

Study Group – *Aryadeva's 400 Verses*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

1 May 2007

As usual we shall set a good motivation for receiving 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 into practice whatever I hear'.

1.2. Abandoning contaminated actions, the cause for birth in cyclic existence¹

This is subdivided into three:

1.2.1. Advice to abandon actions projecting rebirth in cyclic existence

1.2.2. Why it is necessary to abandon them

1.2.3. Actual way to abandon them

This section explains how to abandon that which leads to rebirth into cyclic existence again and again. It is also good to derive an understanding from the outline itself. Here the sequence is first, advice on how to abandon the causes that lead to rebirth in cyclic existence; second is why it is necessary to abandon those causes and the third is the actual way to abandon the causes for rebirth in cyclic existence. Keeping that sequence in mind can help us to remember the main points.

1.2.1. Advice to abandon actions projecting rebirth in cyclic existence

The wise rid themselves of rebirth in cyclic existence which is governed by the force of contaminated actions; moreover they do so by stopping the process of contaminated action.

*The pain of walking, one sees, 159
Decreases when doing the opposite.
Thus the intelligent generate
The intention to end all action*

What is being indicated here is how the wise seek the means to overcome the actions that lead to rebirth in cyclic existence. Seeing delusions and karma as the cause to be reborn in the cyclic existence, the wise thus seek to overcome delusions and karma as a result of their sound understanding of the Dharma, the cause and effect sequences of karma and so forth. What is being indicated here is how to overcome rebirth in samsara as a result of the influence of delusions and karma. This does not refer to the bodhisattvas' rebirth into samsara, which is out of their intention to benefit sentient beings. Rather it is rebirth in samsara as a result of the influence of delusions and karma that is to be overcome, or abandoned.

The result, which is samsara, is overcome by abandoning the causes, which are identified as being the delusions and karma. What is being indicated is that those who do not desire the result, which is the experience of being reborn in

cyclic existence, need to overcome the cause. Therefore what is being indicated here specifically is how to overcome the result, which is the rebirth in cyclic existence, by overcoming the causes.

The very causes that lead one into cyclic existence have to be overcome. This is a profound way of explaining how, if one does not wish to experience the result, one must tackle what causes that result. To claim that one doesn't want to be reborn in samsara, and to then willingly engage in the actions that lead one into samsara would be hypocritical, because one definitely cannot achieve the result without tackling the causes. The very actions that we engage in on a daily basis are the sorts of actions that lead one into samsara.

As the commentary explains:

One sees that the pain caused by actions like walking, strolling, lying down and so forth decreases and gradually loses its former intensity when doing the opposite kind of action such as sitting.

The normal activities of walking or strolling or even lying down, are used as an analogy. These sorts of activities require some sort of exertion and because there is exertion, there is eventually discomfort. By walking for too long, one can feel tired and feel aches and pains in one's body. Likewise there can also be the discomfort caused by strolling around, or even in some cases, lying down. What is being indicated here is that the discomfort or pain from walking and so forth is decreased when we stop the action that causes the pain.

As the commentary further explains:

By breaking the continuity of all contaminated actions, all suffering stops.

This is of course very true. If we stop the continuity of the action that brings about the suffering, then naturally the suffering itself will subside.

Thus the intelligent expand their minds to encompass the means to attain the state of nirvana in which all contaminated actions projecting worldly existence have ceased.

Here the commentary is explaining that the main point being made in the verse is that the intelligent strive to expand their minds so that they are able to develop the means to achieve the state of nirvana, which is the state where all the contaminated actions that project one into cyclic existence are completely severed and overcome. The main point being explained here is that those intelligent beings, who wish to achieve nirvana, have such a very sincere determination that will seek out the causes that prevent one from reaching liberation, or in other words, the causes that lead one into cyclic existence. By analysing and thinking about the main causes, or actions that lead one into rebirth in cyclic existence again and again, wise beings first attempt to minimise, and then eventually stop the actions that lead one into cyclic existence. They clearly see that without stopping those actions, one can never stop that cycle of being reborn into cyclic existence again and again.

Having identified and recognised the causes, or actions that lead one into cyclic existence, the wise attempt to minimise those actions. Completely stopping those actions, will then lead to creating the causes to achieve liberation. As the understanding and knowledge of how to achieve liberation is expanded, one comes to understand that without severing the main cause, which is the karma and delusions, by completely overcoming them in their entirety, one can never achieve liberation. Having understood that, the wise attempt

¹ The sequence given on 10 April 2007 was '1.2. Abandoning contaminated actions, the cause for birth there' and '1.2.1. Advice to abandon actions projecting rebirth there', where 'there' referred to cyclic existence. The headings have been made a little more self explanatory here.

to completely sever and overcome delusions and karma. Thus in brief, unless and until the delusions and karma completely cease, rebirth in cyclic existence will continue.

1.2.2. Why it is necessary to abandon actions leading to rebirth in cyclic existence

Seeing the reasons why it is necessary to abandon the cyclic existence will provide the determination to overcome cyclic existence. Four reasons are given:

1.2.2.1. Since cyclic existence is a source of fear, it should be abandoned by way of its cause, contaminated actions

1.2.2.2. Cultivation of fear considering the effects of contaminated actions

1.2.2.3. Considering the nature of contaminated actions, effort should be made to abandon them

1.2.2.4. Inappropriateness of attachment to contaminated actions on the grounds that they cause pleasure

1.2.2.1. SINCE CYCLIC EXISTENCE IS A SOURCE OF FEAR, IT SHOULD BE ABANDONED BY WAY OF ITS CAUSE, CONTAMINATED ACTIONS

Assertion: The intelligent rid themselves of cyclic existence by stopping the process of contaminated action.

*When a single effect's original cause
Is not seen, and one sees the extensiveness
Regarding even a single effect,
Who would not be afraid?* 160

As the commentary reads:

No one can perceive the original cause of even a single effect, such as an element, an elemental derivative, the mind and so forth...

What is being explained here is that the continuity of matter and mind is infinite. This is understood when we talk about a seed: it is the result of a previous seed, which was produced from the maturation and sprouting of a previous seed. That previous seed was also related to its earlier seed as well. In that way when we try to trace the continuity of one single seed, it seems to be endless. Therefore we can see that there are different causes for even one seed, and when we look into different causes of that seed and try to trace it back, it seems to go back infinitely. Thus it is very hard to really comprehend the entirety of the causes and conditions needed to bring about even one seed.

Likewise with mind: the mind is a product of a previous state of mind and that previous state of mind is a product of an earlier state of mind before that. When we try to trace back the continuity of our mind, we cannot come to one point where we can say 'This is where mind begins'. Therefore the continuity of the mind also goes back infinitely. Thus we find that trying to comprehend the causes and conditions of matter or of mind is really quite incomprehensible.

When one realizes that even a single effect has a limitless multitude of causes, what childish person would not be afraid? Therefore one should always feel aversion toward, and strive for the means to gain liberation from, this vast wilderness of cyclic existence, made difficult to cross by the thickets of ignorance failing to comprehend its continuity.

What is being explained in these lines is that having used the analogy of external matter and the continuity of a mind to show how difficult it is to comprehend its continuation, one understands how the continuity of the causes for being reborn in cyclic existence (which are delusions, ignorance

and all of the different delusions which are caused by ignorance) also seem limitless.

Thus cyclic existence is analogous to 'thickets of ignorance'. The ignorance within our mind is so thick and intertwined that it seems like a maze from which we cannot possibly escape. The complexities of the delusions that arise from ignorance are so thick and complex that it is almost impossible to try to think how one could possibly escape from them. When one becomes aware of how delusions are so ingrained and deep-rooted in our mind, then that should definitely bring fear, realising how if one were to remain in that state, suffering in cyclic existence will be endless. Understanding that should definitely instil a strong determination and wish to achieve liberation. When the text asks, 'What childish person would not be afraid? that is a rhetorical question indicating that one should indeed be afraid. When one actually realises that the complexities of all the ignorance and the delusions within one's mind and the suffering that they cause, then that should definitely instil a sense of fear and urgency about overcoming samsara and achieving liberation.

