

# Study Group – Aryadeva's 400 Verses

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As always it is appropriate to find a comfortable posture. While sitting comfortably, generate a good motivation by bringing the mind inward, distancing it from distractions and keeping it focussed on the teachings to be received. Then generate a positive motivation such as, 'In order to liberate all sentient beings from all suffering I need to achieve enlightenment, and for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice as best as I can'.

### 1.2.3.1.3.4. Repudiating their accumulation for the sake of power and wealth

Assertion: Though sense objects should be disparaged, one ought to create merit for the sake of kingship, a source of superlative pleasure.

Answer: It is inappropriate to do so.

*For one not in need of authority, 171  
Practices for that [end] are meaningless.  
Whoever strives for authority  
Is called a fool among men.*

This is indicating that even if one has followed all the previous reasonings of how attachment to sensual pleasures is not appropriate, and has come to accept them in general, there is still a remaining doubt: it might be worthwhile to become a king, because that is a really pleasurable state. After considering the riches and status of a king, ordinary people may definitely have the instinctive thought, 'If I were to be a king then everything will be fine, and I would be really happy'. The answer to this assertion is that it is inappropriate to think in this way.

One should understand that desiring to be a king out of mere attachment to the pleasures and high status associated with that is, as explained here, inappropriate. However if one were to have the motivation of using the high status, great power and influence of king to benefit other beings, then it would be appropriate to strive to achieve kingship. That is a different situation. The commentary explains that the verse relates to desiring the status of a king because of attachment to not only the pleasures of that state, but also the capacity to control others. As the commentary reads:

For adepts who have gained mental control and can effortlessly accomplish whatever they desire, practices such as giving for the sake of attaining worldly authority are senseless.

The great yogis, who have gained control over their own mind, already have the power to effortlessly accomplish whatever they desire because of their mental control. Therefore, it is senseless for such yogis to engage in the practices of generosity with an intention to obtain worldly authority, because they already have that result now.

As the commentary further explains:

Whoever strives for the authority of mere verbal domination, [referring to having authority over others] is a fool among men, because he seeks kingship, a source of great futility.

Anyone engaging in practices such as generosity, merely to obtain kingship in order to dominate others is a fool, because of the fact that achieving even the high status of kingship is futile. As mentioned in previous verses such a state is still a source of great suffering, and therefore futile. Thus to engage in practices to obtain such a state would be foolish.

The main point that one should derive from this explanation is that as one attains more mental control through one's practices, one reaches a significant level of being able to control one's mind. A natural consequence of that will be to effortlessly obtain what one wishes for. One can also say that this is a by-product of being able to control the mind.

To focus on a temporary goal like kingship, where one will again be creating the causes for more suffering and so forth, rather than on a goal from which one gains so much more benefit, would be foolish. To take it a little further, the main point being made here is that gaining mental control is achieved by obtaining the states of liberation and enlightenment. If, instead of that one were to strive to obtain a futile, temporary goal such as the high status of kingship in cyclic existence, then that would be futile and foolish. That is the main point that one should understand.

### 1.2.3.1.3.5. Repudiating the accumulation of actions out of attachment to subsequent wealth

Assertion: One should do meritorious actions, since one wants their effects (such as wealth) in future lives.

Answer:

*With a view to future effects 172  
You grasp at practices out of greed.  
When you see the future outcome  
Why are you not afraid?*

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

If, on realizing that there will be future effects such as wealth, one grasps at practices like giving, out of greed and attachment, one will have to experience many bad rebirths as a result of that attachment. When you see that the future outcome of such attachment is a bad rebirth, aren't you afraid?

While the good effects of practising generosity and morality (which are obtaining a good rebirth i.e. a sound body and wealth) in the future are acknowledged, if one were to practice generosity and moral ethics out of attachment to those effects, then the result of that attachment will be the creation of the negative karma to take a lower rebirth. And shouldn't one be afraid of being reborn in the lower rebirths? Thus, what is being implied here is that attachment to the goals of pleasurable experiences in the future will in fact produce the causes to be reborn in lower rebirths. One should be afraid of that and thus abandon attachment.

### 1.2.3.2. REPUDIATING THE ACCUMULATION OF UNMERITORIOUS ACTIONS<sup>1</sup>

*Merit is in every way 173  
Just like a wage for a wage earner.  
How could those who do not want  
[Even] virtue do what is non-virtuous?*

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Just like a wage earned by a worker, merit will come to resemble a payment. Therefore the wise do not do even meritorious actions motivated by attachment.

