
Study Group – Aryadeva's 400 Verses

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1.2. Explaining extensively how to abandon disturbing emotions

1.2.3. Stages leading to the meaning of the fundamental mode of existence

1.2.3.5. THROUGH FAMILIARISATION IN THIS WAY,

NIRVANA CAN DEFINITELY BE ATTAINED

1.2.3.5.2. WHY SOME DO NOT GAIN RELEASE ALTHOUGH RELEASE IS GAINED BY UNDERSTANDING SUCHNESS

Question: If there are many who understand suchness [or emptiness] why does one not see people who are released from worldly existence?

This question is in relation to the doubt that if it is true that one obtains liberation by realising emptiness, then why do we not see many who are liberated?

Answer: Though one does see some, mere intention does not create results. The coming together of causes and conditions does, yet this is very rare.

What this indicates (which is also the main point of the following verse) is that even though there may be many who wish to achieve liberation, that mere wish in itself cannot serve as a cause to bring about the result of liberation. There are many causes and conditions that have to come together to achieve that end.

Accomplishment of all intended Actions is extremely uncommon. 198
It is not that nirvana is absent here
But conjunction and the released are rare.

The first two lines of the verse explicitly state that it is very uncommon to obtain goals just by merely wishing to achieve them. This is actually a very important point that we should take as personal advice. We all have grand wishes and we want to achieve high realisations and so forth. However, as indicated here, merely having a wish without acquiring the appropriate causes and conditions to achieve that goal, doesn't bring those results. This is something that one has to keep in mind; if one wishes to achieve a goal, one must acquire the causes and conditions.

As indicated here in commentary the coming together of causes and conditions will bring about the result of realisation and ultimately liberation, however this is very rare. What is being indicated here is that although the results can be obtained by the accumulation of causes and conditions, being able to accumulate all the necessary causes and conditions is very rare or, according to the literal meaning of the Tibetan term, very difficult.

As the commentary further explains:

The accomplishment, merely through intention, of actions that result as intended is extremely uncommon not only in the case of liberation but in all cases.

It is clearly explained here how it is also very difficult to obtain all the causes and conditions for a desired worldly result, let alone achieving the causes and conditions for liberation. With normal mundane wishes such as the wish to obtain wealth, if we don't actually engage in the causes and conditions to obtain money, we will never gain any. The necessary causes and conditions to obtain money are to get a good job! If one merely has a wish for a good job but does not do anything about finding that job, that again will not bring about the result of having a good job. Thus to obtain money there are many causes and conditions involved in obtaining that result. One cannot obtain something just with a mere wish. This is actually very sound and practical advice.

As the commentary continues:

It is not that no one aspires to attain nirvana in the Buddha's teaching, but that causes and conditions – external conditions such as a spiritual friend, and internal ones such as the correct mental approach – very seldom combine and come together, which is why the released are rare.

What is being clearly explained here is that by hearing the Buddha's teaching and by studying it, the wish or aspiration to achieve liberation will definitely occur. The reason why liberation is difficult to obtain isn't because no one aspires to achieve liberation, but because it is difficult to meet with the necessary external and internal conditions, either because they are rare or because it is hard for them to come together.

As explained here, the external conditions rely on a spiritual friend or a spiritual teacher and the internal conditions involve having the correct mental approach. With regard to the internal conditions, we may wish for liberation, yet we normally engage in incorrect mental approaches on a daily basis. This refers to all the delusions and so forth with which we are most familiar. Thus the internal conditions of a correct mental approach are very difficult for us to gather.

The reason, according to the commentary is 'why the released are rare', which means that those who are to obtain liberation are very rare.

One of the correct mental approaches in relation to achieving liberation is cultivating detachment. When we look into how much we engage in the correct mental approach, which is detachment, we may find that that is very seldom, whereas the opposite, which is attachment, occurs rapidly, and continuously. Thus rather than acquiring the causes and conditions for liberation, we are acquiring the causes and conditions to further ourselves from that goal.

