
Study Group – *Aryadeva's 400 Verses*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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Sitting comfortably and distancing our mind from external distractions, we generate a positive motivation to receive the teachings such as, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice as best I can'.

1.1.1.2.3. REFUTING PROOF OF A PERMANENT SELF

Refuting proof of a permanent self is subdivided into three:

1.1.1.2.3.1. Seeing memory of past rebirths is unsuitable as proof of a permanent self

1.1.1.2.3.2. Unfeasibility of mindless matter remembering past rebirths

1.1.1.2.3.3. Entailment of permanence, if that which has attributes such as intelligence remembers past rebirths

1.1.1.2.3.1. Seeing memory of past rebirths is unsuitable as proof of a permanent self

The point being refuted is that remembrance of past lives shows that the self is permanent.

It is not the remembrance of past lives that is being refuted here, because according to our system there is remembrance of past lives. What is being refuted is that, according to the Vaisesika, the remembrance of past lives is proof that the self is a permanent entity.

Assertion: The self is permanent because there is memory of previous rebirths. Memory of other lives is not feasible for composite things whose nature is to disintegrate as soon as it is produced.

This is the reason they give to indicate that the self is permanent.

Answer:

If your self is permanent

Because of remembering other lives

How can your body be impermanent

When you see a scar previously formed?

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You may consider the self permanent because there is memory of past lives, like thinking, 'I was human in my last rebirth'. Then how could your body be impermanent? It should be permanent

There is remembrance of past lives: if one has been a human then the memory, 'I was a human in past lives', can occur for those who have memory of past lives.

The reason that the Vaisesikas give for the self being permanent is that for those who remember their past lives, such as human beings, that remembrance of a past life as a human being proves that the self that exists now, and has existed in the past, and thus the self is a permanent entity. The refutation to that assertion is:

Then how could your body be impermanent? It should be permanent because in a past life you saw the scar of a

wound inflicted on the body and now, when you see a birthmark which resembles that previously inflicted wound you say 'That is a scar of a wound inflicted in the past'.

The refutation is that if you were to assert that remembering a past life indicates that the self is a permanent phenomenon then would not the body also be a permanent phenomenon? There are certain marks, birthmarks in this life which are indications of having received wounds in the past. For example, if one has died in a battle, in the area of the body where one was wounded by weapons such as knives, one could be born with a birthmark. As one remembers one's past life and how one died from those wounds, these marks that one has on one's body now can be an indication of how one died. Carrying those birthmarks in this life would indicate that the body is also permanent.

Having refuted the Vaisesikas by pointing out the absurdity of their assertion, the Prasangikas present their view:

According to us the object of the thought 'I' is co-extensive with both the self of the past and of this life. Since it is merely imputed, memory of past rebirths is feasible.

According to the Prasangika point of view, the existence of the memory of past lives is of course acceptable. What is established as the 'I' is the continuity of the past 'I', so even though the 'I' of this rebirth is not exactly the same 'I' of the past, the continuity of the 'I' is the same. Thus because the continuum is similar, you can establish a memory of a past life. The main point is that the 'I' of this life is a continuum of the 'I' of previous lifetimes.

That is also why it is mentioned in the teachings that the Buddha's 'I' consists of the continuum of the 'I' of a sentient being, because the Buddha was once a sentient being. Thus the Buddha can recall all the past memories as a sentient being, and this proves that the continuum of the 'I' is the same.

Thus the memory of past lives is established through the continuum of the previous 'I'. However the 'I' or the self is not a permanent entity: it cannot be established as being a permanent entity, or a truly existent entity, but rather it is an entity that is, as mentioned here, a merely imputed phenomenon. So the 'I' is a merely imputed phenomenon rather than being a truly existent phenomenon.

The analogy that is presented here in the commentary is that of a bowl of curd. The translation seems to miss out on the point of the explanation, which is that if a bowl of yoghurt is covered with a certain sort of grass and then a bird, such as a pigeon, lands on it, even though the feet or claws don't touch the yoghurt directly, an imprint in the shape of the feet is made through the grass. This refers to the fact that:

all actions and agents are feasible for that which arises dependently

This means that even though things do not arise independently, in and of themselves, but are merely imputed, there is still a conventional existence of phenomena.

Because things are interdependently arisen, they lack inherent existence or true existence, yet they are able to function conventionally.

