

---

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

༄༅། །འཇུག་བཅོམ་བཞི་བརྒྱ་པའི་སྐབས་སུ་བའི་ཚོགས་ལེན་པའི་སྐབས་སུ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

*Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga*

*Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*

22 July 2008

---

We generate the appropriate motivation to receive the teachings 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 as best as I can'.

### 1.2.6. *Explaining the purpose of teaching emptiness*

*Question:* If analogies, reasons and all things do not exist, what is the purpose of writing all the chapters of your treatise?

*Answer:* It is for the attainment of liberation and omniscience through understanding the meaning of suchness.

*If things exist inherently*

398

*What good is it to perceive emptiness?*

*Perception by way of conceptions binds.*

*This is refuted here.*

In no way does our own system assert that analogies, reasons and things do not exist at all. However what our system does establish is that analogies, reasons and things do not exist inherently. This is what our opponents fail to grasp: when our system indicates that analogies, reasons and things do not have inherent existence, that seems to imply to them that analogies, reasons and things do not exist at all. Therefore they fail to understand the deeper meaning of our view, and they pose the above question based on their mistaken belief in what they think our system is saying.

The purpose of writing the treatises, specifically on the lack of inherent existence of analogies, reasons and things is, as explained in the answer, 'for the attainment of liberation and omniscience through understanding the meaning of suchness'. It is good for us to understand the profound implication of this answer. What it implies is that without an actual realisation of suchness or emptiness, there is no possibility of obtaining liberation and omniscience. One cannot even hope to achieve liberation or omniscience without gaining the realisation of suchness or emptiness. That is the main point that is being presented here.

The commentary then further explains the meaning of the verse:

If things existed inherently, what good would there be in perceiving emptiness, since it would be erroneous?

In explaining the meaning of the verses the commentary always includes the actual words used in the verses. Here it begins with 'If things exist inherently', (which is the first line of the verse) 'what good would there be in perceiving emptiness, since it would be erroneous?' This is a hypothetical question, which implies that things do not exist inherently, but if they were to exist inherently then perceiving emptiness would actually be a fault. But rather than perceiving emptiness being a fault, the

perception of things as truly existent is the actual fault. What is the nature of that fault?

As the commentary reads:

Thinking of things as truly existent [the fault is that it] causes one to accumulate actions and thereby wander in cyclic existence...

What is being presented here is that with a faulty perception of true existence or inherent existence in relation to the self, grasping at a truly existent self causes one to accumulate karma, from which follows being re-born in samsara over and over again, or as the commentary reads "thereby wandering in cyclic existence". That is what the fault would be. Then the commentary further explains:

...but through fully understanding that all phenomena lack inherent existence, one gains release from worldly existence. Thus as long as one sees things as truly existent, because of conceptions which cling to their true existence, one is bound to cyclic existence. In this treatise, therefore, the truly existent person and aggregates, which are the referent objects of conceptions of true existence, are refuted by an extensive collection of reasoning.

The last sentence relates to all the syllogisms negating inherent existence or true existence that have been presented, specifically those relating that to the person and aggregates. If we were to take, for example, the self of person and the negation of the self of a person, we can use the same syllogism that was presented earlier, but with the subject being the person: Take the subject 'a person', it lacks an inherently existent self, because it is an interdependent origination. With that syllogism, one basically uses the same structure that was used earlier in relation to particular referent objects. Here we use the particular objects of the person and the aggregates, which relate directly to us. The referent objects are the objects of the conception of true existence.

The opposite of the thesis or the predicate in the above syllogism is an inherently existent self of person. That is what is identified as being the object of negation. So when the commentary says 'are refuted by an extensive collection of reasoning' that refers to the object of negation, an inherently existent self and inherently existent aggregates, which are refuted through an extensive collection of reasoning.

As illustrated by the author of the commentary, Aryadeva's main purpose in composing this text was to refute the referent objects of conceptions of true existence. They are refuted using an extensive collection of reasoning. Therefore, as presented here, the main reason for composing the thesis is basically to introduce the correct understanding of emptiness, which is the main subject matter that has been presented in this thesis.

As explained here, the reason for presenting this is that without refuting the referent objects of conception of true existence, one will have to repeatedly wander in cyclic existence. Those of us who actually study the text, and thus try to grasp its main essence, should take this to heart and use it in our personal practice. For us, that becomes the purpose. In terms of one's practice, it is advised that we relate to the specific referent objects of

the person and aggregates, because those objects relate to us on a personal level.

