

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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As usual, sitting in an appropriate posture, it would be good to set the proper motivation for receiving the teachings such as, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings by freeing them from suffering, I need to achieve enlightenment. So I will listen to teachings and put them into practice as best as I can'.

1.1.1.2.1.1. REFUTING TRULY EXISTENT OBJECTS (CONT.)

1.1.1.2.1.1.2. Refuting that which perceives objects

This has five subdivisions:

1.1.1.2.1.1.2.1. Refuting that the eye is by way of its own entity an instrument of looking at form

1.1.1.2.1.1.2.2. Refuting consciousness as agent

1.1.1.2.1.1.2.3. Refuting the eye as agent

1.1.1.2.1.1.2.4. Consequence that the eye is an instrument of looking in relation to the eye (which refers to the consequences of the eye being able to see itself and refuting that)

1.1.1.2.1.1.2.5. Refuting a combination of three factors as the instrument of looking at visible form

1.1.1.2.1.1.2.1. Refuting that the eye is by way of its own entity an instrument of looking at form

The function of an eye is to look at forms, and what is being explicitly refuted here is that the eye is an agent that looks at forms by way of its own entity, or inherently. This becomes an issue for our system to refute, because of the earlier contention that the object (in this case form) as well as the object perceiver (the eye consciousness) are both existent by way of their own nature, or inherently existent. That is what is being refuted.

What also has to be understood is the relationship between the object and the object possessor. The other schools assert, as do we in our own system, that the object and the object perceiver are mutually dependent on each other. In order to establish an object there has to be an object possessor and in order to establish an object possessor, there has to be an object to be perceived. So object and object possessor are interdependent.

Of course as followers of the Prasangika view, we would agree with the refutation of the Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools' assertions of the inherent existence of object perceivers and so forth. However for our personal practice, we need to first of all investigate how we ourselves perceive things. Do we perceive things as existing from their own side? Does an object appear to us as existing by way of its own entity? Do we believe in the way that it appears or not?

In fact, for ordinary beings, things appear to have inherent existence or to exist by way of their own nature. What has to be investigated is whether they actually exist in that way or not. This text, which adopts the stance of the Prasangika view point, refutes that objects have inherent existence, or that they exist by way of their own nature. There are some Buddhist schools that assert true existence, and some that don't. However true existence is refuted in our system and

so we, as individuals studying this text, would be on the side of not accepting that objects and object perceivers are truly existent, or inherently existent, or existent by way of their own nature. Since we are on that side it is important for us to really bring it home, and investigate for ourselves whether this is true or not.

The Madhyamika text asserts that for ordinary beings the object of negation is the object that appears to the consciousnesses. What is being implied is that when an object appears to us, it appears as existing by way of its own nature, as existing independently, and not dependent on anything else but existing by way of its own entity. That very appearance is the object to be negated. It does not exist in the way that it appears, and so the object is empty of inherent existence. That is what we have to realise.

Assertion: Because sense organs exist—such as the eyes, which are instruments of perception—directly perceptible objects such as visible form exist.

In Tibetan the assertion reads, 'Directly perceptible objects such as visible form exist because sense organs exist. That is how it is'. So the assertion is that because sense organs such as the eye exist, and are instruments of perception, then it follows that objects such as visible form exist.

Answer:

*The eye, like the ear, is an outcome of
The elements. The eyes see while the others do not.
Certainly therefore the Subduer said
The fruition of actions is inconceivable.* 311

The Vaibashika Buddhist school asserts that the sense organs, or faculties, perceive objects such as forms and so forth. Their reasoning is that form, for example, has to be perceived by the eye sense organ because if the organ did not perceive the form then the consciousness couldn't perceive it, as the organ itself would obstruct the consciousness from seeing the object. According to their reasoning, one has to establish that the organ itself couldn't see form.

These points were of course explained earlier. However the main point is that the Vaibashikas assert that the sense organ itself would be an obstruction, just like putting up a book in front of ourselves. If there was an object behind the book we wouldn't be able to see the object, because it would be obstructed by the book. Similarly, they assert that as it is form, if the organ does not to perceive the object then the consciousness couldn't perceive the object, because there would be an obstruction between the consciousness and the object.

Of course if we were to debate this using normal conventions, we would have to say that by wearing glasses we wouldn't be able to see an object because the glass itself is a form, and thus an obstructive object. But we all know we can see things more clearly through glasses.

As the commentary explains the meaning of the first two lines:

Regarding the subject, the eye organ: since the eye perceives visual stimuli while other senses do not, it does not perceive visible form by way of its own entity, for like the nose sense organ it is an outcome of the elements. A demonstration of the valid reasons which invalidate the entailment is given below.

