

Study Group – Aryadeva's 400 Verses

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As usual it would be appropriate to set a motivation for receiving the teachings, such as generating the thought, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will listen to the advice and instructions in the teachings and engage in putting them into practice as best as I can'.

1.1.1. Considering the general faults of cyclic existence

1.1.1.2. HOW TO GENERATE AVERSION TO IT (CONT.)

1.1.1.2.4. REFUTING THAT EFFORT TO ABANDON CYCLIC EXISTENCE IS PURPOSELESS AND INEFFECTUAL

This is sub-divided into two categories:

1.1.1.2.4.1. The actual meaning

1.1.1.2.4.2. Repudiating hope for the future without effort in this life

1.1.1.2.4.1. The actual meaning

The conjunction of a listener, What is to be heard and exponent Is very rare. In brief the cycle of Rebirths neither has nor has not an end. 155

The verse and the explanation of it is in response to this question:

Does the cycle of rebirth have an end or not? If it does one will gain freedom without the need for effort. If it does not effort to cut through the cycle of birth and death is senseless since despite effort one will not gain freedom?

This may seem quite a fair question to ask. Since there is going to be an end cyclic existence anyway why strive towards achieving that end. Likewise if there is no end to cyclic existence then it is also meaningless to strive to end it. From an ordinary perspective it seems quite a logical doubt to have, why should one make effort to try to overcome samsara when it is going to end any way? And if there is no end then there is no point in trying to end samsara.

The main point of the explanation of the verse is that there is an end to samsara for those who have both acquired and used the favourable conditions that contribute towards overcoming samsara. Whereas there will be no end to samsara for those who don't have or don't use the favourable conditions.

As the commentary states:

A listener is one who has attained a special life of leisure and fortune...

This refers to the eight freedoms and the ten endowments that contribute to the perfect human rebirth.

... and is ready to generate spiritual paths.

Not only are there the conditions for a human rebirth, but there are those who are ready to generate the special spiritual path. This refers to the specific realisations of emptiness, which serve as the antidote that overcomes delusions.

What is to be heard refers to discourses teaching suchness [or emptiness], and their exponents are the Tathagatas. These three occur in the world simultaneously as rarely as the udambara flower.

Using the analogy of this rare flower, those who achieve the combination of the perfect human life with leisure and endowments, and who strive to achieve realisations, and who come into contact with the Tathagata's teaching are very rare.

The reason why it is rare for the Tathagata or enlightened Buddha to give teachings on this planet is because the causes that need to be created in order to achieve enlightenment are very rare. This means that the accumulation of merit takes place over countless eons, and it is very rare to find those who are prepared to make a concerted effort strive to accumulate merit over countless eons. Not only are the causes rare but so too is the effort required. So the result, which is becoming an enlightened buddha who gives teachings to the world, is thus very rare.

We can use also the analogy in a contemporary worldly sense: we only rarely see people wearing expensive jewellery made of gold, diamonds and other expensive gems, because the causes to obtain those precious gems are very rare. For example, if an earring cost a million dollars it would be hard to find ordinary people wearing such an ornament, because acquiring a million dollars is very difficult.

'The three rare ones' refers specifically to the Tathagata, who is the founder or the exponent of the teachings; the teaching itself, which is the Dharma; and the followers of the teaching, who are the Sangha. These three are said to be the three supreme rare ones in this world.

The Dharma refers not only to the actual oral teachings of the Buddha but also to the realisations that are derived from the teachings. These fall into two categories, cessation and the path. The realisations of the path specifically refer to the realisations of emptiness, and those who have obtained the realisations of emptiness and the cessation of delusions are the Sangha. Thus they can be understood as being very rare.

Having explained what the three rare ones refers to, the commentary continues,

Thus, in brief, for a person who has three rare and supreme prerequisites for the growth of spiritual paths, the cycle of rebirth is not without an end...

In our case we may not have had the fortune to meet the actual Buddha or Tathagata who came to this world in the supreme emanation, however we have come into contact with great spiritual teachers who we call spiritual friends, and who serve as the representative of the buddhas. These great masters have practised and studied and prayed over many lifetimes to be able to expound the Buddha's teachings. So they are like actual representations of the Buddha—when we come into contact with them, receiving personal guidance and instructions from them, they are like the buddhas for us. Having met these great teachers is equivalent of having met the buddhas and through their presentations we also meet the Buddha's teachings. They are also called the Sangha. So in this way we have the great fortune to meet with what we call the three supreme ones, and if we fortunate beings put what they teach into practice then there will be an end to samsara.

