

# Study Group – *Aryadeva's 400 Verses*

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*Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga*

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3 June 2008

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'.

## 3.2.2.2. SECTION B: SHOWING HOW TO MEDITATE ON SETTLING [THE PROCEDURE BETWEEN] SPIRITUAL GUIDES AND STUDENTS BY WAY OF [EXPLAINING] THE PURPOSE OF THE CHAPTERS AND ELIMINATING REMAINING COUNTER-ARGUMENTS BY MISGUIDED OPPONENTS<sup>1</sup>

This heading is sub-divided into two:

1. Explanation of the material in the chapter
2. Presenting the name of the chapter

### 1. Explanation of the material in the chapter

Explaining the material of the chapter has two main sub-divisions:

- 1.1. Briefly explaining the purpose of writing these chapters
- 1.2. Eliminating remaining counter-arguments raised by misguided opponents

#### 1.1. Briefly explaining the purpose of writing these chapters

The commentary reads:

These chapters were written so that trainees may enter the state of liberation through giving up attachment to cyclic existence.

This relates to the earlier discussion on the purpose of studying this text. The main purpose is explained in the first line, which is to present the material of the previous fifteen chapters in order for a trainee to gain liberation and thus they must give up attachment to cyclic existence. The explanation in the commentary is on how to do that.

Without ascertaining the meaning of emptiness as it actually is, one cannot develop enthusiasm for omniscience or even for liberation through the giving up of attachment to cyclic existence.

<sup>1</sup> The numbering of this heading refers back to the initial structure the text outlined on 7 March 2006 and 14 March 2006, and on 10 July 2007. The text has four subdivisions:

1. Meaning of the title
2. Translators prostration
3. Meaning of the text
4. Colophon or conclusion

Section 3 'Meaning of the text' has two subdivisions:

- 3.1 An overview of the text
- 3.2 Specific explanation of the different chapters
- 3.2.2. Explaining the stages of the path dependent on ultimate truth

This has two subdivisions:

- 3.2.2.1. Extensively explaining ultimate truth
- 3.2.2.2. Showing how to meditate on settling [the procedure between] spiritual guides and students by way of [explaining] the purpose of the chapters and eliminating remaining counter-arguments by misguided opponents

As usual, the numbering recommences with the beginning of a new chapter.

The way to release oneself from samsara is by first of all giving up attachment to cyclic existence. One does that by gaining the realisation of emptiness. Without developing the realisation of emptiness there is no possibility of freeing oneself from attachment to samsara or cyclic existence. One must derive a more detailed understanding of the main cause of cyclic existence or samsara, which is the ignorance of grasping at the self; the ignorance of self-grasping. The ignorance of self-grasping is the main cause which leads one into cyclic existence.

In one's own practice it is good to recall the way the ignorance of self-grasping becomes the cause for leading one into samsara. This can be understood in more detail by reflecting on the twelve links of interdependent origination. Ignorance being the first link then causes karma and so forth. So, through the sequential cause and effect of the twelve links, one then enters into samsara. For as long as one has the main cause of ignorance grasping at the self, one will repeatedly be thrown into samsara. So to free oneself one must overcome the very root cause, and the only way to overcome the ignorance of grasping at the self is by cultivating the direct antidote, which is the realisation of selflessness or emptiness. Consequently emptiness and selflessness are the main antidotes for overcoming the grasping at a self.

...one cannot develop enthusiasm for omniscience or even for liberation through the giving up of attachment to cyclic existence. The emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena frightens those who have not heard sufficient teaching and are bound by the noose of clinging to a self. As already described, the path leading to freedom from worldly existence should therefore only be explained after first making the mind ready, in the way that the death of a king's beloved queen was conveyed to him.

So the main cause for overcoming grasping at the self or clinging to the self is the realisation of emptiness. However if emptiness is presented before the trainee is ready, in the sense of having the right mental capacity to absorb the explanation of emptiness, they may become frightened. The text itself is presented in such a way that the first eight chapters deal mainly with conventional reality. The text goes into great detail explaining conventional reality in terms of the suffering and so forth of cyclic existence before the explanation of ultimate reality, which is emptiness.

