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

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*Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga*

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Sitting in a comfortable position, generate a positive motivation along the lines that we have just recited in the Refuge Prayer, which is a prayer that encompasses both refuge and the bodhicitta motivations. As indicated in the Mahayana teachings, an authentic Mahayana attitude has to consist of refuge as well as the bodhicitta attitude. Thus in addition to the Refuge prayer, we generate this strong motivation, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings may I achieve the state of enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well'.

As mentioned previously, it is worthwhile treating the teaching session as a pledge, where along with actually listening to the Dharma, we re-confirm our pledge to achieve enlightenment. That pledge should also be re-confirmed as we practice.

It is really significant that we begin our practice session with that motivation. Reciting the Refuge Prayer, which encompasses the bodhicitta attitude, is an element that secures our practice as an authentic practice. In terms of the actual elements within the Refuge Prayer, the stronger the refuge that we have in our mind, the stronger the confirmation of being protected from the lower realms in our future life will be. Similarly, the stronger our bodhicitta attitude is, the stronger our determination to dedicate our practice towards enlightenment will become.

This prayer also encompasses generating refuge in order to overcome an improper or incorrect path, while generating bodhicitta in order to overcome the lower vehicles and enter the Mahayana path. I have mentioned this many times previously, but I mention it again so as to remind ourselves of the significance and importance of the bodhicitta motivation.

To further indicate the significance of generating refuge and bodhicitta, you might recollect from earlier explanations that generating refuge is the doorway to entering the Buddhist path, whereas generating bodhicitta is the doorway to entering the Mahayana path. It is essential that we remember these points in our practice.

When the Lam Rim teachings refer to the topic of precious human re-birth, it mentions that there are three levels of taking the essence of a precious human life. The first level, or most basic way of taking essence of a precious human life is to use it so that we can protect ourselves from unfortunate births in future lives. The next best way to take the essence from one's precious human life is for it to become a cause to be free from being reborn into cyclic existence, and thus obtain liberation. While the utmost way to take the essence of one's precious human life is to enable it to become a cause for achieving enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. So we can think of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta along these lines.

One must not underestimate the great significance of taking refuge. Merely taking refuge with a strong convinced mind is, in itself, a means to protect oneself from being re-born in lower realms. So by taking refuge one is taking the essence

of one's precious human life. Thus merely taking refuge is, at the very least, a great practice. The reason that I emphasise the significance and importance of taking refuge is because it is the very foundation of any practice we do along the Buddhist path. All our practices on the Buddhist path are based on refuge. Whatever practice we engage in, it starts with taking refuge, and it is important that we don't underestimate the part of taking refuge. It is one of the essential elements of our practice because it secures our practice, so it is a very significant practice.

As we engage in the teachings and practise meditation and so forth, it is good to remind ourselves why we are doing that practice. What is it that we are trying to get out of the practice? What is it that we are trying to achieve? Here we need to reflect back on the Lam Rim, a teaching which presents the entire Buddhist path. You can summarise it by thinking of how refuge plays an important role all along the path. In the practice of the small scope, as we begin to realise that we have a precious human life with these unique conditions as a human being, we come to contemplate how we can use this precious human life in the best way. Also, following the presentation in the Lam Rim, just as we have this precious human life now, we contemplate how easily we can lose it; when we experience death, we lose this precious human life. Then we think about how difficult it would be to achieve such a life again in the future. Thus we must utilise this precious human life that we have now in the utmost way.

Then, one reflects further on how one's karma—positive and negative actions, in particular the negative actions and imprints on one's mind, and the actions that follow—can lead to an unfortunate rebirth in the lower realms. Thus a strong fear of the lower realms and wishing to be free from that is generated, and one develops a determination to obtain a fortunate rebirth, such as a human or in the god realms. Then in order to achieve such a fortunate rebirth one generates a strong conviction that taking refuge has the potential to help one, and so one takes refuge. Thus taking refuge becomes the most essential practice to avoid lower rebirth.