1.1.1.2.3.2. Unfeasibility of mindless matter remembering past rebirths

It follows that the self cannot remember past rebirths because it is asserted as mindless matter. It is also unreasonable to assert that it remembers past lives by virtue of having mind, because by first lacking memory and later possessing memory, it has given up its entity.

*If the self when possessing that
Which has mind is a knower, 233
By that [same argument] that which has a mind
would be
Mindless and the person permanent.*

According to this reasoning that which does not have memory in the past, because of being a permanent entity, later transforms into an entity which has memory. This is pointing out the absurdity of the assertion that the self is permanent, because its whole entity has changed from the past to the present.

As the commentary reads:

If the self, despite being matter, is a knower of the past because of possessing that which has mind, by that [same argument] the attribute, that which has mind, should be mindless and matter because of possessing a self which is classified as matter? It follows that the self is not permanent because first it does not remember but later newly develops memory of past lives.

1.1.1.2.3.3. Entailment of permanence, if that which has attributes such as intelligence remembers past rebirths

*A life force which has pleasure and so forth 234
Appears as various as pleasure and so forth
Thus like pleasure it is not
Suitable as something permanent.*

The assertion in relation to this verse is a counter-question asking if the life force or self has mind because of having attributes like intelligence:

... because of having attributes like pleasure and pain, it should appear as different as pleasure and so forth while experiencing satisfaction and affliction. Thus like pleasure and so forth it cannot be permanent either.

This is pointing out the absurdity of asserting that the self is permanent. You have to accept the self as being impermanent, just as you accept the pleasure and pain experienced by the self as changing. There are times where pleasure is experienced and other times where pain is experienced, and afflictions and so forth come and go. Likewise the 'I' who experiences those changes should also go through change. Thus, the 'I' or the self cannot be permanent.

From our own experience, we make statements in relation to our experience of pleasure and pain, wellbeing and feeling unwell such as, 'I felt very well yesterday, but today I don't feel so well'. The one who experiences different kinds of feelings such as being well or unwell, or who experiences a sense of change occurring is related to the self, which also experiences change and pleasure and unpleasantness. If the self were permanent, that experience of change could not occur, and one could not

refer to oneself as feeling one way or another at different times.

1.1.2. Refuting the self imputed by Samkhyas

This is subdivided into three

1.1.2.1. Unacceptability of asserting a permanent conscious person

1.1.2.2. Entailment that [the activity of experiencing] cannot stop until the conscious person, the substance, has disintegrated

1.1.2.3. Unacceptability of asserting that the person's nature [changes] from actual consciousness first to potential consciousness

1.1.2.1. UNACCEPTABILITY OF ASSERTING A PERMANENT CONSCIOUS PERSON

Samkhya assertion: If the self is asserted as matter these inconsistencies apply but since, according to us, the person's nature is to be conscious, there is not the least unwanted entailment.

*If consciousness is permanent 235
An agent is superfluous
If fire is permanent
Fuel is unnecessary.*

The Samkhya assertion is that the definition of a person is that which is consciousness. Thus the Samkhyas assert that person, consciousness, knowledge or cognition are synonymous. The Samkhyas actually define twenty-five categories of phenomena of which twenty-four are matter and the twenty-fifth is asserted as the knower, person and self.

As mentioned previously, the Samkhyas assert that everything is a product of the primary source, which is nature. When the individual realises that everything is a manifestation of the primary source, then they merge into the primary source and attain liberation.

According to our own system, all phenomena are divided into three categories: form or matter, consciousness and non-associated composites. The third category, which is non-composite phenomena, is divided into two: that which has life or mind, and that which does not have life. The instance of non-associated phenomena that has life is the person. The instance of non-associated phenomena that does not have life is imprints, the general impermanence and functionality of things and so forth.

The refutation of the Samkhya's assertion is as follows:

If the conscious person is asserted as permanent, it follows that agents such as the eyes and so forth which permit experience of objects are superfluous and useless because the person that experiences objects exists as a permanent functional thing. Fuel is needed to make a fire but if fire is permanent, fuel is unnecessary.

The Samkhyas assert, as mentioned earlier, that a person is basically consciousness and the consciousness that they assert is one primary consciousness, which functions through the sense faculties such as the eye, nose, ear, tongue and body sense faculties. What is functioning through these faculties is the one consciousness, which is the primary consciousness. The analogy they use is that if there is one person in a house with six windows, then it would be the same person looking out of the house whatever window they choose to view things from.

