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## 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 a motivation such as, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. For that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice as best as possible'.

### **1.2.5.2.3. SUITABILITY OF THE COMPLETE ABANDONMENT OF CONCEPTIONS OF A SELF AS LIBERATION**

*It is certain that those liberated* 224  
*From suffering have no other [self].*  
*Therefore the end of the self*  
*Should always be affirmed as good.*

As the commentary explains:

It is certain that in a state of nirvana, people who have gained liberation from suffering by completely abandoning the contaminated aggregates through the total elimination of disturbing attitudes and emotions have no other causeless permanent self which does not depend on aggregates.

When someone gains liberation it is the liberation from suffering by completely abandoning the contaminated aggregates through the total elimination of disturbing attitudes. So the total elimination of disturbing attitudes together with the abandonment of the contaminated aggregates is liberation. However there is no other causeless permanent self that does not depend on the aggregates. That being the case when a person attains liberation they abandon the contaminated aggregates.

What is implied here is that a person still depends on the aggregates. In other words, no person can attain nirvana or liberation without depending on aggregates. Even though the contaminated aggregates are abandoned because disturbing attitudes are completely abandoned, one cannot then conclude that there is a causeless permanent self at that time. That is not the case. Rather there is a self that is dependent on the aggregates, and it is this self which attains liberation.

Therefore people who aspire to become free should always affirm that the complete ending forever of conceptions of a self is good and should never assert existence of such a useless liberated self.

'Useless liberated self' refers to a permanent self. Thus one should not assert that there is a permanent liberated self, but rather a self which is dependent on the aggregates. Not only is this explicitly stating that one cannot assert a permanent self, but it also implies that one cannot assert a self that is independently existent or inherently existent, because a self that does not rely on anything else would be an inherently existent self or a truly existent self.

### **1.3. Arguing the unsuitability of refuting true existence**

Having from our own side, (the Prasangika viewpoint) established a non-inherently existent self, the next verse raises a debate with that assertion.

*The conventional is preferable* 225  
*But the ultimate never is.*  
*Ordinary people have some [belief in this]*  
*But none in the ultimate.*

As the commentary reads:

If during liberation there is no liberated self, and nirvana which is termed the ultimate is said to be the mere ending of conceptions of a self through the non-recurrence of that which is composite, what is the purpose of striving for such an ultimate? It is preferable for those interested in their own good to accept conventionalities like eyes, sprouts and so forth but not to assert any ultimate, for ordinary people have some belief in virtuous and non-virtuous actions...

This verse doesn't seem to be an original root text verse. It has been added to posit the principle question that will be refuted by the verses in chapter 10. The assertion is that if there is no liberated self at the time of liberation then this is in accordance with the assertions of the non-buddhist schools. If there is no self at the time of liberation then there is no point in reaching that state of nirvana as the self will cease to exist. So it is much more preferable to abide by the conventionalities of ordinary beings, who at least have the understandings of virtue and so forth. That seems to be preferable to achieving the state of nirvana where everything becomes nothing because there is no self existence at that time.

The summarising stanza by Gyaltsab Rinpoche reads:

Discovering that external and internal dependently arising  
Phenomena exist in reliance, and understanding  
Their emptiness of existence by way of their own entities,  
Grow wise in the meaning of the middle way free from extremes.

The main point being emphasised here is that gaining an understanding of dependently arising phenomena will help to establish the understanding of emptiness. 'Discovering that external and internal dependent arising phenomena exist in reliance' means that everything that exists (both internal and external) is a dependent arising phenomena. This means that the very existence of internal and external phenomena is dependent on causes and conditions. For them to exist at all, they have to depend on causes and conditions, thus they are known to be interdependent phenomena.

Establishing things as being interdependent, or dependent on causes and conditions in itself, shows how things do not exist independently, or from their own side. 'Their emptiness of existence by way of their own entities', explains that one can understand their existence by way of their own entity. This means that the very entities of phenomena, which is that they are dependently arisen phenomena, will in themselves help

to establish the understanding of how things are empty of inherent existence. Thus 'grow wise in the meaning of the middle way free from extremes'; What is being established here is the profound understanding of emptiness - the middle way.