As we recall, the first chapters deal with impermanence, the nature of suffering, the impurity of the body and so forth. Thus the chapters begin with an explanation of conventional reality first, particularly in relation to how one enters into samsara, the suffering nature of cyclic existence. Then later the teachings on emptiness, ultimate reality, are presented. This is the way to prepare the trainee. The particular Tibetan word they use is to 'ripen' the mind, which means making the mind receptive to the teachings on emptiness. This is presented in the earlier part of the text and then one is led to ultimate reality.

...in the way that the death of a king's beloved queen was conveyed to him.

The analogy refers to the manner in which a king is told of his beloved queen's death. If he were informed in an abrupt manner he would be shocked and have difficulty coming to terms with the disturbing news. A skilled minister conveys the death of the king's beloved queen in a very tactful way by first conveying reports that gradually lead the king to acceptance of the news of the queen's death. The skilful

minister does not mention the queen's death directly but in a gradual way. Then the king is not so shocked or devastated. In fact a skilled minister relates the sad news in a way that makes it easier for the king to accept without great emotional shock and aversion.

The text employs this analogy in the understanding of emptiness. If emptiness is presented in a sequential way, then when the trainee actually hears the topic of emptiness they should be able to accept it without fear and aversion to the idea. Instead they will experience joy and acceptance. The mind can be further developed in that realisation. A fearful reaction to hearing about emptiness can thus be avoided.

Some students have commented that even though the *Madhyamika* is a difficult text and can be hard to understand, it gives some joy to the mind. This demonstrates receptivity of the mind to the topic of emptiness. Even though it may be hard to fathom and understand the subtleties of the presentation of emptiness if it brings joy to the mind and an eagerness to understand more about it, that definitely shows a receptive mind, one that is ready for that teaching.

*For various reasons, that which is empty* 376  
*Appears nonetheless as if not empty.*  
*These are refuted individually*  
*By all the chapters.*

The commentary then explains the meaning of the verse:

Even though things are empty of inherent existence, they appear not to be empty and are thought of in this way for various reasons, such as considering them truly existent. All of the preceding fifteen chapters refute these reasons individually.

As explained here clearly, even though things lack inherent existence, for an ordinary being they appear as having inherent existence. "For various reasons", means through various different imprints and so forth. However the main reason here is "such as considering them truly existent" Adherence to true existence or the perception of true existence becomes the main cause for things to appear as being inherently existent.

Therefore true existence is refuted in the preceding chapters. "Individually" meaning that in each chapter it has been presented in different ways, either explicitly or implicitly. All the chapters deal with how to overcome the misconception of true existence. One should understand that the cause of the appearance of true existence is the misconception of holding phenomena as being truly existent. "All of the preceding fifteen chapters refute these" meaning the causes for the appearance of inherent existence, and the belief in it. "These reasons" means many different reasons for adhering to the misconception of true existence, and all these reasons have been refuted individually. What should be understood here is that all of the material presented in the text, and every verse within each chapter, are related to overcoming the misconception of inherent existence. When it is understood that they are all presented as techniques for overcoming that misconception, there is no evidence contradicting that.

## 1.2. Eliminating remaining counter-arguments raised by misguided opponents

That is sub-divided into eight:

- 1.2.1. Refuting reasoning to negate emptiness
- 1.2.2. Refuting adherence to theses which fall into extremes
- 1.2.3. Showing parity of reasoning with regard to true existence or lack of true existence

- 1.2.4. Refuting non-existence as the thesis
- 1.2.5. Refuting that things are not empty because analogies and reasons to establish emptiness exist
- 1.2.6. Explaining the purpose of teaching emptiness
- 1.2.7. Showing that conceptions of extremes of existence are erroneous
- 1.2.8. Impossibility of refuting through reasoning that which is free from extremes

### 1.2.1. Refuting reasoning to negate emptiness

This is in relation to refuting their reasons that negate emptiness.

