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## Study Group – *Aryadeva's 400 Verses*

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*Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga*

*Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*

19 February 2008

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I am very glad that we have gathered again to begin Study Group for the year. The name Study Group implies that it is a group that is inclined to study. The equivalent is what our sister centre in Queensland, Chenrezig Institute, calls the BSB or Basic Study Programme. Geshe Tashi Tsering seems to be quite fond of that name, and says 'Our BSB is quite good'. I thought BSB meant Basic Study Group but when I asked someone else they said it stands for Buddhist Study Programme.

### **Why come to study group?**

In any case our Tuesday evening group is called the Study Group. So it is appropriate to consider what type of study we are doing. Generally study means learning things that you previously hadn't known about, and further increasing one's knowledge so that it becomes even more profound. The connotation of 'study' in Tibetan has those two elements - learning something that one has not previously understood or known, and then increasing what one has already learned.

Having given that definition there may be some who feel, 'I have already studied whatever there is to be studied, and there is no need for me to increase my knowledge'. Our Study Group however is always relevant as it is the study of the different methods and techniques that subdue the mind, in particular how to overcome the delusions in the mind, and then increasing both that knowledge and the qualities in one's mind.

Why do we need to subdue our mind by overcoming the delusions, in particular the three root delusions of attachment, anger and ignorance? To answer that question we just need to reflect on our own life, and see that when delusions are prevalent in our mind they harm us on a continuous basis. We need to see how much suffering, disturbance and destruction delusions bring to our life whenever they dominate our mind.

The worldly knowledge that one acquires with normal study does not serve as a means of subduing the mind and overcoming the delusions. In fact, in many cases, if it is not put to good use worldly knowledge can be a cause to increase the delusions in one's mind.

To see the importance of the particular study that we do here, one can reflect on the fact that if one has not been able to subdue one's mind by overcoming the three root delusions, then no matter what kind of worldly or any other knowledge that one might have acquired, it will not be of much use to us if it has not served to overcome the delusions in one's mind. It will not be of real benefit as it has not brought real happiness and peace to our mind.

The conclusion that we need to come to is that one must definitely work to overcome the three delusions in one's mind. That begins by first of all identifying the delusions, and then slowly trying to engage in the practice of applying the different antidotes that are the techniques to overcome particular delusions. Therefore when we consider the

purpose of our study here we should always remind ourselves of that basic main purpose, which is to identify the delusions and then gradually overcome them.

As we progress in our study, the knowledge that we gain serves to establish any virtue that we gain from overcoming attachment, any virtue that we gain from overcoming anger, and any root virtues that we may gain from overcoming ignorance. These virtues then serve as a basis on which to increase those virtues within one's mind. That is the twofold purpose of our study.

### **Integrating Dharma and worldly life**

The real purpose of the study we do here is to recognise and subdue the mind by not allowing the delusions, in particular the three poisons, to arise in the mind, and to increase any virtues that we develop. If we then abide by that conduct in our daily life then whatever worldly knowledge and virtues we may have gained in our earlier studies will actually serve as a purpose for our own benefit. So we can see that there is an incredible benefit from doing Dharma study. Not only do we gain qualities and virtues that lead to ultimate goals, but the very process of gaining the qualities of the virtues of Dharma study helps us to utilise our worldly knowledge on a practical level. Thus it helps to provide the basic necessities that we need to sustain ourselves, in addition to the benefit of bringing some peace and happiness in our mind.

Without Dharma practice and study, just having mere worldly knowledge can actually harm us by contributing to negative states of mind. For example, in relation to those who are better or superior to us in any way, we develop jealousy, to those who are inferior or less privileged than us we develop contempt and pride, and we develop a sense of competitiveness towards those who are considered as being equal to us, for instance colleagues at work. When these delusions arise in our mind they bring so much discomfort for us, and others. If mere worldly knowledge is not utilised with the Dharma then it can serve as a means for delusions to increase, thus harming oneself and others.

