
Study Group – *Aryadeva's 400 Verses*

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By withdrawing our mind from external distractions and focussing on the subject of the teachings, we generate a positive motivation such as, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice'.

The benefit of generating a bodhicitta motivation is not only limited to fulfilling an immediate purpose to benefit from listening to the teachings, but it also leaves a very strong imprint to actualise that promise in the future.

1.1.3. The profound is not taught for the sake of argument (cont.)

1.1.3.2. Why this is so

This is sub-divided in two sections:

1.1.3.2.1. Actual meaning

1.1.3.2.2. Why the exalted do not experience fear

1.1.3.2.1. ACTUAL MEANING

Question: How does this teaching burn up others' contentions, when understanding of it arises in the mind of someone with interest in it?

Answer:

Whoever knows this teaching

Will not relish others.

Thus to me this teaching seems

Like the door to destruction.

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The answer to the opening question is something that we must reflect on for our own practice. Gaining the realisation of emptiness will definitely remove all misconceptions and, as the commentary says, 'burn up others' contentions'. We actually have extreme wrong views, because grasping at the self is the cause for all other wrong views to arise in the mind. That which destroys grasping at the self is the realisation of emptiness, so once one gains a realisation of emptiness, which is a direct opponent to the grasping at the self, then naturally all wrong conceptions and contentions will be completely removed. Reflecting on this will generate the determination to develop the realisation of emptiness for the purpose of combating grasping at the self.

As the commentary explains:

Whoever comes to know the nectar-like taste of this teaching, the emptiness of inherent existence, through hearing, thinking and meditating will not relish views adhering to the true existence of things.

As clearly mentioned here, 'to know' means realising the teaching on emptiness, which is seeing that phenomena lack inherent existence. The process of gaining the realisations of emptiness and the lack of inherent existence is through hearing, thinking and contemplation. Through hearing the teachings and explanations one gains a certain level of understanding. Then one uses

one's own intelligence and analytical wisdom to investigate further and analyse the meaning of what one has heard. Through this analysis one investigates whether that understanding actually corresponds to the facts or not. When one gains a level of confirmation through that analysis, one uses that as the object of meditation, and meditates on the meaning that one has gained from analysis. That is how, as one's meditation progresses, one gradually gains the realisations and ultimately attains primordial wisdom.

Without first hearing and then contemplating the meaning, one cannot possibly meditate on the meaning. The great Kadampa masters as well as Lama Tsong Khapa said that the more one hears the teachings, the more one is able to analyse the teachings, and the more one is able to analyse the teachings the more meaning one has to meditate upon. Thus the result of meditation, which is to gain realisations, increases. In this way one gains the ultimate realisations. By following that tradition we come to understand that the process of gaining realisations begins with hearing the teachings.

After having heard the teachings, not just once or twice but again and again, we gain a conceptual understanding through hearing. Then we use what we have understood from hearing as a basis to analyse the teachings. As we analyse the teachings more profoundly we gain an understanding from ultimate analysis, and we then meditate upon the meaning that we get from our ultimate analysis. We may have faith in the teaching and think, 'Yes, everything is empty', but if we try to meditate just with those words, we wouldn't know what we are supposed to focus on. Not knowing where to begin we may end up quite confused, and start to develop doubts because we are not clear about what being empty means.

So after hearing the explanations about emptiness, and how things are empty of inherent existence, we begin by contemplating the faults of perceiving things as inherently existent. If things were inherently existent, then what sort of faults would arise from that? In this way we need to first identify and then contemplate the object of negation i.e. inherent existence. Once one comes to clearly see the faults of inherent existence, then one begins to see how things are empty of inherent existence, or empty of true existence. Once we gain an affirmation of how things are empty of inherent existence, then we can meditate upon that meaning. When we begin to understand the process of how things lack inherent existence, then we will know what to meditate on.

It is good for us to really consider the process of study and practice and relate to these explanations personally. Then we gain some sort of certainty about the tradition we are following, which is to gain realisations that are the combination of analytical meditation and contemplative meditation. We also gain a greater understanding about why these two forms of meditation should be combined, as that is said to be essential.

Then the commentary mentions that through that process of

... hearing, thinking and meditating [one] will not relish views adhering to the true existence of things.

The 'views adhering to true existence' are the wrong views that are propounded by the non-Buddhist schools. One 'will not relish it' means that one will not hold these views as being true and important.

As the commentary further mentions:

The Master Aryadeva therefore says that this teaching of emptiness seems to him like the door and means to the destruction of wrong views.