Similarly there is only one main consciousness within oneself functioning through the five sense faculties that perceive external phenomena and the mental sense faculty that perceives internal phenomena (making six in total).

The refutation being made here is that if the consciousness which you assert as being a person is permanent, then you would not have to rely on the sense faculties in order to perceive objects. They would normally assert, just as we do, that three conditions need to take place in order for an object to be observed: the object itself, the sense faculty and the consciousness. It is through the contact of these three factors that things are observed.

'So according to your assertions', the Buddhists say, 'If the consciousness is permanent then it would not need to rely on the sense faculties, which would be useless because the consciousness could always perceive things, regardless of needing to rely on other factors'. The analogy is, if fire was permanent then it would constantly be burning and not require extra fuel for its continuity, but that is, of course, not the case. We all observe that fire obviously needs fuel for its continuity. A consciousness not needing to rely on the sense faculties because it was permanent would be similar to the fire being permanent and not needing fuel.

To recap the main point: if the self, or the consciousness, is permanent, then it would not have to rely on the sense faculties in order to function, just as fire would not have to rely on fuel for its continuity or function if it was permanent.

1.1.2.2. ENTAILMENT THAT [THE ACTIVITY OF EXPERIENCING] CANNOT STOP UNTIL THE CONSCIOUS PERSON, THE SUBSTANCE, HAS DISINTEGRATED

Assertion: The person whose nature is potential consciousness is the experiencer of objects, and being conscious is the activity of experiencing. Since this depends on agents like the eye, there is no flaw.

Answer: Movement does not occur unless, for instance, a tree is agitated by the wind, but those fallacies would entail movement until the substantial entity disintegrates. The phenomenon of activity depends on the substantial entity and is motion.

*A substantial entity, unlike an action, 236
Does not alter until it disintegrates,
Thus it is improper to claim
The person exists but consciousness does not.*

Following the earlier refutation of the assertion, the Samkhyas counter by asserting that the person, whose nature is potential consciousness, and who is the experiencer of objects, is still a permanent phenomenon, and can depend on other things. 'Being conscious is the experiencer' means that being conscious is the activity of the experiencing, which depends on agents like the eye, ear and so forth. 'Thus there is no flaw' means that even though it is permanent, the consciousness has a functional activity that is dependent on the eyes and so forth.

The activity of moving depends on the substantial entity and may cease even though the substantial entity has not disintegrated. The nature of the substantial entity does

not likewise change between its production and its disintegration. By contrast consciousness and the person are an indifferentiable permanent entity. Thus it is improper to claim that the person but not consciousness exists prior to experiencing an object.

The point being made here is that the Samkhyas' assertion implies that prior to an activity there is consciousness but not a person, and when an activity occurs there is a person but the consciousness does not exist. So they make a distinction between the consciousness and the actual person, the one who does the activity, thus implying there is a gap between the consciousness, which happens prior to the action, and the person who actually engages in the action.

The Samkhyas however have to accept that consciousness and person are an undifferentiated entity, meaning that consciousness and person cannot be separated, and are of one nature. By being of one nature, one could not possibly exist without the other at any time. Thus it is improper to claim that the person but not the consciousness exists prior to the experiencing of the object. This is the absurdity that is being pointed out in refutation of their assertions.

1.1.2.3. UNACCEPTABILITY OF ASSERTING THAT THE PERSON'S NATURE [CHANGES] FROM ACTUAL CONSCIOUSNESS FIRST TO POTENTIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Prior to the person engaging in an activity there is the assertion that:

Although there is no consciousness prior to experiencing objects, it's potential and thus the person exists.

Answer

*At times one sees potential consciousness, 237
At others consciousness itself.
Because of being like molten iron
The person undergoes change.*

The absurdity of their assertion is that prior to experiencing objects there is no consciousness. The fallacy arises because if there is no consciousness then how could a person exist? So in order to avoid that absurdity, what they state here is that even though there is no consciousness, there is the potential of consciousness. Thus there is the person because of the potential consciousness.

The Samkhyas first of all assert that prior to experiencing objects there is no actual consciousness. That might cause them to posit the absurdity that there is no person, so to avoid that they say even though there is no consciousness one can still posit a person existing, because there is the potential of consciousness. That is how they try to avoid that absurdity.

As the commentary reads:

On occasion other than when objects are being experienced one sees potential consciousness, and when objects are being experienced, consciousness itself.

