

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

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As usual we sit in a comfortable relaxed position and generate a positive motivation such as, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment and for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and practise well'.

### 1.1.1.2. Summarized meaning: showing the effects of refuting production

*There is no coming of the produced, 360*  
*Likewise no going of that which has ceased.*  
*Since it is thus, why should existence*  
*Not be like a magician's illusions?*

In order to understand the meaning of the verse the commentary quotes from a sutra that reads:

Sutra says: "Monks, it is as follows: when the eye is produced, it does not come from anywhere, and when it ceases, it does not go anywhere."

This relates to production by way of its own entity: that which does not come from anywhere nor does it go anywhere when it ceases. The commentary then explains the meaning of the sutra:

Thus if there were inherent production, a thing should come from somewhere when it is produced, like the rising moon, and go somewhere when it ceases, like the setting moon. In that case it would be permanent, but since production and cessation are mere nominal imputations, one must accept that they are like magical illusions.

The analogy illustrating the absurdity of production being inherently existent is that it would be like the rising moon that must come from somewhere when it rises and goes somewhere when it sets. The meaning of the phrase, 'In that case it would be permanent' is, first of all when we perceive the moon rising in the evening and setting in the morning, we perceive it as being the same moon. However if the moon that rises and the one that sets were in fact the same moon, then of course it would be permanent. If the question is, 'Is there a moon when it rises?' then the answer is yes. Likewise, is there a moon when it sets? Yes there is a moon. However if the question is whether it is the same moon, then of course it is not the same, because the moon goes through change every single moment from the time that it rises until it sets. So that means while the earlier moments of the rising moon cease, the consequent later moments of the moon continue to come into existence.

Earlier in the teachings, it was shown that a functional thing in the morning ceases to exist by evening. The continuity of a functional thing in the morning will still remain in the evening, however the actual functional thing that one relates to in the morning will cease. This is the case for all functional phenomena; all productions have the nature of ceasing the moment after they are produced.

If production were to be inherently existent, or existent by way of its own entity, then it would be unchanging or unceasing. In that case the moon would be permanent: the setting moon would have to be the same moon that rose

earlier in the evening. However that is absurd, as the moon is an impermanent phenomenon.

Then the commentary explains the meaning of the verse.

Since things do not come from anywhere when they are produced nor go anywhere when they cease, why should external and internal existence not be like a magician's illusions? When dependent arising is seen as it is, it is like a created illusion and not like a barren woman's child.

What is being explained is that all functional phenomena, while lacking inherent existence, have the nature of being produced and then ceasing, and thus they are like magical illusions. An example of a magical illusion is a conjured horse or rabbit that appears to be a real horse or rabbit, but which in reality is not an actual horse or rabbit. All phenomena are in the same nature in that they appear as being inherently existent but in reality lack even an atom of inherent existence. That is how everything is like a magician's illusion.

When the commentary says, 'Why should external and internal existence not be like a magician's illusions?' that rhetorical question implies that all external and internal phenomena are in fact like a magician's illusions. Further on, when it says, 'When dependent arising is seen as it is, it is like a created illusion and not like a barren woman's child', it is differentiating two different analogies. Although all phenomena are like a 'created illusion', they are not like a 'barren woman's child', which is an example of non-existence. There cannot be a child to a barren woman, so that is an example of something that does not exist, whereas magician's illusions, such as conjured horses, do exist. The mistaken perception is to perceive the illusion as an actual phenomena, e.g. to perceive the conjured horse as an actual horse. That is a mistaken view, but actually perceiving the illusion is not mistaken, because there is a conjured horse. So in debate if it is asked whether a conjured horse exists, i.e. a magician's illusion, then the answer would have to be 'yes'. But if the question is whether the conjured horse actually exists as a real horse, then the answer is no. Though the illusion exists, the horse does not actually exist. Likewise, an unenlightened being's view that phenomena are truly existent is a mistaken perception, even though phenomena do exist. That is how the magician's illusion analogy illustrates the existence of all phenomena.

The difference between these two examples should be clearly understood. A barren woman's child is an example of something that does not exist, while a magician's illusion, such as a conjured horse, does exist. Another analogy of something that exists, but which does not exist in the way it appears, is the reflection of our face in the mirror. Although the reflection of our face exists, the reflection in the mirror is not actually our face. So seeing the reflection as being our actual face is mistaken. However the image of the reflection of our face in the mirror does exist. So the conclusion is that the mere reflection of our face in the mirror is existent, while the actual face does not exist in the mirror.