Because we are not free from samsara we all need to rely on worldly material things to sustain ourselves. So we do need worldly knowledge. But merely having worldly knowledge can serve to harm us by increasing the delusions whereas when worldly knowledge is utilised with a Dharma practice it can benefit us. When we integrate worldly studies with Dharma practice, then in addition to the great benefits from the Dharma practice, we can use whatever worldly knowledge we have for our real benefit and happiness.

### **An example of a beneficial practice**

If we take one delusion, anger for example, we can see the negative consequences when anger arises in our mind, as well as the positive consequences when anger decreases as a result of applying the antidote. We have both those mental states within ourselves, - anger as well as patience. That is because we have the seeds or imprints of anger as well as the seeds of patience within our own mind. It is now a matter for us to recognise both of them, and completely understand how they work within our mind, and then to apply the positive and try to decrease the negative. It can be done in quite a simple practice: when one has a moment to oneself sit quietly somewhere and for the sake of understanding how anger works, try to imagine becoming angry in an unpleasant situation. You can create the scenario in your mind of someone criticising you for example, which makes you feel very angry, then imagine what the consequences would be. How would you react physically, mentally and

verbally? How would you normally react with anger? Then try to analyse the consequences. Is the outcome a beneficial effect for oneself and others or is it an unpleasant one?

Then practice the opposite: imagine applying the antidote of patience when anger starts to arise in one's mind. Imagine not retaliating, and not reacting out of that angry state of mind, but rather trying to subdue the mind of anger. Imagine the consequences and effects when one replaces anger with patience and tolerance. Would that bring calmness and peace to one's mind? What would the effect be for others? Would they feel much more at ease and peaceful too, or not? Analyse within oneself in this way, by generating the delusion and seeing the consequences. There is a particular Tibetan word *gyu-tag* which means to investigate and check one's mind; to see what kind of mental states one may have and what kind of effects one experiences as a result of those mental states. In this way if we apply the practice in our daily life, we can then slowly begin to apply the antidotes to the negative states of mind.

### **The importance of applying practice**

Having analysed and understood the positive consequences of non-attachment, non-anger, non-hatred and so forth and the negative consequences of anger and attachment, it is not sufficient to just leave it at that. Just knowing that anger, for example, is destructive and harmful and that patience is beneficial will not really be of much benefit to oneself, if one doesn't engage in the practice of overcoming anger.

What then needs to be done is to put one's knowledge into practice. As one great master has said, 'It is not the fault of not knowing. We all seem to know quite well. The fault lies in not applying the practice'. In Study Group we can safely assume that everyone knows and agrees that anger is destructive, and that patience is a virtue. The negative consequences of anger are understood quite well, and the positive effect of patience is something we can all acknowledge and accept. It is the same with attachment. We can safely assume that most people definitely understand the negative consequences of attachment, as well as ignorance, and the positive effects of non-attachment are also understood.

If just knowing this doesn't seem to bring much change, then that indicates that we have not been able to apply our knowledge in our daily life. To explain this there is an analogy of a doctor diagnosing a patient's illness and prescribing the proper medication. If the doctor has properly diagnosed the illness and prescribes the proper medication, then there will be no fault from the doctor's side, and because it is correct medication there will be no fault from the side of the medication. Now if the patient does not take the medication and starts complaining that he is not cured, then is quite obvious where the fault lies!

It is the same in our situation - it is not as if we don't have the perfect teachings. The teaching itself is definitely valid, and there is no fault there. Nor is there any fault in the teacher who, using their knowledge of the scripture, presents the faultless teachings in a proper way. If the teaching doesn't seem to benefit one, then it can only mean that one has not applied the teachings in one's actual practice. It is good for us to know where the fault lies, because it seems that some people are confused about this. They may wonder why, if it is so correct and pure, doesn't the Dharma help to solve all of one's problems.

It is important to understand and keep in mind that even though the Dharma itself is pure, and the instructions are

pure, if we are not careful in utilising it in our practice then the very knowledge that we gain from the Dharma can actually turn into a cause for the delusions to increase. Here one must understand the fault does not lie in the instruction itself, but it lies in not applying the instructions in a proper way.

