

Study Group – Aryadeva's 400 Verses

༄༅། །བརྒྱ་བཅོམ་བཞི་བརྒྱ་པའི་སྐྱེ་བའི་ཚོགས་ལེ་ལུར་བྱས་པ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

1 April 2008

Sitting in a comfortable position, you can generate a positive motivation in your mind 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 well'.

1.1.2.1.2.2. Briefly refuting that though there are many components, the composite is a truly existent single unit

Assertion: Though it has many components, the pot is a truly existent single unit.

As clearly explained in the outline itself, what is being refuted is that when many components come together they form an inherently single unit.

Answer:

Though they meet and come together 339
Form cannot be smell.
Therefore like the pot
The composite cannot be one.

As explained previously, both sides accept that the pot is a composite that is made up of the eight substances. What is being asserted is that when these eight substances come together they form a truly existent single unit. To explain the meaning of the verse the commentary says:

Though visible form, smell and so forth meet and combine, form cannot be smell, for the things that create the composite do not give up their different characteristics.

When different components such as form and smell and so forth come together to make a composite, such as a pot, each component retains its particular characteristics. That which is to be perceived by the eye consciousness is form, that which is perceived by the nose consciousness is smell, and that which is perceived by the tongue consciousness is taste and so on. Each of the substances has its own characteristics, which remain as separate characteristics even when they combine to make a composite such as a pot.

Thus, the absurdity that is being pointed out here is that if the composite, the pot, is inherently existent, or truly existent, then all the components that make up the composite would also, by default, have to be truly or inherently existent. The pot would have to be one with its components and all of the components would have to be inherently one with each other. That means that they would have to combine and become a single unit with undifferentiated characteristics, which is an absurdity.

Though form, smell and so forth combine they do not have one nature. Thus just as the pot as a truly existent single unit was refuted by the words [in stanza 332],

Because the pot is not separate from
Its characteristics, it is not one,

the composite too cannot be a truly existent single unit.

Even though the components, the eight substances, do combine to make a unit or composite, which is the pot, they do not become one in nature. As explained earlier, this is because their particular characteristics remain. If you assert

an inherently existent pot or truly existent pot, then the absurdity is that by default everything that is related to the pot would also have to be truly existent or inherently existent, and thus they would have to become one in nature. Just as the components were refuted as being truly existent earlier, so too, the composite cannot be truly existent.

How one should understand the conclusion to be asserted from one's own side is that while the pot or the vase is a single unit, it is not a truly existent single unit. If the pot were to be truly existent single unit, then the eight substances that make up the pot would also have to be truly existent. Then the pot would have to be one with the components, which, because they are truly existent, would have to be one with each other. Being a truly existent one or a single unit with all the other components means that the composite and components would lose their individual characteristics. And that is an absurdity, as the eight substances each have their own particular characteristics and do not combine to become one. Likewise when the components combine to make a pot they do not combine to make a pot that is an inherently existent single unit; rather they combine to make just a pot.

As mentioned previously in the text, if the pot were to be an inherently or truly existent single unit or one, then it would have to exist independently without relying on any other factors or components. That point also has to be understood in this context as well.

As one analyses the content here one should bring to mind immediately earlier explanations that gave reasons as to why the pot or the vase is not a truly existent, or an inherently existent one, or a single unit. The reason, as mentioned previously, is because it is a dependent origination. If a pot were to be an inherently or truly existent single unit then that implies that the pot would have to exist independently of all its components, i.e. it would have to exist without depending on, or relating to its components. That would be absurd because the pot is a dependent origination.

Thus one must understand that the vase or pot cannot exist independently, or cannot exist from its own side, because its existence depends on its components. It cannot exist otherwise. Because it depends on its components to come into existence it cannot exist from its own side.