### Putting theory into practice

The reflection of our face in the mirror is one of the analogies of how phenomena are like an illusion, and it should be incorporated into our thinking, and used in our daily life. Most of us look in the mirror in the morning, so when you see the reflection of your face, it would be good if that reminded you of how things lack inherent existence. When you see the image of your face in the mirror, you can remind yourself, 'Even though my face appears there, in reality it is

not my face. Likewise all phenomena appear as being inherently existent, or truly existent. However that is not the case, as they lack true existence'. If one can actually bring that to mind, then looking in the mirror would have served a great purpose in accumulating great merit.

The significance of this analogy relates to the syllogism: 'Things lack true existence, because of being interdependent origination'. If one were to actually bring to mind the meaning of that when one looks in the mirror, then there will not be much room for attachment when one looks in the mirror! In fact it can become an immediate antidote for overcoming attachment. As the advice given is to meditate on emptiness from the beginning of the morning, I suppose this would be a good way to start meditating on emptiness.

As the great masters have repeatedly advised we must put into practice whatever we have learned through the teachings. We must try to take that advice in a practical way, but it does not necessarily mean we have to go into solitude. On a daily basis we can use our daily activities, such as looking in the mirror, to remind ourselves of the actual meaning of the teachings. If we can remind ourselves of how the mirror illustrates that phenomena lack inherent existence, or true existence, and bring to mind that just as the reflection in the mirror is not one's face even though it appears to be, we can then go on to recall that all phenomena, though they appear to be truly or inherently existent, in reality they lack any inherent or true existence. Just bringing that to mind is highly significant, and that is how we put into practice the meanings we derive from the teachings. That is how we can familiarise ourselves with the teachings on a daily basis.

The teachings often refer to recalling an image and meditating on it. One often finds that sort of instruction in the teachings. Focusing on an image refers to the meditation object. For example, if we are meditating on the image of Buddha Shakyamuni, it is not the gross outline of the painting or the statue that we are focusing on in our meditation, but the complete image of the Buddha that one recalls in one's mind. Even though bringing the image of the Buddha to one's mind is initially difficult, it becomes clearer and clearer through familiarity, and that is what we focus on in the practice of meditation.

Likewise Lama Tsong Khapa said that focusing on the image means focusing on the aspect of the Buddha, and that is what one brings to mind. The more one becomes familiar with that image as one engages in the practice of meditation, the more vivid the image will become in one's mind. As it becomes clearer and more vivid, then one's practice of meditating on it becomes more and more profound.

The commentary then further refers to Chandrakirti's *Madhyamika* text, which explains that though things appear to be inherently existent or truly existent, in reality they entirely lack inherent existence or true existence in every way. Just like an illusion appears to be real, things appear to be truly existent. An Arya being perceives all phenomena as being like an illusion, and seeing phenomena as an illusion, which leads one to freedom from bondage to samsara. As explained further, until and unless one sees all phenomena as an illusion, yet functioning in the nature of interdependent origination, there is no way to gain freedom from cyclic existence.

## 1.1.2. General refutation of inherently existent production, duration and disintegration

This has four sub-headings.

1.1.2.1. Refutation of inherently existent characteristics by examining sequentiality and simultaneity

1.1.2.2. Refutation through the consequence of infinite regress of the characteristics

1.1.2.3. Refutation by examining whether they are one or different

1.1.2.4. Refutation by examining whether they are existent or non-existent by way of their own entity

### 1.1.2.1. Refutation of inherently existent characteristics by examining sequentiality and simultaneity

Here the word 'characteristics' refers to the three characteristics of products mentioned previously, which are production, duration and disintegration. The refutation refers to inherently existent production: if it existed then the characteristics would have to occur either simultaneously or sequentially, as there is no other way they can occur.

*Production, duration and disintegration* 361  
*Do not occur simultaneously.*  
*If they are not consecutive either,*  
*When can they ever occur?*

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse thus:

Since production, duration and disintegration, the characteristics of products, do not occur simultaneously by way of their own entity nor consecutively by way of their own entity, when do they occur by way of their own entity?

This implies that as the characteristics do not occur simultaneously or consecutively, there is no other way that they can occur. The syllogism in relation to the refutation here is, as quoted in the commentary:

Subject: Production, duration and disintegration  
Predicate: Do not exist inherently  
Reason: Because of not being inherently simultaneous or consecutive.

