

Study Group – Aryadeva's 400 Verses

༄༅། །བརྒྱ་བཅོམ་བཞི་བརྒྱ་པའི་སྐུ་བའི་ཚོགས་ལེན་ལུ་རྩལ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

20 May 2008

1.1.2.4.2. PRODUCTION AND SO FORTH ARE NEITHER TRULY EXISTENT THINGS NOR NON-THINGS

In relation to the outline 'things' refers to compounded phenomena. Compounded phenomena are things that are amassed and have causes and effects, so they are impermanent phenomena. Whereas 'non-things' are uncompounded, permanent phenomena. So production and so forth is being refuted as being either truly existent 'things' or truly existent 'non-things'. The verse that presents the refutation is the following verse:

A thing does not become a thing, 365
Nor does a non-thing become a thing.
A non-thing does not become a non-thing,
Nor does a thing become a non-thing.

The main points being presented here are the refutations of truly existent phenomena. It is good to bring to mind the reasons why things lack true existence or existence by way of their own entity or inherent existence. Why do they lack that? One can first relate to how things appear to us and then question whether they exist in the way they appear to us. In relation to an ordinary being's perception, we can conclude that if things were to exist in the manner that they appear, then that would imply that things are truly existent. That is because to an ordinary being's perception, everything appears as being truly existent or inherently existent. It is good to think about this in relation to one's own perceptions. Do things actually exist in the way that they appear to oneself or not?

In order to investigate and analyse whether things exist in the way that they appear, one must first relate to how things appear to one's own perception. How do they appear? How do external and internal phenomena appear to us when we perceive them? That is something that we need to contemplate and analyse. With this kind of investigation one will get closer and closer to the actual understanding of the lack of true or inherent existence. Otherwise just by relating to these topics and assuming that things do not truly exist, or just saying with mere words that things lack true existence, will not really help one's practice very much. One needs to engage in the actual analysis and investigation oneself.

Investigating and analysing further why things appear as being inherently existent to our consciousness, we can consider for example, how things appear to our eye consciousness. The reason why an eye consciousness perceiving the colour 'blue' is considered a mistaken consciousness is because the eye consciousness itself is stained with, or influenced by, the ignorance of grasping at the self, which is the misconception of grasping at a truly existent self. Thus an ordinary being's eye consciousness is considered to be a mistaken consciousness. Though it is not a wrong consciousness as far as perceiving 'blue' as the colour blue, it is mistaken with regard to perceiving 'blue' as being inherently existent. It should be understood that when the blue colour appears to the eye consciousness it appears as being independently existent, existing by way of its own entity, meaning that the blue colour appears to exist in of

itself without depending on causes and conditions. It does not appear as being an interdependent origination but rather a phenomenon that exists from its own side, without depending on causes and conditions. That is how it appears to the eye consciousness and the misconception of grasping at the self influences the eye consciousness to hold on to that appearance and believe in it. The eye consciousness seeing the blue colour as 'blue' is not a wrong consciousness, but it is mistaken in relation to perceiving the colour 'blue' as truly existent. It is this misconception of grasping at true existence or inherent existence that influences us to believe in what appears to the eye consciousness.

To clarify again, the appearance of 'blue' as the colour blue is not wrong but apprehending the colour blue as existing by way of its own entity without depending on causes and conditions, and then grasping and believing that, is the mistaken conception of grasping at true existence. This is how we must identify the ignorance of grasping at true existence that we have within our own mind. It is very important that we understand and realise this point. Then in our investigation we will come to understand that everything that appears to the five sense consciousnesses appears as being truly existent for an ordinary being. Therefore they are mistaken consciousness.

Understanding this will definitely help our practice in reducing and eventually overcoming our misconceptions. Take the example of when something beautiful appears to the eye consciousness. One should immediately question, 'Does it exist in the way that it appears to me or not?' Does the beauty truly exist in the object that one sees, or not? If beauty does exist in the way that it appears to one's eye consciousness, then the conclusion would be that beauty is indeed truly existent – that beauty does exist independently, as that is the criteria for true existence, which is existing in the way that it appears to an ordinary perception.