As mentioned earlier, the Dharma refers to the specific realisations that are obtained from having listened to the

teachings and received instructions, and that realisation of emptiness becomes the main means for overcoming samsara. The direct perception of emptiness definitely serves as a direct antidote to overcome the delusions that are the cause of samsara. Thus there is an end to samsara.

From the moment someone obtains a realisation of emptiness they are directly able to see the possibility of overcoming the delusions—the main delusion being the ignorance of grasping at the self. When the root delusion, grasping at the self, can be seen, then the process for abandoning it can definitely be seen. At that instant it is seen that cyclic existence at both a general and a personal level can be severed and completely overcome. Having gained the realisation of emptiness one gains ultimate confidence in one's ability to abandon the causes of cyclic existence. Once causes are identified the results of those causes will naturally be eradicated. The main cause of samsara is the grasping at the self, and when it is seen that it is possible to completely eradicate that self-grasping, then the result is that the experience of samsara will also be overcome.

As it further explains in the commentary:

In the case of a person for whom they are not assembled, it does not have an end because one cannot determine precisely when the cycle of rebirths will cease.

What is being indicated here is that those beings who do not have the prerequisites of the three supreme rare ones will not have an end to samsara, because they will not be able to engage in eradicating the causes for overcoming samsara. Actually, in other texts that he composed, the author of the commentary, Gyaltsab Je, clearly stated that while there was an end to samsara for the individual, he could not foresee an end to samsara in general, i.e. for all living beings. However other teachings such as *Root Wisdom* indicate there is an end to samsara for all beings. It is a matter of interpretation. In any case what is being presented here is that there is an end to samsara for those who have the intact conditions, whereas for those who lack the conditions there cannot be an end.

In relation to one's own personal practice it is quite irrelevant to try to find an answer as to whether there is an end to samsara in general or not. As indicated in every teaching, what is clear is that there will be no end to one's own samsara unless we acquire the causes to cease existing in samsara, which as mentioned before is gaining the realisations that serve as an antidote for overcoming the delusions. Even if one did conclude that there was an end to samsara in general, there is no possibility for ending one's own samsara unless one applies the causes. That is the understanding that one should gain here.

As the commentary further explains:

With regard also to its final mode of existence, it is not specified as either having or not having an end in terms of ultimate existence.

What this specifically refers to is the fact that when the question as to whether or not there is an end to samsara was asked of the Buddha he did not give an immediate answer. It is referred to as one of the unanswered questions. It is the same as when the Buddha did not give an answer as to whether there or not there is a self. If the Buddha had said there is a self the person who asked the question may have had the type of mentality that could have led them to a certain extreme, whereas if he had said there was no self they could have been led into another extreme. It is said that

there is an implicit understanding to be gained from the fact that the Buddha did not give an answer.

Here it is to be understood that the implicit understanding of the Buddha's reason for not directly answering the question as to whether or not there is an end to samsara, is that if the conditions are present then there is an end to samsara, but if the conditions are not present then there can be no end to samsara.

If the Buddha were to say that there is no end to samsara then a listener with limited capacity could completely misunderstand and think that there was no end at all, and might even imply that there could be no causes or conditions that would lead to the end of samsara. So in order to protect them from that extreme the Buddha didn't say that there is no end to samsara. If he had said that there is an end to samsara then again the listener of limited capacity might be led to the extreme of thinking that the end of samsara can be achieved without any causes and conditions, and thus not even engage in striving to break free of samsara. So in order to prevent these extreme views the Buddha remained silent.

Those who are wise need to endeavour to accumulate the causes and conditions that will lead to the achievement of the state of being free from samsara.

The main point one must derive from this explanation is that if one were to include oneself as one of the wise, one needs to understand the implications of what an end to samsara means, which is that if the causes and conditions to end samsara are assembled, then one can use those causes and conditions to cease existing in samsara. It would be a wise being who could do that.

1.1.1.2.4.2. Repudiating hope for the future without effort in this life

We can really take this outline as sound personal instruction, as it is a point that has to be considered well in relation to our practice. We must contemplate the fact that we have the perfect conditions right now, such as having met with flawless spiritual teachers, in the sense that they present the unmistakable meaning of the Buddha's teachings in an unbroken lineage. That is really a very fortunate condition that we have. We also have the opportunity to study and practise those teachings and we are surrounded by the Sangha—those who have realisations. We really do have the perfect conditions right now. So one must try to use this fortunate situation for the best purpose, which is to accumulate the causes to overcome samsara.