In relation to the external condition of finding 'spiritual friend', an authentic spiritual friend is one with all the characteristics intact, i.e. a spiritual friend who has a realisation of emptiness. So when we look into the qualities required to be an authentic spiritual friend, we see that, actually, that also can be very difficult to find.

1.2.4. Advice that disturbing attitudes and emotions can certainly be brought to an end

Question: How can one be sure there is an end to this multitude of disturbing attitudes and emotions which

have continued to occur for so long, since beginningless time?

Answer:

*On hearing that the body lacks good qualities, 199
Attachment does not last long.
Will not all disturbing attitudes
End by means of this very path?*

In relation to the first line in the Tibetan version, the commentary explains:

... the body lacks good qualities in that its nature is to disintegrate non matter how long it is cared for with all kinds of things, that it is ungrateful and difficult to nurture, ...

This translation says 'difficult to nurture', but the Tibetan says, 'difficult to understand the nature of the body'. Even though it is difficult to understand the nature of the body, when this is explained to the intelligent, who know how to think analytically, then their attachment to their body will not last long. As explained in the commentary it is the nature of our body that although it has all these faults, ordinary beings only see its attractiveness and contemplate that.

This obscures the reality of the body, which is that it lacks good qualities and that it is in its nature to disintegrate and so forth. Here 'the intelligent' refers to those who have an understanding of emptiness. When the nature of the body is described to such intelligent beings, they are immediately able to overcome attachment to their body, because of their intelligence and ability to use analytical wisdom.

Similarly why should it not be possible to end all disturbing attitudes and emotions through the path that consists of meditating on dependent arising free from extremes of elaboration?

Here, the commentary explains that just as it is possible to overcome long-standing attachment to the body, other attachments or delusions can also be overcome. When the text refers to 'the path that consists of meditating on dependent arising' this refers to the path of seeing. In other words, through the direct realisation of emptiness, one can definitely overcome all other disturbing emotions.

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

As the outline explains, our life in samsara is said to be beginningless. There is no one point that we can say is the beginning of our life. However even though that is the case, there can be an end to samsaric life. That is explained with an analogy that we have also referred to in the past.

Question: How can the continuity of rebirths occurring since beginningless time come to an end?

Answer:

*Just as the end of a seed is seen 200
Though it has no beginning,
When the causes are incomplete
Birth, too, will not occur.*

As the commentary explains:

Although a seed, such as a barley seed, has no beginning, its end is seen when it is burnt by fire and the like.

This is quite an explicit analogy which refers to the continuum of a seed. A seed is the result of a previous seed. Likewise, that seed will have had a previous seed. In this way, when we go back to trying to find the first seed, the beginning of any continuum of a seed, we find that we cannot possibly trace it back, and be able to say 'This seed is the beginning of the continuum of a seed'. However there can be an end to the continuum of a particular seed when, for example, it is burnt by fire, so that it doesn't have any potential to sprout anymore. As the commentary reads:

Similarly the causes for birth in worldly existence are made incomplete by eliminating all conceptions of a personal self. Thus though the strength of the antidote, rebirth in worldly existence due to contaminated actions and disturbing attitudes and emotions will not occur again.

As clearly explained here, just as with the earlier analogy of the cessation of a seed, cessation of worldly or samsaric existence (even though there is no beginning) can be achieved by eliminating all conceptions of a personal self. When grasping at the self, which is the main or root cause of cyclic existence is overcome, then as explained here, cyclic existence ceases. As the commentary also explains:

Thus though the strength of the antidote, rebirth in worldly existence due to contaminated actions and disturbing attitudes and emotions will not occur again.

A further analogy is:

Once a butterlamp's fuel is exhausted it will not burn.

When the fuel of a butter lamp is exhausted it cannot burn any longer. It is similar with worldly existence. Involuntary rebirth in worldly existence or samsara under the influence of delusions and contaminated actions will cease when the root cause of self-grasping is overcome. That can be clearly understood with the earlier analogy. So it is good for us to use that analogy to reflect on how we can view samsara.