Thus the understanding of interdependent origination should complement the understanding of emptiness, which means the emptiness of inherent existence. If things were to independently exist in and of themselves then they would be inherently existent, and exist from their own side. However, because things are not independent and do not exist in and of themselves from their own side, they are empty. Thus they are in the nature of emptiness.

## 2. Presenting the name of the chapter

*This is the ninth chapter from the Four Hundred on the Yogic Deeds showing how to meditate on the refutation of permanent functional phenomena.*

### **3.2.2.1.2. INDIVIDUAL REFUTATION OF TRULY EXISTENT FUNCTIONAL PHENOMENA<sup>1</sup>**

Here again it is good for one to understand the synonyms of truly existent phenomena. From the Prasangika point of view truly existent phenomena, inherently existent phenomena, and independently existent phenomena all mean the same thing. True existence or inherent existence or existing from its own side all mean the same thing and this is what is being refuted; that things or phenomena exist from their own side or are truly existent.

The individual refutation of truly existent functional phenomena is sub-divided into five:

- 3.2.2.1.2.1. Refuting the self
- 3.2.2.1.2.2. Refuting truly existent time
- 3.2.2.1.2.3. Refuting true existence of that which is viewed
- 3.2.2.1.2.4. Refuting true existence of sense objects and organs
- 3.2.2.1.2.5. Refuting extreme conceptions

## **CHAPTER X: REFUTING THE SELF<sup>2</sup>**

This chapter has two main sections.

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

### **1. Explanation of the material of the chapter**

The material in this chapter is divided into three main categories:

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<sup>1</sup> This heading and numbering comes from the full heading structure of the text as outlined on 7 March 2006, 14 March 2006, and 10 July 2007.  
3.2.2. Explaining the stages of the path dependent on ultimate truth  
3.2.2.1. Extensively explaining ultimate truth  
3.2.2.1.2. Individual refutation of truly existent functional phenomena  
The 5 subheadings of this heading form the content of chapters 10 to 14.

<sup>2</sup> The numbering of each chapter starts anew to keep the number of digits under control.

- 1.1. Individual refutations of the self
- 1.2. General refutation
- 1.3. Eliminating any fault of annihilation with regard to selflessness

### **1.1. Individual refutations of the self**

The individual refutations of the self has four subdivisions:

- 1.1.1. Refuting the Vaisesika self
- 1.1.2. Refuting the self imputed by the Samkyas
- 1.1.3. Refuting the self imputed by the Naiyayikas
- 1.1.4. Explaining other refutations like that of the attributes and so forth

#### **1.1.1. Refuting the Vaisesika self**

It is good to remember the five main features of a self that the Vaisesika asserted which were explained earlier.<sup>3</sup>

One must understand that the refutation here is against the self that the non-buddhist Vaisesikas assert. It is not refuting the self entirely because, of course, all Buddhist schools assert a self. Furthermore a self, a person and a being are synonymous. So when we talk about a person or a being, they are synonymous with self. What is being refuted is the misinterpreted self of the non-buddhist schools.

As mentioned previously there are certain attributes of a self that all non-buddhist schools assert in common, and that is what is being negated: a self is permanent as it does not change from moment to moment; it does not depend on parts, and it is independent. We should keep the three main features of being permanent, partless and independent in mind, because those are the main features that are being refuted.

The Buddhist schools assert that there is a self but not a self of person, whereas the non-buddhist schools assert that there is a self of a person that is either a substantially existent self or a permanently existent self. Within the Buddhist schools there are some which assert that there is a substantially existent self but no Buddhist school asserts a permanent self.

Refuting the Vaisesika self is sub-divided into two:

- 1.1.1.1. Refuting the nature of the self
- 1.1.1.2. Refuting the proofs

#### **1.1.1.1. REFUTING THE NATURE OF THE SELF**

This heading is then sub-divided into three:

- 1.1.1.1.1. The actual meaning
- 1.1.1.1.2. Refuting the rejoinder
- 1.1.1.1.3. [Unwanted or unfeasible] conclusion that generating the thought 'I' when observing another's self is reasonable

##### **1.1.1.1.1. THE ACTUAL MEANING**

What is being established here is how the Vaisesika assert the self.