On a more practical level, one can contemplate these main points in one's practice. If we reflect on our own contaminated physical body, we come to realise that the shortcomings of our contaminated physical body are endless. We are so vulnerable to sickness, to feeling fatigue and tired as a result of work and so forth. In order to sustain this physical contaminated body, we have to work so hard and exert so much time and energy, and experience so much suffering. When we reflect even further on our contaminated mental states, we can definitely see that there is so much anxiety, frustration, sadness, depression and so forth that we experience because of the contaminated state of mind that we have. This combination of a contaminated physical body and a contaminated state of mind then becomes the cause for us to experience all of the shortcomings that the body and the mind possess.

By thinking about these disadvantages it becomes really appropriate for us to develop a strong determination and wish to be free from this conditioning. If it is possible to free ourselves, then it is most reasonable to contemplate how we can be free from these limitations and this conditioning that we are in, and thus strive to achieve the state of liberation, or freedom. Contemplating in this way will help us to reduce our strong grasping or attachment to our contaminated existence, and also the contaminated objects that we relate to, the sensual pleasures and so forth. We can develop a mind where we don't place complete trust in them and are more detached from our conditioning and the essential pleasures and so forth that sustain us. Reducing our strong attachment and craving for that can bring release in the mind and thus we can experience some sort of pleasure and happiness as a result of that. Contemplating in this way can be very practical, and even beneficial.

We find that there are so many conditions and experiences in our life that lead us to feel unhappy, uncomfortable, depressed and so forth. We establish so many things but then changes occur. No matter how much we plan, there will always some things that will go wrong and changes that will take place. When those changes occur, that becomes a cause for us to feel depressed or frustrated and to lose hope and so forth. If we can think about how that is the nature of samsara, and think along the lines of how, due to karma, certain changes take place and certain experiences come about, then even when there are changes and things don't go

well externally, it will not affect our mind to the degree where we will feel very depressed and sad. If we have that understanding and reflect in that way, it will prevent us from experiencing shock when things happen. This will help the mind to become more relaxed and more peaceful, and in that way can be of benefit.

1.2.2.2. CULTIVATION OF FEAR CONSIDERING THE EFFECTS OF CONTAMINATED ACTIONS

This is in relation to generating fear by thinking about the effects or the results of the contaminated actions.

*Since all results will not definitely
Be achieved, and those that are
Will certainly come to an end,
Why exhaust yourself for their sake?* 161

This verse relates to very practical advice that we can definitely use. As the commentary reads:

Effort would be appropriate if the results of actions for a specific purpose, motivated by attachment, could definitely be achieved.

What is being explained here in a very practical sense is that if we can definitely vouch for the results to be obtained, then one might think that it will be worthwhile to exert ourselves, to be motivated by attachment, and to engage in those actions. However it is:

...not certain that you will achieve all the results such as perfect happiness. Moreover whatever is achieved is sure to perish in the end.

What is being implied here is that first of all, it is not certain that one will achieve the desired result that one seeks out of attachment, and thus exerting so much energy and effort to achieve a result based on attachment is questionable. We have many examples of how people put in so much effort and energy and time into an attempt to achieve a particular goal in life, or a certain status, or a certain amount of wealth. Having exerted themselves in this way, they mostly don't end up satisfied with achieving what they had planned to achieve.

For example, farmers put in so much time and energy into ploughing and cultivating the fields and harvesting the crop. Throughout the year they work hard in order to achieve a certain amount of wealth and status, so that they can live happily and contentedly. However there are many things that can go wrong during that process, and they never achieve the goal that they seek. Even if they do achieve a certain amount of wealth it is not stable. It is the same with whatever kind of work that one engages in out of samsaric attachment. It is not as though whatever one achieves and obtains will remain satisfactory for ever. In fact because it is in the nature of impermanence, its very nature is that the very next moment that wealth is obtained, it starts to decrease. Eventually one has to give up and lose everything. That is the nature of samsaric existence.

So what is being indicated here is how there is no real essence in the samsaric pleasures and achievements. On a practical note what one can derive from this explanation is that this understanding can release the strong expectations that we have in our mind. It is these strong expectations of samsaric pleasures that cause us disappointment and thus great suffering. Understanding this can lessen any great expectations and trust in samsaric pleasures, and that reduces disappointment. So if through strong grasping we initially had a grand samsaric goal to achieve e.g. some great wealth or status, an understanding of the nature of samsara can lessen the suffering caused by that grasping. If we

cannot achieve our samsaric goals we can reflect on how that is the nature of samsara, cause and effect, and karmic consequences. If one has not previously accumulated appropriate causes, the natural outcome is that our grand goal is not achievable. So in that way understanding this can lessen anxiety.

This understanding that samsara has no essence can help release the strong suffering that may arise when those who have obtained a certain amount of wealth and status lose that, or find that it is decreasing. Understanding that it is the nature of samsara that there is no real essence can help us to deal with change or loss of any wealth and status that we might achieve. So this understanding has a very practical benefit for us.

The commentary then asks another rhetorical question:

Why exhaust yourself physically, verbally and mentally to achieve mistaken objectives?

We have just explained there is no reason to do so.

Make effort to give up actions projecting cyclic existence.

Again, the main point here relates to one's own experience. We can see the fear that we have as a result of having obtained this contaminated body and this contaminated state of mind. This fear that is instilled in us is unavoidable; especially fear of the prospect of losing everything: losing our wealth, losing our status and losing our life. These fears come about naturally as a result of having a contaminated body and a contaminated state of mind. Again, with this understanding of how having a contaminated body in cyclic existence it is in the nature of samsara that we experience the shortcomings of the contaminated body and eventually disintegrate.

Having to give up our body is the result of the karma that we have created in the past. If we have that understanding, then again it can help to loosen that strong fear that we have in our mind. Because we see that it is in the nature of samsara, we see that there is no real essence in this contaminated body and contaminated state of mind that we possess. This can instil the wish to really want to stop the causes of this contaminated body and state of mind, which are the delusions and karma. That strong wish to really overcome the suffering of samsara can result in a deeply felt wish to overcome or abandon the delusions and karma. Thus, as it mentions here, one must exert oneself in overcoming the causes for samsara, which are the delusions and karma.

1.2.2.3. CONSIDERING THE NATURE OF CONTAMINATED ACTIONS, EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE TO ABANDON THEM

Since actions themselves, like their results, are bound to perish, do not exert yourself for no purpose.

*Once it is done, work done with effort
Effortlessly disintegrates. 162
Though this is so, still you are not
At all free from attachment to actions.*

As the commentary explains:

Work, like building a wall, requires effort, but when it is finished it disintegrates effortlessly.

What the first two lines of the verse indicate is that even though so much effort is put into achieving something, it actually disintegrates without any effort.

The explanation in the commentary can be understood in the light of a different kind of explanation of the analogy. If we saw someone erecting a wall, and soon after it was finished

he took it down again and began to erect it again, and this continued in a seemingly endless process, we would regard such a person as utterly foolish. Our situation of being in cyclic existence is similar to that. Thus as the commentary explains:

This being so, since you still do such things, your utter lack of freedom from attachment to actions shows how foolish you are.

What this is indicating is that even while one is experiencing all the shortcomings in samsara, all the sufferings, all the disadvantages that come about as a result of having a contaminated physical body and the contaminated state of mind, one still engages in the actions that produce that situation again and again. What is more we are actually attached to those actions! To willingly engage in the actions that bring about this condition of existing in samsara again and again, can similarly be seen as being extremely foolish, and unreasonable. Thus one must understand how behaving in such a way is very foolish, and that one must overcome that situation. We should contemplate this explanation. The analogy and the explanation are quite vivid, so just contemplating these lines is appropriate.