The commentary also quotes from the works from the master Buddhapalita:

Though seeing transmigrators as empty,
Since you wish to remove their suffering
You have toiled for a long time.
This is most amazing!

Master Buddhapalita was renowned as a most skilled scholar, particularly of the Madhyamika or Middle Way. Even hearing or uttering the name 'Buddhapalita', is said to remove a lot of negative karma from our mind. This quote from Buddhapalita explicitly refers to the great deeds of a bodhisattva. It explains that even though for them involuntary samsaric rebirth has ceased through the wisdom realising emptiness, like a fire that destroys the seeds of delusions and karma, bodhisattvas (who have achieved that wisdom) out of their great love and compassion for sentient beings, voluntarily take rebirth into cyclic existence over and over again, in order to

benefit sentient beings. So in order to work for the benefit of sentient beings, bodhisattvas voluntarily come back into cyclic existence. That is said to be because of their great prayers and aspirations to benefit sentient beings. As it says, 'This is most amazing!'

Gyaltsab Je explains that:

The deeds of Bodhisattvas, who are concerned with the welfare of sentient beings though they see that transmigrators do not exist inherently, are most amazing.

Even though only a short explanation is given here, it refers to the most amazing fact that even though all the causes and conditions to come into cyclic existence have ceased through having developed the wisdom realising emptiness, and using that to completely overcome the root causes, the fact that bodhisattvas voluntarily come back into cyclic existence is most amazing.

As is also mentioned in other teachings, bodhisattvas cannot bear the suffering of sentient beings and come back into cyclic existence to benefit sentient beings, through their prayers and aspiration. This shows the power of the prayers and aspirations that we make now. So if we make strong prayers and aspirations to benefit sentient beings then, when we gain realisations of emptiness, we will not become immersed in the bliss of those realisations. Rather, we are constantly reminded to come back again to continue to benefit sentient beings. Thus the power of prayers and aspirations are illustrated here. The personal advice is, as mentioned in the commentary:

Therefore, one should emulate them.

These points have been explained earlier in other teachings, however it is good to reflect on the main points again. A bodhisattva, who has gained direct realisations of emptiness, could not be involuntarily reborn into cyclic existence, because the causes to be reborn into cyclic existence have completely ceased. Yet they do choose to be reborn again due to their prayers and aspirations to benefit sentient beings. That is why, as it is as explained here, 'This is most amazing!'

The summarising stanza by Gyel-tsap Rinpoche is:

Develop recognition that through contaminated
action,
Even to attain the best states as gods and humans is
imprisonment.
Though familiarity with meditation on dependent
arising free from extremes,
Make yourself a suitable vessel for the Great Vehicle.

What is being indicated here is that the mind has been made suitable to receive the teachings of emptiness through the earlier explanations and the teachings on emptiness contained in this chapter.

2. Presenting the name of the chapter

This is the eighth chapter from the Four Hundred on the Yogic Deeds, on training the student.

It is good to put everything into the context of how the whole text is a presentation leading an individual being to enlightenment by presenting the **basis**, which is the Two Truths; the **method** which is the paths of the

accumulation of merit and wisdom; and the **results**, which are the two types of enlightened buddha bodies to be obtained. Thus in the context of the whole path leading to enlightenment, we can see how the basis, which is the Two Truths (conventional truth and ultimate truth) is being presented.

Now we go more specifically into presenting ultimate truth which then leads into the accumulation of merit and wisdom, which in turn leads to the ultimate result.

3.2.2. EXPLAINING THE STAGES OF THE PATHS DEPENDENT ON ULTIMATE TRUTH¹

This is sub-divided into two:

3.2.2.1. Extensively explaining ultimate truth

3.2.2.2. Showing how to meditate on settling [the procedure between] spiritual guides and students by way of [explaining] the purpose of the chapters and eliminating remaining counter-arguments by misguided opponents

3.2.2.1. EXTENSIVELY EXPLAINING ULTIMATE TRUTH

As the definition explains, that which is in accordance to the actual mode of existence, or how things actually exist, is ultimate truth. Whereas, that which appears to be reality, but which contradicts the actual mode of its existence is what is called a conventional truth.

