

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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As usual it will be appropriate to set a motivation for the teaching. While sitting in a comfortable and upright posture, we generate a motivation such as, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment, and for that purpose I need to listen to the Dharma and put it into practice as best as I can'.

1.2.1.3. DETAILED EXPLANATION OF HOW TO ABANDON ANGER AND DESIRE

Even though desire will be explained first, anger is mentioned first in the heading simply because this order sounds better in Tibetan.

This heading is sub-divided into two categories:

1.2.1.3.1. How to abandon desire

1.2.1.3.2. Explaining extensively how to abandon anger

1.2.1.3.1. HOW TO ABANDON DESIRE

This is further divided into two sub-headings.

1.2.1.3.1.1. Characteristics of a person habituated to desire

This section gives a description of the outer signs and characteristics of a person who is habituated to desire.

1.2.1.3.1.2. Means of caring for such a person

This section explains how to help a person with strong desire.

1.2.1.3.1.1. Characteristics of a person habituated to desire

Question: How does one recognise people in whom desire is a strong habit?

Answer:

They always like "Claiming the Earth," 137
Are extravagant, greedy and fastidious.
Characteristics such as these
Are seen in people with desire.

The verse shows some of the characteristics of a person who is known to have desire. As the commentary explains, people who are habituated with strong desire are:

always like dances such as "Claiming the Earth,"...

They like dancing and singing and opera, in which they like to participate.

They also like 'fun and flirtation' as well as making jokes and so forth with others. There are also those who are extravagant, liking clothes and so forth. As indicated in the text they also have a liking for:

... flowers, perfume, garlands, jewellery, colour [such as make-up] and so forth.

As further explained in the commentary, people who are known to be habituated with desire also have, to a certain extent, the quality of being generous to others in addition to spending a lot of money on themselves. They utter kind words to others, as well as honest words, and they also take extra care in keeping things tidy - they can be obsessed with cleanliness. Those are the sort of characteristics that are seen in people who have strong desire. When you see such characteristics in others or in oneself, then that is an

indication of strong desire. Although it might not be true in all cases it is generally the case that those with strong desire have the qualities described above.

As explained in the commentary the characteristics of someone with strong anger in their mind are the opposite of those with strong desire in their mind. That seems to suggest that they are not extravagant, they don't seem to like going to the opera and so forth. They may like to be alone and also not say things honestly or in a nice way to others.

An equal mix of both types of characteristics is a characteristic of someone who has confusion or ignorance prevalent in their mind. So, those who have characteristics of both desire and anger are people who have confusion in their mind.

Having heard about these characteristics, it is good to be mindful of them and relate them to oneself or others to see if they apply to oneself or not.

1.2.1.3.1.2. Means of caring for [or subduing] such a person

Question: How does one train someone in whom desire is a strong habit?

Answer:

Buddhas told those with desire 138
That food, clothes and dwellings are all
To be avoided and to remain
Close to their spiritual guides.

As the commentary explains:

Buddhas told those with desire that objects of beauty and quality which stimulate desire such as fine food, clothes and dwellings are all to be avoided,...

As indicated earlier in the text, the Buddha placed restrictions on the food, clothing and dwellings that are appropriate for ordained sangha. Even in a worldly context, we find it is basically different kinds of foods that serve as a continual basis on which attachment arises. The same is true for clothing and housing. On a continual basis they arouse a strong desire in us, that is really prevalent.

The restrictions which the Buddha particularly laid down for ordained sangha are a means of overcoming manifest desire. As mentioned previously the Buddha laid down twelve rules of training.¹ Ordained sangha should dwell in isolated places, like cemeteries, or in places without a roof. Even with our limited experience, we can see that if we put someone with very strong desire for objects, and things like dwellings and so forth, into a situation where everyone else is living similarly (in moderate dwellings and so forth), then the strong desires for dwellings and so forth can definitely be reduced or minimised. Because everyone has a similar environment the manifest strong desire for objects can be reduced.