This is sub-divided into three:

- 1.2.1.1. Impossibility of refuting the thesis of emptiness
- 1.2.1.2. Impossibility of proving the thesis of non-emptiness
- 1.2.1.3. Refuting other reasoning

#### 1.2.1.1. IMPOSSIBILITY OF REFUTING THE THESIS OF EMPTINESS

This is sub-divided into two:

- 1.2.1.1.1. Actual meaning
- 1.2.1.1.2. Refutation by virtue of parity

##### 1.2.1.1.1. ACTUAL MEANING

*When the author and subject also exist* 377  
*It is incorrect to call them empty.*  
*Also with regard to these three, whatever*  
*Arises in dependence does not exist.*

The commentary then explains the meaning of the first two lines, which are the assertion.

*Assertion:*  
*When the author and subject also exist* 377ab  
*It is incorrect to call them empty.*

The commentary says:

If the chapters were written for these purposes...

"The chapters" here are the previous fifteen chapters. "These purposes" indicates the purposes of explaining emptiness. The purpose of explaining the fifteen earlier chapters is to present emptiness. In relation to that the opponent says:

If the chapters were written for these purposes, things are established as not being empty...

In our own system the chapters were written for the purpose of explaining emptiness. The opponents say, 'in fact, what you are saying actually establishes things as not being empty; it is contrary to things being empty'. The reason they give is:

...since the author and the subject matter explained by the fifteen chapters exist.

They say that because the author exists and the subject matter exists then to say 'that they are empty is contrary to what you're presenting. How could they be empty? They could not be empty.' That's what they are trying to establish.

"Also" indicates the words that express the meaning of emptiness.

They summarise by saying:

Therefore it is incorrect to speak of the emptiness of inherent existence of things.

*Answer:*  
*Also with regard to these three, whatever* 377cd  
*Arises in dependence does not exist.*

Then in relation to the second two lines of the verse which serve as the answer or the refutation to the opponents' assertion:

According to us, the words, subject matter and author are imputations dependent on one another and do not

exist independently. Whatever arises in dependence does not exist inherently. Since the author, subject matter and words are all dependently imputed, these three also do not have inherent existence. Thus emptiness is well established.

The response is that words are dependent on the subject, the subject is dependent on the author and without the author uttering the words there could not even be a subject. So they are all dependent on each other for their existence. 'Thus we are not negating the existence of words, subject and author, but we say that their existence is interdependent, they are dependent on each other, so they are actually empty of inherent existence.' Contrary to the opponents' understanding of emptiness which for them implies that nothing exists, from our own system what is being established is that things exist in dependence, through dependent origination, particularly in relation here to the words, the subject and the author. They do exist but they do not have inherent existence. So, this in fact establishes the view of emptiness well.

For the opponent the words, subject matter and author are inherently existent. For them if they exist, they have to exist inherently. Whereas in our own system, the words, the subject matter and the author exist not independently but rather in dependence upon each other. They lack inherent existence because of their interdependent co-existence. They exist, but not inherently. This is the way emptiness is established well.

#### **1.2.1.1.2. REFUTATION BY VIRTUE OF PARITY**

In the same way as saying that the establishment of emptiness is flawed, claiming that emptiness does not exist is also a flaw.

*Assertion:* If all of these were empty, the senses and their objects would be like donkeys' horns! But since they exist, things do exist inherently.

*Answer:*

*If through flaws concerning emptiness* 378  
*[Things] were established as not empty,*  
*Why would emptiness not be established*  
*Through flaws concerning lack of emptiness?*

The opponents assert that if everything is empty then phenomena could not exist. The senses and the objects would be like "donkeys' horns" and the existence of donkey horns is analogous to non-existence. So if all phenomena, if everything were empty, then the senses and what the senses perceive, the objects, would all be like donkey horns, implying that they would be non-existent. But since they do exist they have to exist inherently. That is how they establish existent phenomena as being inherently existent.