### **The focus of our study**

The particular study topic we are covering now, which was indicated even before we actually engaged studying in this text, is the antidote to overcome delusions, in particular the root delusion of grasping at an inherently existent self, or the grasping at the self. These teachings describe the antidotes for overcoming that root delusion. Teachings that describe the various antidotes for overcoming delusions are generally classified into the extensive teachings and the profound teachings. Also the whole path of the teaching can be presented as that which deals with the conventional phenomena and that which deals with ultimate phenomena. The teaching in this text is a teaching that presents the profound teachings on emptiness. Within the Two Truths it presents the ultimate truth, which is emptiness.

It is good to be studying a profound teaching, but why is it profound? How is the profundity of the teaching utilised in overcoming the delusions within our mind? Again we go back to identifying the root delusion, which is the ignorance of grasping at the self. It is called the root delusion because grasping at the self is the main delusion that is the cause for us to cycle in samsara over and over again. In order to overcome that root delusion one needs to meditate on emptiness or selflessness, but without first identifying that actual root delusion within oneself and understanding that it is the main culprit, trying to meditate on emptiness wouldn't really have much effect. Therefore, as prescribed in the teachings, it is essential to clearly recognise and understand what that grasping at the self is, in order to overcome it.

It is also good for us to reflect and ponder again and again on why the ignorance grasping at the self is identified as being a root delusion. The way to identify self-grasping is to really check within oneself to see how the self-grasping comes about. When we think about it, we really do have that instinctive notion of a self, don't we? There's this really strong feeling of self identity, which is always there spontaneously. We don't even have to think about it, that notion of me, or the self, is always with us wherever we go, in whatever we do. There is nothing really wrong with a notion of a self, but the problem is that we have a misperception of how that self exists, and as a result there is the strong grasping or attachment to the self.

With an initial strong attachment to the self, what follows naturally is a strong attachment to the belongings of the self. The possessor is the self and the possessions are everything that belongs to, or which is related to, the self. We classify those who are beneficial to the self as friends, and we classify as foes or enemies those who seem to harm us. So as a result, attachment to friends and aversion or anger towards enemies arises. When we investigate how these delusions arise in our mind it becomes very obvious to us that they start from that misperceived notion of 'I' and 'me'. The importance of 'me' leads to attachment to those who are favourable to oneself, and aversion or anger to those who are not favourable to oneself.

When we have a good understanding of this root delusion - the ignorance grasping at the self - then we can apply that understanding directly to the twelve interdependent links. The first link is the link of ignorance which is identified as

the root delusion of all samsara, and that ignorance leads to the second link, which is karmic formations.

Also in the explanations of karma in the Four Noble Truths, the primary cause for samsara is said to be delusions. It is ignorance of grasping at the self that is the primary delusion within one's mind, which leads on to all the other delusions. When we begin to understand that, then we understand that we create karma as a result of the delusions.

### The result of practice

You already have all this knowledge, so I am presenting it now just a reminder. In a way it is a recipe that brings out the flavour of the actual practice, which shows how we can apply that practice, derived from our understanding of the teachings, to our daily life. I mention this as a reminder of the main topic of our studies here. In fact reflecting on this, and on the importance of practice, it is in our best interest if we can actually apply the practice to our life, primarily to bring about a more subdued and kinder mind. That is the main purpose. If by coming to the teachings, studying the texts and so forth can help to induce a more subdued and kinder mind, particularly towards others, then that will serve as the purpose of our study.

If having applied the teachings to our practice in our daily life, then we can begin to see the result of having a kinder mind. That will then naturally result in having an even happier and more joyful mind, which will be a good result. When others see us being kinder than before, and genuinely more happy and jolly, then that will be the hallmark of the benefit of the teachings. Trying to convince others that Buddhism is good or that coming to teachings is good while one remains as agitated as before, or as short tempered and angry as before, will not be a good advertisement. Basically the best way to give others the message that the teachings work, that Buddhism works, is to show it through the positive transformation that one goes through oneself. Then others will speak up loudly about the benefit and real worthiness of the Dharma to others. Then one needn't say much to others to try to convince them, as they will be interested from their own side, because looking back they will say, 'This person used to be so irritable and agitated before, but having practised Buddhism they have become much kinder and happier, so there must be something to this'.