Specifically, for monks who are attached to dwellings like nice temples and so forth, it is laid down that they should live in isolation, or in cemeteries, or in housing without roofing. For those who are particularly attached to sleep and bedding, there are the restrictions of not sleeping by lying down completely, but by sitting in an upright posture and living in isolated areas like forests and so forth. There are also specific restrictions in relation to food for fully ordained monks: relying on foods from alms, eating only in one sitting, and not eating after noon. Monks should wear inexpensive, woollen, patched clothes. 'Inexpensive'

¹ See 20 February 2007.

particularly refers to second-hand clothes which others have already used for at least four months.

These restrictions were laid down by the Buddha so that his followers would be venerated because they were seen as being modest. Being satisfied with meagre shelter and food and so forth is also a bodhisattva practice, which is to hold a low place and to be satisfied with little. In that way these restrictions also help others to generate faith and admiration in the followers of the Buddha. Ultimately the main purpose is that these are a means of leading others onto the path, and the practise of Dharma.

The commentary further explains how to guide such beings:

...and that they should always remain close to their spiritual guides. Being made to work constantly by their spiritual guide will curb their desire and through instruction in training, they will be able to rid themselves of their incorrect mental approach.

These are the means of guiding someone whose mind is pervaded by desire. If we follow such instructions it helps the mind to overcome the manifest desires in the mind. It is also mentioned in teachings that as one practises in such a way, one should seek companions who are able to be content and also live on meagre necessities. Then the mutual benefit for each other becomes a means for practising well.

The text mentioned earlier that to guide and lead beings who have strong manifest anger prevalent in their mind, the teacher provides them with nice clothing and food and dwellings and so forth, which helps to overcome their manifest level of anger. Then they can be trained along the path. It is good to really keep this advice in mind to be used in practical ways. That means remembering that the best means of helping someone with strong anger prevalent in their mind is by providing necessities, which will calm them down.

What we normally tend to do is the opposite. When someone is angry we tend to become upset and respond with anger ourselves. So instead of resolving the situation we fuel it even more. Actually our anger just worsens the situation rather than making it better. So if one sees someone angry, then rather than responding with anger just let them be for a while and if possible provide them with nice things, that will help to subdue them. If, say, you have two children and one seems to be a little more short tempered, then maybe a good way to deal with that child is to provide them with better food. If you give better food to a child who has a short temper, that will help them to calm down.

1.2.1.3.2. EXPLAINING EXTENSIVELY HOW TO ABANDON ANGER

This sub-division is sub-divided into five.

1.2.1.3.2.1. Considering the disadvantages of anger

1.2.1.3.2.2. Explaining extensively how to apply antidotes to anger

1.2.1.3.2.3. Refuting that it is not wrong to punish the slanderer of an innocent person

1.2.1.3.2.4. Preventing anger by considering the benefits of patience

1.2.1.3.2.5. Appropriateness of cultivating patience when disparaged by others

1.2.1.3.2.1. Considering the disadvantages of anger

If one wants to get rid of anger, one should think about its disadvantages.

*Through anger, those who are powerless
Only make themselves look ugly;* 139

*But one who has power and is merciless
Is said to be the worst.*

It is of course very true that it is only by seeing the disadvantages of anger that a wish to actually overcome anger is instilled. Seeing the disadvantages is the necessary beginning. As the commentary explains, when one exhibits anger towards those who are more powerful than oneself, then, because the other is more powerful, one is not able to do anything about the situation beyond being angry. In this situation one suffers just because of the fact that one is powerless, and not able to fight back. Furthermore a state of anger makes one's face turn dark and unappealing. Angry frowns and the like make one look ugly: in fact one's whole appearance looks unappealing. Someone with a frown on their face and looking a bit fierce is not a person who is welcomed or liked to be seen by others. Therefore it brings about a situation where one is just left by oneself, and often not able to deal with the situation. The first part of the explanation in the commentary has concerned the inappropriateness of being angry towards someone who is more powerful.