This relates to the last two lines of verse 291. There Aryadeva is making a personal comment about how the process of understanding the emptiness of inherent existence (which is thinking, hearing and meditating) is the ultimate means to abstain from adhering to or relishing wrong views. As indicated in other teachings by the great masters, the noble or superior beings, experience great joy when they relate to the Buddha's words. Aryadeva himself makes a personal comment about how this is really the ultimate method and how the explanation on emptiness gives him great personal satisfaction and joy.

As the commentary further reads:

Alternatively he says it with texts on emptiness in mind, in that the words of the Buddha that teach emptiness also seem like this to the Master.

An alternative way to explain the above statement is that Aryadeva is affirming the Buddha's teaching on emptiness, which explains the true nature of all existence exactly as it is. Aryadeva says this with conviction, as a result of his own analysis.

1.1.3.2.2. WHY THE EXALTED DO NOT EXPERIENCE FEAR

Question: Why does emptiness not cause the Exalted fear?

Answer: Because they have destroyed the seed of attachment to the self.

For those who think there is 292
In reality no self and abide in this thought,
How will existence cause pleasure
Or non-existence cause fear?

The term 'the Exalted' in the preliminary question refers to the aryas who have realised emptiness directly. As explained previously, aryas are called exalted or superior because they are superior in their level of realisation. Compared with the understanding of emptiness by ordinary bodhisattvas, (i.e. those on the path of accumulation and preparation) and of those ordinary beings on the path of the lower vehicle, the aryas have a much more profound realization of emptiness. Having a superior realisation means having the direct realisation or perception of emptiness. Whereas the ordinary beings on the path only have a conceptual understanding and have not yet attained the direct realisation of emptiness.

Another interpretation of superior or exalted is having surpassed the grip of grasping at the self or true existence. Ordinary beings are still in the grip of grasping at true existence, whereas once one reaches the superior state, the grip, which is grasping at true existence, is loosened. How? Through the realisation of emptiness. Why? Ultimately because the realisation of emptiness, directly opposes the grasping at true existence, and thus the grip is released.

Although it may not be the case that all aryas 'have destroyed the seed of attachment to the self yet', that can also imply that they are sure to destroy the seed of attachment in the future. This indicates that they will definitely destroy the seed of attachment.

Because they have destroyed the seed of attachment to the self, then:

Since they have no attachment to views of a self or hostility toward selflessness ...

You can interpret destroying the seed of attachment to mean that the continuum of the realisation that supreme arya beings have gained will now be the ultimate opponent to completely overcome the seed of attachment (which can also mean a subtle imprint). That's one way you could answer this in debate. Even though not all aryas have actually overcome the seed of attachment, it can be applied to those who are still on the path, because of that certainty of overcoming the seed of attachment.

If we were to take it literally as explained here in the teaching, then we can relate the seed to mean the intellectually acquired misconception of inherent existence, which is definitely overcome by all aryas. Furthermore, one can also relate it to overcoming fear. Prior to gaining the realisation of emptiness directly, there is a lot of fear in relation to the attachment to the self. Higher beings however will definitely have no fear.

Referring again to the commentary:

... how will those who think that external and internal phenomena are in reality selfless and who abide in a direct understanding of this be pleased by the existence of the self or frightened by selflessness?

Again this is referring to exalted beings or superior beings. This rhetorical question implies that such beings would have no fear in relation to the existence of a self, nor would they be frightened by selflessness. 'Pleased by the existence of the self', refers to an inherently existent self. Superior beings are not pleased and they do not adhere to the existence of a truly existent self. Thus they are not frightened of selflessness. That is the main point.

The reason is then given:

Fear therefore does not arise in those who have direct understanding of selflessness because they have eliminated the cause of fear.

Fear in relation to either the lack of an inherently existing self or to selflessness is completely eliminated through the understanding of selflessness or emptiness. What we can derive from this explanation is that the real cause of fear is a strong grasping at the self. The stronger the grasping at the self, the more fear we will experience in relation to the self. Whether things are going well or not, it is all in relation to the self that we adhere to as being inherently existent. Thus the real cause of all our fears is the grasping at the self. So if we wonder why others have so much fear, or why we have so much fear, then that is the answer. It is because we have the cause of fear within us—grasping at an inherently existent self.

As the commentary explains, superior beings have no fear because they have overcome the causes of fear by gaining the direct understanding or realisation of selflessness.

1.1.3.3. APPROPRIATENESS OF COMPASSION FOR THOSE FOLLOWING WRONG PATHS

Seeing the many Forders 293
Who are seeds of futility,
Who would not feel pity
For people who long for a teaching?

