
Study Group – Aryadeva's 400 Verses

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual it would be appropriate to set one's motivation such as, 'In order to liberate all sentient beings from all suffering, I need to achieve the state of enlightenment. For that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice as much as I can'.

CHAPTER 7 ABANDONING ATTACHMENT TO SENSE OBJECTS ON WHICH DISTURBING EMOTIONS FOCUS

It was explained earlier that having understood how the delusions arise and so forth, one must then battle to overcome them. This particular chapter is about identifying the sense objects themselves and how to abandon attachment to those sense objects. Unless we can overcome attachment to those sense objects they will become a condition for our attachment to arise, increase, and remain in our mind. That is how the sense objects influence us.

The commentary goes on to explain that in order to establish disgust for cyclic existence the faults of cyclic existence need to be explained. One must understand that the causes for rebirth in cyclic existence are attachment to sense objects, so therefore meditating on attachment to the sense objects becomes the means to develop that disgust. As explained in the commentary, in order to develop disgust for cyclic existence, one must develop detachment towards the causes for rebirth. The main cause for rebirth, as explained in the twelve interdependent links, is the second link, which is compositional karma. That in turn is under the influence of the first link, ignorance. Due to ignorance one creates what is called compositional karma, which becomes the main cause to throw one into cyclic existence for the next rebirth. Detachment towards that karma is a very profound way of saying that in order to stop cyclic existence; one must develop detachment towards its very cause, which is compositional karma itself. Until we avert that particular karma, we will never stop the causes for future rebirths in cyclic existence. Therefore, one must develop detachment towards compositional karma.

The chapter falls into two main sub-headings which are:

1. The explanation of the material in the chapter
2. Presenting the name of the chapter

1. The explanation of the material in the chapter

Explaining the material of the chapter comes under three main headings, which are:

- 1.1. Considering the disadvantages of cyclic existence
- 1.2. Abandoning contaminated actions, the cause for birth there
- 1.3. Explaining the need to abandon contaminated actions

1.1. Considering the disadvantages of cyclic existence

This is sub-divided into two:

- 1.1.1. Considering the general faults of cyclic existence
- 1.1.2. Specifically abandoning attachment to happy rebirths

1.1.1. Considering the general faults of cyclic existence

This is further sub-divided into two:

- 1.1.1.1. Why it is necessary to cultivate fear of cyclic existence
- 1.1.1.2. How to generate aversion to it

One must also try to relate these headings to the Lam Rim headings, which specifically consider the disadvantages of cyclic existence. The presentation that is given here is actually no different to what is taught in the Lam Rim. Although each has a different way of presenting the topic and a different way of presenting the headings, one should understand that essentially, both come to the same point. For example, the Lam Rim considers the disadvantages of cyclic existence under the heading of thinking about the three types of sufferings, the six types of sufferings and so forth. All of these explanations that are given in the Lam Rim are condensed in this text and that is how one should understand it. Even if one does not take the explanations here as being a completely separate topic, one can use it in the context of the explanations of the Lam Rim.

The specific differences between the presentation of the Lam Rim and that presented here is the different approach to the explanation of the disadvantages of cyclic existence. In the Lam Rim, these disadvantages are presented mainly from the point of view of the results of cyclic existence, such as the different types of sufferings. Through that the disadvantages of cyclic existence are presented. Whereas what is unique to this text is the presentation of the disadvantages of cyclic existence through an explanation of the causes of cyclic existence. When you combine the two, then it is clear that without overcoming the causes of cyclic existence then one cannot overcome the results. The realisation of the disadvantages of cyclic existence that one must develop is the same; it is just the presentation that is different.

1.1.1.1. WHY IT IS NECESSARY TO CULTIVATE FEAR OF CYCLIC EXISTENCE

The reason why one must develop fear of cyclic existence is explained here.

On the basis of the influence of delusion and karma, that which continues to experience cyclic existence, being re-born in cyclic existence over and over again is what is called samsara. The reverse of that is considered as liberation, which is having severed the delusions and karma, and thus being free from being re-born again and again in this cyclic existence. That is what liberation is – being free from that conditioning.

When we consider the actual results of the influence of delusions and karma, we see that our contaminated body, the contaminated aggregates, is the result of the continuum of delusions and karma. When we see and experience the disadvantages of the contaminated aggregates, we realise that to overcome these disadvantages delusion and karma, which are the causes, must cease. Without the cessation of delusion and karma, one cannot overcome this condition of having contaminated aggregates.

One must first think about the disadvantages of cyclic existence in order to give up the contaminated actions which are its cause.