If the so-called self existed by way of its own entity [it should be seen in the state of nirvana]. Fearing its discontinuation because it is not seen during nirvana,

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<sup>3</sup> The nine features of a self according to the Vaisesika can be found in footnote four of chapter 10, page 360.

they say, "The conventional is preferable," and so forth. However the self does not exist by way of its own entity, for if it did it should be male, female or neuter, but that is inappropriate.

*When the inner self is not  
Female, male or neuter,  
It is only out of ignorance  
That you think your own self male.* 226

This is refuting the assertion that there is a self which exists independently, a truly existent self that is without causes and conditions. The commentary states, 'However the self does not exist by way of its own entity' where 'own entity' means existing from its own side. If the self were to exist by way of its own entity then it should be either male or female or neuter, but we cannot assert the self to be either of the three.

It explicitly says here that the self should be male, female or neuter. This indicates that if a self were to exist of its own entity then it would have to exist either as an entirely male entity, or an entirely female entity or an entirely neuter entity by itself, and that is obviously not the case. The existence of a male entity is a dependent arising because it relates to certain features that are called male. Likewise because of the dependent arising features of a female entity you can call certain beings female. The Tibetan word for female *bume* has the connotation of a non-protruding organ, so that which does not have a protruding organ is a female. This shows that male or female or neuter is dependent on the features that characterise the entity. The Tibetan word *ma-ning* which is translated in the text as neuter, actually means having both organs. Apparently there are beings who have both organs in these times.

If the self were to exist permanently one would have to always exist as a male, or always as a female or always as a neuter. That, however, is not the case.

As the commentary further explains

The Forders [which refers to this non-buddhist school] assert two selves an inner self and an outer self. The first is inside the body, and this inner agent which makes the very sense organs engage with objects is the focus of the conception "I".

It is explicitly explained here that what they assert as the inner self is the agent within the body, which makes the various sense organs engage with the objects, and which is the focus of the conception of 'I'.

The second [external self] is a combination of the body and sense organs which assists the first [self].

The following quote refutes that inner and outer self, which this non-buddhist school asserts is a self that exists by way of its own entity:

It follows that the inner self does not exist by way of its own entity. If it did a woman should in future lives too only ever be a woman, yet change is observed. Femaleness and so forth are also not attributes of the self. Thus it follows that the inner agential person does not exist by way of its own entity...

What is being explained here is that if the self were to exist by way of its own entity, then a female, for example, because of existing by way of its own entity, meaning that

it exists from its own side, would have to always exist in that way. This means that a female would always have to be a female. However that goes against what we notice in lifetimes of definite change.

The commentary continues:

... for when the inner self is neither female, male or neuter, it is just out ignorant confusion that you imagine your own self male. It is a fabrication like mistaking a mottled rope for a snake.

The refutation is, 'If a self were to exist by way of its own entity, a self of a male or female would always have to exist as that entity - a female always as a female, and a male always as a male. Otherwise you could not distinguish between male, female or neuter. Thus you are asserting a self to exist in that way only out of ignorant confusion'. The analogy that they give here is that mistakenly perceiving a mottled rope as a snake would only happen to someone who is ignorant of the fact that it is a rope. For someone who understands that it is a rope, that mistaken perception of a snake would not be there, and the person understands it as a rope.

#### **1.1.1.1.2. REFUTING THE REJOINER**

*Assertion:* Male gender, female gender and so forth are marks of the outer self. Through its connection with this the inner self is male and so forth.

*Answer:* It follows that because of their connection with the outer self, the four great external elements would also be a male self and so forth. If that were so, all the elements would be the person, since for truly existent functional things there can be no differences between what is and is not male and so forth.

*When all the elements are not  
Male female or neuter,  
How is it that which depends on them  
Male, female or neuter?* 227

As the commentary continues:

When all elements do not have male, female or neuter gender, how can the inner self which relies upon the outer self—those elements—feasibly be male, female or neuter? It cannot. If all elements were male, female or neuter, it would follow that even during the early stages of the foetus, maleness and so forth should be observable.