Relating to the referent object in terms of person and aggregates, explains something of who we are. Thus when we read this text and study and contemplate its meaning, we should try to relate to it on a personal level. By reminding oneself that, 'the whole purpose of study, is for me to try to understand the true nature of myself and my aggregates. If we fail to do that, and retain the misconception of holding onto the referent objects of conception of true existence (here the person and the aggregates), then for as long as we hold on to the referent objects of conceptions of true existence, that will be the cause for us to wander in samsara over and over again. There will be no possibility of achieving liberation and ultimately enlightenment, for the sake of other beings. Therefore one must definitely overcome the misconception of having a truly existent self and aggregates'. In that way we relate the study to our main purpose and goal: 'If I'm not able to refute the referent objects of conceptions of true existence, then I will be stuck in samsara for ever, so I must develop the sound understanding of emptiness'.

In order to grasp the lack of inherent existence of person and phenomena (specifically our aggregates), one must first of all identify the actual object of negation. That means really scrutinising the person and thinking about how the person would exist if it did have an inherently existent self. Likewise if phenomena were to have an inherently existent self then how would they exist? By clearly identifying the object of negation, as one begins to see the absurdity of an inherently existent person and phenomena, one will begin to grasp the true meaning of emptiness. When one has understood and perceived that an inherently existent self of person and phenomena are actually not possible, and that they are completely contrary to how they appear to our ordinary senses, then one has actually touched the point about the lack of inherent or true existence.

In order to grasp an understanding of the lack of inherent existence of person and phenomena (in this instance the aggregates), one must first have a sound understanding of how an inherently existing person would have to exist. That is the main point of the teachings.

Another important point to understand is this: As other texts explain, it is the case of focusing on one object, but apprehending it in a completely different manner. What is being pointed out, is that the referent object in both perceptions, that of true existence as well as that of lack of true existence, are the same. But the way the object is apprehended is different. So the difference is not in the focusing or perception of the object but rather in how the object is being apprehended.

To clarify further, based on the same object—a person—the perception of inherent existence apprehends the person as being inherently or independently existent, existing from its own side. Whereas the perception of the lack of inherent existence of the person, apprehends the person as interdependently arisen, rather than being independently or truly existent. So, when one understands that while the perceived object is the same, the apprehension is completely different (i.e. things don't

exist truly as apprehended by the wrong conception, but that things do lack true existence as apprehended by the right view), then one has understood the meaning of that phrase, which is an important and crucial point.

Then the commentary quotes this sutra:

Sutra says, "All phenomena are empty in that they do not exist inherently" and so forth.

The commentary further reads:

Accordingly, this was written to teach lack of inherent existence, which does not contradict the acceptance in our system of all dependently arising phenomena.

Of course this point has been explained in detail earlier, however the main point relating to the quotation from the sutra is that while things lack inherent existence, the appearance or the conventional existence does not negate the interdependent arising of phenomena and things.

### *1.2.7. Showing that conceptions of extremes of existence are erroneous*

According to some of the Buddhist schools, the consciousness itself is truly existent, while objects do not exist at all. That is what is being referred to as 'erroneous'.

Among our own sectarians, Vijñaptivādins [the Sanskrit word for one of the Mind-only schools] and all those who have not understood the actual meaning of the scriptures assert that consciousness is truly existent, and that external objects do not even exist conventionally. This is therefore shown to be wrong for both are alike in existing conventionally but not ultimately.

*To say one exists and the other does not  
Is neither reality nor the conventional.  
Therefore it cannot be said  
That this exists but that does not.*

399

The main point is that both the consciousness, or the subject, and external objects are alike in existing conventionally. Likewise, both the consciousness and external objects do not exist ultimately. So they are also the same in lacking ultimate existence.

As the commentary further explains:

To say that one exists and the other does not is not a presentation of reality, since both do not exist ultimately and are not ultimate truths. Nor is it a presentation of the conventional, since both exist conventionally and are conventional truths.

To say that external objects do not exist conventionally is contrary to worldly views. It would be absurd to deny the perceptions of ordinary people, who hold that external objects exist.

Furthermore:

Therefore all five aggregates exist conventionally but not ultimately, and so it cannot be said that mind and mental factors exist truly while external objects do not even exist conventionally.