*When there is no end at all
To this ocean of suffering,
Why are you childish people
Not afraid of drowning in it?*

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Cyclic existence is explained with an analogy of a great ocean. We find this description in many of the teachings,

because if one were to be shipwrecked and stranded in the ocean, it would be almost impossible to escape, because of all the dangers that exist there. Similarly, once one is in cyclic existence, there are so many factors that bind us to that existence and it is extremely difficult to break free from it. Also there is a reference in other texts to the colour of the ocean resembling a milky colour. That makes the analogy even more vivid. A milky colour prevents one from seeing the depths and thus the dangers within the ocean. It is like an illusion, where you see the top of the ocean but may not be fully aware of the dangers that lurk beneath the surface. Thus cyclic existence is similar to a milky surface, which prevents you from seeing the actual dangers.

One must integrate these explanations of the disadvantages of cyclic existence into one's own experience, so that it can become a means for us to develop some renunciation, or the wish to be free from cyclic existence. If we were to just use it to look at others and see how they are suffering, then it would be hard to develop that renunciation within oneself. In relation to oneself, one can definitely see how one has fallen into the sea of cyclic existence, through the mere fact that we have obtained a body of contaminated aggregates.

As the commentary reads:

The beginningless cycle of rebirths is an ocean of suffering without any end at all, infested by thirty-six sea snake fetters of ignorance, pride and craving of worldly existence.

Here, there is reference to thirty-six fetters. There are, of course, different ways of classifying the fetters; however the main classification is the nine-fold classification of the fetters. What is translated here as fetters is from the Tibetan word *kun jor*. *Kun* has a connotation of 'all', so it refers to all types of suffering, while *jor* means that which makes you come into contact. So the literal meaning of *kun jor* is that which makes you come into contact with all types of suffering. The nine fetters are: attachment, anger, pride, ignorance, wrong views, view of superiority, doubt, jealousy and miserliness. When one honestly looks into oneself, one comes to realise how many of these fetters one has within oneself and then one can see how much one is immersed in samsaric existence.

As the commentary further explains:

It is churned by sea monsters of the sixty-two wrong views and fraught with whirlpools of birth and death.

Here sea monster is added to the list of analogies that include the ocean of cyclic existence, and the sea snake fetters. Within the ocean there are various types of fearsome creatures, and the sixty-two wrong views are like these unknown sea monsters. Again there is a whole list of different types of wrong views, and there are also different interpretations of the classifications of the different wrong views. We can go into more detail later, but one classification is based on the self and environment. In relation to the self: whether the self is permanent or impermanent, whether it is both or whether it is neither. In relation to the environment: is it permanent, impermanent, both or neither? In relation to self and the three times: was it existent in the past, or in the present, the future, all three or neither? So there are these views which are established as being wrong views because they are extreme views. There are also explanations of the wrong views in relation to the view of the transitory collections. However, we are not going into the details of the numbers right now, because all we need now is a basic understanding that there are different

types of wrong extreme views basically in relation to oneself and the environment. Those wrong views are likened to sea monsters and they are what bind us to cyclic existence. Fearsome sea monsters would, if you were stranded in the ocean, harm you or devour you, and bring a lot of suffering. Likewise, these wrong views are the factors that bring us tremendous suffering in cyclic existence.

The commentary further reads on:

Why are you ordinary childish people, drowning in it since beginningless time, not afraid?

Ordinary people have a great fear of drowning in the ocean, where it is hard to see its depth and expanse; this is similar to being in cyclic existence, where one cannot see or really understand the causes for being there. Just as it is hard to fathom the depth and the breadth of the ocean, it is even harder to understand the nature of cyclic existence, which goes back to beginningless time. So if ordinary beings are afraid of the ocean, which is a physical aspect that one can not measure and so forth, then how much more should one be actually afraid of cyclic existence, which is beginningless. The lines in the text indicate that one should develop the fear of such an existence.

If one should fear to drown in a sea whose depth and breadth are apparent, how much more so in this one!

This refers to the analogy of someone being stranded in an ocean, surrounded by fearsome creatures. If that situation is fearful then why wouldn't one be afraid of the situation of being in cyclic existence, which is beginningless and seemingly endless as well? Cyclic existence is a much more fearsome place to be in. Therefore the main point being made here is that for all these obvious reasons, one must definitely develop a strong fear of cyclic existence, and thus develop a wish to rid oneself of that situation. In Chandrakirti's *Entering the Middle Way* he explains in great detail again using the analogy of an ocean, how the beings within cyclic existence have been continuously tossed in waves of suffering and torment from beginningless time. Unless the causes and conditions for that are stopped, it seems to be endless as well. In that kind of situation where beings are experiencing so much suffering on a continual basis, anyone aware of the fact that they are in that situation would definitely develop a strong fear, and thus the wish to be free from that. The reasons why we should develop a fear of cyclic existence is described in great detail in the following section.