If on account of the [presumed] flaws concerning proof of emptiness, the words and so forth were not empty because one has to, accept their existence, why would emptiness not be established through flaws concerning your proof that things are not empty?

In refuting their assertion our response is: 'As we present things as being empty you attempt to prove that as a way of saying that things are in fact not empty. If you say that to us then by that same logical reasoning when you prove things to be not empty, why wouldn't that in fact prove things to be empty?' 'It follows that you should certainly accept emptiness because you accept the interdependence of the words and so forth.' As they accept that the author, the subject and words all depend on each other, they are in fact accepting interdependence. 'So since you accept that, you would have to accept emptiness.'

The parity is that 'just as you have refuted us, in fact that same reasoning similarly applies to you.' The opponents say that the words, the subject and the author exist. Their assertion is that because they exist, they couldn't be empty. That's how the opponent refutes the presentation of emptiness from our system. However, we employ the same line of logic to refute them. We state that 'if you're saying that because it exists, things couldn't be empty, in fact, because things do exist interdependently, they should be empty.' This is the unique presentation in our system.

#### **1.2.1.2. IMPOSSIBILITY OF PROVING THE THESIS OF NON-EMPTINESS**

This is sub-divided into two:

1.2.1.2.1. Actual meaning

1.2.1.2.2. Refuting the justification

##### **1.2.1.2.1. ACTUAL MEANING**

*In refuting the thesis of others*  
*And in proving your own thesis,*  
*If on the one hand you like to disprove,*  
*Why do you not like to prove?*

379

This is how our system clarifies the verse:

You cannot establish your own thesis merely by dismissing the proponents of emptiness.

You cannot establish your thesis of a lack of emptiness or that there is inherent existence simply by dismissing the proponents of the view of emptiness.

Opponents asserting that things exist truly must refute the others' thesis of emptiness as well as prove their own thesis that things are truly existent. You, however, are simply engaged in dismissing the proponents of emptiness.

Opponents refute the thesis of emptiness but they do not actually prove their thesis of things being truly existent. If one were to refute someone else's view or thesis, then the proper way to do this is to give logical reasons proving one's own thesis, while refuting the other's thesis. So what our system is saying is 'you are simply just refuting the thesis of emptiness while not giving any sound reasoning to establish your own thesis of true existence.'

If on the one hand you like disproving the thesis of others, why do you not like proving your own? You should! To proponents of emptiness whatever proofs you adduce to validate your own thesis remain as unestablished as that which is to be proved. You should therefore give up adherence to the thesis that things are inherently existent.

The proof or reasons they give should actually prove their thesis, but the reasons given are not sound enough to prove their thesis. So because they can't establish acceptable reasons to prove their thesis they 'should give up adherence to the thesis that things are inherently existent.'

The reasons they give, such as the existence of the author, the words and the subject help to establish our views as well, as in our system we don't negate the existence of the words, subject and author. In fact, we establish them more clearly, as dependent arising. So their reasons, rather than proving their own thesis only serve to help prove and validate our own system's thesis. When they say the author exists, the words exist and the subject exists they are in fact saying exactly what our system claims. They do exist by virtue of being dependent origination, dependent arising. Through establishing phenomena as dependent arising, lack of inherent existence and therefore emptiness is also established.

### 1.2.1.2.2. REFUTING THE JUSTIFICATION

Assertion:

*When thoroughly investigated,  
The non-existent is not a thesis.* 380ab

The thesis put forward by proponents of emptiness is not feasible since when thoroughly investigated, it is illogical. Something which does not exist as a knowable object is not an assertable thesis. Therefore the thesis put forward by proponents of true existence is established.

Answer: No thesis is feasible when investigated by the reasoning that analyzes the ultimate.

*Then all three, such as oneness,  
Also are not theses.* 380cd

Since negated by this reasoning, truly existent oneness, otherness and ineffability asserted by any opponent are also not theses. Therefore one should not assert even the slightest true existence.