As the commentary explains the verse:

The Forders' many venomous snakes drive their students into thorny thickets of wrong views holding things to be truly existent, the seed of uninterrupted futile suffering in cyclic existence...

According to the explanations in the teachings, the main cause of being in cyclic existence is grasping at a truly existent self. As long as the grasping at a truly existent self is there, the continuum of that grasping will keep us in cyclic existence for aeons and aeons. What keeps us in this seemingly endless cycle is grasping at a truly existent self and that which we call the continuum. In other words the grasping at a truly existing self serves as a cause for an exactly similar continuum to continue into the next instant. And for as long as those instants occur as a consequence of grasping at the truly existent self, samsara remains. As the Forders expound wrong views, the seed of an uninterrupted futile suffering in cyclic existence continues.

...daily killing their life force of virtue consistent with liberation.

If you take 'their life force of virtue consistent with liberation' literally, it applies to the virtue that we create in relation to the right views, and which thus become a cause for liberation. However it also refers specifically to the first path, which is the path of accumulation. The first path is referred to as the life force of virtue consistent with liberation, because the path of accumulation is the beginning of the main cause to be developed, which will ultimately result in liberation. The definition of the path of accumulation indicates that it is the life force of virtue consistent with liberation. However we can also take this literally as referring to all the virtues consistent with the right view that leads to liberation.

So as the commentary further explains:

Seeing this and knowing the nature of these teachings, who with a Bodhisattva's disposition would not feel pity for those who long for a teaching that will liberate them from cyclic existence?

This is yet another rhetorical question, indicating that the bodhisattvas will definitely have great pity or compassion for those who, because they naturally long for true peace and liberation, yearn for a teaching that will liberate them from cyclic existence. As individuals wanting true peace they seek liberation so that they will be free from cyclic existence. But through the misfortune of having met teachers who expound wrong views that increase their misconceptions, they are led further into cyclic existence rather than being liberated. Seeing that reality, a bodhisattva will have immense compassion and love, because on one hand, these beings long for liberation and to be free from cyclic existence, but on the other hand they are kept in cyclic existence because of the misfortune of meeting with expounders of wrong views.

As the commentary concludes:

Therefore one must show sentient beings the path of non-inherent existence so that they will not be ravaged by the Forders' snakes.

When we read these texts, it is really very useful for us to take the time to read them over and over again, and try to derive the real meaning of what has been explained, and not to just skim over it. When one skims over a text, one will miss the points and not derive the real meaning. Even someone who is considered to be quite skilled in the understanding of teachings and so forth, may still lack the intense derivation of the meaning of the text if they do not read it carefully. This particular text is of course a complex one, but if we use our time and energy in trying to derive its meaning, even where the meaning is quite deep, then through our practice and familiarity with trying to understand a teaching like this we will find the rest of the teachings with simpler explanations really very easy to read and understand. When we take the time, we can find the deep meaning of the words in this teaching.

If we take the time, to read each line of the text and derive its meaning, we will then naturally go into a very contemplative state, where our mind will be very focussed. Thus the more we concentrate and focus on deriving the meaning from the text, the more understanding we will get from it. In fact, there will be no difficulty in us spending time in reading texts because we will be so engrossed in them. To give a mundane example, it is like someone who is watching an interesting show or their favourite show on TV, or a movie. They seem to be so engrossed and are completely focussed, and if someone distracts them, they say, 'Please leave me alone, I want to concentrate on the show so that I don't miss anything'. They don't appreciate being disturbed because they are so engrossed. Similarly with the teaching and text, once we can derive some meaning from reading the text, we will be quite engrossed and will thus be able to focus on the teaching.

1.1.4. Showing the comparative subtlety and coarseness of our own and others' teaching

This heading has two sub-divisions:

1.1.4.1. General explanation of why those of inferior intelligence value others' teaching but not the Buddha's

1.1.4.2. Specific explanation

1.1.4.1. GENERAL EXPLANATION OF WHY THOSE OF INFERIOR INTELLIGENCE VALUE OTHERS' TEACHING BUT NOT THE BUDDHA'S

As the outline indicates, this is a question as to why some value the teachings of other teachers, or the expounding of other views, but do not value the teachings of the Buddha. What is the reason? The text will answer those questions.

Question: Why, despite their inclination toward virtue, do people mostly follow Forders' systems and not the Buddha's teaching?

Answer: Because it is subtle and hard to understand.

The teaching of the Sakyas, 294
Nirgranthas and Brahmins are perceived
By the mind, the eyes and the ears.
Thus the Subduer's teaching is subtle.