What is explained next is that it is equally inappropriate to be angry towards those who are less powerful than oneself, because that is abusing their powerless situation. Being angry and merciless towards those less powerful is totally inappropriate. Such anger arises because of a lack of concern or love for the object. The combination of lacking concern and love for the object together with the object being less powerful than oneself will lead one to doing disastrous things, such as hurting them physically, or even leading to the situation of taking their life and so forth. So grave misdeeds can be inflicted on a less powerful object as a result of anger. Even in a worldly sense when a more powerful person abuses their power to hurt the less powerful, that is seen as being unfair and totally inappropriate.

Therefore it is made clear here that in either situation one should avoid exhibiting or harbouring anger. For one more powerful than oneself there is no point. Firstly, by getting angry towards the more powerful one will achieve nothing, because by itself, one's anger can do nothing to harm them. Because they are more powerful, one cannot do anything to harm them. So, just being angry and harbouring anger in one's mind cannot help the situation. Furthermore it makes one look ugly and so forth, and so it is inappropriate. For those who are less powerful than oneself, it would be considered as being inhuman and inappropriate to be angry with them, even in a worldly sense. From the Dharma point of view, it is definitely, totally inappropriate to be angry towards those who are less powerful. The point about having no compassion towards the object is very true. The very wish to harm the object is because the lack of love or compassion in one's heart.

As I often point out, even in normal situations with normal relationships one first has some affection, love and concern for the other. But as the love and concern begins to wane and diminish, then what replaces the concern and love is anger. So if anger towards the object starts to arise in the mind then that is a clear sign that one's affection and love for them is slowly waning and actually diminishing. Therefore one must be very careful towards those for whom one feels strong affection and concern. Initially, one needs to try and maintain that affection and concern and see all the good reasons as to why one should maintain it. If affection and concern diminishes then what comes in its place is anger.

Of course there are many more details about the disadvantages of anger and the advantages of practising patience, and these are described more extensively in the sixth chapter of the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. So it is good to relate what is discussed here to those teachings, and learn from them. We do not have time to go into detail now, but it is good to remind oneself and look at those teachings as a means to enhance one's practice. As one studies a text like this, one should remind oneself of the other texts one has studied and revise them, and that will enhance the points which are made here. By revising and looking them up again, it really brings a deeper understanding to one's mind. Whatever understanding one gains not only deepens, but also becomes firmer and in that way we really make progress.

1.2.1.3.2.2. Explaining extensively how to apply antidotes to anger

That is sub-divided into five headings:

1.2.1.3.2.2.1. Inappropriateness of anger at the circumstances which terminate the effects of ill deeds

1.2.1.3.2.2.2. Inappropriateness of anger because unpleasant words are designated as harmful by oneself and are not inherently harmful

1.2.1.3.2.2.3. Advice to punish the abuser in treatises on social conventions is wrong

1.2.1.3.2.2.4. Inappropriateness of anger at those who make others aware of one's faults

1.2.1.3.2.2.5. Inappropriateness of anger when inferiors use abusive language

1.2.1.3.2.2.1. Inappropriateness of anger at the circumstances which terminate the effects of ill deeds

It is foolish to feel angry when one hears harsh words.

*It is said unpleasant words
End previously done ill deeds. 140
The ignorant and unwise do not
Want to purify themselves.*

The point being made here is that if one hears words of criticism and gets angry or upset, then that is very foolish. As the commentary reads:

Hearing unpleasant words is said to rid one of the effects of previously done ill deeds by bringing them to an end.