This is basically the assertion. The main refutation to their assertion is made with this analogy:

In that case, like molten iron which later becomes solid mass, former potential consciousness later becomes actual consciousness. It therefore follows that the person

undergoes change because consciousness and the person are accepted as one entity.

Molten iron later becomes a solid mass, and even though its form changes, the continuity of iron stays. There is the obvious change from a liquid form into a solid mass, but the continuity is the same. Similarly if you assert that there is potential consciousness prior to the experience and later the actual consciousness then, by default, you are accepting the fact that something that was something else earlier changes into a different instance in the future. This means that if you accept that the potential consciousness transforms into consciousness, then you would have to accept that the person undergoes change. Thus because the Samkhyas assert consciousness as being the person, the person cannot be a permanent phenomenon, because it undergoes change.

The refutation of the assertion is made by pointing out the absurdity of their assertions by building on what they have already accepted. First, they assert that a person is consciousness, then they assert that prior to the experience there is no consciousness. Yet they assert that there is a person, so there has to be a person. But because they assert that there is no consciousness prior to the experience, when the absurdity of there not being a person is pointed out, they say that even though there is no consciousness, there is potential consciousness before the experience.

What is being pointed out here is that, just as molten iron later turns into a solid mass, likewise potential consciousness has to later turn into consciousness. Even though there is continuity, it goes through change. So if you are to accept that, you also have to accept that because the person and the consciousness are of one entity (because the Samkhyas assert the person to be consciousness), the earlier person, which is the potential consciousness, goes through change when it turns into consciousness. Thus by default the person changes and thus could not be a permanent phenomenon.

What one should understand from these assertions, debates and refutations is that what is being refuted is a permanent self i.e. the 'I', the person, or the self being a permanent phenomenon. What is being pointed out is the absurdity that if the person or the self were to be permanent, then there is no connection between the agent, the action, and the experiencer. So there is no interdependency between the person, the experience, and what is being experienced. If the self were permanent, it would have to be a constant thing, and there could not be any changes. However according to our system and our own experience too, there is change that is experienced, such as pleasure and pain. That indicates that the person is interdependent and goes through changes, and thus it is not a permanent phenomenon, a truly existent, or inherently existent phenomenon.

From these explanations, one should come to the conclusion that what we refer to as the self is devoid of a permanent entity, devoid of a truly existent entity or an inherently existent entity. What that means is that what we refer to as a self goes through changes in relation to the experiences one has: sometimes the self experiences pleasure, at other times unpleasant feelings. Not only do

we have these experiences now, but they also go on to future lifetimes. What we refer to as the self is the one who creates the causes to experience pleasure or pain now and in the future. Thus there is a continuity which goes through constant change from this life on to the next life.

What goes on from this life to the next lifetime is not a self that is a permanent unchanging entity. Rather it is a constantly changing entity that continues on to future lifetimes. One must conclude in one's meditation and practice that the self is in constant fluctuation from moment to moment, and that it continues to exist in the next moment and on to future lifetimes. The causes created by the self now, will be experienced in the future, and that is how the self is established.

1.1.3. Refuting the self imputed by Naiyāyikas

The Naiyayikas are another non-Buddhist school, and they assert that the self is a single entity that is omnipresent and as vast as space. Space pervades throughout the universe and there is no distinction between different spaces as such. There is one space that pervades everywhere, and just as we have reflections of the one sky on many different lakes, similarly the single omnipresent entity of the self manifests in different forms, in different bodies. So what we see as different bodies are actually basically manifestations of that one and single omnipresent self. The Naiyayikas assert that omnipresent self as being a permanent self. There are two subdivisions within this category.

1.1.3.1. Refuting that a part of the self possessing a mere particle of mind perceives object

1.1.3.2. Refuting belief in a permanent omnipresent self

1.1.3.1. REFUTING THE PART OF THE SELF POSSESSING A MERE PARTICLE OF MIND PERCEIVES OBJECT

Naiyayika Assertion: Our person is not a conscious entity. Since a part of the self the mere size of a particle has mind, there is consciousness of objects. It depends on just this part with mind. A person that is conscious and not separate from mind is produced through this association. The person is permanent and very extensive like space.

*Merely [a small part with] mind is conscious 238
But the person is as vast as space.*

*Therefore it would seem as though
Its nature is not to be conscious.*

The assertions of the Naiyayikas are different from the Samkhyas, and they assert that the person is basically just a consciousness. So, within the non-Buddhist schools there are different assertions and different viewpoints too.