If you say that the features of a male and female are because of the connection that the inner self has with the external self, then we would have to say that all external elements would have those features, because of the connection of the self with the external elements and so forth. However we do not see that all external elements have those features. Furthermore, if that were the case then if you were to say, in connection to the inner self, that the features exist by their own nature, or by their own side. This means that if those features were to exist in and of themselves without having to depend on other conditions they would already be distinguished by their nature from the beginning, and this would be so even at the early foetal stage.

The teachings describe all the stages from conception. In the beginning the foetus is like a creamy substance and then it becomes hardened a bit, like yoghurt, and so forth. So at these early stages just after conception we would

have to be able to distinguish the foetus as a male, female or neuter. But we can't distinguish between male, female or neuter at that time, which shows that the external conditions are required in order to establish the gender characteristics, and they do not exist by themselves, or from their own side.

The refutation of the non-buddhist school is based on their assertion of a self existing by way of its own nature or an inherently existing self. Thus, as mentioned earlier, they assert that there is an inner self and an outer self, and that the outer self assists the inner self. It is because the external self has the features of male, female or neuter that you can call the inner self male, female or neuter. That is how the external self assists the internal self, and that is how you can distinguish between the different sexes.

However if the refutation is based on the assertion of an inherently existent self, a self which exists in and of itself, then the external self would also have to exist in that way. It would also have to exist as either an inherently existent male or an inherently existent female. 'If you claim that which distinguishes the sexes is the inner nature, then you would also have to claim that the external elements would have to be able to be distinguished in that way. Furthermore if the internal self is inherently existent then the external self also has to exist in that way.'

Then the non-buddhist schools raise an objection saying that:

The same error is entailed for you.

'You also talk about a dependently arising self who is dependent on aggregates'; (which is how the Buddhists establish the self.) So the non-buddhist school throws the question back to the Buddhists and raises an objection by saying, 'The same error is entailed to you', meaning, 'If you establish that the self is dependent on aggregates then just as you refute me when I say that external self assists in the internal self, that same error entails to you too.

However the Buddhist school says, 'That does not entail to us:

Since we impute gender in dependence upon elements which lack inherent existence, there is no error.

This means that the self is a dependent arising which relies upon the aggregates, which are also dependently arisen. 'Thus we don't have that fault', say the Buddhists.

**1.1.1.1.3. [UNWANTED] CONCLUSION GENERATING THE THOUGHT 'I' WHEN OBSERVING ANOTHER'S SELF IS REASONABLE**

It follows that the personal self is not established by way of its own entity. If it were, just as the thought "blue" arises universally in relation to blue, the thought "I" should arise in Yajna [the name of a person] when he observes Devadatta's self, but it does not.

*Your self is not myself and thus there is  
No such self, since it is not ascertained.  
Does the conception not arise  
In relation to impermanent things?* 228

Remembering that non-buddhist school asserts that the self exists by way of its own entity, the main point here is that if the self were to exist by way of its own entity, then when you saw someone else's self, you would, by default, have to generate the feeling of 'I'. However that is not the case. When you see someone else's basis of a self you do not instinctively simply feel 'me' or 'I' based on their aggregates. If a self were to exist by way of its own entity, then by default that would have to be the case, and obviously that is not the case.

As the commentary reads:

Since that which is yourself is not my own self, it follows that the object of your conception of "I" is not a self existing by way of its own entity, because it is not ascertained as an object of my conception of "I" or my attachment to the self.

The analogy being used here to emphasise the point is, 'just as the thought "blue" arises universally in relation to blue', similarly the conception of 'I' should arise whenever you view another person.

What is being explained here is that if the self were to be inherently existent self, or an entity existing in and of itself, then whoever views that self would instinctively have to feel 'me' just as like the analogy, where everyone who sees blue commonly perceives it as being blue. There is no distinction in the perception of the blue object, so whoever sees blue would immediately think, 'I am seeing blue'.

Likewise if the self were to be an entity existing by way of itself then whoever views the self would have to think 'me'. This means that if you view someone else's self normally you would not think, 'This is me', because obviously it is a separate entity. However it is not like viewing blue, where everyone thinks, 'I am seeing blue' at the same time, as everyone has their own distinctive self.