1.2.2.4. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF ATTACHMENT TO CONTAMINATED ACTIONS ON THE GROUNDS THAT THEY CAUSE PLEASURE

Assertion: Though actions which require exertion do perish, one cannot free oneself from attachment to them, because they are a source of pleasure.

Answer:

*There is no pleasure in relation to
Either the past or the future. 163
That which occurs now, too, is passing.
Why do you weary yourself?*

This assertion comes from those who say that without attachment, one cannot feel any pleasure i.e. there can be no pleasure without attachment. As an answer to this assertion, the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

There can be no real pleasure in relation to past consciousness, since it has already ceased...

If one were to assert that attachment to the actions that lead one to samsaric existence does bring about a certain pleasure and so it seems appropriate to engage in those actions, then the answer, as explained here is to ask, 'What is the real pleasure?'. There is no real pleasure in relation to the past consciousness; if one has experienced something in the past, there is no pleasure now because it has already happened in the past. The consciousness that experienced that pleasure in the past has already gone, so one cannot assert that there is pleasure now.

...nor in relation to future consciousness, since it is not yet produced.

One cannot claim to experience the pleasure of the future because it has not yet come.

Where is the pleasure that one wishes to experience? If we relate that pleasure to the experience of the consciousness in the past, then because it is in the past we cannot possibly derive any real pleasure now, because it is already gone. We cannot derive pleasure from a future experience, because it has not even happened yet. What we are left with is the pleasure that we experience now, in this moment. That is the only thing we can relate to. However, even the pleasure that we claim to experience now is very momentary and fleeting.

The commentary continues:

Moreover consciousness which is occurring now disintegrates moment by moment and passes. Since there is no reliable happiness, why do you weary yourself?

This rhetorical question indicates that there is no point in making yourself weary for momentary pleasurable experiences now, and that striving for a non-existent effect is unreasonable. The happiness or the pleasure that one claims to be attached to and wishes to experience is not reliable, and it is not real happiness, because it disintegrates from moment to moment. Contemplating this fact in relation to our own practical experience would be very effective. The teaching explains that pleasure is not a reliable source of happiness because it does not give us real lasting pleasure and happiness in our mind. All that we experience is a fleeting, momentary pleasure.

Even though we may have a general understanding of impermanence, if we don't relate it to our actual experiences, then it doesn't make much sense. But when we relate this to our own experiences we can see how, for example, we may have had some elated feeling of being content and happy this morning, but after something happens or an incident occurs, the initial happiness is suddenly gone. Even if we experience some sort of sensual pleasure, in the next moment it is gone and replaced with something else. In that way we can see that each moment's pleasure fades away and disintegrates, and thus it is not lasting, and therefore not reliable.

The commentary gives the analogy that it is that it is like building a house on the bank of a river, or on a cliff overlooking the sea. The flow of water or waves will cause a landslide and then the house will collapse. If the house is rebuilt in the same position the same thing will happen, and one will never complete the house because it will keep on collapsing.

1.2.3. Actual way to abandon them

That is divided into two:

1.2.3.1. Repudiating attachment to meritorious actions

What is referred to here as 'meritorious actions' actually refers to the virtuous actions. One should understand here that this is not saying that meritorious action should be abandoned, but that attachment to such actions should be. It does not refer to repudiating the meritorious action itself, but to attachment to the meritorious action.

1.2.3.2. Repudiating accumulation of demeritorious actions

1.2.3.1. REPUDIATING ATTACHMENT TO MERITORIOUS ACTIONS

This is sub-divided into three:

1.2.3.1.1. Generally repudiating accumulation of actions for the sake of high rebirth out of attachment

1.2.3.1.2. Rarity of going from happiness to happiness

1.2.3.1.3. Detailed repudiation of accumulating actions for the sake of high rebirths

1.2.3.1.1. GENERALLY REPUDIATING ACCUMULATION OF ACTIONS FOR THE SAKE OF HIGH REBIRTH OUT OF ATTACHMENT

This is again sub-divided into two:

1.2.3.1.1.1. Appropriateness of fear since the Exalted see even high rebirths as [being] like hells

1.2.3.1.1.2. If ordinary people ever perceived it like this, they would immediately faint

1.2.3.1.1.1. Appropriateness of fear since the Exalted see even high rebirths as [being] like hells

Assertion: One should perform virtuous actions for the sake of a high rebirth.

Answer:

*The wise feel the same fear for even
A high rebirth has for the hells.
It is rare indeed for a worldly state
Not to produce fear in them.* 164

The assertion that one should perform virtuous actions for the sake of a higher rebirth may seem a reasonable assertion. However what should be understood here is that engaging in virtuous actions just for the sake of experiencing the pleasures of a higher rebirth, such as in the human or in the god realms, is inappropriate. As the commentary explains:

Even high rebirths as gods and so forth, ablaze with the fire of rampant disturbing emotions and shrouded in the darkness of ignorance like the hells, produce fear in the wise with direct perception of suchness [or emptiness].

What is being explained here is that for the wise arya beings, who have direct realisation of emptiness, existence as a human or in the god realms is no different to life in the hell realms. This doesn't refer to the extent of the suffering that is being experienced, which are obviously greater in the hell realms, but to the degree of delusions and ignorance found in the higher realms. The ignorance and delusions that we have are so prevalent and so intricate in our minds that it is equivalent to being in the hell realms, because delusions and ignorance are the causes to end up in the hell realms.

For the wise beings existence as a human or in the god realms is not a really desirable and pleasurable state. We can see that even in the human realms some humans experience really extreme degrees of suffering. Other humans, because of their delusions and ignorance live or behave almost like animals. That is something we can relate to. With these sorts of examples we can come to understand what is being explained.

As it is rare indeed for any worldly state not to inspire the Exalted with fear, the intelligent should consider the disadvantages of cyclic existence. The accumulation of actions out of craving based on seeing a high rebirth as something attractive in itself, without cultivating aversion to worldly existence, is rejected.

What is being explained here is that by seeing the disadvantages and shortcomings of existence even with a high rebirth as a human or in the god realms, the wise ones will shun the causes to be reborn there.

However, it is completely wrong to prevent and give up the accumulation of causes for life as a god or human for the purpose of liberation.

This clarification is to clear away the doubt that if one should give up craving for a higher rebirth, such as the human or the god realms, one should give up entirely the causes to achieve such a higher rebirth. One should not be led to that misunderstanding.

One should reject the idea that it is appropriate to crave for the pleasures of a high rebirth as a human or god, and then engage in actions to achieve that state. However it is appropriate to work towards such a high rebirth for the purpose of achieving liberation and enlightenment, as one may not be able to achieve that goal in one lifetime and would have to continue to engage in the causes to achieve liberation and enlightenment in further lifetimes. Within cyclic existence the best rebirth is as a human or in some

states of the god realms. Therefore as a means for liberation or enlightenment, one need not give up the causes to achieve high rebirth.

This corresponds directly to the explanations given in the Lam Rim teachings in relation to removing the doubts about achieving the highest rebirth. I will clarify that point next week.

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

8 May 2007

As usual it would be good to sit in an appropriate physical posture and make sure that the mind is not distracted, by distancing oneself from any distractions. Set your mind by keeping it focused on the teachings to be received, then generate a motivation such as, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment. So for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice as best as I can'.

1.2.3.1.1.2. If ordinary people ever perceived it like this, they would immediately faint

*If childish people ever perceived
The suffering of cyclic existence,
At that moment both their mind
[And body] would completely fail.* 165

As the commentary explains:

If childish people ever directly perceived the suffering of cyclic existence as do the Exalted, their mind or heart and body would both completely fail...

Here 'Exalted' refers to the arya bodhisattvas who perceive the true nature of worldly existence - the environment and the beings who live within that environment - as a state of complete suffering and misery. That is because aryas directly perceive the actual nature of existence and reality. Thus when we refer to the truth, it is the arya view of truth, and when we talk about the four noble truths, each one is called a noble truth because it is a truth as seen by the noble or arya beings.