1.1.1.2. HOW TO GENERATE AVERSION TO IT

This heading means how to generate aversion towards cyclic existence, and it is sub-divided into four sections.

1.1.1.2.1. Inappropriateness of attachment to youth

This refers particularly to our appearance. We may develop great pride in our appearance, especially in our youth. What is explained in this heading is that being attached to our appearance serves as a cause for remaining in cyclic existence. Therefore the text explains how it is inappropriate to be attached to one's youth.

1.1.1.2.2. Appropriateness of fear, because of being governed by contaminated actions and disturbing attitudes and emotions

What this sub-heading explains is that fear is developed by realising that one is governed, or influenced by contaminated actions and disturbing attitudes. These are what are called the delusions. It is very true that for as long as we are governed by them we are under the control of

contaminated actions and delusions, and for as long as we are under their control, then we have no choice whatsoever in the type of rebirth we will have in a future lifetime. As ordinary beings we cannot say with any certainty that we will not be re-born in the lower realms. If one finds oneself under the influence of delusions and karma, then that is already a sign that one has no real control over one's future rebirths, which are entirely dependent on the kind of karmic imprints that we gather through the influence of delusions. Therefore when we think about this reality, it should actually bring about a really strong fear of being held cyclic existence. Through these explanations, one can actually come to understand how what we have now is a result of being in cyclic existence, and that understanding can really bring us in touch with reality.

Those who are intentionally re-born in cyclic existence are the bodhisattvas, who out of great compassion, come back to cyclic existence to benefit all sentient beings. This is explained in the text, *The Grounds and Paths of the Bodhisattva: A Commentary on the Bodhisattvas' Deeds*. However what is explained in this sub-heading is that by realising the great shortcomings of being in cyclic existence, one must then develop a very strong intention to avoid remaining in cyclic existence.

1.1.1.2.3. Advice to make effort to abandon the causes for rebirth in cyclic existence

1.1.1.2.4. Refuting that effort to abandon cyclic existence is purposeless and ineffectual

1.1.1.2.1. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF ATTACHMENT TO YOUTH

Assertion: Though cyclic existence has many disadvantages, those who are proud of their youth and so forth are not afraid.

Answer:

*Youth lies behind and then
Once more it is ahead. 152
Though [one imagines] it will last,
In this world it is like a race.*

It is definitely the case that for many of those who are in the prime of life, a strong pride in their youthful state prevents them from really putting the Dharma into practice, because they have a sense that everything is fine and going well. That particular delusion is called haughtiness.

As explained further in the commentary:

Since youth and the like do not last, pride on that account is unreasonable.

As explained here, no matter how youthful or how beautiful one may look, and how good the circumstances may be, that situation will not last. It will definitely change and pass away. The more we contemplate the fact that youth and the good circumstances of youth will not last long, the less attachment we will have to that state. Youth is impermanent and definitely subject to change, so it will not be long before youth has gone. Contemplating that fact will definitely help to reduce attachment to youth.

As the commentary further reads:

In this life youth lies behind old age; after death it is once more ahead and then again it is behind old age. Though one imagines one can remain young, in this world youth, old age and death compete ...

As explained here, it is definitely the case where in this life we say that youth comes first, and at a certain stage we leave youth behind and it becomes the past, and old age comes to the forefront. Then after a certain period of old age, we come

to the point where we have to experience death and then due to the influence of delusions and karma, we have to take rebirth again. Then youth will be in front again, and after that old age comes up and youth is left behind and one has to experience that cycle again. In this way, youth, old age and death follow each other in a circle, and that circle seems to go on and on. When we really contemplate that, we feel disgusted about this situation where we have to experience these states again and again with all the shortcomings that accompany them.

The commentary goes on to say:

Though one imagines one can remain young, in this world youth, old age and death compete as if in a race, claiming "I'm ahead, I'm ahead!" Since none can always remain ahead, it is unreasonable to feel proud because of that.

It is as though youth, old age and death are competing in a race and each one claims that they are ahead. But the fact remains that once one is ahead, the other follows and after that the third. In this way the cycle continues. Nevertheless when you are young you feel, 'I am ahead, I'm youthful and that is what is ahead right now'. That is how we are continuously immersed in this illusion. The main point that we need to contemplate is the reality of how the duration of these states is actually very short. Then strong attachment in relation to youth and so forth will definitely be reduced. We can see the actual result of contemplating in that way.

1.1.1.2.2. APPROPRIATENESS OF FEAR, BECAUSE OF BEING GOVERNED BY CONTAMINATED ACTIONS AND DISTURBING ATTITUDES AND EMOTIONS

Assertion: Though one must go on to another life, it is not frightening.