<sup>1</sup> This was given on 1 May 2007 as Repudiating accumulation of demeritorious actions

Experiencing the results of merit resembles the payment of a wage for work that has been done. It is the temporary gain that one receives from the hard work that one has done. Using that analogy, it would be futile to waste one's energy by then spending that money on meaningless things. That's one way that one can understand this explanation.

Another way to understand the explanation is that others could give us presents out of ulterior motives – they may want something back in return, or they may want a favour. If we are very gullible and naïve and don't understand their ulterior motive, we might fall into their trap, and thus have to do a lot for them in return. Indulging in the pleasures that one receives from one's own merit is like that. If one uses up that merit in that way, it is as if you are being fooled by the merit. One has worked so hard for the merit, but then uses it in a futile way. Thus, as the commentary further explains:

When the wise do not want even the virtue that produces worldly existence, because of seeing it as a cause for the cycle of rebirths, how could they do demeritorious actions which are non-virtuous?

What is being explained here is that the wise understand that creating merit out of attachment to sensual goals and pleasures is a temporary goal and only a further cause to be re-born in cyclic existence, and they do not engage in meritorious actions just to be reborn in cyclic existence. So there is no question that they refrain from non-virtuous actions. To illustrate this further, the wise ones should be understood as being those beings who have gained the realisation of emptiness. These beings clearly understand that engaging in virtuous actions out of attachment would only be a cause to be re-born again in cyclic existence. Thus they completely refrain from engaging in virtuous actions out of attachment. That being the case there is no question that the wise would also avoid non-virtuous actions, which are a cause for suffering in cyclic existence.

What we can extract as personal instruction for ourselves, is to understand that engaging in virtuous actions out of attachment will be only a cause to further one's existence in samsara. When we engage in virtue out of a wish to be free from cyclic existence, to be liberated, and to ultimately achieve enlightenment for the sake of other beings, we should be mindful that we do not have strong attachment towards our practice and the results of our practice.

A good way of ensuring that we are detached about our practice and its results is to establish good motivation in the beginning and in our dedication at the end. If our motivation is imbued with renunciation and a bodhicitta attitude, then whatever practice we do and whatever merit we gain will become the sole cause for achieving liberation and becoming free from the delusions, and ultimately achieving enlightenment for the sake of other beings.

We need not worry about our own well-being. As mentioned earlier, when we gain control over our mind, the things that we wish for normally will appear spontaneously as a by-product of our mental control. If we focus on the ultimate goal, we do not even have to think about the temporary goals; we don't even have to wish for them as they will manifest spontaneously. It is much more worthwhile to aim to make sure that from the very beginning we are focussed on our main goal and not allow ourselves to become attached to temporary goals.

One can also relate these explanations to the mind-training practices, where the main advice is to engage in mind-training until one reaches a point where one can exchange

worldly attitudes for Dharma attitudes. What is specifically mentioned is changing the worldly attitude in relation to gain and loss, where one has a natural tendency to strive towards gain (or whatever is profitable) which we relate to well-being and pleasures. We strive towards that, and thus we have a very strong attachment to worldly gains and the pleasures one derives from that.

Conversely, we have a very strong aversion towards anything that is unpleasant, or suffering; we have an immediate inclination to completely avoid it, and see it as being completely negative. We need to develop our mental training so that we get to the point where we can welcome sufferings, seeing them as a means to enhance our practice, and where we avoid attachment to gains. When our attitude is changed in this way, then we have reached a significant level in mind-training. So, one should understand the main points that are made here, along with the points that are made in the mind-training practices.

Changing our attitude to the worldly dharmas into a positive frame of mind is not meant to indicate that we should abandon all happiness and only suffer. That is not the proper understanding. What it is saying is that the cause of our suffering is attachment to the worldly gains. When one neutralises even the temporary sufferings that one has to experience anyway, then that can become a means for enhancing one's practice to point of gaining ultimate happiness. Actually, when we refer to our practices, we can see how the eight worldly concerns<sup>2</sup> influence our attitudes, and how they affect the purity of our practice. The main obstacles that arise in our practices really seem to be the worldly concerns. It is because our practices are stained with these worldly concerns, that we are not able to become true practitioners. Thus if we wish for our practice to be pure, we must definitely overcome the worldly concerns.

### ***1.3. Explaining the need to abandon contaminated actions***

This category is further sub-divided into two:

1.3.1. The wise, who understand reality, abandon attachment and reach liberation

1.3.2. When the wise do not enjoy even a high rebirth out of attachment, their enjoyment of states consistent with aversion is impossible

#### ***1.3.1. The wise, who understand reality, abandon attachment and reach liberation***

*Whoever sees phenomena as like  
A collection of mechanical devices  
And like illusory beings,  
Most clearly reaches the excellent state*

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As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Only childish people like cyclic existence. The wise who directly perceive dependent arising as lacking inherent existence see external and internal phenomena as like a collection of mechanical devices made of wood that look like men and women. Those who see phenomena as empty of inherent existence, yet appearing like illusory people, traverse cyclic existence and most clearly reach the excellent states of liberation and omniscience.