This shows that when ordinary beings perceive existence and phenomena they perceive it with a faulty state of mind. For ordinary beings things appear as being contrary to how they actually exist, like an illusion.

As the commentary explains, if childish people were ever to directly perceive the suffering of cyclic existence in the same way as arya noble beings, then their mind (or heart) and body would both completely fail. Ordinary beings would not be able to bear seeing cyclic existence in its entirety with all its sufferings.

And, as the commentary further explains:

...they continue as if they were happy.

What this is indicating is that ordinary beings remain happy in their state of denial, because they fail to see the actual reality of cyclic existence, or samsara, and because of their contrived way of perceiving samsara as being a pleasurable state.

This point was also explained in another text by Chandrakirti. He said that if ordinary beings were to perceive the reality of cyclic existence and thus understand its suffering nature, then that would instil such a great fear in their mind that there would be no choice but to develop a strong determination to be free

from cyclic existence. Thus they would be able to develop a strong determination to become entirely free from cyclic existence by achieving liberation. In this way the process of developing the determination to be free can be clearly understood.

These points have been explained previously, however it is worthwhile refreshing them. For as long as one does not realise the sufferings of cyclic existence and generate a fear of its pitfalls, one will not develop the determination to be free from that situation. It is similar to a prisoner who sees the confinement and sufferings of prison as an undesirable state to be in. The more they reflect on that, the stronger their determination to be free from prison will be. If ordinary beings in cyclic existence do not develop fear and clearly see the disadvantages, and in particular the sufferings, of cyclic existence they will not develop the determination to free themselves from it. Conversely, the stronger the fear that is generated in one's mind the stronger the determination to be free from it.

The analogy in the commentary is that

It is like Indrabala, who sacrificed his life out of desire to be chief...

Indrabala sacrificed his life to be a chief but then that became a cause to be reborn again as a chief.

1.2.3.1.2. RARITY OF GOING FROM HAPPINESS TO HAPPINESS

This will be clarified in detail later. Here, happiness refers to the happy state of being continually reborn in higher states, which is very rare.

This heading is subdivided into two

1.2.3.1.2.1. The actual meaning

1.2.3.1.2.2. Repudiating attachment to higher rebirths attained through abstaining from ill deeds

1.2.3.1.2.1. The actual meaning

*People without pride are rare,
And the proud have no compassion.
Thus it is said to be very rare
To go from light to light.* 166

This verse serves as an explanation to the normal way of thinking which is explained in the statement:

Though belonging to the best class and having the finest possession is known as happiness...

This refers to the worldly circumstances of having riches, the finest resources and a good sound body, which are considered as a happy state. The general assumption is that those who have riches or power or high status, such as kings or other leaders, must be very happy, as everything is going well for them. When a poor person looks upon a rich person they have the natural assumption that the rich, who have everything, must be the happiest people. However as the commentary explains:

...aversion even towards that is appropriate.

People of good caste and so forth who are not inflated with pride are rare.

What this indicates is that there are numberless beings who have a good sound body, all the resources, and who have knowledge and so forth, but it is very rare to find

amongst them those who do not have pride in their riches, high status and knowledge. This explanation is giving us very sound advice, so it is good to pay attention and really try to understand the main points.

The reason why such beings have pride is explained in the next few lines:

Moreover, since those who are conceited think themselves best and out of envy want to crush their equals and betters, they lack compassion.

Those who have riches, resources, knowledge and so forth generate a strong sense of pride and, because of their conceit in thinking that they have everything and are the best, they look down upon those who are inferior to themselves; they also develop a strong sense of competition with those they regard as equals; and they develop a sense of envy and jealousy towards those who are better than themselves. So their pride utterly poisons their mind and they lack any sense of compassion. The sutra called *Topics Of Instruction* explains that because they lack compassion it is very rare for such beings to go from light to light. When the sutra says 'go from light to light' this refers to being reborn from one higher rebirth into the another higher rebirth, and this is rare for beings who are filled with pride.

There is a direct relationship between possessing pride and conceit and a lack of compassion, and this is an obstacle to achieving higher rebirths. As explained earlier, when any being develops a strong sense of pride because of their status, or their wealth, or their knowledge, then due to that pride they develop a sense of superiority. They look down on those beings who are inferior wishing to crush them; they develop a sense of competitiveness towards those who are equal, and a sense of envy and jealousy towards those who are superior to them.

We can see how with an attitude of wanting to crush others there is definitely a sense of wishing them harm, and thus there is a lack of compassion. With equals, a sense of competitiveness means that you want to be better and will do whatever is necessary in order to compete with them. For this purpose one performs actions and deeds that harm them. Developing a sense of jealousy and envy towards superiors also means that one has an intention of not being able to bear their success and so forth, and thus one develops a negative intent and a lack of compassion towards them. With a lack of compassion one is not able to practice the basis of the causes for higher rebirth, which is ethical morality.

The very basis of the definition of morality is refraining from harming others, and practising non-violence. With an attitude of wishing to crush others, or be competitive with them, or envy, or jealousy, there is no room for a positive compassionate attitude of benefiting others. Rather one will create negative karma out of that lack of compassion and harm. Thus one destroys the causes for achieving a higher rebirth, and so it is said that it is very rare for such beings to achieve a higher rebirth.

What we take from this as personal advice is that when we enjoy good resources, or knowledge, or high status we must guard ourselves against falling into these categories of developing negative states of mind conceived by pride

and conceit. One must constantly guard oneself against looking down on others, or competitiveness, or being jealous, and appreciate what one has. One must guard oneself from falling into these negative states at all costs.

When we consider how having the very favourable conditions of good resources, wealth, knowledge or high status actually serve as a means to develop pride and conceit, then that is definitely a situation one would feel disgusted with, because these conditions are the cause to be reborn in the lower states rather than higher rebirths. Rather than these fortunate conditions being a source of envy and ambition, they can generate a sense of disgust because they destroy one's good rebirth. With such a result why would one want to achieve that state? Also, as mentioned earlier, beings in cyclic existence are constantly in the state of suffering, which can be summarised as physical sufferings and mental sufferings. Although those of high status in cyclic existence have good physical conditions they have a lot of mental suffering, whereas those who live in an impoverished state experience sufferings on the physical level, because of lacking nourishment and so forth. Whether existing in a high state or in a lowly state there is constant suffering. By reflecting on this we see that neither is a desirable state to be in.

Mental suffering in particular is very much related to the superstitious conceptual thoughts that we have in our mind, which create a lot of unwanted unnecessary sufferings for many sentient beings.

1.2.3.1.2.2. Repudiating attachment to higher rebirths attained through abstaining from ill deeds

One must remind oneself again that these outlines and explanations are all in relation to encouraging beings to strive to achieve liberation, and that they must be understood in that light.

Assertion: Though the proud are depreciable because they perform ill deeds, it is appropriate for those without pride to strive for high rebirth.

Answer:

*Whoever renounces them now
Will, it is said, obtain sense objects.
For what reason would such perverse
Practice be considered correct?*

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The assertion is that if one can understand that the proud are to be looked down upon because they perform ill deeds, it may then be appropriate for those without pride to strive for higher rebirth? The verse answers that such a view is also not appropriate. This assertion is along the lines of, on one hand it seems appropriate to strive for high status, but on another hand it is not appropriate.

As the commentary reads:

It is said that those who promise to be chaste in this life for the sake of high rebirth in the future and who renounce sense objects, having cultivated antipathy towards them...

Renouncing sense objects refers to renouncing the desirable sense objects of the eye, ear, nose and tongue and tactile senses. Those who see the faults of cyclic existence as a result of contemplating its sufferings and miseries, and who have come to a point of developing a

sense of disgust for cyclic existence. may begin to actually refrain from engaging in sensual objects and desires. As a result of refraining from engaging with sensual objects and practising morality and so forth, they will obtain a higher rebirth in the future life.