Another syllogism in relation to the production, duration and disintegration not existing inherently uses the reason, 'because they are phenomena that have parts'.

Here the syllogism is that production, duration and disintegration, do not exist inherently, because of not being inherently simultaneous or consecutive. In relation to earlier explanations, if they were to be simultaneous then the fault that would arise would be that the three characteristics of production, duration and disintegration would be one and the same, and could not be differentiated.

On the other hand if these three characteristics were produced consecutively, then when there is production, it would lack the other two characteristics, i.e. duration and disintegration would not exist at that time. Likewise when there is duration then that phenomenon would not have production or disintegration, and also when there is disintegration it would lack duration and production. Thus the definition of a product would not apply. Then, as mentioned previously, the fallacy of functional phenomena lacking characteristics of a product, would occur.

So the conclusion is that since the characteristics of a product cannot be inherently simultaneous, nor consecutively existent with the product, there is no way that a product can be inherently existent.

### 1.1.2.2. Refutation through the consequence of infinite regress of the characteristics

If things were to be inherently existent then another fault would be infinite regress of the characteristics. In this verse inherent production, or inherent existence, is refuted by showing the fallacy of infinite regress of the characteristics.

*If for production and all the others, 362  
All of these occurred again,  
Disintegration would seem like production  
And duration like disintegration.*

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Since production, duration and disintegration would all require the production of production and so forth, disintegration like production, would have another disintegration and duration too would seem like disintegration in that one would have to assert that it has another duration. Thus there would be infinite regress. In that case the basic characteristics would not be established. Therefore there is not even an atom of inherent existence.

If production, duration and disintegration existed inherently then the infinite regress would be that production itself would need another production, and duration would need another duration and that duration would also need another duration and in that way there would be infinite regress in all three instances of production, duration and disintegration. Thus there would be no way that one could point out the actual characteristics. As it says here, the characteristics themselves would not be established, because they would all have to depend upon another factor for their existence. If the characteristics cannot be established then that which is characterised also cannot be established. Therefore, that which is characterised cannot be established inherently.

Basically what is to be understood here is that there is continuity in relation to the continuity of production, duration and disintegration. However it is not an inherently existent continuation. When we talk about a phenomenon in terms of being a product, then that phenomenon, whatever it is, has production, duration and disintegration. However it is the continuity of that phenomenon that goes through production, and then duration and disintegration. For example when the seed turns into a sprout it is not as though the seed itself without changing, travels along and becomes a sprout. However the continuation of the seed can be established as existing at the time of the sprout.

It is the same with the individual self: we relate to ourselves as existing in the morning, through the day and in the evening. That existence is based on the continuity of the self of the individual. It is not that the same individual in the morning exists at noon and then exists in the evening as well. Of course conventionally the fact that we wake up in the morning establishes that the individual from last night still exists. However that is because there is the continuation of the self or individual from the previous evening.

During the night when the individual sleeps it is the continuation of that person who went to sleep. Then they wake up in the morning and continue to exist throughout the day and evening. So in reality it is the continuity of the individual or the person. It is because of the continuity of the person can be established that we are able to establish that the person exists. So conventionally we would say that the person from last night still exists now. If we were to ask, does the person from last night still exist this morning? Yes. Does the person from this morning exist at noon? Yes. Do

they still exist in the evening? Yes. So, it is because of establishing the continuity of the person that we can conventionally say that the person exists.

Some individuals can use this for their practice to establish the existence of past lives. They relate waking up in the morning seemingly not having been conscious during sleep, to the existence of past lives. Just as one wakes up in the morning and continues to function, so too one was reborn following death in a past life. The continuity of one's existence from past lives can be understood in this way.

In relation to the existence of a self or 'I', what we have to understand is that there is what is called a 'mere self', and it is this mere self that is the self that comes from previous lifetimes into this life, and which will continue on to future lives. In relation to ourselves there is the 'mere self' which is characterised and related to the existence in 'all our lives', and a self that is characterised with the features of 'this life'. The self that is characterised with this life is a self that is imputed upon the aggregates that we have now, and this self will come to an end when we experience death. That is, the self that is characterised in relation to this life will cease to exist.