One way of defining conventional reality is 'that which exists to ordinary beings without a thorough analysis'. When things are perceived without scrutiny, then that is conventional existence. However the main point being made here is that basically you cannot establish that mind and mental factors exist truly while external objects do not exist conventionally, as that would go against even worldly conventions.

As the commentary concludes:

Thus Madhyamikas, too, accept both external objects and consciousness as they are known in the world.

Therefore the Madhyamikas too accept external objects and consciousness, as they are known conventionally. Madhyamikas establish conventional existence as things being merely labelled by terms and designation as they appear to worldly beings.

### *1.2.8. Impossibility of refuting through reasoning that which is free from extremes*

When assertions regarding true existence of things and so forth have been thoroughly refuted in this way, it is impossible to state any refutation of the assertions regarding emptiness.

What is being explained is that the assertions regarding true existence have been thoroughly refuted with many reasons and analogies and so forth. Also, as mentioned previously, for the opponents 'it has been impossible to state any refutation of the assertions regarding emptiness'.

The assertion by the opponents is:

*Assertion:* Even though we are unable to answer you at present, you will receive an answer-there will be those who make great effort on behalf of the Tathagata's teaching.

The opponents say, 'Even though we are not able to answer it, in the future there will be those who are really earnest in the Buddha's teachings who will challenge and answer you'. In a way they are sort of threatening our own system [*laughter*] by saying, 'I may not have been able to answer you now, but there will be others who will make great effort on behalf of the Tathagata's teaching. So, those who really scrutinise and study the Buddha's teachings will find an answer to present to you'.

*Answer:* That is a futile hope! If we held a faulty thesis, it could be refuted by proving its converse.

As an answer our system says, 'That is a futile hope', the Tibetan word is more like a false hope. The reason why it is a futile or false hope is that if the thesis on emptiness were to have some error or fault and could be refuted in any way, then it would not be a futile or false hope. If there were some fault, then even though the present opponents are not able to present refutations or counter-arguments to refute the thesis of emptiness, it might be true that later on it could be contradicted. However that is a 'futile hope', because it cannot be refuted.

Thus the last verse in the text says:

*Against one who holds no thesis that [things] 400  
Exist, do not, or do and do not exist,  
Counter-arguments cannot be raised  
No matter how long [one tries].*

As the commentary states:

No Mādhyamikas hold the erroneous theses that things are inherently existent, that even the slightest thing is non-existent, that non-things are inherently both existent and non-existent, or neither.

This rules out all four possibilities of an erroneous belief being held by any Madhyamika, in particular the Prasangika Madhyamika.

No matter how long one tries, no counter-arguments can be raised.

Since all possible erroneous views in relation to these extremes are not, and will never be, held by the Prasangika Madhyamika, there will be no time in the future when refutations against the thesis of emptiness can be raised.

The commentary then presents this analogy to illustrate the likelihood of a counter-argument raised in the future:

You should understand that refuting skilled proponents of emptiness [referring to the Prasangika Madhyamika point of view] is as impossible as drawing pictures in space or causing space pain by beating it with an iron bar.

The summarising stanza by Gyel-tsap Rinpoche is:

The sun's light dispels all darkness.  
Darkness has no power to destroy the sun's light.  
The correct view destroys all extreme conceptions,  
Banishing any opportunity for controversy.

The meaning of this stanza is quite clear. What is being presented with the analogy is that just as 'the sun's light dispels all darkness' and 'darkness has no power to destroy the sun's light', likewise 'a correct view' of emptiness 'destroys all extreme conceptions banishing any opportunity for controversy'. Here 'controversy' means not leaving any opportunity to raise any counter-arguments against that view.

## **2. Presenting the name of the chapter**

*This is the sixteenth chapter from the Four Hundred on the Yogic Deeds, showing how to meditate on settling [the procedure between] spiritual guides and students.*

This heading is sub-divided into two:

- 2.1. Presenting the author who composed the text
- 2.2. Presenting the translators of the text

### *2.1. Presenting the author who composed the text*

*This concludes the Treatise of Four Hundred Stanzas on the Yogic Deeds of Bodhisattvas from the mouth of Aryadeva, the spiritual son at the Exalted Naga's feet.*

The commentary explains:

This concludes the explanation both of the great trailblazer and Bodhisattva, the Master Aryadeva's work Four Hundred Stanzas on the Yogic Deeds of Bodhisattvas...

