therefore it would be good to actually memorise them and keep them in mind. The previous verse identified the root cause of all suffering, which is ignorance and this next verse shows us how over to overcome ignorance, which is through the realisation of emptiness and dependent arising. So these two verses are very important verses.

A good understanding of these two verses serves as a basis for whatever practice one engages in, such as the Lam Rim topics. Whatever Lam Rim topic one meditates on can be based upon the understanding one gains from these two verses. So in that way they serve as a very good foundation for one's practice, because as they explain that all practices should ultimately lead to achieving the same goals.

The verse serves as an answer to the following question:

What are the means to get rid of confusion, which is the root of futility?

What is being explained here is that there are so many activities in our life, where we put so much time, energy and effort, but to achieve what? In the end we find that we are putting all our energy and effort into achieving very futile results. There is no real essence in what we achieve.

Having meditated on the faults of samsara, and really looking into the causes of these faults, or into our senseless activities, and all the delusions that arise in our mind, we

should ask ourselves, 'What is the purpose?' 'What are the causes?' Having raised that question, we must use the different reasons and analogies explained in the teachings to develop a good understanding that ignorance is the main cause. However that understanding by itself does not really help one's mind much. One should really try to relate that understanding to one's experience, and develop a strong feeling, really looking into it from every angle and see how ignorance really serves as the root cause. Then you will develop the strong sense, 'Without getting rid of this cause I will never have real happiness, and things will never be right'. This instills a strong wish to get rid of the cause, which is ignorance. The verse in this section shows how to get rid of that ignorance.

Using this understanding in one's practice, in meditation, even analysing it in analytical meditation, one should arrive at the point of wanting to get rid of the cause. Then the natural question that may arise in the mind is, 'Is it possible to get rid of ignorance?'. When that question arises one must further look into how this ignorance perceives things. First of all one looks into how everything appears to us. Things appear to us as real. Is this true? Is it valid? Do things exist in the way they appear to us? If they existed exactly in the way they appear to us then one could conclude that there is nothing that one can do about it.

But through investigation and analysis one can slowly begin to see that things do not exist in the way they appear. When one begins to see the falsity of appearance and how the actual mode of existence is contrary to how it appears, then that means that there is a valid reasoning that one can use to overcome the misconception that we have. I wonder if you are getting the point that is being made here: it is that if one can see a discrepancy between how things appear and how they actually exist, then one can see that there is a need to overcome the misconception. Because things do not exist in the way they appear then one can conclude that there is a valid reason to overcome this misconception, the belief in appearance.

One comes to understand what emptiness means when one begins to understand what it is negating, and what is being negated is what appears to us and our belief in it. When we focus on phenomena, which means anything external, internal, impermanent or permanent, in brief all existence, they appear to be inherently existent, existing from their own side without depending on anything. What we call the view of emptiness is the opposite of that: it is seeing the non-validity of that appearance. When one begins to understand that all existence lacks inherent existence, that they do not have any inherent or independent existence then that is what is called the understanding of selflessness or emptiness. And that view, which comes from a deepening experience, serves as a means to completely eradicate that misconception about the nature of existence.

First of all one analyses how grasping at true existence is a misconception, because it views things as existing without depending on any causes or conditions whatsoever. This view that things exist in and of themselves is what we call the view of grasping at true existence.

As the text explains:

If a sprout, action and so forth exist by way of their own entities...

The analogy is a sprout and its cause, which is the seed, explaining action and its cause which is ignorance. Here action is the karma which is specifically the second of the

twelve interdependent links, compositional action. This specific karma is created as a result of the first link, which is ignorance.

If the sprout and action existed by way of their own entities they would not depend on the seed nor on ignorance, but they do.

This means that if a sprout existed by way of its own entity, or by itself, then it would not have to depend on anything else. Then one would have to conclude that a sprout would not have to depend on a seed. Likewise if compositional action were to exist from its own side, by its own entity, then one would have to conclude that it does not depend on ignorance. However, using the obvious analogy, as any ordinary person who sees the cause and effect sequence of a sprout and a seed knows, for a sprout to exist it has to depend on the seed. There can be no sprout arising without a preceding seed. Likewise for compositional action or karma there has to be the ignorance that precedes it. The fact that it has to depend on an earlier preceding cause for its existence is proof in itself that it does not exist by its own entity or by itself.

First of all, it is obvious that a sprout exists, and likewise karma exists. For a sprout to come into existence it depends upon a seed. Likewise the second of the twelve interdependent links, compositional action or karma exists, and its existence depends on the preceding cause of ignorance. Therefore since a sprout and karma are dependent originations they do not exist independently in and of themselves. The commentary further explains with the help of many different kinds of reasoning that one must understand that the existence of the sprout is exclusively a dependent existence, and not an existence by way of its own identity.

One derives a further understanding of dependent origination from this explanation, and when one gets some understanding of dependent origination, then one can begin to understand how that serves as a sound reasoning to validate emptiness. Within the four schools the Mind Only school and below assert dependent origination as a sequence of cause and effect. Where there is a cause there is an effect and that cause and effect sequence is what is meant by dependent origination.