1.1.2.2. REFUTING TRULY EXISTENT COMPONENTS

This has four subdivisions:

1.1.2.2.1. Just as a composite does not exist truly apart from visible form, smell and so forth, there are no truly existent elemental derivatives that do not rely on the elements

1.1.2.2.2. Refuting truly existent elements

1.1.2.2.3. Refuting the rejoinder

1.1.2.2.4. Refuting a fire particle as truly existent fire

1.1.2.2.1. JUST AS A COMPOSITE DOES NOT EXIST TRULY APART FROM VISIBLE FORM, SMELL AND SO FORTH, THERE ARE NO TRULY EXISTENT ELEMENTAL DERIVATIVES THAT DO NOT RELY ON THE ELEMENTS

Just as the pot does not exist
Apart from form and so forth,
Likewise form does not exist
Apart from air and so forth.

340

Just as the previously explained reasoning shows that there is no truly existent pot apart from form, smell and so forth, there is no truly existent component visible form apart from the great elements such as air, for it is imputed in dependence upon these.

Basically what is being explained here follows on from the earlier refutation of a truly existent pot on the grounds that there are no truly existent components. Using the same logical reasoning, if there is no truly existent composite then that by default, also proves that there are no truly existent components. So on the one hand, showing that there are no truly existent components proves that there is no truly existent composite. While on the other hand there is no truly existent composite, so there cannot be truly existent components.

The phrase 'for it is imputed in dependence upon these' means that a composite has to be established in dependence upon its components—without its components a composite cannot be established. Likewise components depend on a composite because if there is no composite one cannot talk about its components. That logical conclusion applies to both the composite as well as its components. In other words, it should be understood that in refuting a truly existent composite, then by default the same logic is applicable to its components. Just as there is no truly existent composite, so there cannot be truly existent components. Likewise in establishing that there are no truly existent components then by default one should understand that there is no truly existent composite.

To explain it a little bit further, if the components were to be truly existent then that implies that the components do not depend on a composite. In and of themselves they would have to exist independently of the composite, and could not depend on the composite. But the reality is that the very fact that something is posited as a composite means that it is dependent upon its components. The establishment of component means that it is related, or dependent upon, a composite. Likewise establishing a composite means that it has to depend on its components. Both the composite and its components are dependent originations and so cannot be truly existent. One can relate this line of reasoning to understand all other phenomena.

1.1.2.2.2. REFUTING TRULY EXISTENT ELEMENTS

Just as visible form, smell and the like cannot exist without air and so forth, the great elements too do not exist by way of their own entity without relying on each other. Thus fire is that which burns and the other three elements that which is burnt.

This is the same line of reasoning that was explained earlier. Visible form, smell and so forth are that which comes from the four elements. That which derives from the elements cannot exist without the elements, so the elements themselves are dependent on each other. Here the relationship between the four elements is related to the example of fire as that which burns, and the remaining elements as that which will burn as a cause, in dependence on the fire.

*That which is hot is fire but how
Can that burn which is not hot?
Thus so-called fuel does not exist,
And without it fire too does not.* 341

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Fire burns only fuel whose nature is the other three elements, yet hot fuel is fire and no longer fuel to be burnt. If it is not hot, since it is unrelated to fire how will it burn?

What is being explained here is the interdependence of fire and the other elements. The definition of fire is that which is hot and burns. However in order for fire to burn there has to be fuel, for without fuel there could not be fire that is hot

and burning. The fuel is a combination of the other three elements. So none of the four elements in general, and in particular the fire element, exists inherently or independently. If fire were to exist independently or inherently then it would have to have the nature of hot and burning without having to depend on the fuel, which is the composite of the other elements. Obviously there could not be fire without fuel, so fire clearly depends on fuel, or the other elements, in order to have the nature of hot and burning. Thus fire cannot exist independently or inherently from its own side.

Thus fuel independent of fire does not exist by way of its own entity and because of this, fire independent of fuel does not exist by way of its own entity either.

