
Study Group – *Aryadeva's 400 Verses*

༄༅། །འཇུག་བཅོམ་བཞི་བརྒྱ་པའི་སྐབས་སུ་བའི་ཚེ་གཤམ་ལེ་དུར་གྱིས་པ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

8 July 2008

As usual we sit with a fresh mind that is free from external distraction, and try to bring it inward. Then from within a focused state of mind we generate a positive motivation such as, 'in order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well'.

1.2.2.1.2.3. Not even the smallest particle of true existence can be observed

What this outline indicates is that let alone big things, even the smallest particle does not have true existence.

For the following reason, too, it is incorrect to assert true existence:

When there is nowhere, even in particles, 386
A truly existent entity, how can it occur?
Even for Buddhas, it does not exist.
Thus it is irrelevant.

The commentary quotes from an earlier stanza:

As explained in the context of [stanza 305],
This also applies when one examines
Whether particles have parts.

As was explained earlier the opponents assert a partless particle as an instance of a truly existent phenomenon. According to our system a particle that has no parts and which is a complete separate entity that does not depend on anything else, is non-existent. There are no such partless particles as even the tiniest particle is dependent on its directional parts. So, as it is a dependent arising, even the tiniest particle cannot be truly existent, or an independently existent phenomenon.

The commentary further explains:

If there were a truly existent entity, it should be observable even in extremely small things such as particles, but it is not observable. How can truly existent production occur for that which does not exist anywhere?

As explicitly explained here, if there were a truly existent entity, then it would have to be found when searched for. However when investigated, even the tiniest particle cannot be seen as being truly existent. The rhetorical question, "How can truly existent production occur for that which does not exist anywhere?" implies that since truly existent phenomena cannot be found to be existent anywhere, there could not be any instances of a truly existent production.

As the commentary further reads:

It is totally incorrect to accept as existent that which is non-existent to the perception of Buddhas, the sun-like radiance of whose consummate understanding of the suchness of things dispels all darkness of ignorance.

First of all, the qualities of the Buddha are explained with an analogy of the rays of the sun, and the way they dispel darkness. Just as darkness is immediately dispelled wherever the sun's rays hit the Earth, likewise the radiance of the buddhas, which is the quality of the Buddha's omniscient mind, radiate forth in order to help sentient beings remove their ignorance, which is analogous to darkness. The sun-like radiance of the Buddha, removes all the darkness of ignorance from the minds of sentient beings.

This explanation of the Buddha's quality also relates to the literal meaning of the word *sang gye* in Tibetan. These two syllables connote Buddha, the Enlightened One or Awakened One, but each syllable has a specific connotation. *Sang* has the connotation of completely dispelling, implying dispelling all ignorance and negativity from the mind. *Gye* has the connotation of proliferation, implying the proliferation of all qualities. Thus the two syllables connote an enlightened being who has dispelled all ignorance and proliferated all qualities.

The commentary then relates this explanation of an enlightened being, or a buddha, to the meaning of the verse: even an enlightened being or buddha who has the highest qualities, does not see true existence or inherent existence in any phenomena.

Using the meaning of the verse, it concludes that if there is no instance at all of inherent or true existence of any phenomenon, even for an enlightened mind, then that rules out any possibility of there being an instance of true existence at any other time.

The commentary concludes:

Asserting true existence is thus unrelated to any feasible thesis.

When it says, 'asserting true existence is thus unrelated to any feasible thesis' this relates to refuting certain views of opponents who assert that 'there is no true existence from the Buddha's perspective, however in general one must accept that there is true existence'. As the commentary explains, true existence cannot be established under any circumstance.

In relation to the meaning of 'buddha' explained earlier, the Sanskrit word 'buddha' literally translates as either 'awakened' or 'blossomed', (sometimes the analogy of a lotus is used) just as a lotus, although born from a muddy pond, blossoms into a beautiful flower, likewise the Buddha's mind blossoms from the darkness of ignorance. However the Tibetan word *sang gye* has a further connotation. It includes the aspect of dispelling all darkness as well as the proliferation or accomplishment of all possible good qualities.