Once when I was teaching in Bendigo two students overheard others whispering among themselves saying, 'Those two used to be quite disagreeable people in the past but it must be the Buddhist path or whatever that they are following, as they seem to be much calmer and more subdued nowadays'.

### The importance of motivation and dedication

Normally one needs to develop a positive motivation for engaging in the teachings. So the positive motivation that we can develop is, 'The purpose for engaging in the teachings and study is not merely for my own sake, but rather for the benefit other sentient beings. By putting the teachings into practice may I be able to attain the ultimate state of enlightenment so that I can benefit all sentient beings, by eliminating every suffering and bringing them to ultimate happiness'.

To stress the importance of motivation and dedication we can quote from a teaching by Lama Tsong Khapa that is in prayer form. The meaning of a particular stanza is:

In the beginning I spent a long time listening to the teachings,

In the middle part all the teachings that I heard and studied appeared as personal instructions,  
At the end I put all these instructions into practice,  
I dedicate all the merits to the flourishing of the Buddhist doctrine.

Here he basically explains his whole life in one verse, showing how he conducted his life in practice. The dedication to the flourishing of the Buddhist doctrine is the equivalent of saying, 'I dedicate for the happiness of all beings', because Buddhist doctrine is an unmistakable method of bringing happiness to sentient beings. If those techniques were to prevail then it will naturally bring about happiness as a result for whoever practises in that way. Therefore one should understand that dedicating for the welfare of all sentient beings is the equivalent to dedicating for the teachings to flourish. Likewise dedicating for the teachings to flourish is equivalent to dedicating to the welfare and happiness of all sentient beings.

I have spent quite a lot of time on what may seem like a sidetrack from our text. Even though it is quite warm and it seems like you are already quite overwhelmed by the heat, we will spend a few more minutes going into the text. If you can just endure that extra bit of suffering then it might be for a worthwhile cause. As the saying goes, that which is difficult to obtain, once obtained will be priceless. The literal meaning of 'priceless' is like a precious jewel; it is quite difficult for treasure hunters to find a precious gem and they have to endure all sorts of the hardships in their search for such a gem. However when they find it, that precious jewel will have great benefits, and all the hardships endured earlier will not have been in vain. Rather the hardships will have led to great gain. We can use that analogy for our study and practice. Regardless of a bit of heat and difficulty now, we will use it wisely to derive great benefit from the teachings.

#### 1.1.1.2.2. REFUTING APPREHENSION BY MENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS<sup>1</sup>

*Without the sense organs what will mind* 321  
*Do after it has gone?*  
*If it were so, why would that which lives*  
*Not always be without mind?*

It is good to try to develop an understanding of what the heading means. It refers to refuting apprehension or perception by mental consciousness. So can mental consciousness actually apprehend an object? How does it apprehend an object?

*Student: Through the senses?*

Why should we refute apprehension of mental consciousness when mental consciousness does actually apprehend objects? What is wrong with the notion of mental consciousness apprehending objects? Why should we refute that? In other words why are we refuting apprehension by mental consciousness?

*Student: We are refuting the mode of apprehension; that things exist inherently.*

My interpretation is that it is not actually refuting the manner of how the mental consciousness apprehends, but rather the apprehension of mental consciousness itself. It might become clearer as we go through it.

The lower Buddhist schools posit that mental consciousness exists from its own side. whereas the higher Madhyamika

<sup>1</sup> This heading is the second part of 1.1.1.2, Individual refutations, which in turn the second part of 1.1.1. Refuting the true existence of that which is apprehended: the sense objects.

school refutes that mental consciousness is truly existent or that it exists from its own side. So, my view is that what is being refuted is that mental consciousness itself is inherently existent, or as the text states, existing by way of its own identity.