What is being emphasised here is a combination of the inappropriateness of anger with an understanding of karma. What this means basically is whatever unpleasant experience we may have, such as hearing criticism and so forth, is a result of particular karma that we have created in the past. As the teachings on karma emphasise, nothing can be produced without a cause. Anything that is produced is preceded by its own appropriate causes. Therefore when we experience certain kinds of words that are hurtful, it is definitely a result of a particular type of karma that we have created in the past that we have to hear those words. At this point, we can use the understanding of karma to understand that hearing these hurtful words now is a means of overcoming the particular negative karma that one has created in the past. In other words, hearing the unpleasant words is purifying or exhausting that particular karma now. Therefore if one uses the understanding of karma, then there is no real reason for us to feel unhappy about the situation, but instead we should feel rather glad that we are now exhausting that karma. As the commentary goes on to say:

Not to feel glad but angry at the circumstances that end these effects is simply to be ignorant regarding actions

and their effects and unwise in not wanting to purify ill deeds.

What is being explained here is that if one were not to accept the criticism, then that in itself indicates that one is failing to accept the cause and effect sequence of karma in general. If one were not to accept the cause and effect sequence of karma, then that means that one is not ready to accept the criticism as a means to exhaust one's karma. So feeling unhappy about criticism is indication that one is being foolish, because of either being ignorant of an understanding of karma, or, if one has such an understanding, then not accepting it. In contrast, if one accepts the criticism as a way of experiencing the effects of the karma that one has already created, in addition to a means of actually exhausting that karma, then it should actually bring joy to the mind, rather than feeling unhappy and hurt. That is what is being indicated here as the main point.

1.2.1.3.2.2.2. Inappropriateness of anger because unpleasant words are designated as harmful by oneself and are not inherently harmful

These sub-headings on antidotes to anger are actually very important points, so we have to pay careful attention to them.

For the following reason, too, it is appropriate to be angry about harsh words.

*Though unpleasant to hear 141
They are not intrinsically harmful.
Thus it is fantasy to think that
What comes from preconception comes from elsewhere.*

What is being explained here is that although harsh words are unpleasant, the words themselves are not intrinsically harmful; it is not as though the words themselves will harm us. If they were harmful, then one would have to assume that those who are uttering those words would also be harmed, because they have uttered the words. It is actually very clear: if words were to be intrinsically harmful from their own side, the one who spoke those words would have to be harmed too. As the commentary reads:

Thus, when the damage done by anger comes from one's own preconception that one has been insulted, it is just fantasy...

What is being explained here is that even though one conceives the anger that arises on hearing unpleasant words as being a result of the words that have been uttered, the words themselves do not harm us. What is actually harming us is only our preconception, what is called *namtok* in Tibetan, which is all of the different kind of superstitious minds which occur within oneself. It is only the superstitions or preconceptions in our minds that are harming us.

As the commentary says:

...it is just fantasy to suppose it comes from elsewhere. When one's own ideas have done the harm, it is unreasonable to be angry with others.

What is being indicated here is that the reason one is hurt is not because the words that have been uttered are intrinsically harmful themselves, but because of the way one perceives them. As a result of one's preconception, we feel the harm. Therefore it is not fair to blame others because we feel hurt. We can verify this through our own experience. For example, when certain words are uttered there may be times when they do not affect us, because of the context in which they were said. Yet at other times those very same words can make us feel hurt, blamed and so forth. If words

were intrinsically harmful from their own side, then one would have to conclude that they would be harmful at all times. Also, as mentioned earlier, if they are intrinsically harmful, then the one who uttered those words would have to feel harmed too.

But the fact is that the one who utters the words is not harmed, and we are also not harmed in every situation; it is only sometimes and in certain situations that we feel harmed. It is because of our preconceptions and how our superstitious mind interprets them that we are actually harmed. So actually the one to blame is our own superstitious mind, rather than the words or the person who utters them. Therefore the conclusion is that the harm that we bring upon ourselves through our misconception shouldn't be a reason for us to become upset with others and blame them for hurting us.

1.2.1.3.2.3. Advice to punish the abuser in treatises on social conventions is wrong

Assertion: Treatises on social conventions state that those who are abusive should be punished.

Answer:

Just as it plainly says 142
The abuser should be punished,
Likewise why should one who speaks
Pleasantly not be rewarded?