In this outline Aryadeva is really giving us very personal and sound advice, indicating that if we do not to use the perfect conditions we have now, it will be extremely difficult to find these conditions in the future. So one must strive to take the full opportunity of having met this great and fortunate state.

The next verse shows how it is difficult to obtain these conditions again in the future. It reads:

*Most people cling to
An unwholesome direction.
Thus most common beings
Certainly go to bad rebirths.* 156

The verse serves as an answer to the assertion that:

As long as scriptural texts exist, there will be spiritual friends and oral transmissions of them. One may therefore try to end worldly existence in other rebirths.

Again, this is a seemingly logical assertion. The spiritual texts do exist now and there will be spiritual friends giving the teachings continuously. That being the case why couldn't one continue to study and practice in future lifetimes? However what is explained in the verse is that even though there are teachers who expound the teachings, and the teachings remain, those who listen to the teachings and strive to practise them are very rare.

As it explains in the commentary:

Though the texts and the other two may exist, it is difficult to be proper listener for the following reasons:...

It clearly mentions here that despite having met the a teacher and listened to the teachings it is very difficult for the following reason:

...Most people cling to the ten non-virtuous paths of action, which is an unwholesome direction...

Here unwholesome is a reference to the Tibetan word *thumba mepa*, which is the opposite of *thumpa*, which means wholesome. Wholesome deeds refers, for example, to adopting the ten virtues, which is refraining from negative deeds. Those who refrain from the ten non-virtues and thus engage in the ten virtues are engaging in wholesome deeds, while those who adopt the ten non-virtues are following an unwholesome direction. As the commentary reads on:

...and thus through the power of their actions they are reborn in different states. Since most common beings therefore go to the bad rebirths...

The reality is that most beings don't naturally engage in the ten virtuous deeds and thus follow a wholesome direction, but rather engage regularly and naturally in the ten non-virtuous deeds. Thus they continually create the causes to go to the lower rebirths.

So as a conclusion, the author of the commentary explains that:

...one should make effort to hear the teaching while the two prerequisites are assembled. Not to strive for liberation as if one's head were on fire...

Although there is another analogy in the text this mention of one's head being on fire serves as an additional analogy. If one notices that one's head is starting to catch fire one would engage in every means to put the fire out immediately. Being in samsara is said to be an even graver situation than that. So to leave things as they are, and not do anything about it will bring disastrous results that will be experienced later. Thus one must strive to put all one's effort into overcoming the causes of samsara and thus be liberated. This is a personal instruction.

It is most meaningful if one takes this instruction as personal advice. When you think about it, one would definitely be wasting the great opportunity that one has now if one were not to put it into use to strive to create the causes to achieve liberation, at the very least. As the teachings mention again and again these conditions will not last and we can lose them. In comparison to many others we are really fortunate. Many don't even recognise that they are in samsara, or don't understand the gravity of their situation, or don't have the means to overcome the causes for samsara, which is a really sad situation. All we can do is feel pity and have compassion for them. As they don't have the means they cannot be blamed for doing nothing. We, however, do have the means, and we have the necessary conditions. If we were not to put them into use then it would be a great waste.

1.1.2. Specifically abandoning attachment to happy rebirths

This is sub-divided into two.

1.1.2.1. Aversion should be cultivated even to happy rebirths

1.1.2.2. Showing that to remain in cyclic existence out of attachment is like insanity

1.1.2.1. AVERSION SHOULD BE CULTIVATED EVEN TO HAPPY REBIRTHS

Assertion: Although bad rebirths must be avoided because they are states without freedom, full of many kinds of suffering, one need not feel aversion to good rebirths since they are happy states.

Answer: It is proper to feel aversion towards good rebirths just as one does towards bad ones.

On earth the maturation of ill deeds

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Is seen to be only deleterious.

Thus to the wise the world appears

Similar to a slaughterhouse.

The assertion relates to our limited perceptions of the world as ordinary beings. It is quite obvious that we would not want to experience the suffering of, for example, the animal realm at any price. When we think about it, it would be quite unimaginable for us to experience all the limitations that the animals have, thus a wish to not have to experience the suffering state of an animal occurs quite naturally. However it might be more difficult for us to feel aversion towards the state of a wealthy human being. When we think of people who seem to have an abundance of wealth and plentiful possessions and experiences, we do seem to have a sense of longing to achieve such a state. We see value in having wealth, abundance, good status and so forth, and we see these worldly material things as being something that we would like to have.