If it were just relating to the apprehension of objects by the mental consciousness, then it is commonly known that there are many modes of how mental consciousness apprehends objects, some in the right way and some in a faulty way. There are valid cognitions and invalid cognitions, which we dealt with earlier. Even though there are certain invalid apprehensions by mind that doesn't need to imply that we have to refute apprehension of the consciousness itself. Here we are referring to mental consciousness in general, and my interpretation would be that it refers to refuting the apprehension of mental consciousness as being truly existent or inherently existent.

Whereas a more literal explanation of the verse implies that the mental consciousness itself does not have the ability to apprehend things as being inherently existent.

Referring to mental consciousness, what is the difference between mind and mental factors, and what is the difference between mind and primary mind? This is a quiz for those who have studied mind and mental factors or *lo rig*. You should know this.

*Student: Mind identifies the object and mental factors identifies the aspects.*

Now the difference between mind and mental consciousness?

*Student: Inaudible.*

We talk about the mind as the primary mind when it views an object as a whole, without any detailed characteristics. Whereas the mental factors perceive the specific characteristics of the object. The analogy usually given in the teachings is of a king and the ministers or generals who work under the king. A more contemporary example would be a prime minister and his cabinet ministers. The prime minister is the overall political leader and the ministers have specific jobs to carry out the overall mission of the prime minister. Mind and mental factors operate in a similar way to perceive objects.

If you who wish to refresh your mind it would be good to go back to the notes of the teachings on Mind and Mental Factors. We did not have time to complete the six root delusions and the twenty secondary delusions at that time, but all of the earlier mental factors were covered, so it would be good to refer to your notes<sup>2</sup>. I remember that we allocated a specific time of eight weeks to teach the topic Mind and Mental Factors and about seventy five people came, who were very eager and determined to study, and they stuck with it all the way through the eight weeks. If you put in such an effort, with interest and attention at that time, it would be unfortunate now to relapse and forget.

To explain the meaning of the verse the commentary posits this assertion:

*Assertion:* The mind apprehends objects after travelling to them.

Even though it is not specifically mentioned in the commentary this assertion implies the following question: when the mind apprehends objects does it travel to the object or not? The assertion is given as an answer to the

question, stating that the mind apprehends objects by travelling to the object. What this basically implies in relation to the main meaning of the verse is that although the mind has the ability to apprehend objects, that ability is not inherently existent within the mind.

In order to present an answer to the question above, we can speculate that there are two further questions: If the mind apprehends objects after travelling to the object then does it travel with the organ or without the organ? The answer relates to the assertion that the mind travels to the object with the organ. If that is the case then:

*Answer:* That is incorrect. Auditory consciousness does not travel to the object along with the ear organ, for the organs always remain in the body.

The commentary then explains:

Even if mind, such as an auditory consciousness, approached its object without the sense organs, how could it perform the functions of listening, looking and so forth, since like a blind person it would lack the ability to perceive its object?

What is being presented here is the absurdity of the mind apprehending an object without the sense organs. If it travelled without the sense organs then how could the mind perceive the object? How could it perform the function of listening and so forth if the organ is missing? The analogy that is given is that of a blind person: even though they have the features of the eye and so forth the reason why they cannot see is because there is damage to the organ. This shows that objects cannot be perceived without the organ.

As the commentary further reads:

If it were so, why would that which lives, i.e. the self, not always be without mind?

The word Tibetan word *sog* translated here as 'the self' also has the connotation of 'that which lives' or life-force in general. There are many different terms used in the sutras for 'the self'. In this instance 'that which lives' actually relates to the self so 'why would that which lives, i.e. the self not always be without mind?' This is a rhetorical question indicating that a self always has to have a mind. It would be an absurdity if the self did not have a mind.

When one investigates in this way by means of reasoning, neither sense organs nor consciousnesses have by way of their own entity the ability to apprehend objects.