Even though the commentary will explain it further a general overview of the verse is that the teaching of the Sakyas refers to the Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings, while the Nirgranthas and the Brahmins are non-Buddhist schools. Being perceived by the mind, means that Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings are understood or perceived by analysing them with the mind, in particular with wisdom. Thus mind refers to the primordial wisdom within one's mind, through which one perceives the Shakyamuni's teachings. Whereas the teachings of the non-Buddhist Nirgranthas are perceived by visual perception, and the Brahmins' teachings are mainly perceived by the ears. Because of these differences in how the teachings are perceived, the Shakyamuni's teachings are indicated here as being more profound and subtle.

It is not as if these followers of other non-Buddhist schools do not have an inclination to virtue, as they do in fact engage in a lot of virtuous activities. But although they favour accumulating virtue they follow other non-Buddhist teachings. Why is that so? The immediate and direct answer is 'because it is subtle and hard to understand'.

As the commentary explains:

Since the teaching of the Sakyas, the Nirgranthas and Brahmins is understood by the mind, the eyes and the ears respectively...

The Subduer's textual system is more subtle and thus most people do not follow it.

The sun-like view, the understanding of non-inherent existence, is said to illuminate one's mindstream. It destroys all the thickets of unwholesome views. Seeing all products as being like dreams makes one's mindstream stainless. All this must be understood through meditative equipoise, and thus the Sakyas' teaching is subtle.

'The sun-like view' is an analogy. Just as the sun's rays are able to illuminate everything and eliminate darkness, the understanding of non-inherent existence, or the wisdom realising emptiness eliminates the darkness of ignorance within oneself. It illuminates one's mindstream so that one is able to understand the ultimate nature of one's own mind. Thus, 'it destroys all the thickets of unwholesome views' or wrong views. As the text explains, 'Seeing all products as being like dreams makes one's mindstream stainless'.

As that realisation is gained only through meditative equipoise, one has to make an effort because, as mentioned earlier, it is only through the proper process, ultimately through meditative equipoise, that one gains the realisation of emptiness. Thus the Sakyas' teaching is subtle.

Why are the Buddha's teachings more subtle and profound? It is because that which eliminates the darkness of ignorance, which is grasping at true existence and grasping at a self, is eliminated through gaining the realisation of emptiness. Thus the teaching of emptiness illuminates the true nature of our mind by destroying the darkness within one's mind. That is not achieved instantaneously, but rather through the gradual process, as mentioned earlier, of hearing, thinking and then ultimately meditating on it. Because of this gradual

process and the continuous exertion of effort needed to gain that realisation it is much more subtle. Thus the ultimate result of the realisation one gains from these teachings, is much more subtle.

Moreover the ultimate means of purifying our negative karma is through that process of hearing, studying, contemplating, analysing and meditating and thus gaining the ultimate realisation of emptiness. The non-Buddhist schools are quite different to that.

Since the practices of Nirgranthas consist of a lack of hygiene and physical pain caused by the sun and wind, they can be understood by merely seeing them...

For the non-Buddhist school called Nirgranthas the means of purifying negative karma is to endure a lot of physical pain and suffering, such as by exposing themselves to the heat of the sun or to the wind. They believe that the mere enduring of physical hardships is the means to purify one's negative karma. The endurance of physical pain is something you can see, and thus much easier to understand, compared to the Buddha's teachings.

Since Brahmins take recitation of the Vedas alone as the essence of their practice and their means of purification, they can be understood by hearing and are therefore easier to comprehend. This will be further explained in the following section.

1.1.4.2. SPECIFIC EXPLANATION

This explanation has three sub-divisions:

1.1.4.2.1. Those seeking liberation should not try these systems

1.1.4.2.2. How those of inferior intelligence develop respect

1.1.4.2.3. Why those systems are not excellent teaching

1.1.4.2.1. THOSE SEEKING LIBERATION SHOULD NOT TRY THESE SYSTEMS

Assertion: If ordinary people engage in outsiders' practices because they may be perceived by coarse forms of awareness, it is right for you to do so too.

Answer: It is not right.

*Brahmin practices are said
Mainly to be an outward show.*

*The practices of Nirgranthas
Are said to be mainly stultifying.*

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The meaning of the verse is explained thus:

Since most Brahmin practices such as recitation, burnt offerings, auspicious incantation, repentance, confession and so forth are mainly an outward show for the sake of reward and respect...