### *2.2. Presenting the translators of the text*

...and of its commentary by the Master Candrakirti. It was translated from the Indian into the Tibetan language in the temple of Ratnaguptavihāra in the center of the glorious Kasmiri city of Anupamapura by the Indian abbot Sūksmajana, son of the Brahmin Sajjana from the paternal line of the Brahmin Ratnavajra and by the Tibetan translator Batsap Nyimadrak...

Then Gyel-tsap Rinpoche concludes with these stanzas:

May the one predicted by the Conqueror who attained  
the supreme state,  
As well as Aryadeva and the glorious Candrakirti,  
Who most clearly elucidated Nagarjuna's good system,  
Rest victoriously on the crown of our heads.

May the one predicted by the Conqueror who attained  
the supreme state,  
As well as Aryadeva and the glorious Candrakirti,  
Who most clearly elucidated Nagarjuna's good system,  
Rest victoriously on the crown of our heads.

Unable to bear misinterpretations of this system  
 Through the misconceptions of those who follow their  
 own presuppositions,  
 Who lack the flawless eye of reasoning  
 And ignore the textual systems of the great trailblazers,  
 I have explained the words and meaning of this text  
 simply,  
 Commenting in a clear, unconfused and complete way  
 On the paths that mature the mind and bring about  
 release  
 For all people with a Mahayana disposition.  
 Since Aryadeva's thought is hard to ascertain  
 And my mind is poor, my acquired knowledge weak,  
 May my spiritual guides and deities  
 Forgive whatever errors there may be.  
 Through any immaculate virtue created by my efforts  
 To illuminate the good Madhyamika path free from  
 extremes,  
 May all transmigrators, bound in the prison of worldly  
 existence,  
 Attain the peerless happiness of liberation.  
 May I, too, in all future lives never be separated  
 From a spiritual guide of the supreme vehicle,  
 And through fully entering this path by listening  
 thinking and meditating,  
 May I obtain the state of an omniscient Conqueror.

That dedication should be quite clear.

### *Why Gyel-tsap Rinpoche composed his commentary*

In conclusion Gyel-tsap Rinpoche, the author of the commentary, explains:

This Essence of Good Explanations, Explanation of the "Four Hundred" was written at the insistence of Lama Namkasangbowa who cherishes his precious precepts and holds the three sets of vows, and of Lama Draksengwa exceptionally tireless in bearing the responsibility of spreading the Subduer's teaching, they urged me again and again from Upper DoKam with lavish and repeated flower-like offerings. It was written also at the insistence of Kunga Sengge of Dzaytang, a great holder of the three sets of teachings who has heard the texts of sūtra and tantra many times, and at the insistence of numerous other holders of the three sets of teaching.

Later on the commentary mentions:

This was made possible by the kind explanations received directly from the noble, venerable and holy Rendawa Shonnulodro...

This indicates that Gyel-tsap Je actually received the teachings from his own master Geshe Rendawa Shonnulodro, who was actually a Sakya lama. Geshe Rendawa was one of the main gurus of Lama Tsong Khapa, who considered him to be one of the most kind teachers.

The 'migtsema', which is the four-line praise to Lama Tsong Khapa, was actually composed by Lama Tsong Khapa himself in praise of his teacher Rendawa. The last line originally read: *To Jetsun Rendawa, at your feet I make requests.*

When Lama Tsong Khapa offered this four line praise to his master, Rendawa said, 'This praise doesn't suit me, its best for you' and offered it back, changing the last line into Losang Dragpa which is Lama Tsong Khapa's name. That's why now it reads, *To Losang Dragpa, at your feet I make requests.*

Then, the commentary continues:

Rendawa Shonnulodro, great follower of the Conqueror, with consummate understanding especially that all external and internal dependently arising things are like the reflection of the moon in water, and from the great omniscient one in this time of degeneration, whose prayer to hold the excellent teaching of the Conqueror is perfectly accomplished, the glorious and good foremost precious Losang-drakba [i.e. Lama Tsong Khapa]. They are the father and son, the dust beneath whose feet I have long and respectfully venerated.

Then it says<sup>1</sup>:

It was written at Drokriwoche Gandenambar-gyelwayling by the logician and fully ordained monk Darma-rinchen

The place where it was composed was Ganden Monastery.