<sup>2</sup> On 27 September 2005 these were listed as: a liking for gain and a dislike of loss; a liking for praise and dislike of criticism; a liking for being spoken to pleasantly and a dislike of being spoken to unpleasantly; a liking for happiness and a dislike of unhappiness.

What is being indicated here is that childish people are beings who are attached to the sensory or worldly pleasures. Attachment to the causes of the cyclic existence is the equivalent of liking cyclic existence. Thus the childish, meaning those who purposely engage in the causes of cyclic existence, are the ones who are attached to the sensual pleasures of the cyclic existence. This is in contrast to the wise, who are defined in the commentary as those who directly perceive dependent arising as lacking inherent existence.

The wise have a direct understanding and realisation of emptiness, which affects their perception and view of the world and the beings within the world. This means that they see men and women as 'mechanical devices made out of wood'. The analogy is that mechanical devices made to look like men and women might appear to be real if one didn't know that they were made out of inanimate substances. But once one knows that they are mechanical devices, then even though they appear to be like men and women, one does not believe that they are. One knows that it is not a reality.

To wise beings who have the direct understanding of emptiness, the world and the beings within that world appear to be illusory. Because they see things as being dependent arisings, they know that even though they appear to be inherently existent, that is not the case, as there is no real inherent existence. Thus they see phenomena as being illusory because they see things as dependent arisings. Even though things appear as inherently existent, they know that this is not the case. As a result they are detached about the objects within the cyclic existence. This detachment and their further practices leads them to the ultimate states. As mentioned here, they

...traverse cyclic existence and most clearly reach the excellent states of liberation and omniscience [meaning enlightenment].

Thus the understanding they have, and their view of the world leads them to the ultimate state of liberation and enlightenment. What is being indicated here is that one should not follow the attitudes of the childish, who are attached to cyclic existence and continuously remain in cyclic existence. Rather, one should adopt the view of the wise beings, which is to strive towards achieving the wisdom of understanding emptiness, which leads us to the ultimate goals.

The earlier chapters explained how one should not be attached to the sensual pleasures. They were a preliminary to the main point that is being made here. The attempt to initially reduce attachment to sensual pleasures is to ultimately to overcome actual attachment to the sensual pleasures, i.e. to completely uproot the delusions of attachment, anger and ignorance. This is done by gaining the realisation of emptiness, which is necessary to free oneself from cyclic existence. The realisation of emptiness is the main tool to completely uproot the delusions, leading one to reach liberation and enlightenment.

*1.3.2. When the wise do not enjoy even a high rebirth out of attachment, their enjoyment of states consistent with aversion is impossible*

What is being reiterated here is that the wise do not enjoy a high rebirth in cyclic existence out of attachment.

*For those who do not enjoy  
Any objects in cyclic existence  
It is altogether impossible  
To take pleasure in this [world].*

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As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

When those who are wise with regard to the meaning of reality do not enjoy or crave even those objects in cyclic existence which are normally enjoyable, how could they enjoy the source of birth, aging and so forth which normally cause aversion? Thus for them there is never any joy out of attachment to cyclic existence.

There is not much one won't understand from that explanation, which is elucidated very clearly. So I will not elaborate further.

Gyaltsab Rinpoche's summarising stanza is:

Thinking thoroughly about impermanence and suffering  
Give up craving for objects such as visual form,  
The cause for this bottomless boundless ocean of  
suffering,  
And strive to attain unsurpassable enlightenment.

'Thinking thoroughly about impermanence and suffering' refers to the explanations given earlier about impermanence and suffering. One contemplates thoroughly about how things are in the nature of impermanence and how contaminated objects are in the nature of suffering. One should give up craving for objects such as the visual forms, because craving or attachment to sensual objects such as the visual forms is the cause for the bottomless, boundless ocean of suffering in cyclic existence. So one should give up the attachment or craving for these objects, and thus strive towards attaining the unsurpassable state of enlightenment.

## 2. Presenting the name of the chapter

*This is the seventh chapter from the Four Hundred on the Yogic Deeds, showing the means to give up clinging to objects of enjoyment which humans desire.*

That completes the seventh chapter.