However the 'mere' self will not cease to exist, as it is that which continues on to future lives. In the teachings of the *Life Stories of the Buddha* we see, for example, that the Buddha mentions that at a certain time he was a certain being, a bodhisattva, a Brahmin and so forth. When it is related to past lives of the Buddha, for example, it is referring to a particular instance of a particular lifetime. It is the same for clairvoyants who can remember their past lives, for example being a Deva being, or celestial god. Their memory of that shows that the self is a continuation of 'the mere self' that existed then which is remembered by the self that is characterised with the features of the life now. Thus one can have a memory of a previous lifetime such as a god.

When that existence of a lifetime of a god is remembered it relates to the individual at that time. It is not remembered as, 'I am now that god who was in the previous lifetime'. Rather it is remembered as an individual at that time, who is related to the self now, who had an existence at that time as a god, that is being remembered. So that is how one should relate to the self, which comes from the past and goes on to future lifetimes.

### 1.1.2.3. Refutation by examining whether they are one or different

What is being refuted here is a phenomenon existing either as an inherently existent one or single entity, or existing as an inherently different or separate entity in relation to its characteristics.

*Question:* Are the characteristics and that which they characterize one or different in nature?

*Assertion:* That which is characterized, namely a product such as a pot, is different in nature from its three characteristics-production, duration and disintegration.

*Answer:* How can that which is characterized, namely a product such as a pot, be impermanent? It follows that it is not, for impermanence and the pot are inherently different.

The characteristics are production, duration and disintegration and 'that which they characterise'. A vase, for example, would be 'that which is characterised'. So the question here is are the characteristics and that which they characterize one or different or separate in nature?

*If that which is characterized is said to be  
Different from its characteristics,  
How can the characterized be impermanent?  
Alternatively, existence of all four is unclear.* 363

The assertion relates to the first two lines of the verse. What is being explained here is that if the characteristics and that which is being characterised, i.e. the pot and its characteristics, are inherently different then because there is no relation between the characteristics and that which is being characterised, that would mean that the pot would not have those qualities of production, duration and disintegration. So the pot could not be impermanent.

The absurdity is clearly pointed out. If the pot and its characteristics were inherently separate or different, then that would mean that they are mutually exclusive, i.e. there is no relationship between the pot and its characteristics. If that were the case then because they have no relationship whatsoever, the characteristics of production, duration and disintegration would not apply to the pot because there is no connection, as they are inherently separate. If they are not related in any way then those qualities will not apply to the pot and then the pot would fail to be impermanent. That which makes a pot impermanent is its characteristics of production, duration and disintegration. However if the pot is completely separate from its characteristics then those qualities would not pertain to the pot and it would fail to be impermanent.

As the commentary continues:

Alternatively, if they are inherently not different, the four, i.e. the three characteristics and that which they characterize, do not clearly have the entity of existing as functional things. It follows that the characteristics are not characteristics because of being one with that which they characterize, and that which they characterize is not what is characterized because of being one with the characteristics. One should therefore not assert that they are inherently one or different.

If that which is being characterised and the characteristics are inherently one then they cannot exist as a functional thing, because that which is characterised and the characteristics will be one and inseparable, and we would not be able to distinguish between them. The commentary says that if they were inherently one then, 'It follows that the characteristics are not characteristics because of being one with that which they characterise'. If they are one with what they characterise then how can there be characteristics? That is the absurdity that would follow if they were inherently one.

The meaning of 'and that which they characterise is not what is characterised because of being one with the characteristics', is that a functional phenomena ceases to serve the entity of being a functional phenomena, because the distinction between the characteristics, and that which is being characterised, cannot be established. That is the absurdity that is being pointed out.

Thus the commentary concludes that 'one should therefore not assert that they are inherently one or different'. This relates to the earlier syllogism:

Subject: A phenomena that has the three characteristics, such as a pot  
Predicate: Does not exist inherently  
Reason: Because it is not inherently existent one or inherently existent different.

The conclusion from our own system is: if you were to ask if whether that which is being characterised and the characteristics are separate or not then conventionally, as mentioned earlier in the commentary, we would have to say that they are separate. The very fact that they have a different sound indicates that they are separate. One is 'that which is to be characterised' and the other is 'the characteristics' of that which is to be characterised. So they are clearly separate conventionally. However what is being refuted here is that they cannot be inherently separate. Thus that which is characterised and the characteristics are conventionally separate but not inherently separate.

#### **1.1.2.4. Refutation by examining whether they are existent or non-existent by way of their own entity**

That is subdivided into two.