To refute the assertion of the Naiyayikas, the commentary explains:

Since except for a part as small as a particle the rest of this permanent and extensive self is not associated with consciousness...

The absurdity of their assertion is pointed with the following analogy:

...that self's nature does not seem to have consciousness of objects.

The main point here is that if only a mere particle is considered as being the consciousness and the rest is permanent, then this self does not seem to have objects of consciousness. Basically what is being pointed out here is that a part of the consciousness as small as a particle would not be sufficient for a person to be able to be conscious of objects. This is pointed out with the following analogy:

Just as it cannot be said that the water of the Ganges is salty because of contact with a grain of salt, it is inappropriate to assert that which is not conscious as the person.

This vivid analogy points out that placing a small grain of salt into the Ganges River couldn't possibly turn the whole Ganges River into salty water. Obviously everyone would be able to accept that this is not possible. The person is stated as being as vast as space, so a small 'particle of consciousness' could not possibly be sufficient for the person to be conscious of all objects. That is just absurd.

1.1.3.2. REFUTING BELIEF IN A PERMANENT OMNIPRESENT SELF

*If the self is in everyone then why
Does another not think of this one as 'I'?
It is unacceptable to say that
It is obscured by itself.* 239

As the commentary explains:

If there is a part-less permanent self which is omnipresent like space in each individual sentient being, why would another person not think 'I' in relation to my own self? It follows that they should think of it as 'I' because the two selves are one. It cannot be omnipresent if the object of someone else's conception of self is not my own self.

The refutation is of the Naiyayika assertion that the self is one omnipresent entity as vast as space. This omnipresent entity is in each individual sentient being. Basically what they are saying is that it is as if there is only one self that is distributed, so to speak, in different individuals.

According to their assertion, there couldn't be a difference between individuals, because they are part of the one omnipresent self. That would then mean that when you view someone else, you are actually viewing yourself. When you think about someone else, you would then have to think about yourself. However that is absurd because we have distinctive individual selves.

'If there is a distinction between the other's self and one's own self then your assertion of it being omnipresent does not stand. That could not be the case.' That is how the Naiyayika assertion is being refuted.

According to their assertion, one would have to have a sense of feeling 'I' when referring to others, and the experiences of others would have to relate to one's own experiences. Similarly if one were to remember someone else's past lives, then one would have to identify that memory as being one's own past lives too. However that is not the case. If one could remember the past lives of others, it would be in relation to their past lives. But one does not have the distinctive experience of their past lives being one's own past lives. According to the Naiyayika assertion, the entity of all beings is one, so remembering

past lives of others would be equal to remembering one's own past lives and vice versa. However there is definitely a distinction because of the separate entities of oneself and the selves of others.

When one remembers the past lives of oneself in different aspects, such as in human or animal forms, one has the distinctive memory of it being oneself in the past, because of being of the same continuity in the previous lifetimes, regardless of the aspect or form as an animal or as a human. Whereas if one remembers or sees the past lives of others, one does not feel that connection. One is not associated with the memory of it as being one's own past lives. This indicates that that is a separate entity, a separate continuum from oneself. So when one sees the past lives of others, one does not relate to them as being oneself. In relation to the past, there is a distinction between sentient beings of the past lives of others and sentient beings of one's own past lives, which are of one's own continuity.

Similarly the innate grasping at the self is in relation to one's own self. One does not have that distinctive innate grasping at the self in relation to someone else's self. Again that is because of the fact that it is a separate continuum to oneself. Innate grasping within oneself arises only in relation to oneself and the continuum of oneself in the past. We refer to the self of others as being a person or a self or an 'I' but even though the term is used, the reason one does not generate that innate self-grasping in relation to other selves is because of being in a separate continuum.

Furthermore, when you see specific people, you refer to them as being 'my' friends, 'my' mother, 'my' father, 'my' family and relatives, and so forth. They are connected to the self and related to the self, but one does not experience them as being the self. The reason why one does not experience the entity of others' self as being oneself is because there is a separate continuum.

I will try to cover the following verses in Chapters 10 and 11 quickly, and we can spend more time on Chapter 12.

Perhaps in two more sessions we might finish this chapter. So I think that we might finish chapters 10 and 11 by the end of October.

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Edited Version*

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