Ultimately under thorough investigation truly existent oneness or otherness cannot be found. The main point here is that after thorough investigation true existence cannot be found anywhere. So therefore one should not assert even the slightest true existence.

I will conclude here for the evening so that you can read on and prepare yourself for next time.

Next Tuesday there will not be a Study Group session because we are going to Sydney for His Holiness' teachings - I presume most of us are going. The following Tuesday, 17 June will be discussion night and 24 June will be the exam night, so keep that in mind. I have told Venerable Carolyn to send out a message to that effect. But before Venerable Carolyn conveys the message to you, I am conveying it personally! [laughter].

It's good for those who are going to Sydney to receive the teachings from His Holiness to be mentally prepared to receive this very valuable teaching. The teaching itself has very sound instructions, so it's very good to attend with a clear mind. Apparently His Holiness will be teaching in English, therefore since you will receive a direct teaching it's good to prepare one's mind. The text has been translated into English as well, so that's something that you will have access to.

In preparation for receiving the teachings it is good to go with the understanding and awareness that the Lama who is giving the teaching is the actual manifestation of Avaloketishvara the buddha of compassion, and the teaching itself is a highly valuable instruction of the text by Kamalashila, the great Indian master. The main subject matter is on how to develop calm abiding and special insight. We have covered the subject matter in our previous lamrim studies, so you will be familiar with it. However, it is good to take note that Kamalashila himself was an adherent of the Svatantrika Middle Way School. However when His Holiness presents the emptiness of selflessness from the text, he might actually relate it to the Prasangika point of view. So it is good for you to go with the understanding that even though it is presented in the Svatantrika view, His Holiness might present it from the Prasangika point of view, in order to leave a stronger imprint on the mind.

So the Lama is Avaloketishvara the subject matter is a supreme subject, and the listeners, you, are all qualified listeners, so in this context all the conditions are perfect. One should take this opportunity and put some effort into trying to gain as much as one can from this teaching, as to get this

opportunity again in the future might be very rare and difficult.

The main outline of the *Middle Stages of Meditation* text as I recall is compassion, then bodhicitta and then the method. The outline itself clearly indicates the structural flow of the text and through the outline one can gain an overview of the presentation of the text. The two lower scopes are included in the outline of compassion. The small scope and the medium scope presentation of the teachings will be subsumed into that. So when it is presented through the text itself, you will see how eloquently it is all put together.

As it will be presented in English, I might not be able to participate so much; I will just sit there, and just when I think that I understand something it might just flow onto the next subject! However, I have received the teaching from His Holiness once before in Bodhgaya.

Again, I want to remind those who are going to the teachings to take the utmost advantage of the opportunity to accumulate merit. From the time that you start the journey to receive the teachings, just one step taken is a virtuous act that collects merit. It is good to also reflect on it in this way and to take the utmost advantage of the opportunity.

We can be inspired by the stories of previous masters such as Atisha who travelled all the way to Indonesia to receive teachings on bodhicitta. Of course in those days the journeys took many days on foot and by boat. This is an example of the way an arduous journey for the purpose of receiving the Dharma was, in every aspect, a way to accumulate merit. Of course we will not have to travel for many days, in fact we can take a plane and reach there in a few hours. These days when we go to India it only takes a few hours. Atisha's journey to Indonesia is said to have taken twelve months. For us, taking an aeroplane to India might take only twelve hours. So one hour corresponds to a month! It seems that in the past journeys taken on foot and so forth were less costly; even though now it may be easier to receive the teachings in terms of travel, we have to pay more as it is more expensive. (laughter)

The reason why I mention all this is for us to recognise the fact that we are incredibly fortunate in having such valuable teachings so accessible. Of course, the great effort made, and great hardship endured by earlier masters, was performed in the context of a practice itself. Each part of the journey, and all of the difficulties were part of the practice of the accumulation of great merit. However in this time and age, we are able to receive the teachings without having to experience much hardship. That is something that we should also feel grateful for and happy about and in this way we should feel fortunate. It is important to recognise that.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright  
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Edited Version*

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