## **CHAPTER VIII: SHOWING THE METHODS OF FULLY TRAINING THE STUDENT'S MINDSTREAM MAKING IT RECEPTIVE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPIRITUAL PATHS**

The chapter is divided into two parts:

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**

From the sequence of material in the earlier chapters, specifically the seventh chapter, we understand that they were a preparation for receiving the teaching on emptiness. The explanation of overcoming delusions was mainly in reference to the manifest delusions, and here, in the eighth chapter we find explanations about how to overcome the root of the delusions, and in accordance with this it actually gives the teachings on emptiness. One should try to derive this meaning and understanding from the outlines.

The explanation of the material in the chapter is sub-divided into three:

#### 1.1. Why disturbing emotions can be abandoned

Before actually explaining the antidote for overcoming the delusions, the chapter explains by explaining how disturbing emotions can be abandoned, and gives reasons why they can be abandoned.

#### 1.2. Explaining extensively how to abandon disturbing emotions

Having explained how it is possible to abandon disturbing emotions this section explains how to actually engage in abandoning them.

1.3. Showing by analogy that though birth connecting one with the next existence is beginningless, it has an end

This is indicating that though there was no beginning to one's samsaric rebirths, there is an end, and this is shown with an analogy.

### ***1.1. Why disturbing emotions can be abandoned***

This is sub-divided into two:

1.1.1. Actual meaning

1.1.2. Showing how it is possible to abandon disturbing emotions

Question: How do we escape from the bondage of desire to which we have been accustomed since beginningless time?

Answer:

*Just as friendship between people  
Who disagree does not last long,  
Desire does not last long  
When the faults of all things are recognised?* 176

As the commentary explains the meaning of this verse:

A friendship motivated by desire between people who are not amicable and who disagree does not last long. Similarly desire does not last long for an adept who recognizes the faults in all external and internal things which give rise to many unwanted consequences. When properly investigated, its root is found to be unstable and thus one can get rid of it. A friendship motivated by desire between people who are not amicable and who disagree does not last long.

This is a vivid analogy. When friendship is based on a mere attachment, it does not last long. One can understand this in relation to for example, the passage in the commentary on the Bodhicitta mind. In this text, it explains how one very object, such as a beautiful figure of a woman can appear as an object of desire for some, whereas for others it can appear as being like a corpse, and yet others see it as edible food. What is being explained here is that when someone with a longing for a beautiful figure comes into contact with the beautiful figure of a woman, and sees the object, they experience desire. Whereas when a meditator who is meditating on the faults of the body, reflects on a beautiful figure of a woman, because of their detailed analysis that body may appear as being equivalent to viewing a corpse. Wild animals however will see that body as food. So depending on one's perception one figure can appear in different ways.

An object can be either an object of desire, or an object of aversion that causes anger to arise, or an object inducing ignorance or stupor in the mind. That same object can be the causes of these different emotions of attachment, anger or ignorance. What this indicates is that when an object is viewed with a deluded mind, there is no stability. Thus with a friendship based on attachment, because the very basis of that friendship comes from a deluded mind of attachment, it is natural that it will not last. As long as that deluded state of mind of attachment is present, it is liable to change at any time.

The reason why a friendship that is based on attachment does not last long is because the initial attraction to the object is obscured by attachment. So, one may not initially

see the faults of the other. When the faults become apparent, then the strong attachment one has toward the friend or partner slowly fades away, and as they start seeing the faults, then aversion may arise. That is what causes the friendship not to last. We see many examples of that in our relationships. We don't have to really go further into this, because it is very apparent.

Using the fact that friendship does not last when faults are seen in the object as an analogy, we see that it is the same with delusions. As mentioned here, adepts or the yogis recognise the faults in all external things. They see the faults of the delusions and how they give rise to unwanted consequences. When properly investigated, the root of delusions is found to be unstable and thus delusions can be overcome.

The analogy that is given here in the text is a very vivid one that we can all relate to. The main point of the analogy is that just as the friendship that is based on attachment does not last long when you see faults in the friend, likewise when you see faults of attachment and other delusions, then you can get rid of them, because you will be able to see that they are not stable.

The analogy is a vivid one, because we definitely see it happening a lot in relationships. Initially, due to very strong attachment the faults may not be apparent. We can see that initially there may be strong attachment from both sides, therefore the relationship seems to be soaring and is really very good. But eventually when one begins to see faults in the other, then the attachment might reduce and then aversion starts to arise. Because of seeing faults in the other, then they may try to distance themselves. If that were to happen simultaneously, there may be less of a problem. But where the problem arises is that while one partner sees fault in the other, the other may be still holding on with attachment and seeing everything as still being attractive. So the suffering arises in the one who is still holding on to the exaggerated attractiveness of the other, while the other is seeing faults and distancing themselves.

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