So what is being explained here is that having cultivated antipathy towards sensual objects they:

will, as a result of their practices, have whatever attractive objects they desire when they take a high rebirth. If...out of aversion one gives up the things one has, it is a perverse practice to seek them again.

One obtains a higher rebirth as a natural consequence of having given up sensual pleasures in a previous life. To then develop desire and indulge in that high status, and anticipate its pleasures would be perverse, because you have worked so hard in giving up sensual pleasures to obtain the higher rebirth. That would be seen by wise beings as being a completely absurd and perverse situation, because it is wasting and misusing one's good result for futile gains.

Another point that is being made here is the absurdity of giving away what one already has, and then finding it difficult to obtain it again in the future. This absurd situation can arise if one does not contemplate carefully why one is giving up the sensual pleasures. The example I like to use is that of the people who develop a sense of renunciation that we call an artificial renunciation, as it is not yet very firm. Because of that initial poorly established feeling of renunciation, they may even develop a wish to become ordained. So they give up their boyfriend or girlfriend to become a monk or a nun, but because that renunciation is not well established, it wears off after a while. Then they might again develop a strong longing to have a partner, but by that time they might have a hard time finding a another partner!

If the result of renouncing one's boyfriend or girlfriend is going to end up in it being very hard to find another partner, then it would have been much wiser to have kept one's partner initially, and maintained and enjoyed that relationship. I am not, of course, making jest of western attitudes, as the same is also very true in the east and in other places. There are those who have renounced worldly life after they become ordained, and even gone into solitary retreat for such long periods as ten or twelve years. But after having renounced that life they come back into a completely worldly life. This sort of situation is prevalent throughout the world. The main point is that renunciation must be cultivated gradually, and continually developed on a sound basis, otherwise these faults can occur.

The implication here is that those who have developed a good sound basis of renunciation, cultivating it gradually, and complementing it with a genuine sense of love and compassion towards others, have a sound basis for practising the Dharma continually. We can say such beings will be able see their practise all the way through to their goal.

1.2.3.1.3. A DETAILED REPUDIATION OF ACCUMULATING ACTIONS FOR THE SAKE OF HIGHER REBIRTHS

This is sub-divided into five.

- 1.2.3.1.3.1. Repudiating accumulation of actions for the sake of possessions
- 1.2.3.1.3.2. Repudiating their accumulation out of attachment to worldly practices
- 1.2.3.1.3.3. Repudiating their accumulation for the sake of attractive objects
- 1.2.3.1.3.4. Repudiating their accumulation for the sake of power and wealth
- 1.2.3.1.3.5. Repudiating accumulation of actions out of attachment to subsequent wealth

1.2.3.1.3.1. Repudiating accumulation of actions for the sake of possessions

Wealth, the result of merit, 168
Must be thoroughly protected from others.
How can that which must be constantly
Protected from others be one's own.

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Even those with large resources should not be attached to them...

It is not appropriate for those who have wealth, resources and so forth to develop strong attachment to their wealth and resources.

...for wealth the result of meritorious actions like giving...

This indicates that the excellent resources one has now are actually a result of having previously engaged in acts of giving. However these resources:

...must constantly be protected from other factors such as robbers, thieves, fire, water and so forth.

This is very true. For any wealthy person there is a constant fear of losing their wealth. So they need to engage in measures to protect their wealth.

How can anything needing constant and diligent protection from other factors be one's own exclusive property over which one has control.

One has a notion that any wealth is one's own wealth, however the fact is that one has to protect and constantly guard it. One cannot enjoy wealth that is free from worries and the fear of losing it and so forth. There is nothing that is entirely and exclusively considered to be 'mine' and which is free from worries. The very fact that one needs to protect one's wealth indicates that that others have access to it, which means that it does not exclusively belong to oneself. So what point is there in striving to attain such wealth, which causes such worries and cannot be exclusively owned by oneself anyway? That is the point.

If one were to engage in acts of generosity with the intention of gaining more wealth then that is totally inappropriate, because the wealth that one gains from generosity is just another source of more suffering, fear of losing it, and having to protect it and so forth. It just produces mental strain. So, engaging in acts of generosity with such attachment is totally inappropriate. The fact that one can never be totally satisfied with one's own wealth is result of attachment towards it.

The next outline arises in response to a line of thought that this explanation may produce.

1.2.3.1.3.2. Repudiating their accumulation out of attachment to worldly practices

Assertion: If practices like giving are wrong one should follow conventionally accepted practices.

What this is indicating is that if Dharma practice, such as being generous and so forth, brings about the results that have just been explained, we might as well engage in some worldly practices.

Different social customs 169
Are termed "religious practices".
Thus it seems that society has
More influence that religious practices.

What one needs to understand from the explanation is that on face value it may seem that that the practice of generosity is wrong. Actually what one has to understand implicitly is that this refers to the practice of giving with attachment and the results that one gains from it. If it is imbued with attachment then it is wrong. It would be a misunderstanding if one were to come to the conclusion that since giving with attachment to obtain a result such as good resources, high status, wealth and so forth, which will in turn produce more attachment is wrong, it would be better to follow conventionally accepted practices. As the commentary explains, adherence to these is also improper.

The term "religious practice" is applied to different social customs like giving away and taking a bride.

What is implied here is that in some cultures secular customs such as giving away the bride, or the marriage itself, or wearing certain kinds of ornaments, headdress, or costume and so forth are considered as religious practices.

Such traditions are called religions but they change according to place and time.

This is referring to different types of headdress, costumes and so forth, which are considered as a religious practice in some cultures. However that changes from place to place and time to time.

It is therefore improper to be attached to society which, although it appears more influential than religion does not remain stable.

What is being indicated here is that the norms of a society which, as explained earlier, are sometimes seen as a religious practice, are actually cultural practices which change. There is nothing stable about them, and there are different levels of understanding about the actual customs and traditions. The happiness that one gains from such traditions is not stable either, and that is the main indication here. Though marriages and so on may be considered as firm and stable with mutual commitments and so forth, it is obvious that they are not necessarily stable and that there are many ups and downs. One experiences so much suffering, and so many difficulties in relation to tradition and social standing. In that sense it does not give a stable lasting good quality of happiness and so one cannot rely upon such traditions.

1.2.3.1.3.3. Repudiating their accumulation for the sake of attractive objects

Assertion: Pleasure does not occur without attractive sense objects since these are the results of merit it is

permissible to perform meritorious actions out of attachment to attractive objects in order to have pleasure.

Answer:

Through virtue there are attractive objects, 170
But such objects to are considered bad.
By giving them up one will be happy.
What need is there to acquire them.

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse;

Though attractive visual forms, sounds and other objects are obtained through virtues like giving, those who desire liberation disparage and consider even such sense objects bad...

The main point, which is clearly illustrated here, is that even though attractive sense objects are obtained through virtuous activities such as giving and so forth, they are to be discarded by those who aspire to achieve liberation.

As the commentary further explains, this is because:

...they are the root of futility and are constantly affected by suffering and permanence.

The reason why attractive objects are considered as objects to be abandoned, is because:

If one becomes happy and virtuous by giving up a source of faults, what need is there to acquire it?

What is being explained here is that although the pleasures that one obtains from the six sense objects are a result of virtuous actions, they are an obstacle for those who aspire to achieve liberation. That is because it is due to attachment to the sensual object that one creates further attachment, which will then bind one to cyclic existence. Therefore, even though there is some pleasure to be obtained from sensual objects, it is indicated that for those who are seeking liberation, one gives up attachment to the sensual pleasures. One gives up the pleasures that one gets from the sensual objects as a means to obtain one's goal, which is liberation. As it is explained here, one becomes happy and virtuous by giving up the source of faults, which is attachment to the sensual pleasures. If the result of giving up attachment to the sensual pleasures becomes a cause to attain a happy state then what need is there to acquire it? This rhetorical question indicates that one should not feel the need to acquire sensual objects, which are an obstacle to attaining one's ultimate goal of happiness, or liberation.