However for the Prasangika school, which is the highest Buddhist school, the explanation goes further, saying that it is not merely the cause and effect sequence that determines the dependent origination of phenomena, but rather the dependence on different parts and conditions. From the Prasangika point of view anything that exists is a dependent origination. So even what we call permanent phenomena, which are said to be causeless, have parts and so therefore everything that exists has parts to it. Things are not partless, because everything has a part to it. Therefore anything that exists depends on its parts for its existence. Things could not exist without depending on their parts to make them what they are. Therefore it is said that anything which exists is in the nature of dependent arising.

As explained earlier in the commentary one uses many different kinds of reasoning to show what is explained in this point. One should not rely only on one reason for understanding things as lacking inherent existence and thus being empty of inherent existence. As the commentary further reads:

When dependent arising free from existence by way of its own entity is seen by directly valid perception,

confusion will not arise, and because confusion has ended, all other disturbing attitudes and emotions too will end.

When dependent arising itself is seen as a way of explaining how things do not have their own entity or independent nature, and when that is seen by direct valid perception then confusion will not arise, and confusion or ignorance will be severed.

Thus here in the *Treatise of Four Hundred* every effort is made specifically to explain how emptiness means dependent arising.

This is specifically clarified in Lama Tsong Khapa's concise work *The Three Principles of the Path*, where he clearly states that once one has come to an understanding of how dependent origination and emptiness enhance each other and are not contradictory, one has understood the meaning of the Buddha's intent. What is being emphasised here is that the understanding of dependent origination becomes a means to understand emptiness. That is why it is very important to emphasise it. In *The Three Principles of the Path*, Lama Tsong Khapa mentions dependent origination first for the specific reason that the understanding of dependent origination can enhance the understanding of emptiness, and in fact the term dependent origination is often used interchangeably with emptiness in many texts.

However another important point is raised in the commentary:

By merely understanding the dependent arising of a sprout, one does not understand the emptiness of true existence; if one did it would not be a reason establishing emptiness of true existence.

The mere understanding of the interdependence of a sprout does not necessarily mean that one has gained an understanding of emptiness. However dependent arising is used as a reason in the syllogism or a thesis that gives a reasoning for emptiness. The syllogism is: a sprout is empty of inherent existence, because it is a dependent arising. You use that syllogism for someone who has understood that the sprout is a dependent arising, but who has not understood yet that a sprout lacks inherent existence, which means they have not understood yet the emptiness of the sprout. For such a person this syllogism is a valid reasoning: a sprout is empty of inherent existence or lacks inherent existence. Why? Because it is a dependent arising. If understanding dependent arising were to equate with the understanding of emptiness then you couldn't use this syllogism, because if they have understood the sprout to be dependent arising that means they would have already understood emptiness.

The fact that this syllogism is used as a valid reasoning, means that there are those who have understood that the sprout is dependent origination or a dependent arising, but not yet understood emptiness or the lack of inherent existence of it. Therefore gaining an understanding of dependent origination doesn't necessarily equate with gaining an understanding or emptiness.

When you say that a sprout is empty of inherent existence because it is a dependent arising, this makes them begin to realise, 'Oh, I already understand a sprout is a dependent arising, so that means it must also be empty of inherent existence'. For such a person dependent arising serves as a reason that makes a great deal of sense.

When one discovers that existence by way of a thing's own entity is invalidated in many ways one discovers how phenomena exist. Understanding that they only

exist dependently means one should thereby understand that they do not exist by way of their own entity.

When one comes to understand that if the independent entity of any existence is invalidated through many reasons, one discovers how phenomena actually exist, and that they only exist dependently means one should then understand that they do not exist by way of their own entity. When one understands that, one understands that they do exist but they lack independent existence.

This is a very important point and many great scholars such as Nagarjuna and Lama Tsong Khapa have clarified and emphasised it in their teachings. Those who were recently at His Holiness' teachings will recall that His Holiness also considered this as the essence of the explanation of emptiness. So it is important to get the point.

First of all one must understand that emptiness and interdependent origination enhance and do not contradict each other. This does not mean, that someone who merely understands interdependent origination will automatically understand emptiness and vice-versa. What it does mean is that they do not contradict each other. The way they enhance each other is, as I explained, that for someone using many sound logical reasonings and analysis to establish emptiness, or the lack of inherent existence of phenomena, can easily establish the dependent origination of all phenomena and vice-versa, without having to use extra reasonings and much extra effort.

Of course we can refer to this commentary and other commentaries to get further understanding. However the main point is that emptiness and interdependent origination enhance each other and do not contradict each other. If one equates the lack of inherent existence with the non-existence of phenomena, then one has lost the point and fallen into an extreme view. However if one uses the understanding that the lack of inherent existence means that things exist in dependence on causes and conditions and their parts, one has focused on the right understanding, and not fallen into the extreme.

When you understand that things lack inherent existence that does not mean that they do not exist at all but that they exist in dependence, in relation to causes and conditions, and so forth. Things exist in relation to causes and conditions and those causes and conditions contributing to their existence also lack inherent existence. Because things exist in relation to other causes and phenomena; they do not have an inherent independent existence. Thus that understanding of dependent origination, that things exist in dependence on causes and conditions and its parts, enhances the understanding that things lack inherent existence. That is how the understanding of dependent origination enhances the understanding of emptiness. The understanding of one enhances and contributes to the understanding of the other, and in that way it becomes a very effective means of understanding the real intent of the Buddha's teachings, which is a very precious and holy understanding.

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Edited Version*

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