As explained here the assertion being refuted is that the eye sense does not perceive visual form by way of its own entity, for like the nose sense organ it is an outcome of the elements. The eye perceives visual stimuli while the other senses do

not. That is something that is accepted by both sides. Even conventionally we all accept that the eye sense does not perceive other stimuli such as smells or taste and so forth. What is mainly being negated here is that the eye perceiving its objects by way of its own entity. The reasoning given here is that the eye does not perceive visible form by way of its own entity for, like the nose sense organ, it is an outcome of the elements, i.e. derived from elements. So it cannot perceive the object as being by way of its own entity. That the eye is an outcome of the elements is accepted by the Vaibashika as well. As explained earlier, being an outcome of the elements means that the object itself is made up of a combination of the eight substances. So because it is made up of the eight substances it has its own unique way of production, dependent on many factors. Therefore it cannot be perceived as existing by way of its own entity.

The reasoning here is that if, for example, the eye were to perceive visual stimuli by way of its own entity then that would imply that the object would exist independently without having to depend on anything else for existence. However, as mentioned previously, the visual stimuli itself is an outcome of the elements, which means it is a collaboration of the eight substances (which are the four elements plus visual forms, touch, taste and smell).

Objection: If the eye and so forth do not exist it contradicts explanations concerning the maturation of actions.

The objection is that if eye and so forth do not exist, then that contradicts the explanation concerning the maturation of actions, meaning that it will contradict the sutra that says if you do not accept eye and so forth then you will go against the sutras.

Answer: But even we do not refute that.

The answer from our system to refute the earlier objection is that we do not refute the eye and so forth as not existing.

Question: Why is that not refuted?

Answer: We refute that things exist by way of their own entity but far from refuting the existence of all that is dependent arising, we affirm it in our own system.

The reason why we do not refute that is because we only refute that things exist by way of their own entity. Far from refuting the existence of all that is dependent arising, we affirm it in our own system. What is being established is that when the eye and so forth are negated the eye sense and so forth are not being negated. What is being negated, is existing by way of its own nature, or existing inherently.

Therefore far from refuting the existence of all that is dependent arising, we are firm in our own system that everything is dependent arising.

Although it cannot sustain investigation by the reasoning which analyzes suchness and though it is not established by way of its own entity, it is undeniable that the eye sees visible form and does not hear sound.

Thus recognizing that the maturation of actions is inconceivable, one should accept it without applying analysis by reasoning.

That which is perceived and conventionally established is something that has to be accepted as existing. The analysis asserts that it exists without applying analysis and reasoning as to the nature of how it exists.

Certainly therefore the Subduer said that the fruition of actions is inconceivable. Sūtra says:

The maturation of sentient beings' actions is inconceivable.

Thus this whole world comes into existence through causes.

The sutra cited here says that the maturation of sentient beings' actions is inconceivable. Thus this whole world comes into existence through causes. There is actually much more to this citation, but this is what is relevant here.

1.1.1.2.1.1.2.2. Refuting consciousness as agent

Having refuted that the eye exists by way of its own entity, this second heading concerns refuting consciousness as an agent existing by way of its own entity.

Assertion: The eye and so forth [meaning the rest of the consciousnesses] are inherently existent because one experiences consciousness, their effect.

Answer:

Because the conditions are incomplete

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There is no awareness before looking,

While afterwards awareness is of no use.

The instrument is of no use in the third case.

By using the effect as reasoning they establish that the causes, the eye and so forth, are also inherently existent. Thus they are saying that because of the eye organ there is an eye consciousness, and because there is an eye organ they exist inherently, because one experiences the consciousness as the effect. So they are establishing that because there is an effect that one experiences, then the cause itself must also be inherently existent.

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

A visual consciousness does not exist before looking at a form, for prior to that the conditions which produce it are incomplete. Alternatively if it exists after looking at the form, it follows that the eye consciousness is of no use in looking at the form, because looking takes place before it exists.

The main point here is that visual consciousness does not exist before looking at form. What is being implied here is that a visual consciousness does not exist by way of its own entity before looking at form, for prior to that the conditions that produce it are incomplete. According to their assertion if it exists after looking at form, then it follows that the eye consciousness is of no use looking at the form, because looking at it takes place before it exists. Again, this has to be related to inherently existence, or existence by way of its own entity. What is being established then is that a visual consciousness could not exist inherently, or by way of its own entity, before looking at form, nor could it exist as being inherently existent after looking at something.