Likewise, in relation to an object that one feels aversion towards; do the faults that appear to one's perception actually exist in the way that they appear or not? When one does this analysis with the logical reasoning given in the teachings, one can then conclude that neither the beauty nor the faults of the object that one perceives actually exist in the way that they appear to oneself. That will then immediately reduce the attachment and aversion in relation to the object. We will then be able to see the direct connection between the analysis and the effect, true existence or inherent existence, and how that understanding serves as an antidote to reduce strong attachment and anger. So in this way we can see the relevance of the practice.

As the teachings mention, it is really incredible when one begins to see attachment and aversion being reduced in this way. Then one can derive the meaning of the teachings that say, 'Even having a doubt about selflessness or emptiness will shatter the very core of samsaric existence'. Also we can then begin to understand the teachings, which say, 'When one meditates on the antidotes of grasping at true existence, that then becomes an antidote for overcoming all delusions'.

With a detailed investigation and analysis, we then come to the correct conclusion that things do not exist in the way the way they appear to an ordinary perception. To make the main point, as mentioned previously that conclusion, becomes a highly valid conclusion in our thinking. The reason is because when one actually comes to the point where one understands how things do not exist in the way that they appear to an ordinary perception, it is like holding the view of emptiness. It is holding the view associated with

emptiness, because the realisation of emptiness is basically seeing the lack of inherent or true existence in phenomena. Thus, bringing to mind the understanding that things do not exist in the way that they appear is bringing to mind the view of emptiness. In that way it becomes a highly meritorious, highly valuable view with which to familiarise our mind.

To make it simple for oneself, try to understand that perceiving things as truly existent or existing by way of their own entity is a faulty perception, and in this way we can identify the ignorance of grasping at true existence, which is what we need to abandon. The opposite view which is that things do not exist in the way that they appear to an ordinary perception, and therefore lack any kind of true or inherent existence. This is associated with the view of emptiness, which is what we need to adopt.

By recognising these two views as opposites we can familiarise ourselves with the correct view of selflessness or emptiness. It seems that I have side-tracked a bit; however I feel that these are very important points and techniques that we need to use in our daily lives.

We may not have the actual realisation of emptiness yet, but being keen students we wish to know the best way to practise in order to gain an understanding of emptiness. So for us the best way is to constantly remind ourselves of how things lack inherent or true existence. Even though all phenomena appear as being truly and independently existent, that is in fact false; phenomena do not exist in that way. We should constantly remind ourselves of that view and familiarise ourselves with understanding of emptiness. Of course we may not yet have a real conceptual understanding of emptiness derived from a lot of analysis, but constantly reminding and familiarising ourselves with this will lead to the direct realisations of emptiness.

The reason I stress this is because it is important that we use the great opportunities that we have now, such as the leisure of having clear thinking. We have the attribute of having a clear mind now so we must use it in a positive way. This in itself is a great opportunity. If we can use the clarity of our mind, the time and the leisure now to use our thinking process to rationalise and think. If we can use this ability of our mind now in a positive way to become familiar with the essential points of the Dharma such as the understanding of emptiness, then that makes our time now most worthwhile and useful. This is how we put into practice what we have heard from the teachings. We hear the teachings and we are interested in the teachings, but if we don't actually take it further in our daily life by using our intelligence and ability to think about these points now then that would be a wasted opportunity.

The Dharma says that wasting our time never stops, and that from moment to moment our life is fading away. So in each moment we are losing a great opportunity. As the great Kadampa masters have mentioned, 'The more one hears the more it should enhance one's positive way of thinking, that then makes one's life most meaningful and useful'. So this is the way to go about our practice.