Then as we reflect further, we see that even if one were to be free from the lower realms, and be reborn again as a human being or in the god realms, one will still have to go through sufferings and so forth—there are still a lot of disadvantages in returning to a life in cyclic existence. So again one determines to free oneself from that, to take the essence of one's human life to try to create the causes to be free from the whole of cyclic existence. Thus one engages in depth in the practices of the four noble truths and the three higher trainings. In that way one again takes strong refuge in order to be able to utilise and engage in these practices. Thus in the medium scope, one's practices are also based on taking refuge.

Then, as one contemplates further, one sees that even if one were to be free from suffering and from cyclic existence, which would be a satisfactory personal goal, all other sentient beings would continue to suffer immensely while they remain in cyclic existence. Thus one generates a strong determination to free all other beings from all suffering, for which one needs to train further in order to reach the highest goal of enlightenment, where one reaches one's full potential. Based on taking refuge and seeking the guidance of refuge, one generates a bodhicitta attitude, wish to achieve enlightenment in order to help others, which is based on love and compassion. In that way, we can see how

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refuge is the basis all along the path leading up to enlightenment, and so see its value. Of course taking the essence of one's precious human life as explained in the teachings and using it in the best way, doesn't mean sitting back, and relaxing, and making a lot of money. That's obviously not what it means!

It is really important that we contemplate these factors and constantly remind ourselves of them as we engage in the practice of the Dharma. It is particularly important for those of you who have already studied and learned a lot, and actually put quite a lot of effort into your study. One must ensure that the actual study becomes worthwhile, and that one utilises the study that one has done so that it becomes beneficial. The way for it to become really useful is to ensure that whatever study one does serves as a purpose for one's practice. As mentioned previously the practice is really contemplating and generating a strong sense of refuge and the significance of that refuge in one's mind. Based on that, one contemplates the practices of the small scope, incorporating that into the medium scope, and then into the great scope, combining the practices of the three scopes in that way for one's ultimate goal.

Unless we actually make a particular effort to remind ourselves and make sure that our practice is a worthwhile practice, it is so easy for our mind to become completely immersed in, and distracted by, worldly affairs. Normally there are moments of joy and happiness that we experience in the practices that we do. But then that joy or happiness seems to fade away, and it seems so fleeting that we begin to wonder why that happiness and joy doesn't remain. Why is it that even though we seem to get some benefit from the practice, it doesn't secure our happiness? Why is it that we have more problems in our life? Those sorts of doubts and questions may arise in the mind. So one must recognise what is really disturbing us. What are the main causes which interrupt our practice? What is preventing the joy and happiness in our mind from becoming stable?

You will all have noticed for yourselves the simple fact that the stronger our attraction to worldly concerns the more disturbed the mind becomes, and that we find little joy and peace if we allow the mind to be attracted to worldly distractions. Rather than contributing to real happiness, attraction to worldly affairs makes our mind unhappy, and the stronger the attraction we have to worldly affairs, the greater the disturbance. Thus it is very important that we reduce our attraction to the worldly concerns.

Even though we are not able to overcome our attraction to worldly concerns completely, we should make every effort in our practice to make sure that we are attempting to do so. Just for the time when we focus inwardly on our breath, we may feel some relief, and our mind is happy and settled. If we leave our practice at just focussing on our breath for a while, and limit our practice time to just the morning or the evening, and not remember the real practice, which is constant awareness of not allowing ourselves to become completely distracted with the worldly affairs, then we will become completely immersed in those worldly affairs. The main thing is to try to develop a sense of distrust of worldly or samsaric values. Try to develop in one's mind a sense of disgust or disillusionment with samsaric pleasures. If one actually develops that, then the strong belief in and attraction towards worldly pleasures will naturally be reduced. Then, as a result, we will definitely experience a longer lasting sense of contentment and happiness in ourselves, which is really worthwhile.

If we don't pay particular attention to this, then the reverse may actually occur. Rather than achieving a subdued mind our attempt to practice may lead to more distractions in the mind, and stronger desire than before. There is a real danger of that happening, so one must really be careful to prevent that from happening.