Brahmin practices mainly involve recitation of certain verses from their texts. They indicate that the mere recitation of these scriptures and the hearing of this recitation is sufficient to rid one of all negativities and so forth. Then they engage in burning offerings similar to fire pujas, and making offerings to the deities. So 'auspicious incantation' refers to reciting auspicious verses. Repentance and confession are mainly outward show because of their immediate goal for performing the reading and making the offerings is the mundane reward of a payment from those who seek that service. So

Brahmins do their practice mainly as a service for a reward. Outwardly they may seem very pompous and very religious, but in fact their practice is done only for mundane goals.

As the commentary then further explains:

...it is said that they should not be performed by those who seek liberation.

Here the personal advice that we need to derive is that even though the non-Buddhist Brahmins are used as an immediate example of those who perform activities, rituals and so forth for the sake of temporary gain of respect and reward, that is not something those seeking liberation should follow. We really need to take this as personal instruction and advice for ourselves, and make sure that our own practices do not become similar to that. Whatever we do, meditating or practising a ritual, or puja or whatever, if we regard ourselves highly because of being able to do these practices or meditations and so forth well, and if we are not careful to check our motivation, there could be a worldly concern mixed in with our practices. When our practices are mixed with the worldly concerns, then it becomes similar to the practices of the non-Buddhist schools. As people who are interested in seeking liberation and enlightenment that is not what we should seek. As the commentary further explains:

Similarly it is said that most of the Nirgranthas' practices, such as allowing their hair to become matted and employing the five fires, are stultifying. Therefore those who seek liberation should avoid them completely.

That is quite explicit and clear.

1.1.4.2.2. HOW THOSE OF INFERIOR INTELLIGENCE DEVELOP RESPECT

Brahmins are revered 296
Because they adopt the orthodox.
Nirgranthas are pitied
Because they adopt the deluded.

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Brahmin practices are mainly for outward show. Thus some unintelligent people revere Brahmins because they adopt orthodox practices such as reciting the Vedas and so forth. They revere and pity Nirgranthas because they adopt painful and deluded forms of behavior such as mortifying the body through sun and wind.

This is as explained previously.

1.1.4.2.3. WHY THOSE SYSTEMS ARE NOT EXCELLENT TEACHING

This outline indicates the main point of this section, by explaining why the teachings of other schools are not excellent, or not the right teachings.

Suffering is a maturation 297
And thus is not virtuous.
Similarly, birth too is not virtuous,
Being a maturation of actions.

As indicated previously, the practices that the Nirgranthas follow are the severe mortification of the body by enduring the suffering and pain from extreme heat and cold and the wind. They even light fires between

their fingers in order to endure the pain of having their fingers and so forth burnt. They see these practices of mortification as being the ultimate practice of purification.

The Brahmins propound that if one pays respect to the Brahmin and make offerings, one will be born as a Brahmin. That very fact of being born as a Brahmin is a result of a practise of revering and respecting the Brahmins. That is their practice.

With respect to the Nirgranthas the commentary explains:

Painful sensations such as mortification of the body are not virtuous but are instead, like the suffering in the hells, the maturation of non-virtuous actions.

What is being clearly explained here is that the painful experiences received from mortifying the body cannot in themselves be a virtuous practice. In fact the pain that one experiences from this extreme practice is nothing more than the maturation of non-virtuous actions that one has created in the past. Just as experiencing the sufferings of the hell realms is the maturation of past non-virtuous actions, so too the pain that one experiences under these circumstances are also the maturation of non-virtue.

With respect to the Brahmins the commentary states:

Similarly, because it is a maturation of past actions as are eyes and so forth, birth as a Brahmin is not something virtuous enabling the attainment of liberation.

The Brahmins believe that by revering Brahmins one will take birth as a Brahmin, and is then virtuous. Moreover that virtuous act of revering Brahmins and so forth, is the way to obtain liberation. That is refuted here with the argument that being born as a Brahmin is nothing more than the maturation of past actions—it is the maturation or the ripening result of past actions. The five sense faculties that we have with our contaminated body, is a maturation or a ripening result of past actions. The Brahmins' rebirth is exactly like that and thus not a cause for liberation.

The remaining verses of the chapter establish what the right 'excellent' teaching is. Having refuted the view of the non-Buddhist schools that their practices lead to high status and liberation or enlightenment, it has to be established what the right practice or the 'excellent teachings' are that will lead to the goals of liberation and enlightenment. The following verses are quite profound and we will leave them for the next session.

Normally we have a discussion after four sessions, followed by a test. The discussion seems to be useful because you can share ideas and get a clear understanding through discussion. So we will leave the next session for discussion, and maybe the exam can be done later on after further sessions. So we will continue with the teachings the week after the discussion.

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