As most of you were at His Holiness' teachings recently, you would remember that His Holiness explicitly pointed out that the Tibetan translations of the text are not only very authentic, but that certain words or terms also carry a very deep meaning. As His Holiness explicitly mentioned, with the word *sang gye*, the Tibetan translators took it a bit further than the meaning of the one syllable in Sanskrit, in order to bring a more profound meaning to the word 'buddha'. So using these two syllables *sang gye* is good for us to get a further understanding of what Buddha means.

As His Holiness also mentioned, the Tibetan translations are such that by following the literal meaning of the words, even an ordinary person can actually develop an understanding of their meaning. So the Tibetan language uses very meaningful terms to explain the Dharma.

His Holiness really emphasised this point, and it seems very true. An old lady came to see me during the teachings, saying that she had been reading sutras but couldn't really understand anything much. In fact trying to read the sutras just made her sleepy because she missed the point. However after coming to the teachings for just two weeks she could understand much of the their meaning. This goes to show that the language itself makes a difference in presenting the meaning of the teachings. Tibetan is really quite unique in that sense of presenting very deep meaning. So this is good news for those who are inspired to learn Tibetan (*laughter*).

It is appropriate to say that without the Tibetan language and texts, it would be quite hard to really get the subtle meanings of the teachings, because Sanskrit is no longer commonly used. Also many of the original Sanskrit texts have been lost. Whereas there has been a successful Tibetan translation of most Sanskrit texts, not only the texts themselves, but the commentaries, and further commentaries on those texts also exist in Tibetan. Thus the actual root text, and the commentaries of those root texts composed by other Indian masters, as well as Tibetan commentaries are all intact in the Tibetan language. At this time and age, it seems that this is the only means to really gain an understanding of the teachings.

When someone who knows Tibetan and who knows the Dharma a bit is able to literally translate from the Tibetan into English, for example, then that seems to present a good sound teaching.

I have heard from other Tibetan scholars who are in Japan that there are earlier commentaries that were translated into Japanese. However they are in an older style of Japanese script and cannot be translated into modern Japanese without knowing some Chinese. Therefore, those texts cannot possibly be translated from modern Japanese into English or any other language for that matter without knowing Chinese. So these very old and ancient texts cannot be used now as they are not accessible to the common people.

1.2.2.1.3. SHOWING THAT EVERYTHING IS EQUALLY FREE FROM EXTREMES

That is subdivided into two.

1.2.2.1.3.1. Actual meaning

1.2.2.1.3.2. Inappropriateness of asserting differentiations of truly existent and not truly existent with regard to any phenomenon

1.2.2.1.3.1. Actual meaning

*If they are not twofold, how can
Anything have an existent entity? 387
If that is reasonable to you also,
Why raise further arguments?*

As the commentary explains:

If there is no twofold division of phenomena into truly existent and not truly existent, what, such as

particles and so forth, could have a truly existent entity...

As mentioned earlier, as even the tiniest particles lack true existence there can be no distinction between phenomena as being truly existent and others as being not truly existent. That is because even the smallest particle and so forth cannot have any true existence.

...since all forms of true existence have been precluded?

This rhetorical question indicates that nothing can have a truly existent entity. This relates to the verse where it says 'if they are not twofold how can anything have an existent entity?' There is another interpretation: according to some other commentaries 'they are not twofold' can also mean that phenomena can be divided into permanent and impermanent phenomena, and so any true existence of either permanent or impermanent phenomena cannot be seen. However we relate to the explanation that is given here in this text.

In relation to the last two lines of the verse the commentary read:

If for the very reasons we have explained, it is appropriate for you too to accept the system which has eliminated the two extremes, why do you cling to the thesis of true existence and raise further arguments against us?

Here again our system is pointing out to the opponents 'having heard all the reasons and explanations that eliminate the two extremes that we have given, then why do you still hold on to theses of true existence and raise these arguments to us?' As there are obvious good reasons explaining the absence of true existence, it shows the absurdity of the opponents still holding on to their views and still trying to argue against the Madhyamika view.

1.2.2.1.3.2. Inappropriateness of asserting differentiations of truly existent and not truly existent with regard to any phenomenon

If any reasoning could disprove the thesis concerning emptiness of true existence, we would be convinced, but since things cannot be proved truly existent, you should accept only our thesis.