One's practice must be utilised in the proper way. Developing a sense of disenchantment with samsara by contemplating the sufferings of samsara is relatively easy for us. Seeing the sufferings of samsara definitely discourages us from wanting to be in samsara. More difficult is developing a sense of disenchantment with the pleasures of samsara, because it is hard to develop a sense of disillusionment or disenchantment with these pleasures.

Even harder still, is developing disillusionment or disenchantment with the neutral experiences of samsara. This is an essential point that we have to recognise. There are what is called the worldly meditative stabilisations, where one develops disillusionment and disenchantment with the worldly pleasures, accompanied by the development of an attraction to the quietness and the peacefulness of that neutral feeling that one gains from meditative concentration. If one is not able to also identify that as a samsaric fault, then further engaging in that meditative concentration creates the causes to be reborn in a higher rebirth, such as long-life gods and so forth. Thus one is actually just creating the causes to further one's existence in samsara. Therefore it is very important that we really pinpoint and understand what it means to develop disillusionment or disenchantment with samsara. It means disillusionment not only with the sufferings, but also the pleasures and the neutral feelings as well.

If one practises in this way, developing that sense of disillusionment and disenchantment with samsara, and lessening one's attraction towards samsaric pleasures, then one will experience, even in this life, release from the difficulties and problems in life that keep us so entangled. The lessening of those problems will bring about a certain amount of ease and happiness that we can experience even in this life, while at the same time creating the causes for a better future life. Thus by giving up or lessening one's desire for the pleasures and attractions worldly life, one gains an immediate benefit while also creating the causes for a better future life. In that way one gains a two-fold benefit.

Alternatively, if we allow our practice for lessening disillusionment or disenchantment with the worldly pleasures to lapse, we will experience more problems in this life. We won't gain real happiness and joy in this life while at the same time creating more causes for suffering in future lives, so we lose out both ways. Thus I would consider anyone who engages in the practices in order to gain the two-fold benefit – benefit for this life as well as benefit for future lives - to be really wise. What better person could you find than that? But I don't know how you think [*soft laughter*].

The main obstacle to developing disenchantment with samsara really comes down to attachment. That is the main delusion in the mind that prevents us from developing a sound sense of disenchantment, which then becomes the obstacle to developing renunciation. Without developing renunciation we can't even enter the path, so in order to develop that disenchantment, one must definitely deal with lessening attachment. Shantideva's text, *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, explains explicitly and very clearly how attachment serves as a fault that prolongs our existence in

samsara. Shantideva clearly explains, as do many other great teachers, that attachment is the main obstruction to our practice of developing disenchantment and renunciation. That is something that we must really pinpoint and recognise.

There are many who, on hearing about the need to develop disenchantment and disgust for the samsaric pleasures ask, 'How can I experience any joy and pleasure if I give up worldly pleasures?'. That is a strong fear or misconception that many hold on to. But the teachings confirm that in giving up or in overcoming the desire for worldly pleasures, one's sense of real pleasure and joy increases rather than decreases. In fact one experiences real joy and pleasure in one's mind.

#### 1.1.2.3.2. THIS FALLACY EQUALLY APPLIES TO OTHER SECTARIANS

*Though they assert that where there are none 345  
Of those things there is singleness,  
Singleness does not exist  
Since everything is threefold.*

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

One may think this refutation applies to our own sectarians who assert that the elements and elemental derivatives occur simultaneously, but not to outsiders...

What is being indicated here is that some may feel that the refutation made earlier, which applies to our own sectarians, is not applied to outsiders, indicating non-Buddhists such as the Vaisheshikas, who hold the view of a partless particle. As explained previously the Vaisheshikas assert that there is a permanent partless particle, which is a single unit that exists by itself. So, what is being explained is that assertion by the non-Buddhists is also being negated.