The main point being discussed here is that if visual consciousness were to exist by way of its own entity then, does it exist prior to looking at form or after looking at form? If it exists prior to looking at form then there is the absurdity that a visual consciousness could not exist before looking at the form, because before looking at the form its conditions to be produced are not complete. Alternatively if it exists after looking at the form, it follows that the eye consciousness is of no use in looking at the form, because looking at it takes place before it exists. So there would be no need for an eye consciousness. That is the absurdity which would arise if visual consciousness were to exist inherently, or by way of its own nature.

To make it simpler, does the eye consciousness see prior to the eye seeing form or afterwards? If it exists prior to seeing

form then it could not be established as seeing form because the very conditions necessary for seeing form have not been completed. So you could not say you could see prior to the eye seeing form. But if the visual consciousness perceives the visual form after it has been seen by the eye then what extra use would there be for an eye consciousness if the form has already been perceived?

The refutation is made by counter argument: if the eye consciousness were to exist inherently or by way of its own entity, then does it exist prior to the eye perceiving or afterwards? In both cases an absurdity arises. There is a third possibility. As the commentary reads:

As a third possibility one might think that that which looks and consciousness are simultaneous.

In that case: It would then follow that the instrument of looking would be of no use in the production of that visual consciousness because the two would exist simultaneously and would be unrelated.

1.1.1.2.1.1.2.3. Refuting the eye as agent

This is sub-divided into three:

1.1.1.2.1.1.2.3.1. Absurdity if the eye travels to look at visible form

1.1.1.2.1.1.2.3.2. Purposelessness if it travels to look at the form after it is seen

1.1.1.2.1.1.2.3.3. Consequence that all objects would be seen if the eye by way of its own entity perceived form without travelling

1.1.1.2.1.1.2.3.1. Absurdity if the eye travels to look at visible form

Assertion: The eye is the instrument of looking.

Again this is implying that the eye is an instrument of looking by way of its own entity.

Answer:

If the eye travels, that which is 313
Distant would take long to see.
Why are extremely close
And very distant forms not clear?

In answer to the assertion and to explain the meaning of the verse two counter questions are posited:

When the eye looks at a form, does it look after travelling to the object or without doing so? In the first case, if when the eye looked at a form there were motion of travelling toward the object, it should take longer to see distant objects.

The assertion is that it should take longer to see distant objects because if the eye actually has to travel over distance, then it would take a long time to see distant objects.

The commentary continues:

If the eye perceived through contact, why would the eye ointment and spatula, which are extremely close, and very distant forms not be equally clear? It follows that they would be because of being perceived through contact.

What is being explained is that if the eye needs to have actual contact with an object in order to see it, then very distant objects could not be seen because you couldn't have contact with very distant objects. However from our experience, we know that we can see very distant things, although not clearly.

The main point that is being refuted is that the eye is an instrument of looking by way of its own entity. If it is established that the eye is an instrument of looking by way

of its own entity, then the two main counter-questions which are raised are, does the eye look at form after travelling to the object or without having to travel.

In the first case, as mentioned here, if the eye had to travel a distance in order to see an object then the absurdity is that it would take a longer to see distant objects because of the time involved in the eye having to travel to the site of the object.

Alternatively if there had to be direct contact with the eye like eye ointment and the spatula which applies the eye ointment, in order to perceive things, then the absurdity would be that one would not perceive things which are at a distance, such as stars and the moon. However again from own experience, we know that we don't have to come into direct contact with an object in order to perceive it.

1.1.1.2.1.1.2.3.2. Purposelessness if it travels to look at the form after it is seen

This section refutes the case where the eye travels to look at the object after having seen it.

If the eye travels when the form is seen 314
Its movement is of no benefit.
Alternatively it is false to say
What it intends to view is ascertained.

As the commentary explains the verse:

If the eye travelled to the form after seeing it [i.e. if that is what is being asserted], its movement would be of no benefit [or no use], for though it does so to view the form, that form has already been seen.

The point here is that if the eye were to travel to perceive form after seeing it, then the movement would be of no benefit because the form has already been seen, so what is the purpose of travelling to it?

The commentary continues:

Alternatively, if it approached without seeing the form which it intended to view, it would be false to say it had definitely been seen, for it approaches what is to be viewed without seeing it, like a blind man.

The analogy is that if a blind person said, 'I am going to see something' then that would be false. Even though he may say that he is going to see something, he will not actually be able to see it because of being blind. Similarly it would be false to say that something had been seen by an eye that travelled to see it.