*Regarding the non-functional [aspect] of all things, 388
Differentiations are inappropriate.*

*That which is seen in all substantial entities
Is not differentiable.*

What our system is pointing out here is that the opponents attempt to disprove our thesis concerning emptiness without any sound reasoning. What our system is basically saying is 'If you were to give some sound reasoning to disapprove the thesis of emptiness then we could accept that, be convinced and there would be no arguments. But besides not being able to provide any good reasons to disprove the thesis of emptiness, you have no good reasons to prove anything to be truly existent'.

'That being the case the only option left is for you to accept our thesis, which is the thesis that explains a lack of inherent or true existence - the thesis of emptiness.'

The commentary further explains the meaning of the verse:

If the nature of internal and external things were truly existent, they would not depend on causes and conditions.

That things depend on causes and conditions has been proved many times.

Also differentiations of truly existent and not truly existent are inappropriate with regard to the absence of truly existent things. There are no differences in the entity of space, because it is a mere absence of obstructing form. Similarly regarding emptiness of true existence, the nature seen in all substantial entities,

What is being further explained is that if internal and external things were truly existent then the conclusion would be that they do not depend on causes and conditions. But clearly things do depend on causes and conditions, which indicates that things could not be truly existent. Furthermore a differentiation between truly existent and not truly existent is inappropriate. The analogy that is given is that just as the entity of space as a 'mere absence of obstructing form' pertains to every part of space, likewise emptiness of true existence pervades all existent phenomena.

The essential point that is presented here, as it has been presented earlier, is the point that reads, 'if the nature of internal and external things were truly existent, they would not depend on causes and conditions'. This point is really the crux of the teachings. Lama Tsong Khapa's teachings explicitly state that when one gains an understanding of interdependence it should help one to understand the lack of inherent or true existence, which is emptiness, while thinking about how things lack true existence or inherent existence should enhance the understanding of interdependence.

If we were to take a vase, for example, it is very important that when we gain an understanding of the specific relationship of interdependence and emptiness, we extend that to gain an insight into the crux of the teachings on emptiness. If things were truly existent then one should understand how that implies that things would not be dependent on causes and conditions. The very assertion of true existence implies an entity that is independently existent, where 'independently existent' means existing from its own side, and by its own right. That in turn implies not depending or relating to anything else, which then implies that it does not relate to any causes or conditions for its existence. That is essentially what is being negated.

For example, when one considers how a vase is dependent on causes and conditions, in other words when one thinks about the vase and how it is made, how it comes into existence due to certain causes, then that very understanding should enhance the understanding that the vase is empty of true existence or inherent existence, because it depends on causes and conditions. Likewise permanent phenomena such as space, also dependent on directional parts for its existence, thus they are interdependent originations.

Thus when thinking about the interdependent nature of something, one gains an insight into the emptiness of that phenomenon. Likewise when one contemplates the vase as being empty of inherent or true existence, and uses that as a reason to establish that it lacks independent existence and is therefore dependent on causes and conditions, then that understanding enhances contemplation on the lack of inherent or true existence of the vase. That then enhances the understanding of the vase as being interdependently existent, or establishing interdependent origination of the vase.

When we relate that to all internal and external phenomena, which covers all existence, this is a point that one should keep in mind. As explained in the teachings it is a very important point for gaining insight into the emptiness of all phenomena. So through this training and understanding we gain further insights into emptiness. Let us use a more contemporary example such as this clock to test your own understanding. If someone were to present the clock and say that it is dependent on causes and conditions, then does that help to enhance the notion that the clock must therefore lack true existence or inherent existence? Just mentioning that the clock is dependent on causes and conditions should help to instill the notion that therefore the clock must lack inherent or true existence.

Likewise if the clock is presented as being a phenomenon that lacks inherent or true existence, then that should help to instill the notion that therefore the clock must exist by depending on causes and conditions. In other words its interdependence, or the interdependent origination of the clock must be understood.

If, after thinking about the clock's interdependent existence, one is still doubtful about the clock's lack of inherent existence then one has missed the point. If, after thinking about the lack of inherent existence of the clock, one starts to wonder about the interdependent origination of the clock, then one has also missed the point.