The commentary further explains the assertion of the outsiders as:

a small permanent earth particle which is a single unit exists,

The next part is an addition in the English translation, which reads:

...where there are no functional things apart from the smallest particles such as earth particles and so forth.

As indicated here in the commentary, the non-Buddhist schools such as the Vaisheshikas assert that there are partless particles. A partless particle is the smallest particle, an entity existing by itself, and a single unit. In our own Buddhist system we do not assert a partless particle. As mentioned previously, every particle consists of the eight substances, thus there cannot be a single particle in itself, as there are always other particles or other elements. Yet while the non-Buddhist schools such as the Vaisheshikas assert that there is a partless particle, at the same time they also accept that:

Yet even in their system the smallest earth particle is three-fold in that it has substantial entity, singleness and existence.

Thus the refutations that were applied earlier in our own system apply to the non-Buddhists as well. There is an absurdity in asserting on the one hand that there is a partless particle, and on the other hand asserting that a partless particle has the entity of being a 'substantial entity, a singleness and existence'. That in itself contradicts the assertion of it being a single unit. As there are three different elements to the partless particle it is cannot be a completely single unit just in itself. Thus the refutations that were made earlier apply to the non-Buddhist schools also.

So, as the commentary concludes:

Thus precisely the same fallacies apply to them.

#### 1.1.2.4. APPLYING REASONING WHICH NEGATES THE FOUR POSSIBILITIES IN OTHER CASES

*The approach of existence, non-existence, 346  
Both existence and non-existence, and neither,  
Should always be applied by those  
With mastery to oneness and so forth.*

The four possibilities are:

##### 1. The Tibetan text of the commentary begins with:

The Samkhyas claim the effect exists at the time of the causes;

This is a particular assertion of the Samkhyas, which is that the effect, or the result, exists at the same time as the cause.

##### 2. Next are the Sautrāntikas.

Though they do not assert that the effect exists at the time of the cause, they assert cause and effect as being truly existent.

##### 3. The non-Buddhist Nirgranthas assert that:

... both existence and non-existence in that a thing is permanent in nature yet temporarily impermanent

The Nirgranthas also assert that which is produced from self and other at the same time, i.e. they assert self-produced objects as well as objects produced from others. To use the example of an earthen vase: they would say that an earthen vase is both self-produced as well as produced by others. It is self-produced because of the fact of being produced from mud or clay, and it is produced by others, because it is made by the potter.

##### 4. Furthermore there are:

...those who assert that though things are substantially existent, they neither exist nor do not exist since they cannot be said to be this nor that.

The Tibetan commentary then reads:

Those who have mastered the art of employing the meaning of suchness always refute oneness, otherness, both and neither by applying the kinds of reasoning which refute the [earlier] assertions.

They apply the reasons previously explained in [stanza 265]... "For those who assert effects exist" [The reason they apply is either] the reason of dependent arising, the lack of being one or many, the diamond fragments reason and so forth.'

'Diamond fragment' is sometimes translated as 'diamond silver'.

So basically verse 346 is refuting these four possibilities.

#### The five types of reasoning

There are actually five reasonings indicating the lack of inherent existence.

1. The second reasoning mentioned in the text relates to phenomena having a **lack of being one or many**. That reasoning comes in the form of this syllogism, which refers to the nature of phenomena: a sprout is not truly existent, because it is neither truly existent one nor truly existent many. This reason relates to the *nature* of phenomena

2. The first reason in the text is the reason of *dependent arising*, which is called the **king of reasonings**. As mentioned previously, in relation to the syllogism using the subject of a sprout: the sprout lacks inherent existence, because it is a dependent origination.

3 The next reasoning is the **diamond fragment reasoning**, which was explained extensively in the Madhyamika text<sup>1</sup>. This reasoning relates to the *causes* of phenomena, and the syllogism is: the sprout lacks production from an inherently existent cause, because it is not produced with any of the four possibilities. Thus it lacks the possibility of being inherently self-produced, being produced from an inherently existent other cause, being produced by neither the self nor the other, or being produced by both.