What is being explained in the commentary is that the kind of assertion that those who utter hurtful words should be punished, while those who say pleasant words are not rewarded, is a very biased way of looking at things. There are some biased treatises that do not really see the situation in an even-handed way.

As the commentary explains:

Just as it plainly says those who are abusive should be punished, likewise why should those who speak pleasingly not be rewarded? It would be reasonable to reward them, but since these treatises do not mention that, they are misleading.

What is being explained here is that there is a disparity between these two situations. The treatises that mention punishing those who use unpleasant words are misleading, as they are not based on sound reasonings.

1.2.1.3.2.4. Inappropriateness of anger at those who make others aware of one's faults

If that for which you are reviled 143
Is known to others though they are not told,
And anger at the speaker is unreasonable,
How much more so toward those who lie.

This verse serves as an answer to the assertion:

Anger is reasonable because abuse reveals one's faults to others.

The commentary uses that very reasoning as a counter-reasoning to show that anger is not reasonable. As it says:

If those things for which you are reviled, such as your blindness or lameness, are known to others even when they have not been told, it is unreasonable to be angry...[when they have been told]

What is being explained here is that if someone criticises you for faults that you actually have, (the examples here are if you are blind in one eye or if you are lame), by calling you a 'blind person' or 'lame guy', and if those faults are known to others, then mentioning them doesn't change anything. So why should one become upset about what is already known to others anyway? It is unreasonable to be angry about such

statements, because others know about it already, whether it has been mentioned or not.

As the commentary further explains:

If that is unreasonable, how much more so is anger toward those who speak untruly, when one does not possess a fault.

What is being explained here is that if someone were to call you a 'blind person' or a 'lame person' when in fact you are not blind or lame, then because they are uttering lies why should one get upset about lies? They might go around and tell everyone that one is blind or lame, but it is obvious that one is not lame or blind. Relating this illustration to other faults, if others mention faults that one does not have, then because they are in the wrong and obviously telling lies, one shouldn't take it as a criticism, because basically it is just a lie.

If someone points to something that is in fact a fault, others may already know about anyway, it is inappropriate to get angry or upset about it. So if they are pointing out faults which one does not have, it is also inappropriate to get angry, because they are in the wrong; they are telling lies and that is inappropriate. In both situations it is inappropriate to get angry. It is good for us to think about these lines. The analogy here is:

It is wrong for a king to punish both someone who calls the blind "blind" as well as someone who calls those who are not blind "blind."

A king will not punish someone who calls a blind person blind, because that is saying something that is obviously true. Likewise the king will not punish someone who describes someone else as being blind when they are not blind, because it is just an inappropriate lie.

Thinking about these points is a good way for us to consider and practise patience. If we can actually practise along the lines as advised here, then we could begin to consider ourselves as leading a meaningful life and doing a spiritual practice. But because we are not able to practise like that, we normally react just like children – whenever there is some criticism or whatever, we just get angry and fierce. On a practical level trying to reduce our anger and apply the practices of patience definitely benefits us in our immediate life, so we are able to lead a good happy life now, even if you are not to think along the lines of liberation and enlightenment, which seem so far into the future.

The immediate benefit in this life should encourage us to practice along these lines, even one does not really have any sight of liberation and enlightenment right now. It is actually very appropriate to look into the immediate benefits that one receives now, as it is difficult to see how doing a practice can benefit future life times. When we look into the benefit that we receive now, then that can serve as a reason to assume that if we have an immediate benefit from these practices, and if there were to be future lifetimes, then there would be no question that it will benefit the future as well. Because if it benefits now, it follows through logical reason, that it will benefit the future, whenever that future comes - in this life and in future lifetimes. As Lama Tsong Khapa clarifies in his teachings, by practising patience, one actually receives the immediate benefit of having a calmer and more peaceful mind now, and that definitely creates the causes for us to obtain higher rebirths in future lifetimes as well.

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