Lama Tsong Khapa clearly and explicitly mentioned in teachings such as the *Three Principals of the Path* that if one does not gain an understanding of emptiness when one thinks about interdependent origination and vice versa then one has not fully understood the Buddha's intent. On the other hand, when one sees that these two understandings enhance each other then one has grasped the full intention of the Buddha. Even though this has been mentioned many times previously I will go over it again now.

The main point, as presented in Lama Tsong Khapa's teachings is that we should understand how emptiness and interdependence enhance each other. If one actually misses that point then the great fault that could arise is that one will not have the right view of emptiness. If one does not have that profound insight into the relationship between interdependence and emptiness then the fault that would arise is that despite claiming that one has a profound understanding of emptiness, one may actually neglect the observance of karma, cause and effect. If the observance of the laws of cause and effect is neglected, then that will be a great danger for oneself and others.

In relation to the specific explanation in the commentary that reads, 'there are no differences in the entity of space, because it is a mere absence of obstructing form', the analogy that is used is space. For example, although a vase, a pot, a glass and other kinds of objects, are all hollow they are clearly different, one being a vase and another being a pot, another being a glass and so forth. However the space within the hollowness of these objects is exactly the same in having the entity of mere absence of obstructing form, which is the definition of space.

One cannot differentiate the entity or nature of space within these different objects. Even though the objects are different, the space within them is the same insofar as it is a mere absence of obstructing form. Likewise, as mentioned here in the commentary, 'regarding emptiness of true existence the nature seen in all substantial entities is the same'. Using that analogy, what is being explained is that even though there may be different entities of phenomena or different existing objects, they all are in the same nature of lacking true existence or inherent existence, regardless of whether they are permanent or impermanent phenomena. So in that way they are exactly the same.

Then the commentary quotes from a stanza that was explained earlier:

[Stanza 191] says:

Whoever sees one thing,
Is said to see all.
That which is the emptiness of one
Is the emptiness of all.

The explanation of this verse was given earlier, so you should already understand it. As explained previously, one must not misinterpret these lines. They do not indicate that the emptiness of one phenomenon is the emptiness of all other phenomena. That is not what is being indicated. Rather, what is being mentioned here is that when one understands the emptiness of one phenomenon then that understanding of the emptiness of the one phenomenon is the equivalent of seeing the emptiness of all phenomena. That is, by using the same logical reasoning one will also be able to see the lack of inherent existence or true existence in other phenomena as well.

Also, in relation to the previous analogy of space, when one sees the emptiness of certain phenomena one is seeing the mere absence of true existence or inherent existence. Emptiness is a non-affirming negation: what is being negated within that phenomenon is mere true existence, or inherent existence. That mere negation of inherent or true existence is the same for any phenomenon. When one realises emptiness of any phenomenon one is negating the true or inherent existence of that phenomenon. In his recent teachings, His Holiness, quoted from other teachings such as *Root Wisdom* by Nagarjuna and so forth to explain this point.

In order to further emphasise the point the commentary quotes from a sutra:

Sutra says, "Whoever has come to know the non-functional with regard to functional things has no attachment to functional things." There are no distinctions of truly existent and not truly existent with regard to any phenomenon whatsoever.

It is good to take note of the nature of this presentation. First logical reasons are used and then to back up those logical reasons a quote from the sutras is used. The citation from a sutra is used to back up the logical reasons that have been given. This is, in fact, the approach to debate in the monasteries: the debate formula is based on logical reasons and when one presents the main logical point in debate it is considered to be very skilful when there is a sound citation to back up that logical reason. If there is an authentic citation from a sutra to back up logical reason then that becomes the complete formula of authentic debate.

1.2.2.2. REFUTING THE JUSTIFICATION

There are two sub-headings:

1.2.2.2.1. Appropriateness of accepting the thesis of emptiness of true existence if it is not accepted the appropriateness of giving a reply but not being able to do so¹

1.2.2.2.2. Difficulty of finding a thesis refuting emptiness of true existence

1.2.2.2.1. APPROPRIATENESS OF ACCEPTING THE THESIS OF EMPTINESS OF TRUE EXISTENCE IF IT IS NOT ACCEPTED THE APPROPRIATENESS OF GIVING A REPLY BUT NOT BEING ABLE TO DO SO

Basically this outline is saying 'our system has presented sound reasons to accept the thesis of emptiness of true existence. It would be appropriate that you either accept that thesis based on the reasons that we present, or if you don't accept it then it would be appropriate that you give a reply saying why my reasons are not good'.