As the commentary explains:

The remains of previous contaminated actions are seen only to the debilitated even those in good rebirth—deformed limbs and members, defective senses, poverty and so forth are unwanted maturation of ill deeds of humans beings living on earth. Thus to the wise exalted, worldly existence seems like a slaughterhouse...

What this is indicating is that in comparison with lower rebirths a human rebirth is a desirable, fortunate rebirth. Nevertheless within human existence there are so many types of sufferings such as are mentioned here—having deformed limbs and defective senses and living in poverty and so forth. This is explained in the commentary as being the results of previous karma. It is said that the ripening result of heavy negative karma is experienced in the lower realms, whereas the remaining karma not purified in the lower realms will be experienced in the human realms. Thus these great sufferings are said to be the ripening of previous negative karma. So when we see these plentiful obvious sufferings we can then see how a human rebirth is undesirable as well.

The 'unwanted maturation of ill deeds' also refers to specifically to the fact that sufferings are experienced even though they are not wanted. It is not as though one voluntarily accepts the sufferings experienced by those who are reborn in a state of poverty or with deformed limbs and so forth. There are so many other unwanted sufferings that are experienced by other human beings, as well as ourselves.

These are all what we call the maturation of the ill deeds or negative karma of the past. All these sufferings are prevalent

here in the human existence as well as in other rebirths. That being the case, worldly existence in general seems like a slaughterhouse to the wise and exalted. If we were to enter a slaughterhouse, or a place where there has been a lot of killing, we would feel a kind of energy that is unsettling and uncomfortable. In the slaughterhouses there would definitely be feelings of disgust as well as sadness. Likewise if one were to go to a cemetery there is a sense of unsettledness and sadness in one's mind, because of the feeling of proximity to the dead. Similarly it is said that the exalted beings that we call the noble Bodhisattvas, or those who have the realisations of emptiness, will have a feeling of disgust and sadness towards cyclic existence in its entirety.

The main reference here is to the sadness that is felt within the minds of noble beings when they look at cyclic existence. In relation to our own experience we can definitely get some sense of feeling of sadness when we reflect on the limitations and all the suffering that is experienced in the human realm. When we reflect on the conditions of all the people who are impoverished, struggling for life or in war stricken situations, that can bring an immediate sadness in our minds even at our level. However, in general, what is being explained here is that there is definitely a difference in the attitudes of an ordinary worldly being and a noble bodhisattva towards cyclic existence, or existence in the human realm. The perception of a noble bodhisattva is completely different to that of an ordinary being.

1.1.2.2. SHOWING THAT TO REMAIN IN CYCLIC EXISTENCE OUT OF ATTACHMENT IS LIKE INSANITY

Question: If the wise see worldly existence like a slaughterhouse, why do ordinary people feel no horror?

Answer: They are as insane as a mad elephant

Question: Insane in what way?

This means how could one see ordinary beings as being insane like an elephant.

Answer:

*If "insane" means 158
That one's mind is unstable,
What wise person would say that those
In worldly existence are not insane.*

In the world someone whose mind that does not function with normal stability due to an imbalance of physical constituents is called insane.

When there is imbalance in the physical constituents, which refers to the nerves and stems in the brain, a person starts to utter things that are meaningless or quite absurd, and they may also act in absurd ways. These signs are an indication of insanity in the worldly sense.

As the commentary further explains:

If that is insanity, what intelligent person would claim that those in the worldly existence are not insane? Ordinary people who want many outrageous things and speak impulsively do not have sound minds.

What is being clearly indicated here is that the description of insanity actually fits the actions and deeds of worldly beings talking about and striving to achieve things that are really quite meaningless. The actions and deeds of a worldly being would definitely be called an act of insanity according to the perception of the exalted, wise beings. Therefore, 'what intelligent person would claim that those in worldly existence are not insane?' is a rhetorical question, which

implies that worldly beings would be considered as insane by the wise and exalted.

From the exalted wise beings' point of view the indications of insanity include not having a stable mind, having an agitated mind, and not being focussed. When we refer to that description to ourselves we find that it is very true that we find it very hard to keep our mind focused even for a few moments, and that it is constantly moving about in every direction.

Thus a wise being clearly seeing this will definitely exert themselves to overcoming this act of insanity of being in cyclic existence, and in every way apply the antidotes for overcoming what we call samsara, or cyclic existence.

1.2. Abandoning contaminated actions, the cause for birth there

This has three subheadings

1.2.1. Advice to abandon actions projecting rebirth there

1.2.2. Why it is necessary to abandon them

1.2.3. Actual way to abandon them

The explanations for these headings that can be presented in our next session.

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