In a practical way as the Kadampa masters have stated, and in reality what we need to practise is what we hear in the teachings, which is where we find the means to do the practice. Otherwise we hear some people saying 'I have heard the teachings, but I don't know what to meditate on now. I don't know what practice to do'. That shows the disparity between what is being heard and not utilising it for one's own practice. In fact if one begins to use whatever one

hears in the Dharma in one's daily life as a practice, then in fact there will be no lack of practices to do. The more one hears, the more one's practice is enhanced. Rather than being confused about what to practise, we gain more and more ways to practise if we can actually find a practical way to use every bit of information that we get from the teaching in our daily life. That then becomes the practice.

In relation to explaining the verse commentary raises this question:

Moreover, should one consider that production and disintegration pertain to that which has the nature of a functional thing or a non-functional thing?

What is being asked is do the characteristics of production and disintegration refer to things that have the nature of a functional thing or a non-functional thing? What needs to be understood in relation to the question is whether production and disintegration exist by way of their own entity. Do production and disintegration refer to that which has the nature of a functional thing by way of its own entity or do they refer to a non-functional thing by way of its own entity? The answer is that both views are inappropriate.

Then as the commentary further explains the meaning the first line 'A thing does not become a thing':

Something already produced does not again become a thing being produced, since it is senseless for it to be produced again.

Because it is produced already, it does not have to be produced again. To continue the explanation of the verse:

A non-functional thing is not produced again as a thing...

This is in relation to the second line 'Nor does a non-thing become a thing'. The reasoning is:

...otherwise it follows that even a barren woman's child could be born.

This points out the absurdity of a non-functional thing being produced again as a thing, because a non-functional thing cannot be produced at all. A non-functional thing does not relate to the cause and effect sequence. A non-functional thing cannot be produced again as a thing, just as there cannot be a barren woman's child. The conclusion is that a thing does not become a thing by way of its own entity, likewise a non-thing cannot become a thing by way of its own entity. In both cases there is a fallacy.

In relation to the first two lines of the verse, the commentary concludes:

Thus there is no inherent production of either functional or non-functional things.

Then in relation to the third line of the verse 'A non-thing does not become a non-thing' the commentary explains:

A totally disintegrated non-functional thing does not again become a disintegrating non-functional thing for something non-existent like a barren woman's child does not disintegrate.

In the first two lines, both a thing and a non-thing were refuted as being produced by way of their own entity and then the third line relates to refuting disintegration by way of its own entity. In refuting disintegration by way of its own entity, then the explanation of the third line is given in the commentary:

A totally disintegrated non-functional thing does not again become a disintegrating non-functional thing for something non-existent like a barren woman's child does not disintegrate.

So again, this shows the absurdity of a disintegrating non-functional thing because something non-existent cannot disintegrate, just like a barren woman's child.

In relation to the fourth line of the verse 'Nor does a thing become a non-thing' we can use the example of a pot. When a pot disintegrates it does not become a non-thing. A pot is a thing, a product, a functional thing. When the pot disintegrates it is not as if the pot then transforms from a functional thing into a non-functional or non-produced phenomenon. However, if the pot were to exist by way of its own entity or be inherently existent, then it could be the case that upon disintegration, it actually became a non-functional thing, a non-functional phenomenon. This is in relation to things lacking true existence or existing by way of their own entity. Even factually, when a pot breaks, on a gross level we could say that the pot disintegrates and ceases to exist as a pot, because it has broken into pieces. However the fact that the pieces remain also shows that the pot has not transformed or turned into a non-thing because there is continuity of the pot. Clearly the continuity of the pot, which is in pieces, is still tangible as we can still see them and so, even on a gross level, we can interpret the absurdity of a thing transforming into a non-thing as not possible.

In relation to the reasoning of the refutation in the commentary, it says:

A functional thing that is already produced does not become a non-functional thing, because the two are contradictory.