Then as the commentary concludes:

Therefore doesn't the thought "I" arise in relation to impermanent things called form and so forth? The self is only imputed.

'The thought "I" arise[s] in relation to impermanent things called form and so forth' means that the thought 'I' arises in relation to both physical and mental aggregates. The conception of 'I' arises in dependence upon the aggregates, and the causes and conditions to bring about the aggregates and so forth. Thus the self is only a merely imputed phenomenon; it is not a phenomenon which arises by itself, or which is an independently existent phenomena. Rather it is an imputed phenomenon.

Putting it another way to make clearer, the conception of 'I' is dependent on causes and conditions, and if the causes and conditions are not present then the conception of 'I' cannot arise. That is the main point. Thus the reason why you do not have the conception 'I' when you see someone else's aggregates and so forth is because the causes and conditions for the conception of 'I' do not come together. The causes and conditions for 'I' to arise in relation to one's self are the dependently arisen aggregates related to oneself. The 'I' is imputed in dependence on those causes and conditions of the

aggregates coming together, and thus the conception of 'I' arises in relation to that.

### 1.1.1.2. REFUTING THE PROOFS

This refers to refuting the proofs or assertions that the Vaisesikas make to show the existence of the self.

This heading has three sub-divisions:

1.1.1.2.1. Refuting that a permanent self is the cause of entering and leaving cyclic existence.

1.1.1.2.2. Refuting it as the activator of the body

1.1.1.2.3. Refuting proof of a permanent self

#### **1.1.1.2.1. REFUTING THAT THE PERMANENT SELF IS THE CAUSE OF ENTERING AND LEAVING CYCLIC EXISTENCE**

*Assertion:* The self is permanent because of being the one that enters and leaves cyclic existence. If there were no self, who would be in cyclic existence because of accumulating actions? Who would gain freedom from cyclic existence? Thus the self exists.

*Answer:*

*From one rebirth to another*

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*The person changes like the body.*

*It is illogical for yours to be*

*Separate from the body and permanent.*

What the Vaisesika are asserting is that the self exists, and that it is a permanent self.

The answer to the assertion is:

It follows that it is illogical for the self you assert to be permanent and a separate entity from the body, because the person, like the body, changes from one rebirth as a god, human and so forth to another.

The manner of refuting the assertion is established by pointing out that the non-buddhist schools accept that a human can be reborn in the god realms, because they assert rebirth, and believe in rebirth in the divine god realms due to certain causes and conditions. What is being pointed out here is that when a person dies and is reborn in the divine god realms then their physical features change. That change obviously has to be accepted, so in that case, has the person changed or not? If they were to assert that it is only the body that has changed, then is the body the self or not? If they assert that the body is related to the self, then just as the body has changed, the self has to change too. Thus it is not permanent. We can obviously see the change of the body, so the self has changed and thus the self cannot be permanent. But if they assert that only the body has changed and that the self has not changed, then the absurdity would be that when a human is reborn as a god, they are only called a god but actually they are still a human, because they have not changed.

#### **1.1.1.2.2. REFUTING IT AS THE ACTIVATOR OF THE BODY**

The Vaisesika assert the self as being permanent. If they say that a permanent self is activating the body, then that is an absurdity. This sub-division is sub-divided into two.

1.1.1.2.2.1. Actual meaning

1.1.1.2.2.2. Showing what invalidates belief in a permanent self

1.1.1.2.2.1. Actual meaning

*Assertion:* Without a self there would be no physical movements such as stretching or flexing because the

body would lack an activator. Thus an inner agential person exists who activates the body just as Devadatta drives his chariot.

*Answer:* That is illogical. It follows that your life force or self is not the instigator of physical movement because a self is not tangible.

*Intangible things do not*

*Produce so called motility.*

*Thus the life force is not*

*Agent of the body's movements.*

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In relation to their asserting the self as being a permanent self the commentary says:

It is so because, just as a chariot can only be moved by something tangible and not by anything intangible, an intangible functional thing cannot actually move that which has form from one place to another. Though Vaisesikas assert that the self has form, they do not accept that it has an external tangibility and so forth.