The main point is that it would be futile and absurd to be attached to sensual objects by thinking that they are a result of previously virtuous actions. In other words, the main doubt that is to be overcome is that it is appropriate to be attached to, and to indulge in, sensual pleasures because they are a result of previous virtuous actions.

Those seeking liberation understand that despite the fact that one has access to sensual objects as a result of previously accumulated virtuous actions, one need not indulge in sensual objects out of attachment, because that indulgence would be an obstacle to achieving one's goal of liberation. Therefore one sees it as meaningful to abstain from indulging in sensual pleasures, and being attachment to them.

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Study Group – Aryadeva's 400 Verses

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

15 May 2007

As always it is appropriate to find a comfortable posture. While sitting comfortably, generate a good motivation by bringing the mind inward, distancing it from distractions and keeping it focussed on the teachings to be received. Then generate a positive motivation such as, 'In order to liberate all sentient beings from all suffering I need to achieve enlightenment, and for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice as best as I can'.

1.2.3.1.3.4. Repudiating their accumulation for the sake of power and wealth

Assertion: Though sense objects should be disparaged, one ought to create merit for the sake of kingship, a source of superlative pleasure.

Answer: It is inappropriate to do so.

For one not in need of authority, 171
Practices for that [end] are meaningless.
Whoever strives for authority
Is called a fool among men.

This is indicating that even if one has followed all the previous reasonings of how attachment to sensual pleasures is not appropriate, and has come to accept them in general, there is still a remaining doubt: it might be worthwhile to become a king, because that is a really pleasurable state. After considering the riches and status of a king, ordinary people may definitely have the instinctive thought, 'If I were to be a king then everything will be fine, and I would be really happy'. The answer to this assertion is that it is inappropriate to think in this way.

One should understand that desiring to be a king out of mere attachment to the pleasures and high status associated with that is, as explained here, inappropriate. However if one were to have the motivation of using the high status, great power and influence of king to benefit other beings, then it would be appropriate to strive to achieve kingship. That is a different situation. The commentary explains that the verse relates to desiring the status of a king because of attachment to not only the pleasures of that state, but also the capacity to control others. As the commentary reads:

For adepts who have gained mental control and can effortlessly accomplish whatever they desire, practices such as giving for the sake of attaining worldly authority are senseless.

The great yogis, who have gained control over their own mind, already have the power to effortlessly accomplish whatever they desire because of their mental control. Therefore, it is senseless for such yogis to engage in the practices of generosity with an intention to obtain worldly authority, because they already have that result now.

As the commentary further explains:

Whoever strives for the authority of mere verbal domination, [referring to having authority over others] is a fool among men, because he seeks kingship, a source of great futility.

Anyone engaging in practices such as generosity, merely to obtain kingship in order to dominate others is a fool, because of the fact that achieving even the high status of kingship is futile. As mentioned in previous verses such a state is still a source of great suffering, and therefore futile. Thus to engage in practices to obtain such a state would be foolish.

The main point that one should derive from this explanation is that as one attains more mental control through one's practices, one reaches a significant level of being able to control one's mind. A natural consequence of that will be to effortlessly obtain what one wishes for. One can also say that this is a by-product of being able to control the mind.

To focus on a temporary goal like kingship, where one will again be creating the causes for more suffering and so forth, rather than on a goal from which one gains so much more benefit, would be foolish. To take it a little further, the main point being made here is that gaining mental control is achieved by obtaining the states of liberation and enlightenment. If, instead of that one were to strive to obtain a futile, temporary goal such as the high status of kingship in cyclic existence, then that would be futile and foolish. That is the main point that one should understand.

1.2.3.1.3.5. Repudiating the accumulation of actions out of attachment to subsequent wealth

Assertion: One should do meritorious actions, since one wants their effects (such as wealth) in future lives.

Answer:

With a view to future effects 172
You grasp at practices out of greed.
When you see the future outcome
Why are you not afraid?

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

If, on realizing that there will be future effects such as wealth, one grasps at practices like giving, out of greed and attachment, one will have to experience many bad rebirths as a result of that attachment. When you see that the future outcome of such attachment is a bad rebirth, aren't you afraid?

While the good effects of practising generosity and morality (which are obtaining a good rebirth i.e. a sound body and wealth) in the future are acknowledged, if one were to practice generosity and moral ethics out of attachment to those effects, then the result of that attachment will be the creation of the negative karma to take a lower rebirth. And shouldn't one be afraid of being reborn in the lower rebirths? Thus, what is being implied here is that attachment to the goals of pleasurable experiences in the future will in fact produce the causes to be reborn in lower rebirths. One should be afraid of that and thus abandon attachment.

1.2.3.2. REPUDIATING THE ACCUMULATION OF UNMERITORIOUS ACTIONS¹

Merit is in every way 173
Just like a wage for a wage earner.
How could those who do not want
[Even] virtue do what is non-virtuous?

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Just like a wage earned by a worker, merit will come to resemble a payment. Therefore the wise do not do even meritorious actions motivated by attachment.

¹ This was given on 1 May 2007 as Repudiating accumulation of demeritorious actions

Experiencing the results of merit resembles the payment of a wage for work that has been done. It is the temporary gain that one receives from the hard work that one has done. Using that analogy, it would be futile to waste one's energy by then spending that money on meaningless things. That's one way that one can understand this explanation.

Another way to understand the explanation is that others could give us presents out of ulterior motives – they may want something back in return, or they may want a favour. If we are very gullible and naïve and don't understand their ulterior motive, we might fall into their trap, and thus have to do a lot for them in return. Indulging in the pleasures that one receives from one's own merit is like that. If one uses up that merit in that way, it is as if you are being fooled by the merit. One has worked so hard for the merit, but then uses it in a futile way. Thus, as the commentary further explains:

When the wise do not want even the virtue that produces worldly existence, because of seeing it as a cause for the cycle of rebirths, how could they do demeritorious actions which are non-virtuous?

What is being explained here is that the wise understand that creating merit out of attachment to sensual goals and pleasures is a temporary goal and only a further cause to be re-born in cyclic existence, and they do not engage in meritorious actions just to be reborn in cyclic existence. So there is no question that they refrain from non-virtuous actions. To illustrate this further, the wise ones should be understood as being those beings who have gained the realisation of emptiness. These beings clearly understand that engaging in virtuous actions out of attachment would only be a cause to be re-born again in cyclic existence. Thus they completely refrain from engaging in virtuous actions out of attachment. That being the case there is no question that the wise would also avoid non-virtuous actions, which are a cause for suffering in cyclic existence.

What we can extract as personal instruction for ourselves, is to understand that engaging in virtuous actions out of attachment will be only a cause to further one's existence in samsara. When we engage in virtue out of a wish to be free from cyclic existence, to be liberated, and to ultimately achieve enlightenment for the sake of other beings, we should be mindful that we do not have strong attachment towards our practice and the results of our practice.

A good way of ensuring that we are detached about our practice and its results is to establish good motivation in the beginning and in our dedication at the end. If our motivation is imbued with renunciation and a bodhicitta attitude, then whatever practice we do and whatever merit we gain will become the sole cause for achieving liberation and becoming free from the delusions, and ultimately achieving enlightenment for the sake of other beings.

We need not worry about our own well-being. As mentioned earlier, when we gain control over our mind, the things that we wish for normally will appear spontaneously as a by-product of our mental control. If we focus on the ultimate goal, we do not even have to think about the temporary goals; we don't even have to wish for them as they will manifest spontaneously. It is much more worthwhile to aim to make sure that from the very beginning we are focussed on our main goal and not allow ourselves to become attached to temporary goals.