'The two are contradictory' refers to a thing and a non-thing being mutually exclusive as they cannot be both a thing and a non-thing. If it is a thing, a produced phenomenon, it cannot be a non-produced phenomenon, it cannot be a non-thing. Likewise if it is a non-thing, it cannot be a thing. So they are mutually exclusive. But if things were to exist by way of their own entity, then they could be one, a thing and a non-thing. However the fact that a thing and a non-thing are mutually exclusive means that a thing cannot be transformed into a non-thing.

Then the commentary quotes this sutra:

"All products and non-products are free [from inherent existence]. Those sages who do not have conceptions [of inherent existence] understand that which is a non-product with regard to all phenomena and are free from views of an [inherent] self."

The meaning of the sutra is similar to the explanation that I gave earlier that if one understands that things do not exist in the way that they appear, then one is free from the misconception of inherent existence.

The literal term 'non-product' means permanent phenomena, but here 'non-product' actually refers to the view of emptiness, which is a non-produced and non-obstructing phenomenon. Thus when the sutra says 'Those sages who do not have conceptions [of inherent existence] understand that which is a non-product with regard to all phenomena', then 'non-product with regard to all phenomena' refers to the emptiness of all phenomena and thus they 'are free from views of an inherent [existent] self'.

1.1.3. Refuting that what is in the process of being produced is being produced inherently

That is sub-divided into three:

1.1.3.1. Brief explanation

1.1.3.2. Extensive explanation

1.1.3.3. Summarized meaning

1.1.3.1. BRIEF EXPLANATION

Assertion: Neither that which has been produced nor that which is unproduced is being produced. That which is in the process of production is being produced.

Answer:

A thing in the process of production

366

Since half-produced, is not being produced.

Alternatively it follows that everything

Is in the process of being produced.

In relation to the earlier refutations, what is now being asserted by the opponent is, "OK, I agree that neither that which has been produced nor that which is not-produced is being produced; rather that 'which is the process of production' is what we will call as 'being produced'". In relation to the assertion the process of production is understood as a thing that is half produced and also half not-produced. That is more or less how we would think of something which is in the process of being produced: it is as if they are half produced but not yet fully produced. When we talk about someone coming, if they are not here yet, but they are already in the process of coming, then we say that they are on their way. They are not in the place where they have started from because they have already left, but they are not yet here. That's where we conventionally use the term 'someone is coming', meaning that we have the idea that someone is on their way.

This assertion is made in relation to a particular refutation that was made earlier in relation to things being produced by way of their own entity. If things are already produced then the production is a thing that has already been produced. The refutation made earlier, is that there is no point in something that has already been produced being produced again, because it has already been produced, and further production is redundant. That refutation was made earlier. Following that refutation, the opponent thinks, 'Well OK, things that are already produced cannot be produced again by way of their own entity, because there is no point'. Then they feel, 'so, I would conclude by asserting that that which is in the process of being produced must then be produced by way of its own entity.'

The refutation being made here, in relation to explaining the meaning of the verse is:

It follows that a sprout in the process of production is not being produced by way of its own entity, because that which is in the process of production must be posited as half produced and half unproduced.

As they assert the process of production as being that case, the refutation is made in pointing out this absurdity:

The produced part belongs to what has already been produced and the unproduced part to what is unproduced.

The produced part belongs to what has already been produced, which is already accepted by the opponent i.e. producing what has already been produced by way of its own entity is redundant. The not-produced part has not been produced yet. So if it is not produced you cannot claim that it is produced by way of its own entity. The conclusion is that:

There is nothing in the process of production with parts other than these existent by way of its own entity.

If something were to exist by way of its own entity, then in the process of production there is no other part than that which is half produced and that which is half not-produced.

So, there are no parts to be found that can be established as being existent by way of their own entity. Furthermore:

If the produced and the unproduced are both considered to be that which is presently being produced, both past and future are also in the process of being produced.

The further refutation is that, 'If the produced and the unproduced are considered to be that which is being presently produced' i.e. half produced and half not-produced, then the commentary explains:

Alternatively, it follows that all three times are presently being produced, since all produced and unproduced things are in the process of production.