In summary what is being explained is the interdependence between fuel and fire. In order for fuel to be perceived as fuel, i.e. to function as fuel, it has to depend on fire. If fuel were to function as fuel without depending on fire then there would have to be independently or inherently existent fuel without any fire. If the fuel did not depend on fire it would burn by itself without a fire having to be lit. Clearly, however, in order for fuel to be called fuel it has to depend on fire so that it does become fuel. Likewise fire itself has to depend on fuel for it to burn, for without fuel there could be no fire and would not burn. Thus one should come to the clear conclusion that fuel and fire are dependent on each other, and thus that they are co-existent, and do not exist independently from their own side.

If you treat the analysis of the material presented here as an intellectual game of mere words, then it may seem quite shallow, and you will not gain the understanding of the real meaning behind it. Even by just hearing the words, 'fire does not exist from its own side independently', and 'fuel does not exist independently from its own side', one should be able to understand that this is a presentation of the emptiness of fire and fuel.

Likewise, hearing that 'fire depends on fuel to be in the nature of hot and burning', and that 'fuel depends on fire for it to be called fuel', one should then be able to understand the profound meaning of interdependent origination. If, in the explanation of this, one can derive the subtle meaning of emptiness and interdependent origination, then one has made the analysis and study of this text worthwhile. By slowly referring to this analysis and the presentations here, one further strengthens one's understanding of emptiness and interdependent origination, which will be incredibly beneficial.

One should use the meaning of these verses to benefit one's practice of both analytical and contemplative meditation. In relation to the example used here, analytical meditation is the process of analysing how fire is not inherently existent, and by analysing further, reasoning what it would mean if fire were to be independently or inherently existent from its own side. It means that fire would have to exist as the nature of being hot and burning without depending on anything else, which means without depending on fuel. So, one contemplates whether fire can exist in that way. Can fire exist without depending on fuel for it to burn?

When through such analysis one comes to the profound conclusion that it would be absurd for fire to exist independently and inherently, and then one places one's mind on that conviction, and remains focussed on that for some time, then that is contemplative meditation on emptiness.

It is instructed in the teachings that it is initially much more important to use analytical meditation, analysing and further analysing, and then to use contemplative meditation later on. Do not spend too much time on contemplative meditation in the beginning, because you will not be able to come to the right conclusions. It would be very hard to really progress very far just by sitting rigidly, without much analysis or understanding of what emptiness and dependent origination means, and assuming that one is meditating on emptiness. That sort of meditation on emptiness will not take you very far!

With respect to discerning the emptiness of phenomena, the instruction is that one should not come to the immediate conclusion that things lack inherent existence too soon. Otherwise there would be the fault of simply thinking, 'Oh yes things lack inherent existence, and they don't truly exist', and just leave it as an intellectual understanding. Then one may not really exert oneself to reach more profound understandings, thinking 'Oh yes, yes', and taking the above statement for granted, just on faith, and not really go beyond that. The instruction in the teachings, particularly the teachings on emptiness, is that if one comes to a conclusion too soon in one's thinking about emptiness, then that will be a fault.

However one should not prolong the confirmation that things lack inherent existence for too long either. If one leaves it for too long then one may never come to the conclusion and be in an extreme state all the time. There is a danger of not really reaching the profound conclusion that things lack inherent existence if one does not actually make an attempt to come to that conclusion. So there needs to be the right balance in coming to the conclusion that phenomena lack inherent existence—it should not be reached too soon, nor left for too long either.

Furthermore it needs to be understood that analytical meditation is in fact meditation, in that it is keeping one's mind focused on an object. One may be analysing the nature of things within a certain context, so one is focusing on the particular object and analysing it. Insofar as one's mind is focused on the object it is meditation. However it is not what we call contemplative meditation, because contemplative meditation or single-pointed mental stabilisation is when the mind is focused on a single object. The definition of single-pointed mental stabilisation is to be focused on the object single-pointedly through one's own power. Analytical meditation is when one is focused on an object, which is not a single object, whereas contemplative meditation training one's mind by focusing only on a single object.