4. Another of the five reasonings, which is not indicated here specifically, is the reasoning that relates to the *effect*, the reasoning of **existence and non-existence of generation and cessation**. Basically, it refers to lacking an inherently produced effect at the time of the cause. So things are not inherently produced at the time of the cause and nor are they inherently not produced at the time of the cause. The actual syllogism is found in the Madhyamika notes<sup>2</sup>.

5. The fifth reasoning is established in relation to both *cause and effect*. It refers to **being free from the four mutually exclusive possibilities in relation to the cause and effect**. Thus the syllogism is a sprout lacks inherent generation because a single inherently existent cause cannot generate an inherently existent effect, multiple inherently existent causes cannot generate multiple inherently existent effects, multiple existing causes cannot generate a single effect and a single cause cannot generate multiple effects. So the reasoning covers the four mutually exclusive ways of negating how, from either a single or multiple inherently existent causes, there cannot be single or multiple inherently existent effects.

## 1.2. Showing the cause for mistaking functional things as permanent and truly existent

*Question:* If things therefore do not have the slightest inherent existence, for what reason do those opponents hold that they are truly existent?

*Answer:*

*When the continuum is misapprehended, 347  
Things are said to be permanent.  
Similarly when composites are  
Misapprehended, things are said to exist.*

The initial question indicates that if things do not actually have the slightest inherent existence as we assert, referring to our own views, and as there are so many reasonings showing the lack of inherent existence, then why do others hold the contrary view, which is of true existence?

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Though there is no valid reason [to hold true existence] in the case of a thing which lasts three days, they feel compelled to assert that whatever existed before must exist later. Functional things are said to be permanent when the continuum which is posited through imputation upon former, intermediate and later moments is misapprehended.

This is explaining the reason why others have these misconceptions. First of all the misconception of permanence arises because others see the continuum of an object as being the actual object, and do not recognise and see the momentary changes that occur. In this particular example, something that is seen for three days, which was seen the previous day, the next day and the day after, is seen as being

the same thing. For as long as it is considered as the same thing, that misapprehension instills the wrong view of permanence.

We can relate this to our own experience. For example when we see someone that we know, we don't even question whether we are seeing the same person - there are no doubts at all. The fact that we think that there is no change at all and that we are seeing exactly the same person, is the misapprehension of permanence, or seeing the other as being permanent, and it is called grasping at permanence. In reality if the person that we see today is in fact the actual person of yesterday, then that implies that a person will never age, because we are always seeing the same person. How could the same person not age?

To point out the absurdity of thinking things are permanent: if it is the same person, then someone who was twenty-nine yesterday and who has a birthday today (thus turning thirty), would have to be the same person who is twenty-nine. But we don't say that do we? Rather the person is now thirty. The fact is that the person who was twenty-nine yesterday is thirty today, because a change has taken place. If there was no change taking place at all then the person couldn't have become a year older, and turn thirty. You can't have a person who is both twenty-nine and thirty years old today can you?

What is being specifically explained here is how that misapprehension, which results in a grasping at permanence, occurs. This misapprehension, or this faulty state of mind, occurs because of holding on to the continuum of something, such as a person actually staying as the same person. This misapprehension, which is explained here, and which causes the grasping at permanence, is none other than the view that occurs when we see today the person that we saw yesterday. As soon as we think, 'Oh I'm seeing the person that I saw yesterday', then that indicates that there is the misapprehension that is the grasping at permanence. There is nothing else that is really identifiable as being grasping at permanence.

Of course, someone who actually has an understanding of impermanence will not have that notion of seeing exactly the same person and believing that nothing has changed. They would understand that subtle changes have taken place because of their underlying realisation or understanding of impermanence.

As the commentary further explains:

Similarly when the composite is misapprehended, it is said that there are truly existent functional things.

Just the misapprehension of permanence occurs, so too the composite of a phenomena is misapprehended, because of the misapprehension of the composite establishes the misapprehension of true existence, i.e. that things exist truly, that they are truly existent functional things.