Answer:

*In worldly existence there is never
Rebirth of one's own free will. 153
Being under others' control,
Who with intelligence would be fearless?*

There are those who may feel, 'Oh well, I am going to take rebirth again, and go onto the next life. There is no big deal about that. It's okay, I can face that'.

As the commentary explains however:

In worldly existence childish beings like you do not have the power to will their own rebirth in good rebirths as gods, humans and so forth, but are under the control of other factors—contaminated actions and disturbing emotions.

As explained here, if you, who are under the control of contaminated actions and disturbing emotions, were to have the control to be reborn as you like, such as a good rebirth in a human or god realms, then that would be fine, and it would be appropriate for you to say that you are not afraid. But if you are under the control of contaminated actions and disturbing emotions, then you have no control over your birth whatsoever. So how can you claim not to be afraid of being reborn again. It is as explained in the teachings: when a great practitioner dies they have great joy in their mind rather than fear, because of their certainty as to where they will be reborn. A middling practitioner will have no fear in their mind, and even a lesser practitioner will have at the very least no regrets in their mind when they die.

As the text continues:

[For someone who is] under the control of other factors – contaminated actions and disturbing emotions. While in

such a frightening situation, what intelligent person would be fearless? One should feel repugnance at being controlled by contaminated actions and disturbing emotions.

As explained here, for as long someone is actually under the control of contaminated actions and delusions, it is definitely appropriate that one develops fear. There definitely should be fear about the next rebirth, as that is what decides where one will go for the rebirth after that. The main point that is being made here is that if one is influenced or controlled by karma and delusions then, as a natural consequence, there definitely should be fear. Even if one were to claim that one has no fear, the natural consequence of being controlled by the karma of delusions is that fear will be generated at the time of death.

1.1.1.2.3. ADVICE TO MAKE EFFORT TO ABANDON THE CAUSES FOR REBIRTH IN CYCLIC EXISTENCE

Having explained how the fear is appropriate and will arise, and thus having initially developed a fear of cyclic existence, the advice now is how to overcome or abandon the causes for rebirth and cyclic existence.

Assertion: Though unable to cut through worldly existence in this life because of being enthralled by pleasure, one will try to do so in a future rebirth.

Answer:

The future is endless and 154
You were always a common being.
Act so that it will never again
Be as it was in the past.

Here it is pointed out that we usually have the view, 'I think it is just too difficult to practise now, because I am so engrossed in the desires and the pleasures of this life. So therefore maybe in a future lifetime I will do better!'. If one had this view out of laziness and procrastination then of course that would be a negative context. However we do find individuals who, while they are engaging in a practice of Dharma, accumulate virtue. They state that in this life they are not able benefit others much because of their limitations. But while they are accumulating virtue and merit, they say that while they may not be able to benefit others much in this life, 'Maybe in a future lifetime, I will have better conditions to help others'. That is a form of aspiration or prayer. It is not as though they are not doing anything now, and are just wishing for something good in the future. But rather while they are engaging in virtue now, they understand their limitations and realise that can't really do much to benefit others now, but they wish that they may be able to be of benefit in the future; that is a good attitude.

As the commentary explains:

Future rebirths are endless and the past is beginningless.

Future rebirths are endless and the past is beginningless. Throughout the beginningless past you were always only a common being. If you are an ordinary being now, which means that you are without any of the realisations, then it is definitely safe to assume that in all past lifetimes, you have always been an ordinary being.

As the commentary further explains:

[That being the case] act so that the present and future will not be as meaningless as the past during which you failed to free yourself from worldly existence.

The fact that we are an ordinary being shows that we have been an ordinary being in all our past lifetimes, and that we have not been able to free ourselves from cyclic existence.

Having coming that realisation now, what we can do is to change the present, which will then change the future. The text is advising us that don't have remain as an ordinary being just as we have in all past lifetimes, which were meaningless, but rather we can put this life to meaningful use now, and for the future, so as to create the causes to free oneself.

The commentary also quotes from *The Array of Tree Trunks Sutra*:

Think of the past bodies you have meaninglessly wasted
Because of your desires.
From today engage in the discipline of seeking
enlightenment
And through that discipline destroy desire.

This sutra quite vividly explains how we have, in the past, wasted all our rebirths in a very meaningless way because of our desires. Therefore, as the sutra advises:

From today engage in the discipline of seeking
enlightenment
And through that discipline destroy desire.

So by exerting ourselves to overcome desire, we begin to set the basis for developing liberation and enlightenment.

The main point being made here is that there is no one who wouldn't wish to achieve the ultimate results of liberation and enlightenment. In the short term, if we were given a choice, we would all definitely also wish for a good rebirth. However while we wish to achieve that, it is as though we intentionally destroy the causes for achieving that result by engaging in desire. Therefore it is as if we are wasting the causes for achieving the result that we want.

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