Analytical meditation does fit into the definition of mental concentration or stabilisation and so we can definitely assert that analytical meditation is a form of meditation. In fact for us beginners it is a very skilful and practical way of meditating. We all know from our own experience that attempting to focus our mind on one single object is extremely difficult initially, if not impossible. If we are left thinking that meditation means focusing only on one single object we might find meditation so difficult that we do not attempt it very often. Whereas it is relatively easy for us to read the text and analyse the context of what is being explained, and really focus our mind on that.

During the time that we are reading a text and thinking about the meaning of those passages, we are meditating, and that is an essential point to understand and remember. There are many who misinterpret meditation as only being focused on a single object, and there are many who come to the

wrong conclusion that if it is meditation it has to be a contemplative meditation, and that analytical meditation is not really meditation. That is a totally wrong conception. So one must understand that and see the value of analytical meditation. In fact, for us beginners, analytical meditation is much more practical and worthwhile.

Furthermore, as explained in the teachings, genuine contemplative meditation must be preceded by analytical meditation. In contemplative meditation one is focusing on an object that has been examined first by a focused mind through one's wisdom. That means one doesn't focus on just any object in contemplative meditation, rather the focus must be on an object that has been asserted with one's wisdom as being a valid object to meditate upon. Where does that wisdom come from? It comes from analysis. One has to first analyse the object in order to assert that it is a suitable object to focus on in one's meditation. So we can see how profound wisdom only arises through analysis, and through thinking about the object.

In order to engage in a focused meditation, such as using the breath as an object, one has to first think about the technique. That process of learning and thinking about the technique itself is part of an analytical meditation. It is only when we have actually understood the instructions properly that we can even attempt to engage in contemplative meditation. This process of analysing first, then contemplating what one has analysed, and then further analysing is called the union of analytical and contemplative meditation. Within the Lam Rim teachings the early sections are primarily analytical meditation, whereas when it comes to the topic of how to achieve calm abiding then the practice becomes primarily contemplative meditation. I am emphasising this point to show the great value of analytical meditation. It should not be just brushed aside on the grounds that it is not important.

1.1.2.2.3. REFUTING THE REJOINER

Assertion: Fuel is hard and so forth but not hot by nature. When it is overpowered by fire, it grows hot and is that which is burnt.

This assertion is presented by the opponents in relation to the earlier refutation which said, 'fire burns only fuel whose nature is the other three elements, yet hot fuel is fire and no longer fuel to be burnt. If it not hot, since it is unrelated to fire how will it burn?' There it was shown that if fuel is in the nature of fire then how it can be considered as fuel, because it is already one with the fire.

What the opponent is presenting is that fuel is not hot so it cannot be one with fire; it is only one with the nature of fire when it is overpowered by fire.

Answer:

*Even if it is hot only when
Overpowered, why is it not fire?
Yet if not hot, to say fire contains
Something else is not plausible.*

342

The commentary goes on to explain:

Even if fuel grows hot only when overpowered by fire, why is it not fire? It follows that it should be fire because it is hot and burns. Yet if fuel is not hot at that time, it is implausible to claim that some thing else which is not hot is present in fire. In that case just heat divorced from the other three elements would be fire, but if one of the great elements does not exist the others cannot exist either. Moreover it contradicts the statement, "Things that arise simultaneously are reciprocal effects like the elements."

What is being presented here is that fuel becomes one with fire and is hot and burning at that time, so that is what is existent at that time. Fuel existing as one in the nature of fire implies that it is not dependent on the other elements.

What is being presented here as a refutation is that there cannot be heat that is divorced from the other three elements. If that were the case, one would be able to assert that the fire element can be divorced, or absent, from the other elements. However that cannot be the case. All the elements exist in relation to each other. They cannot exist inherently by themselves or singly at any time. They are always coexistent and that is what is being presented here as the main point.