Finally, the commentary states:

There seem to be even many adherents to the *Seven Treatises on Valid Cognition* who, through not knowing how to posit the composite and the continuum, follow outsiders.

This refers to certain Buddhist schools such as the Mind Only, or Cittamatrin school and so forth. Even though they follow the treatises on valid cognition, they still hold on to the view of true existence, such as is held by the non-Buddhist schools.

<sup>1</sup> See 15 April 2003 for these five reasonings.

<sup>2</sup> The sprout lacks inherent generation, because it isn't inherently generated at the time of its cause, nor is it inherently not generated at the time of its cause.

### 1.3. Briefly showing the reasoning that establishes absence of true existence

*Anything that has dependent arising  
Is not independent. 348  
All these are not independent,  
Therefore there is no self.*

The verse is a very significant verse that is often quoted in other teachings, and so it is worthwhile memorising as a way of reminding oneself of its meaning.

*Objection:* Even if our view that things exist were wrong, your view is that things do not exist, since you do not accept functional things. It is unreasonable because it contradicts both what is seen and unseen.

The objection raised here is by other systems, which assert truly functional existent phenomena. Because that view is refuted by our own system, they have a counter-objection saying, 'You're claiming that my view, which establishes truly existent functional phenomena, is wrong, however because you say that there are no truly existent functional phenomena, your view is actually an extreme view. You're establishing a nihilistic view in saying that things do not exist. That is unreasonable, because it contradicts what is seen and unseen', i.e. things that are obvious.

*Answer:* We make no claim that things do not exist for we are proponents of dependent arising.

*Question:* Do you assert that things are truly existent?

*Answer:* No, because we are proponents of dependent arising.

Things exist, but they don't truly exist, and the reasoning that establishes things as not being truly existent is the reasoning of dependent arising. Thus the syllogism is: things are not truly existent, because they are dependent arising.

*Question:* What does that mean? [i.e. What does saying that things are dependent arising mean?]

*Answer:* It means that while things are empty of inherent existence, like magical creations and mirages, they can produce effects.

The analogy used here is when a magician conjures things such as horses and elephants. Even though they do not exist they have the function of performing tricks. Similarly, even though things do not exist inherently, they still function.

As further explained in the commentary:

Any relative thing which is found to arise and exist dependently is not found to exist independently. All these phenomena lack an independent mode of existence and thus there is no self of persons or of phenomena.

What is being clearly explained here is that because phenomena lack an inherent mode of existence, there is said to be no self of persons as well as no self of phenomena, referring to an inherently existing self.

Then as the commentary further explains:

The person [this is the subject of which is the person] and the aggregates do not exist inherently, [Why?] because they arise dependently.

This is presented as a syllogism, in the form of subject, predicate and the reason.

Then a counter-question is raised from the others:

*Question:* We too accept that effects are not independent, so what is the difference?

They are saying that as they also accept that effects are not independent, therefore what is the difference between your

view and our view? The answer points out an essential difference, which is that,

You do not understand that dependent arising means mutual reliance.

What our system is saying in reply to the question, 'What is the difference between our views if we both accept that effects are not independent?' is that there is a difference because there is a difference in how we interpret dependent arising.

We may have completed this text by June. The next text will be *The Mahamudra*, and it would be good try to acquire the text, because without a text it would be really hard to follow the teaching and maintain its continuity. Apparently the translation is quite good. So while I refer to the root text and the commentary, you can refer to other commentaries, and read them to become familiar with the text.

Even though we may not be able to go into a detailed explanation of the actual text, if you read the commentaries while we go through the explanation, that will become a very good source of inspiration for one's practice. That is why I chose this text - it is a very inspiring for one's practice.

To use an analogy as to how we are going to conduct our study sessions it will be as if I am pointing the way to the door, to indicate that there are valuable things once you open the door. Then it is up to you to open the door and actually find the valuable things. That is how I will present it. Even if we don't have enough the time to go into much detail in the actual sessions here, if you can read the commentaries and study them, you will find great inspiration in the text.

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