One can also relate these explanations to the mind-training practices, where the main advice is to engage in mind-training until one reaches a point where one can exchange

worldly attitudes for Dharma attitudes. What is specifically mentioned is changing the worldly attitude in relation to gain and loss, where one has a natural tendency to strive towards gain (or whatever is profitable) which we relate to well-being and pleasures. We strive towards that, and thus we have a very strong attachment to worldly gains and the pleasures one derives from that.

Conversely, we have a very strong aversion towards anything that is unpleasant, or suffering; we have an immediate inclination to completely avoid it, and see it as being completely negative. We need to develop our mental training so that we get to the point where we can welcome sufferings, seeing them as a means to enhance our practice, and where we avoid attachment to gains. When our attitude is changed in this way, then we have reached a significant level in mind-training. So, one should understand the main points that are made here, along with the points that are made in the mind-training practices.

Changing our attitude to the worldly dharmas into a positive frame of mind is not meant to indicate that we should abandon all happiness and only suffer. That is not the proper understanding. What it is saying is that the cause of our suffering is attachment to the worldly gains. When one neutralises even the temporary sufferings that one has to experience anyway, then that can become a means for enhancing one's practice to point of gaining ultimate happiness. Actually, when we refer to our practices, we can see how the eight worldly concerns² influence our attitudes, and how they affect the purity of our practice. The main obstacles that arise in our practices really seem to be the worldly concerns. It is because our practices are stained with these worldly concerns, that we are not able to become true practitioners. Thus if we wish for our practice to be pure, we must definitely overcome the worldly concerns.

1.3. Explaining the need to abandon contaminated actions

This category is further sub-divided into two:

1.3.1. The wise, who understand reality, abandon attachment and reach liberation

1.3.2. When the wise do not enjoy even a high rebirth out of attachment, their enjoyment of states consistent with aversion is impossible

1.3.1. The wise, who understand reality, abandon attachment and reach liberation

*Whoever sees phenomena as like
A collection of mechanical devices
And like illusory beings,
Most clearly reaches the excellent state*

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As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Only childish people like cyclic existence. The wise who directly perceive dependent arising as lacking inherent existence see external and internal phenomena as like a collection of mechanical devices made of wood that look like men and women. Those who see phenomena as empty of inherent existence, yet appearing like illusory people, traverse cyclic existence and most clearly reach the excellent states of liberation and omniscience.

² On 27 September 2005 these were listed as: a liking for gain and a dislike of loss; a liking for praise and dislike of criticism; a liking for being spoken to pleasantly and a dislike of being spoken to unpleasantly; a liking for happiness and a dislike of unhappiness.

What is being indicated here is that childish people are beings who are attached to the sensory or worldly pleasures. Attachment to the causes of the cyclic existence is the equivalent of liking cyclic existence. Thus the childish, meaning those who purposely engage in the causes of cyclic existence, are the ones who are attached to the sensual pleasures of the cyclic existence. This is in contrast to the wise, who are defined in the commentary as those who directly perceive dependent arising as lacking inherent existence.

The wise have a direct understanding and realisation of emptiness, which affects their perception and view of the world and the beings within the world. This means that they see men and women as 'mechanical devices made out of wood'. The analogy is that mechanical devices made to look like men and women might appear to be real if one didn't know that they were made out of inanimate substances. But once one knows that they are mechanical devices, then even though they appear to be like men and women, one does not believe that they are. One knows that it is not a reality.

To wise beings who have the direct understanding of emptiness, the world and the beings within that world appear to be illusory. Because they see things as being dependent arisings, they know that even though they appear to be inherently existent, that is not the case, as there is no real inherent existence. Thus they see phenomena as being illusory because they see things as dependent arisings. Even though things appear as inherently existent, they know that this is not the case. As a result they are detached about the objects within the cyclic existence. This detachment and their further practices leads them to the ultimate states. As mentioned here, they

...traverse cyclic existence and most clearly reach the excellent states of liberation and omniscience [meaning enlightenment].

Thus the understanding they have, and their view of the world leads them to the ultimate state of liberation and enlightenment. What is being indicated here is that one should not follow the attitudes of the childish, who are attached to cyclic existence and continuously remain in cyclic existence. Rather, one should adopt the view of the wise beings, which is to strive towards achieving the wisdom of understanding emptiness, which leads us to the ultimate goals.

The earlier chapters explained how one should not be attached to the sensual pleasures. They were a preliminary to the main point that is being made here. The attempt to initially reduce attachment to sensual pleasures is to ultimately to overcome actual attachment to the sensual pleasures, i.e. to completely uproot the delusions of attachment, anger and ignorance. This is done by gaining the realisation of emptiness, which is necessary to free oneself from cyclic existence. The realisation of emptiness is the main tool to completely uproot the delusions, leading one to reach liberation and enlightenment.

1.3.2. When the wise do not enjoy even a high rebirth out of attachment, their enjoyment of states consistent with aversion is impossible

What is being reiterated here is that the wise do not enjoy a high rebirth in cyclic existence out of attachment.

*For those who do not enjoy
Any objects in cyclic existence
It is altogether impossible
To take pleasure in this [world].*

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As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

When those who are wise with regard to the meaning of reality do not enjoy or crave even those objects in cyclic existence which are normally enjoyable, how could they enjoy the source of birth, aging and so forth which normally cause aversion? Thus for them there is never any joy out of attachment to cyclic existence.

There is not much one won't understand from that explanation, which is elucidated very clearly. So I will not elaborate further.

Gyaltsab Rinpoche's summarising stanza is:

Thinking thoroughly about impermanence and suffering
Give up craving for objects such as visual form,
The cause for this bottomless boundless ocean of
suffering,
And strive to attain unsurpassable enlightenment.

'Thinking thoroughly about impermanence and suffering' refers to the explanations given earlier about impermanence and suffering. One contemplates thoroughly about how things are in the nature of impermanence and how contaminated objects are in the nature of suffering. One should give up craving for objects such as the visual forms, because craving or attachment to sensual objects such as the visual forms is the cause for the bottomless, boundless ocean of suffering in cyclic existence. So one should give up the attachment or craving for these objects, and thus strive towards attaining the unsurpassable state of enlightenment.

2. Presenting the name of the chapter

This is the seventh chapter from the Four Hundred on the Yogic Deeds, showing the means to give up clinging to objects of enjoyment which humans desire.

That completes the seventh chapter.

CHAPTER VIII: SHOWING THE METHODS OF FULLY TRAINING THE STUDENT'S MINDSTREAM MAKING IT RECEPTIVE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPIRITUAL PATHS

The chapter is divided into two parts:

1. The explanation of the material in the chapter
2. Presenting the name of the chapter

1. The explanation of the material in the chapter

From the sequence of material in the earlier chapters, specifically the seventh chapter, we understand that they were a preparation for receiving the teaching on emptiness. The explanation of overcoming delusions was mainly in reference to the manifest delusions, and here, in the eighth chapter we find explanations about how to overcome the root of the delusions, and in accordance with this it actually gives the teachings on emptiness. One should try to derive this meaning and understanding from the outlines.

The explanation of the material in the chapter is sub-divided into three:

1.1. Why disturbing emotions can be abandoned

Before actually explaining the antidote for overcoming the delusions, the chapter explains by explaining how disturbing emotions can be abandoned, and gives reasons why they can be abandoned.

1.2. Explaining extensively how to abandon disturbing emotions

Having explained how it is possible to abandon disturbing emotions this section explains how to actually engage in abandoning them.

1.3. Showing by analogy that though birth connecting one with the next existence is beginningless, it has an end

This is indicating that though there was no beginning to one's samsaric rebirths, there is an end, and this is shown with an analogy.

1.1. Why disturbing emotions can be abandoned

This is sub-divided into two:

1.1.1. Actual meaning

1.1.2. Showing how it is possible to abandon disturbing emotions

Question: How do we escape from the bondage of desire to which we have been accustomed since beginningless time?