What this explains is that, as explained in the teachings on Mind and Cognition, for the apprehension of an object to take place three factors must be present: mental consciousness, the sense organ or faculty, and the object itself. When these three conditions are present then an object is perceived. When one investigates one comes to realise that even though these three factors must be present when an object is perceived, none of them could apprehend it independently, and thus inherently perceive or apprehend an object. The mental consciousness by itself could not inherently apprehend an object; the sense organ could not independently or inherently apprehend an object; likewise the object does not present itself as an object to be perceived inherently or independently. That is the conclusion, which is the meaning of the verse.

The main point of this verse is, as explained here in the commentary, that 'neither organs nor consciousnesses have by way of their own entity the ability to apprehend objects'. Thus what is being refuted clearly is not that the mental consciousness does not have the ability to apprehend

<sup>2</sup> Available on the 2007 edition of the CD of transcripts of teachings.

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objects, because it does, but that it does not apprehend objects by way of its entity or inherently.

If the mental consciousness were to apprehend objects by way of its own entity, or inherently, or independently then, as explained here in the commentary, since it is agreed on both sides that the organ serves as a necessary factor to apprehend objects, there would be the absurdity of asking whether it apprehends the object with or without the organ ?

If the consciousness travels to the object without the organ then the absurdity is that it would be like a self without a mind. If it travels with the organ then the absurdity is that the organ actually leaves the body. These are obvious absurdities.

The absurdities described above exhaust all the possibilities of how an object could be apprehended by a mental consciousness by way of its own entity or independently. The conclusion is that the mental consciousness does have the ability to apprehend objects, just as every organ has the ability to apprehend objects, and the object has the ability to be apprehended by the consciousness and the organ. However none of them, have that ability by way of their own entity or independently. Rather they do so interdependently by relating to each other. That is what is being refuted in this outline 'Refuting apprehension by mental consciousness'.

Although we were not able to cover much material from the text this evening, there is no big rush. We will do it slowly in our next sessions. When I was escaping from Tibet the first area of India we came into was Arunachal Pradesh. The people from Arunachal Pradesh are actually quite Tibetan, as their script is Tibetan, so they also speak a bit of Tibetan as many of their words are similar. We would ask them how much further we had to go, how many more mountains we have to cross before we actually get down to the main part of India. They set up camps which we had to reach each evening. When we asked how much further before we reached that evening's camp they replied, 'If we go slowly we will reach there quickly'.

That very simple saying has a deep meaning, and there is actually a good personal instruction in there. When we think about our experiences in life we notice that when we are in a great rush, then although we might be moving quickly our mind is full of anxiety, and wherever we have to go seems to take a long time - the buses seem to take longer to reach their destination. Whereas if you actually relax a bit and take it easy, time seems to go by quite quickly, and we enjoy it much more. So therefore there is practical advice in that saying.

As children in Tibet we would really look forward to Tibetan New Year because that was the biggest holiday of the year, with a lot of good things happening. As children it seemed to take such a long time to reach New Year, but now having grown up it seems that a year goes quite fast. Of course here the children wait for Christmas to come round.

If we go slowly we will reach the end quickly but of course we have to be careful that we do not lose out by going too slowly. I would like to relate to you an incident which occurred in Varanasi when I was there. It was part of the University's activities to have races for which awards were given. Apparently there were two students, one of whom, Urgyen, was normally referred to as the simpleton and the other was called Pema Gyalpo. In the race these two were left behind. With about five miles to go Urgyen said to Pema Gyalpo that as they were way behind anyway they might as

well just relax and take it a bit easier. Urgyen actually had something to eat and he shared it with Pema Gyalpo, so Pema Gyalpo relaxed quite a bit.

Students were given marks based on their finishing position right up to the last person. So when they came to the finishing line Urgyen suddenly put in a lot of effort in and overtook Pema Gyalpo and left him behind. Therefore Urgyen got a few more marks than Pema Gyalpo. Later the other students would tease Pema Gyalpo saying, 'Oh the simpleton Urgyen actually made a fool of you'. Normally Urgyen was called a simpleton, but he was actually quite clever, and not at all foolish.

*Transcribed from tape by Judy Mayne  
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