Because all things are in the process of production, then if it is half produced and half not-produced, this will also apply to past and future being produced in the present, which concludes that all three times are being produced at the same time. So the absurdity being pointed out is that according to this logic all three times exist right now.

1.1.3.2. EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION

1.1.3.2.1. Refutation by examining that which is in the process of being produced

1.1.3.2.2. Refuting the assertion that a thing existing between past and future is that which is in the process of being produced

1.1.3.2.3. Refuting the assertion that a thing before it is produced is what is in the process of being produced

1.1.3.2.4. Refuting the assertion that the unproduced is what is in the process of being produced

1.1.3.2.1. REFUTATION BY EXAMINING THAT WHICH IS IN THE PROCESS OF BEING PRODUCED

As mentioned previously the assertion is that what is being produced is considered to be in the process of being produced. So:

If that which is presently being produced exists by way of its entity, is it considered to have its own nature or not?

This is pointing out two alternatives; is it considered to have its own nature or not?

Both are unacceptable. It follows that it could not be in the process of production.

It should be understood that when it says 'considered to have its own nature or not' then these are the only two possibilities. So if

...it is considered to have its own nature [then] it follows that it could not be in the process of production.

The question in relation to the verse, refuting the meaning of the verse is:

*That which has the nature of presently being produced 367
Is not in the process of production,
Nor is that in the process of production
Which lacks the nature of presently being produced.*

The commentary continues:

It follows that anything which has the nature of presently being produced does not have the nature of being in the process of production.

What should be understood here is that it is redundant to say that something has the nature of being in the process of production, because its nature is the very process of production. You cannot say that it has that nature when that is its nature. The main point in relation to the two alternatives is does 'that which is presently being produced' exist 'by way of its own entity? Is it considered to have its own nature or not?' It is redundant to say that it is produced

with its own nature because its very nature is being produced in the present. Thus to give it an extra characteristic by saying that it is produced with its own nature, is absurd, because its very production (being produced in the present time) is its nature. Thus it is absurd to say that 'it is produced with its own nature.'

Refutation of the first alternative, having its own nature

However it is not produced with its own nature, so the absurdity would clearly be how could something be produced without its nature being present? Something existing without its nature is clearly an absurdity. The commentary is quite clear too:

It follows that anything which has the nature of presently being produced does not have the nature of being in the process of production.

It should become clear when one joins this understanding with the understanding that what is being refuted is that it being produced by way its own entity. Thus:

It follows that anything which has the nature of presently being produced does not have the nature [by way of its own entity] of being in the process of production.

That is the main point that is being refuted, which should be clear.

Refutation of the second alternative, not having its own nature

It follows that whatever does not have the nature of presently being produced is also not in the process of production, because that which is not presently being produced is contrary to that which is.

That which lacks the nature of presently being produced cannot be in the process of production, because that which is not presently being produced is contrary to that which is.

If it lacks its own nature then it cannot have that nature. The refutation of the second alternative is clearer than for the first alternative. But in both instances production by way of its own entity is being refuted.

1.1.3.2.2. REFUTING THE ASSERTION THAT A THING EXISTING BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE IS THAT WHICH IS IN THE PROCESS OF BEING PRODUCED

Again, this relates to the earlier refutations showing that it is an absurdity for something to be produced prior to being produced by way of its own entity. Something being produced after it has been produced by way of its own entity has also been refuted. Even the process of being produced by way of its own entity is also an absurdity. Now the opponent is asserting that somewhere between the past and future things must be produced in relation to the three times.

Assertion: That which is in the process of production exists, since it is located between the past and future. These two times may be posited in relation to what is presently being produced.

This assertion is basically re-affirming the process of production.

Answer:

*For anyone to whom the two are
Impossible without an intermediate,
There is nothing in the process of production
For it too would have an intermediate* 368

In explaining the meaning of the verse, the commentary reads:

In any opponent's system in which there is definitely an intermediate stage without which the past and future cannot exist, that which is presently being produced could not exist by way of its own entity...