1.1.1.2.1.1.2.3.3. Consequence that all objects would be seen if the eye by way of its own entity perceived form without travelling

If the eye perceives without travelling 315
It would see all these phenomena.
For that which does not travel there is
Neither distance nor obscuration.

To avoid these errors [as mentioned previously in relation to the eye travelling to an object to see it] one might assert that it perceives form by way of its own entity without travelling. In that case the eye which stays here would see all of these phenomena: the close and distant, as well as the obscured and unobscured. For an eye which does not approach the object there should be no difference between close or distant, obscured or unobscured objects.

If objects were to be seen by the eye by way of its own entity then these absurdities or faults relating to whether it sees it prior to travelling, or by travelling to the object, or without travelling to the object would arise. These are the faults that

arise if you posit that the eye perceives things by way of its own entity.

The main point being made here is that if the eye were to perceive objects by way of its own entity then regardless of the object the eye would have to perceive the thing. It wouldn't make any difference whether the object was close or distant or obscured or unobscured. If the eye was to perceive things by way of its own entity then regardless of the object the eye would have to be able to perceive it. The conclusion is that the eye does perceive things, but in relation to many conditions, and not by way of its own entity.

1.1.1.2.1.2.4. Consequence that the eye is an instrument of looking in relation to the eye

*If the nature of all things
First appears in themselves,
Why would the eye not
Be perceived by the eye itself?* 316

If the eye were to perceive things by way of its own entity then these further absurdities are being pointed out. The commentary explains the verse thus:

Just as the fragrance of the magnolia or blue lotus is first found at its source and afterwards, through contact, on a sesame seed and so forth...

This analogy relates to the general conventional understanding of where fragrances come from. When objects have a fragrance we know its main source from our own perceptions. Through coming into contact with another object such as sesame seed, the fragrance of a blue lotus will transfer onto that secondary object.

...it is the way of all things that their nature first appears in themselves. Since it cannot relinquish its nature even in relation to itself, if it is an instrument of looking by way of its own entity, why does the eye not perceive itself?

It follows that it should since the eye organ even with the eye as its object cannot give up its nature as an instrument of looking. Yet valid cognition negates that the eye perceives itself. Thus the subject, the eye, is not an instrument of looking at form by way of its own entity, because it does not look at itself.

What is being established is that conventionally we accept that things have their own nature. What is being refuted here is that the eye is an instrument of looking at form by way of its own entity. The absurdity being pointed out here is that if the eye were to look at form by way of its own entity, then that would imply that the eye would have to perceive itself because of having its own nature. However that goes against our observations. We cannot perceive our own eye without relying on something else. However if the eye itself was an instrument to perceive things by way of its own entity then we would have to be able to see our own eye. Not being able see our own eye is yet another conventional reason proving that the eye does not perceive things by way of its own entity.

The syllogism in relation to this is: The subject the eye, is not an instrument of looking at form by way of its own entity, because it does not look at itself.

1.1.1.2.1.2.5. Refuting a combination of three factors as the instrument of looking at visible form

Assertion: The eye alone does not have the ability to view form. The form is seen in dependence upon a combination of three factors.

Answer:

*The eye does not have consciousness
And consciousness lacks that which looks.
If form has neither of these,
How can they see form?* 317

The Sautrantika Buddhist school asserts that the eye cannot perceive or see things just by itself as other factors have to be present. The two other conditions which have to be present are the object and the eye consciousness. The eye can perceive only when all three conditions come into contact.

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Since the eye is matter it is not conscious of the object. Consciousness is not that which looks at the object. The form, the objective condition, is neither that which looks nor consciousness. How can form be seen by way of its own entity through a combination of these three factors? It follows that it is not feasible because visible form which is one of them has no ability to see.

The main assertion here is that form can be seen by way of its own entity through a combination of these three factors. It follows that this is not feasible, because visible form which is one of the three factors has no ability to see.

The absurdity being pointed out is that they assert that form is seen in dependence on the combination of three factors, again implying that form is seen by way of its own entity. What is being pointed out here is that if one of the three factors does not have the ability to perceive at all, which is the object itself (form), then it cannot serve as a factor to actually perceive. Since you say that a combination of the three allows the eye to see, if one of them does not have the actual intrinsic ability to see at all, then one of the conditions does not serve its purpose. It is the general rule that if one of the factors of a combination does not stand, then the whole combination does not stand. So the assertion is thus is being refuted by pointing out this absurdity.

1.1.1.2.1.2. REFUTING TRULY EXISTENT AUDITORY OBJECTS

We will continue with this in the next session.

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