Challenge: After first analyzing, you should either accept emptiness or make a reply.

Objection: It would be appropriate to make a reply if the slightest thing were accepted as truly existent, but since according to you everything is non-existent, how can any reply be made?

What the opponents are saying is, 'if you were to accept something, as being truly existent, then it is appropriate to give a reply to you, but since you accept nothing how can I give you a reply?' What is missing from the translation is 'if you were to say I do not give a reply because you don't accept anything how can any reply be made?'

If owing to non-existence you claim 389
No reply is made to the other's thesis,
Why should you not also prove
Your own thesis which is refuted by reasons?

The commentary then explains the meaning of the verse, which is an answer to the objection:

If you claim that no reply is made to the Mādhyamika thesis because everything is non-existent, why should it not also be proper to prove your own thesis which is refuted by the reasons that prove emptiness? Since one cannot refute another's thesis without proving one's own, yours has become non-existent.

What is being specifically explained here is 'you have not proven your own thesis first. How then can you disprove ours without proving your own thesis? So therefore your

¹ The text does not list the heading in full.

own system becomes non-existent'. That is what our own system is saying.

**1.2.2.2.2. DIFFICULTY OF FINDING A THESIS REFUTING
EMPTINESS OF TRUE EXISTENCE**

What is being explained is that a thesis refuting the emptiness of true existence is actually quite difficult to find. This indicates that the emptiness of true existence cannot really be refuted. The difficulty of finding a thesis implies that it cannot be refuted.

Assertion: Even if one is unable to prove one's thesis, it is said and well known in the world that reasons which refute others' theses are easy to find.

Answer:

*Though the world says it is easy 390
To find reasons with which to refute,
Why can the errors regarding
The others' thesis not be stated?*

What the opponent is saying in the assertion is, 'how can you possibly refute our system without first establishing your own thesis? Actually it is quite easy to refute your thesis. Everyone knows that it is harder to establish one's own views but refuting someone else's views it is actually much easier'.

Basically the counter-argument that the opponents use in relation to the verse is that our own system has said, as mentioned earlier, 'without establishing your own system first, and giving good reasons to establish your own thesis (which establishes true existence), how can you refute our system (which establishes the lack of true existence)? It is unreasonable to refute our system without establishing your own system.'

As a counter argument the opponents say 'your refutations are not so astonishing, because even in a worldly sense it is well known that it is much harder to prove one's own system, and refuting the theses of others is quite easy to do. So, in fact, your claim that I have not established my own thesis through reasons is not unusual. Even in a worldly sense it is accepted that it is much harder to prove one's own thesis. In other words', the opponent is saying, 'it doesn't negate the feasibility of my system if I don't give a good reason to establish my system'.

As a response to the opponent's counter-argument, our system explains the answer, using the meaning of the verse.

Since in that case you too must be in possession of those easily found reasons with which to refute, why are even you unable to fault the others' thesis, that of the Madhyamikas?

What the opponent has said earlier is that it is easy to refute the systems of others. Conventionally it is known that it is much easier to refute others. 'If that is the case', our system is saying, 'you too must be in possession of those easily found reasons with which to refute our thesis, so why are you unable to fault the thesis of the Madhyamikas? If you have reasons, and if you can easily refute the Madhyamika system, then why aren't you doing so?'

'The conclusion is that you are not able to refute our thesis, which is the lack of true existence'. The conclusion, as explained in the commentary is:

Thus as you are unable to fault the others' thesis, reasons refuting emptiness are not easy to find.

'The fact that you have not provided any sound reasoning to refute the thesis of emptiness proves that it is not easy to find reasons to refute emptiness'. In other words, this is implying that there are no reasons that refute emptiness. If it is difficult to find reasons, then that implies that there are no logically sound reasons that refute the thesis of emptiness, or the lack of true existence.

Transcribed from tape by Judy Mayne

Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

Edited Version

© Tara Institute

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