1.1.2.4.1. Refuting that production is truly existent because there are truly existent producing causes

1.1.2.4.2. Production and so forth are neither truly existent things nor non-things

It is good to refer to just the outline to try to get an understanding as to how it relates to the explanation in the text. The outlines can serve as a reminder of the main points that are made in the text.

##### **1.1.2.4.1. Refuting that production is truly existent because there are truly existent producing causes**

What is being refuted is that there are truly existent producing causes. Conventionally there are producing causes, and because they are producing causes that lack inherent existence, there also have to be effects. So conventionally we would have to say that there are producing causes and thus there is production. However what is being refuted here is that there is truly existent production because there are truly existent producing causes. There cannot be truly existent producing causes that produce truly existent effects.

*Assertion:* Production and so forth exist inherently because the agent of production exists inherently.

*Answer:*

*A thing is not produced from a thing* 364  
*Nor is a thing produced from a non-thing.*  
*A non-thing is not produced from a non-thing*  
*Nor is a non-thing produced from a thing.*

As the commentary clearly explains:

The sprout, as an already existing functional thing is not produced again while the seed as a functional thing exists, because a sprout is not produced unless the seed undergoes change. Also a sprout that has already been produced cannot be produced again.

The very fact that a sprout is called a sprout means that it is already produced. That which is already produced is already a functional thing and does not need to be produced again. A sprout will not be produced when the seed as a functional thing exists, means that when the seed exists then the sprout is not produced, because the sprout is produced only when the seed undergoes change. 'Also a sprout that has already been produced cannot be produced again'. In both cases the absurdity that is being pointed out is that a sprout cannot be produced while the seed still exists. If the sprout is already produced then it does not have to be produced again because it has already been produced. That is the fallacy being pointed out.

We can relate the explanation in the commentary to the four possibilities outlined in the verse:

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1. 'A thing is not produced from a thing'. This refers to an inherent existent thing. An inherently existent thing is not produced from another inherently existent thing, because an inherently existent thing does not have production, i.e. it cannot produce things. So, an inherently existent thing being produced from another inherently existent thing, is the first absurdity.

2. 'Nor is a thing produced from a non-thing'. A thing cannot be produced from a non-thing because that goes against the law of cause and effect sequence. A non-thing cannot produce anything so it cannot produce a thing. The possibility of that is an absurdity because of not pertaining to the law of cause and effect sequence.

3. 'A non-thing is not produced from a non-thing' i.e. a non-thing cannot produce anything. A non-thing cannot be produced from a non-thing because a non-thing cannot produce anything. Therefore that possibility is also pointed out as an absurdity.

4. 'Nor is a non-thing produced from a thing'. Even though a thing does produce other things it does produce an effect, and the effect that it produces has to be a functional thing, an existing thing. So a thing cannot produce a non-thing. That is the last absurdity of the four possibilities.

The commentary continues:

The sprout as a functional thing is not produced from a non-functional seed, because a non-functional thing does not have the ability to produce an effect. Furthermore a non-functional effect is not produced from a non-functional cause: a burnt seed does not produce a burnt sprout.

The last part says that 'since inherent production is impossible, causes and conditions giving rise to it are meaningless'. So the conclusion, as it says in the commentary, is that inherent production is impossible and so causes and conditions giving rise to it are meaningless. If there were any possibility, it would have to be one of these four possibilities. However an inherently existent thing produced from an inherently existent thing is not possible. The next possibility is that a thing is produced from a non-thing, however the absurdity is that a non-thing cannot produce anything. Likewise with the third possibility of a non-thing being produced from a non-thing. However that completely forsakes the cause and effect sequence of phenomena that applies to functional things. Non-functional things cannot have the cause and effect sequence, so a non-thing being produced from a non-thing is absurd. The last possibility is that a non-thing is produced from a thing. Though a thing does produce phenomena, what it produces in relation to the law of cause and effect is a functional thing, and it cannot produce a non-functional thing. That is the fourth fallacy. As there is no possibility of an inherently existent production under any circumstances, there cannot be an atom of inherent existence in any phenomena.

So the conclusion is that the law of cause and effect sequence relates conventionally to existing phenomena, being produced and having effects, but cannot relate to inherent existence under any circumstances. By understanding that one should come to the conclusion that there cannot be inherent existence under any circumstances. Though conventional causes produce conventional effects, there cannot at any time be inherently existent causes that produce inherently existent effects.

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