That concludes the text.

I really appreciate those who have come to the teachings to the end. It has been a great opportunity for me to have read the teachings, and the commentaries, and to present it to the best of my ability. Using Gyel-tsap Darma Rinchen's commentary as a basis, I referred to other commentaries, such those of as Jetsun Rendawa and Chandrakirti. To have been able to read the other commentaries and studied them a bit has actually also been fortunate for me. So in that way it has been of mutual benefit.

Of course, this teaching by Gyal-tsap Rinpoche is a very extensive and clear teaching. It is quite unlike other teachings as it illustrates the points of emptiness very clearly.

Prior to becoming a disciple of Lama Tsong Khapa Gyel-tsap Rinpoche is said to have been a great scholar from the Sakya tradition. When Gyel-tsap Rinpoche first came into the presence of Lama Tsong Khapa, he came with an intention of debating with him, as he saw Lama Tsong Khapa as a peer. He had come a long distance carrying his essential things on his back, and while still carrying his sack he sat on the throne next to Lama Tsong Khapa, indicating that he was on the same level.

But as he started to hear Lama Tsong Khapa teach, he began to develop some understanding of the wisdom of Lama Tsong Khapa. That lessened Gyel-tsap's pride and so he moved down below the seat, and in the end he was actually sitting on the floor [*laughter*]. Even though he came as someone to compete with Lama Tsong Khapa, he later became his disciple and was appointed to be first throne-holder in the Ganden tradition after Lama Tsong Khapa. It is said that having initially sat on Lama Tsong Khapa's throne was in a way an auspicious sign for him to actually become the throne-holder after Lama Tsong Khapa passed away.

Gyel-tsap Rinpoche is known as a great scholar and this is clearly seen throughout his works. He composed only eight commentaries, but those eight are really very clear and precise explanations of particular texts. His commentary on the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* is known as a

<sup>1</sup> This is in accordance with the order of the sentences presented in the original Tibetan.

---

very clear and precise commentary and it is now widely used. There is his commentary on the *Prajnaparamita*, as well as the Valid Cognition text, which is also used today by the Sakyas as a text to study logic. As well there are other commentaries on *Gyu-lama*, which is the sublime mental continuum—the teachings on Buddha nature. All his commentaries are very clear, and very well illustrated and explained.

Gyel-tsap Rinpoche is accepted as the emanation of Chenrezig. Therefore, of course, all of his texts would understandably be very profound and clear explanations. In fact Lama Tsong Khapa and his two disciples are seen as emanations of the three main lineage deities—Lama Tsong Khapa being the emanation of Manjushri, Gyel-tsap Rinpoche the emanation of Chenrezig, and Kedrub Rinpoche the emanation of Vajrapani. The statues and drawings of Kedrub Rinpoche depict him as having more wrathful form: his eyes are quite wide and he is fierce looking, indicating that he is an emanation of Vajrapani.

Next Tuesday will be Discussion Night and after that there will be the exam as usual. The exam will coincide with my retreat session, and so I will not be able to come to the exam as my schedule is quite strenuous. The following Tuesday, 12 August, I intend to leave for seminar participants to prepare their presentations. We will begin the new subject on 19 August.

It's good for everyone to read the text prior to actually receiving the teaching. If one does some reading in preparation, then there will be some benefit. Whether or not you actually develop a new understanding from my presentation is not as relevant as trying to develop some understanding by reading and preparing by oneself. That is the main way to get the benefit from the teaching.

In the presentation of the text, first there are the preliminaries, and then it talks about the calm abiding and how to achieve it. That is followed by the topic of special insight. Some texts present the object of meditation first and then later how to meditate, i.e. the subject matter of special insight into emptiness is explained first followed by how to achieve calm abiding. The main point is that there is a particular type of presentation used in the text. That is presenting the view first, then how to achieve calm abiding later. The other approach *is* practising how to meditate first and then finding the right view. It is good to understand these two different techniques; if you recall, His Holiness also mentioned these particular points in Sydney.

Everything has gone very well for this study, and I would like to thank everyone again. Most of you have come quite consistently, and of course some have missed a few times due to unforeseen circumstances – family matters or whatever. Maybe in some cases there has been laziness, but in any case most of you have come, and I thank you very much.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
Edited Version*

© **Tara Institute**

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