What is being established is that, even in the opponent's system, which asserts that there is an intermediate stage that cannot exist without the past and future: 'that which is presently being produced could not exist by way of its own entity'. The reason for this is that 'there would be infinite regress'.

So if what is being presently produced exists by way of its own entity, then the absurdity or fault would be that:

...there would be infinite regress, in that anything in the process of production would require another intermediate stage and that one yet another and so on.

Thus this refutation is based on the fault of there being infinite regress.

1.1.3.2.3. REFUTING THE ASSERTION THAT A THING BEFORE IT IS PRODUCED IS WHAT IS IN THE PROCESS OF BEING PRODUCED

The intermediate stage of what is being produced has been refuted, so the opponent is now asserting that a thing is in the process of being produced before it is produced.

Earlier it was refuted that the half-produced and half-not-produced were part of the process of production. Thus the question now is:

Question: If the half-produced is not in the process of production, what is?

In relation to this assertion the commentary reads:

Since the process of production is, for example, the sprout's being produced through cessation of the seed, something in a state where its production has begun is said to be in the process of production.

'The sprout's being produced through cessation of the seed, something in a state where its production has begun' is being established as the 'process of production'. Thus what is presently being produced appears to be a different entity from that which is half-produced and half-not-produced.

Assertion:

*Since the process of production is the arising
Of the produced through cessation,
That which is presently being produced
Appears to be a different entity.* 369

The commentary explains:

Since the process of production is, for example, the sprout's being produced through cessation of the seed, something in a state where its production has begun is said to be in the process of production.

'The sprout being produced through cessation of the seed, something in a state where its production has begun' is said to be in the process of production. Thus what is presently being produced appears to be a different entity from that which is half produced and half not-produced. This all refers to the assertion that is made in the verse.

The answer to the assertion made in the verse is:

Answer: If one could point to anything and say, "This thing has been produced from this thing which is in the process of production," one could identify something in the process of production existent by way of its own entity in relation to the thing produced from it.

The verse below serves as an answer to the assertion that has just been made.

*When a thing is produced there cannot be
Anything in the process of production.
If the produced is in the process
Of production, why is it being produced?*

In explaining the first two lines the commentary reads:

However when a thing has been produced, there cannot be anything in the process of production which exists by way of its own entity, for what was in the process of production has ceased. A produced thing which has arisen from such a process of production and which would permit its inference does not exist

The main point in the refutation is where it says 'A produced thing which has arisen from such a process of production and which would permit its inference does not exist'.

What was explained earlier is that when an effect is produced, conventionally it is produced when the cause has ceased. That is of course, the conventional reasoning that we use with, for example the syllogism 'There is fire on the hill because we perceive smoke'. Normally we infer that there has been a fire because of the fact that there is smoke, even though the fire may not be seen now because it has already ceased.

Likewise with a seed and a sprout. When the seed undergoes the transformation it ceases and then the sprout is produced. Conventionally the production of an effect can be used to infer that the cause has ceased. Conventionally, that is true. However here when we are relating it to existing by way of its own entity, then the production of an effect cannot serve as an inference for there being a cause ceasing by way of its own entity. That is the main point. Thus as it mentions here:

A produced thing which has arisen from such a process of production and which would permit its inference does not exist.

This is in relation to inherent existence or existence by way of its own entity. 'A produced thing which has arisen from such a process of production and which would permit its inference does not exist', which means it cannot be used as an inference or a fact. The inference that with the cessation of production the cause has ceased and an effect takes place, cannot be used as a way to establish that that process has taken place by way of its own entity.

The assertion in relation to the second half of the verse is:

Assertion: The produced is in the process of production.

The answer given in the last two lines of the verse is clearly explained in the commentary:

If the produced is in the process of production, why is it being produced again? This is unfeasible because it has already been produced.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett and Judy Mayne
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

© Tara Institute

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