This section is sub-divided into three categories:

3.2.2.1.1. General refutation of true existence by refuting permanent functional phenomena

3.2.2.1.2. Individual refutation of truly existent functional phenomena: Refuting the self

3.2.2.1.3. Refuting the inherent existence of production, duration and disintegration, the characteristics of products

¹ The numbering of this heading refers back to the initial structure of the text outlined on 7 March 2006 and 14 March 2006. The numbering of each chapter starts anew to keep the number of digits under control.

The text has four subdivisions:

1. Meaning of the title

2. Translators prostration

3. Meaning of the text

4. Colophon or conclusion

Section 3 'Meaning of the text' has two subdivisions:

3.1 An overview of the text

3.2 Specific explanation of the different chapters

The specific explanation of the different chapters has two outlines:

3.2.1. Explaining the stages of the path dependent on illusory conventional truth

3.2.2. Explaining the stages of the path dependent on ultimate truth

CHAPTER IX: GENERAL REFUTATION OF TRUE EXISTENCE BY REFUTING PERMANENT FUNCTIONAL PHENOMENA²

The chapter is sub-divided into two main categories:

1. Explanation of the material in the chapter
2. Presenting the name of the chapter

1. Explanation of the material in the chapter

This heading is sub-divided into three main sub-divisions:

- 1.1. Refuting permanent functional phenomena in general
- 1.2. Refuting them individually
- 1.3. Arguing the unsuitability of refuting true existence

1.1. Refuting permanent functional phenomena in general

This is sub-divided into two:

- 1.1.1. Actual meaning
- 1.1.2. Refuting the rejoinder

1.1.1. Actual meaning

By cleansing the mindstream with the flowing water of means by which to understand suchness, the previous chapters have made it a vessel fit for the nectar of suchness.

The earlier chapters dealt mainly with conventional reality or conventional truth. In order to understand ultimate truth, one must first establish what conventional truth is, as it is only with a sound understanding of conventional truth that one attempt to understand ultimate truth.

The remaining chapters will explain how products which arise and disintegrate do not have even the slightest essence of inherent existence.

All are produced for their effect 201
Thus none are permanent.
There are no Tathagatas other than
Subduers [who know] things as they are.

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse thus:

In the world it is accepted that when a laborer works hard for his wage, it is for the result and not because it is his nature to do so.

Even though the work someone engages in might be difficult, hard and so forth, and therefore not something that he would naturally engage in, he does the work because of the result that he obtains, which is the wage. It is not as if he is addicted to work and just wants to work without any reason! He works in order to gain a wage. That is what is widely accepted. I think that the analogy is to be understood as meaning that receiving wages is not something that occurs naturally, but only as a result of work that is carried out.

As the commentary further explains:

Similarly all external and internal functional phenomena do not arise of their own accord. Since they are produced solely through a multifarious aggregation of factors consisting of interrelated causes

and effects, functional things are produced for their effects.

The main thing being refuted here is inherent existence, or the permanent existence of functional things. Of course, functional things are not permanent, and here, when inherent existence is refuted, it is refuted as a consequence of seeing that if functional things were to be inherently existent, then that would be similar to seeing them as permanently existent. That is what is being refuted.

Within the schools of Buddhist tenets, those who accept inherent existence are the lower Buddhist schools below the Svatantrika. The Sautrantika, Vaibashika and Cittamatin (or Mind Only) schools are the Buddhist tenets who accept inherent existence. The Middle Way school does not accept inherent existence. So according to the Madhyamaka school, accepting inherent existence would be similar to accepting permanent existence, meaning that functional things would also be permanent. So, just as receiving a wage is an effect of having engaged in the work to achieve that result, similarly, all functional phenomena come about as a result of many factors coming together.

As mentioned in the commentary:

...factors consisting of interrelated causes and effects, functional things are produced for their effects....