The actual objection is not mentioned here in the text but there is actually an implied objection from the non-buddhist schools in that refutation. What is being refuted here is that if the agent is intangible how could it activate tangible things? If a chariot needs a person, which is a tangible thing, to activate it, similarly whenever an action is done by a person, like movement and so forth, it has to be tangible.

Then the objection raised by the non-buddhist school to the Buddhists is, 'Wouldn't you say then that the mind activates things?' According to the Buddhist school there is no error here. The Buddha points out in the following verse that there is no error because when we say the mind activates things, it is basically referring to motivation. There is not really a tangible activator, as it is the motivation which counts. Even when we accept the mind as being an activator it is not as if there is no contact with the mind at all. In fact when anything is absorbed by the mind there are the five ever-present mental factors. Within the five there is the mental factor called contact, which is the contact between the consciousness and the object that is being perceived. All of those factors coming together makes the contact between the consciousness and the object. So there is a contact there.

1.1.1.2.2.2. Showing what invalidates belief in a permanent self

*Why [teach] non-violence and wonder about*

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*Conditions for a permanent self*

*A diamond never has to be*

*Protected against woodworm.*

Here again there is a refutation of the assertion of a permanent self, which the Buddhist school is refuting. As the commentary explains:

It follows that if the self is permanent, it is contradictory to teach non-violence as a practice to protect it from dangers such as bad rebirth or to wonder what conditions are not unfavourable to it, because nothing can harm a permanent functional thing, just as a diamond which is not in danger of harm is never protected from a woodworm, not does it need to be.

The non-buddhist schools commonly teach the acts of non-violence as ways of avoiding harm to others, in order

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to not create negative karma. They also believe that if you engage in actions to harm others, then you are creating the causes for unfortunate rebirths. Thus you are harming yourself. What is being pointed out here is there is no point in teaching about non-violence and writing treatises about non-violence, because who is being harmed? If the self is a permanent phenomena it cannot be harmed, so what is the point of teaching non-violence when there is nothing to be harmed? The analogy given here is that a diamond does not need to be protected from a woodworm since a woodworm cannot possibly destroy a diamond. It would be absurd to try to protect a diamond from a woodworm when the woodworm could not harm or destroy the diamond in any way. If the self was permanent then teaching about non-violence would be similar to that.

### **1.1.1.2.3. REFUTING PROOF OF A PERMANENT SELF**

We can actually conclude here for the evening and explain this outline in the next session.

What is being established here in the text, before establishing one's own point of view, is a description of all the different assertions about the self that come from different schools of thought. In fact these are different tenets, meaning different systems of view. Each of these systems of view has been established with a lot of thought, reasoning and investigation. Our own Buddhist system is also established through a lot of investigation, logical reasons and so forth. It is not out of contempt that the Buddhist school refute the non-buddhist schools, but rather to establish one's own point of view by logically refuting the other kind of views.

The actual word for tenet in Tibetan is *drup ta* which incorporates a connotation of that which is the final assertion. So the actual meaning of tenet is final assertion. For the Buddhist school the final assertion is established by referring to what the Buddha said, along with one's own reasoning. By combining both citations from the Buddha and logical reasons, one comes to the point of being able to comfortably assert that this is how the nature of phenomena is established. When one can comfortably, through logical reasons as well as the citations from the Buddha's teachings combine these and come to the final conclusion, then that is when we call one's own final assertion, one's tenet.

Tenets are based on different views of reality. Thus tenets are established is in relation to views. Understanding the distinction between the view or tenets and the vehicle helps to understand how the path is established. Within the Mahayana vehicle there is a distinction between the Prajnaparamita or sutra vehicle, and the Vajrayana or tantra vehicle. However there is no distinction between the views of these two vehicles, even though the vehicles are different. You don't talk about a sutra or Prajnaparamita view and a tantra view, nor do you have a Sutrayana tenet or a Tantrayana tenet.

We will not have discussion for the next session, because I feel that it's better to continue on with the text.

*Transcribed from tape by Jenny Brooks  
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Edited Version*

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