In relation to the verse, the absurdity that is being pointed out here in the refutation is that if what you assert is true, then the fire element would have to exist independently without relating to the other elements. However as the text says,

Things that arise simultaneously are reciprocal effects like the elements.

This means that wherever the elements are they coexist together, and that at no time can one element be separated from the others.

1.1.2.2.4. REFUTING A FIRE PARTICLE AS TRULY EXISTENT FIRE

Assertion: Since the other three elements are not present in the smallest substantial fire particle, there is fire even without fuel.

Answer:

If the particle has no fuel 343

Fire without fuel exists.

If even it has fuel, a single-natured

Particle does not exist.

The commentary explains the meaning thus:

Fire without fuel exists if the smallest fire particle does not have fuel. Since it therefore would follow that uncaused fire exists, one should not assert a smallest substantial particle as do the Vaisesikas.

The Vaisheshikas assert a substantial partless particle, which one cannot accept. As the text further reads:

If one admits that even the fire particle has fuel, for fear of the conclusion that it would otherwise be causeless, it follows that there is no single-natured particle since the other elements are certainly present in each particle.

What is being presented basically is that each particle, such as an earth particle, incorporates the other three particles, wind and water and fire particles as well. Likewise with the other element particles—each possesses all the other element particles.

1.1.2.3. REFUTATION BY EXAMINING FOR SINGLENES OR PLURALITY

This has two sub-headings.

1.1.2.3.1. Refuting truly existent functional phenomena through the reason of being neither one nor many

1.1.2.3.2. This fallacy equally applies to other sectarians

1.1.2.3.1. REFUTING TRULY EXISTENT FUNCTIONAL PHENOMENA THROUGH THE REASON OF BEING NEITHER ONE NOR MANY

The reason that is presented here is that of being neither one nor many.

When different things are examined 344

None of them have singleness.

Because there is no singleness

There is no plurality either.

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

When functional things like pots and woollen cloth are examined as to whether they are or are not truly existent, these various things, because they have parts, do not have truly existent singleness.

This is refuting truly existent singleness. Having asserted that there cannot be truly existent singleness then also by default:

Nor do they have truly existent plurality for the very reason by which they are not truly single, since plurality comes about through an accumulation of single units. External and internal phenomena are not truly existent because they are neither one nor many. They are like reflections.

This is a summary of what has been explained quite extensively in the earlier part of the chapter. The analogy that is presented here is that phenomena are like reflections. The particular analogy that is related here is seeing a reflection of one's face in a mirror. If one were to investigate whether the reflection were single and one with the face, it does not exist as inherently one with the face nor does it exist as inherently separate from the face. That is the point. Similarly all other phenomena do not exist as either inherently single or inherently separate or many.

Furthermore the reflection of the face in the mirror is also used as an analogy to explain how things do not exist independently or inherently, even though that is how they appear to exist. Even though things appear to us as being independent and inherently existent, in reality things cannot exist in that way.

The analogy again is the reflection of the face. Even though the reflection of the face in the mirror appears to be like the face, in reality it is not the face. It appears in every aspect exactly as the face, however we know conventionally and accept that it is not the face. It is the same with all other phenomena: they lack inherent existence even though they appear to be inherently existent.

We can take the analogy further to explaining how things lack true existence, As explained earlier, things lack inherent existence, or independent existence, or true existence. These terms are all synonymous. In relation to the term 'truly existent' when we see the reflection of our face in the mirror it appears to be truly our face, but it is truly not our face. Reflecting on that analogy can actually help us to understand the actual meaning of the true existence or inherent existence of any phenomena. These analogies provide a very good way for us to reflect upon the lack of inherent or true existence of phenomena. It is very good to think about these analogies and really use them in our practice. If we do that, then through this analysis our practice can become very profound. That is how the analogy serves as a great benefit for our practice.

Transcribed from tape by Judy Mayne

Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

Edited Version

© Tara Institute

Verses from *Yogic Deeds of Bodhisattvas* used with permission of Snow Lion Publications.