Just as with the analogy, all functional phenomena are products or effects of their causes. They arise because of their causes and cannot arise from their own side or inherently. What is also being explained here is the fact that 'interrelated causes' has a deeper meaning. Not only do the causes themselves have to depend on the effects but the effects depend on the causes. What this connotes is that the causes, which are the causes of the effects that are produced, are not inherently existent, and also the effects themselves are not inherently existent. Rather, they are inter-dependent. Thus the effects and their causes all arise because of an interdependent relationship. That again rules out any possibility of either the causes or the effects having inherent existence.

...functional things are produced for their effects...

This means that that functional things are produced to bring about their effects, which shows their inter-relationship.

Thus they are not permanent, inherently produced or truly existent. They do not have an essence able to sustain analysis, nor do they exist as things in and of themselves.

Then the commentary explains the second part of the verse:

Only Subduers because they have the abilities of perfected body, speech and mind, directly know impermanence, emptiness and all things without exception as they are. Since no one else does, there are no other Tathagatas.

What is being explained clearly here is that only someone who has the complete ability to know is suitable to be called a tathagata.

Moreover the Teacher said [referring to the Buddha], "Whatever is produced inevitably ceases, for aging

² For ease of reference each chapter starts the numbering anew.
Chapters 8 and 9

and death are conditioned by birth.” Thus, since production is for the sake of disintegration, nothing endures by way of its own entity.

This points out the very nature of production is that it will disintegrate, and that disintegration is also dependent on the production, so therefore:

... nothing endures by way of its own entity.

This means that there is nothing which is inherently sustaining from its own side.

As the commentary further reads:

Some refute permanence and true existence by virtue of autonomous reasons. The unfeasibility of this is explained in Candrakirti’s commentary.

What is being explained here is that even though permanence and true existence are refuted by the Prasangika, they cannot be refuted with autonomous reasons. This refers to the structure of a syllogism, where there is a subject, a predicate, and a reason. The lower Buddhist schools, the schools below the Prasangika, use a reasoning known as autonomous reasons to prove impermanence or the lack of true existence and so forth. However according to the Prasangika, one does not use autonomous reasons.

As the commentary further explains:

There is no commonly appearing subject, such as a sprout, posited by tenets, in relation to which a direct valid cognition perceiving it is valid, since all except Prasangikas assert that it is valid in relation to a sprout existing by way of its own character. Prasangikas assert this is impossible.

What is being explained here is that there is no commonly appearing subject. For example, if we take the syllogism, ‘a sprout is impermanent, because it is produced’ then the subject is the sprout. According to the lower Buddhist schools, it has to be a valid cognition perceiving it as valid. In other words, the validity of the sprout is established as it appears to the valid cognition. Thus it is said to be valid.

Whereas the Prasangika ‘assert that it is valid in relation to a sprout existing by way of its own character’. What this means is that according to the Prasangika, the validity of the sprout is not established solely by how it appears: it appears to be inherently existent (or to exist by its own characteristics), and that cannot be established as valid. Thus the manner of how to establish the subject (which is a sprout), is different in the lower Buddhist schools compared to how the Prasangika assert it. These points have been explained earlier, so is good to revise the notes from previous teachings.³

The main point here is that according to the Prasangika, when a valid cognition establishes a sprout, for example, when the eye perception establishes the validity of a sprout, it establishes it by seeing the characteristics as existing from their own side, however the validity of the sprout as existing does not have to be a wrong consciousness. The validity is just in seeing the sprout, and it doesn’t have to be correct in every way, in that it

doesn’t have to establish the correctness of it not existing from its own side.

For the lower Buddhist schools, the sprout is established as valid and unmistakable, as it appears to the consciousness. Thus when a sprout appears, it appears unmistakably to exist from its own side, and is thus established as being valid. According to the lower schools, validity is established when one establishes the validity of a sprout and the consciousness perceives the sprout as being unmistakable.

However according to the Prasangika, in that case one would have to then accept that the sprout does exist from its own side (or with its own characteristics), which cannot be the case.

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Edited Version*

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³ This material was covered extensively between 18 May 2004 and 21 September 2004.