Answer:

*Just as friendship between people
Who disagree does not last long,
Desire does not last long
When the faults of all things are recognised?* 176

As the commentary explains the meaning of this verse:

A friendship motivated by desire between people who are not amicable and who disagree does not last long. Similarly desire does not last long for an adept who recognizes the faults in all external and internal things which give rise to many unwanted consequences. When properly investigated, its root is found to be unstable and thus one can get rid of it. A friendship motivated by desire between people who are not amicable and who disagree does not last long.

This is a vivid analogy. When friendship is based on a mere attachment, it does not last long. One can understand this in relation to for example, the passage in the commentary on the Bodhicitta mind. In this text, it explains how one very object, such as a beautiful figure of a woman can appear as an object of desire for some, whereas for others it can appear as being like a corpse, and yet others see it as edible food. What is being explained here is that when someone with a longing for a beautiful figure comes into contact with the beautiful figure of a woman, and sees the object, they experience desire. Whereas when a meditator who is meditating on the faults of the body, reflects on a beautiful figure of a woman, because of their detailed analysis that body may appear as being equivalent to viewing a corpse. Wild animals however will see that body as food. So depending on one's perception one figure can appear in different ways.

An object can be either an object of desire, or an object of aversion that causes anger to arise, or an object inducing ignorance or stupor in the mind. That same object can be the causes of these different emotions of attachment, anger or ignorance. What this indicates is that when an object is viewed with a deluded mind, there is no stability. Thus with a friendship based on attachment, because the very basis of that friendship comes from a deluded mind of attachment, it is natural that it will not last. As long as that deluded state of mind of attachment is present, it is liable to change at any time.

The reason why a friendship that is based on attachment does not last long is because the initial attraction to the object is obscured by attachment. So, one may not initially

see the faults of the other. When the faults become apparent, then the strong attachment one has toward the friend or partner slowly fades away, and as they start seeing the faults, then aversion may arise. That is what causes the friendship not to last. We see many examples of that in our relationships. We don't have to really go further into this, because it is very apparent.

Using the fact that friendship does not last when faults are seen in the object as an analogy, we see that it is the same with delusions. As mentioned here, adepts or the yogis recognise the faults in all external things. They see the faults of the delusions and how they give rise to unwanted consequences. When properly investigated, the root of delusions is found to be unstable and thus delusions can be overcome.

The analogy that is given here in the text is a very vivid one that we can all relate to. The main point of the analogy is that just as the friendship that is based on attachment does not last long when you see faults in the friend, likewise when you see faults of attachment and other delusions, then you can get rid of them, because you will be able to see that they are not stable.

The analogy is a vivid one, because we definitely see it happening a lot in relationships. Initially, due to very strong attachment the faults may not be apparent. We can see that initially there may be strong attachment from both sides, therefore the relationship seems to be soaring and is really very good. But eventually when one begins to see faults in the other, then the attachment might reduce and then aversion starts to arise. Because of seeing faults in the other, then they may try to distance themselves. If that were to happen simultaneously, there may be less of a problem. But where the problem arises is that while one partner sees fault in the other, the other may be still holding on with attachment and seeing everything as still being attractive. So the suffering arises in the one who is still holding on to the exaggerated attractiveness of the other, while the other is seeing faults and distancing themselves.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
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Study Group – Aryadeva's 400 Verses

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

22 May 2007

Without allowing the mind to be distracted externally, find a good and comfortable posture that is appropriate for setting a motivation for receiving the teachings. Then generate a 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 try to put them into practice as best as I can'.

1.1 Why disturbing emotions can be abandoned (cont.)

1.1.2. Showing how it is possible to abandon disturbing emotions, or delusions

This is subdivided into four.

1.1.2.1. Disturbing emotions can be abandoned because their focal basis is not definitive

1.1.2.2. Causes giving rise to the disturbing emotions do not exist truly

1.1.2.3. Refuting proof that disturbing emotions cannot be abandoned

1.1.2.4. Lack of contradiction in seeing many who have not abandoned disturbing emotions

1.1.2.1. DISTURBING EMOTIONS CAN BE ABANDONED BECAUSE THEIR FOCAL BASIS IS NOT DEFINITIVE

Some are attracted to it, 177
Some are averse to it,
Some feel confused by it:
Thus desire has no object.

The text has already explained how desire itself can be reduced by seeing the faults of the object in quite a bit of detail. However here it shows more specifically how seeing the object of desire as lacking inherent existence will help to overcome actual attachment to the object.

As the commentary explains:

Desire depends on and operates in relation to the desired thing which, moreover, does not exist by way of its own entity...

What is being explained here is that because the object of desire exists in the first place it serves as a basis for one's desire to arise. As explained in an earlier session there are three main conditions for desire to arise: first, there is an object of desire; secondly, the person who is viewing or perceiving the object has not abandoned desire; and thirdly, that they have an incorrect mental approach. Due to these three conditions desire arises.

Due to an incorrect mental approach, the object of desire is perceived as being inherently existent. If an object were to be inherently attractive, the qualities of attractiveness would exist inherently within the object. If that were the case, it would be feasible to say that one could not overcome desire for the object because of its inherently existing attractiveness. However that is not the case: one reason why one can overcome desire is because the object does not exist inherently.

Furthermore:

...for some are attracted to that object, some have aversion to it and some are confused by it. If the desired object existed by way of its own entity, only desire should arise towards it.

This is in accordance with the earlier explanation in the text: the same object can be an object of attachment for some, an object of aversion for others while for a third group ignorance will be increased. The converse is that if an object were an entirely attractive object, causing only desire to arise, then whoever perceived that object would have to experience desire, which could not be stopped. However that is not the case.

As the commentary further explains:

Since this is not inevitable, focal objects are only imputed by conceptuality, and that which is desired does not exist by way of its own entity. Therefore, from the point of view of the basis too, disturbing emotions can be abandoned.

Everything in relation to the object, its attributes and so forth, is merely conceptually imputed. It is merely conceptualised, meaning that the objects do not exist from their own side, but are merely labelled by the mind. That being the case, it is also possible to overcome desire and other delusions in relation to the object itself, because of the very nature of the object.

The analogy given in the commentary describes how one object can be viewed differently. A man has two wives: when the one who is a mother sees her daughter, due to attachment, she feels love and concern for her daughter. Whereas when the other wife, who doesn't have a daughter, sees the daughter of the first wife she actually feels aversion towards the girl, because it is not her own child. A servant in the house would view the daughter with indifference i.e. with neither strong attachment nor aversion. The reason why the younger wife feels aversion towards the daughter of the older wife is because there is a bit of jealousy there, and because of that mind of jealousy aversion can arise in the mind.

The main point of the analogy is to illustrate that any given object is not inherently existent, and thus it is possible to overcome misconceptions in relation to the object. If the object of desire were to be inherently existent, then one couldn't overcome any misconception in relation to it, because it and its attributes would actually exist in that way. However, because it does not exist in the way that it appears to exist, one can overcome misconceptions about it.

It is also good to understand how the object and the subject, meaning the conceptual mind that perceives the object and the object itself, are interdependent. The attributes of an object depend on the conceptual mind that conceives it, and the conceptual mind that perceives an object depends on the object in order to be able to attribute any qualities or demerits to it. Therefore the object and the subject (or the mind that perceives the object) are interdependent and interrelated. Thus neither of them exist inherently, and conceptions that arise in relation to them can be altered.

1.1.2.2. CAUSES GIVING RISES TO DISTURBING EMOTIONS OR DELUSIONS DO NOT EXIST TRULY

Not only can disturbing emotions be abandoned because their focal objects lack true existence, but also because their causes do not have true existence.

Apart from conceptuality,
Desire and so forth have no existence.

178

*Who with intelligence would hold [that there are]
Real things imputed by conceptuality?*

At this point the commentary quotes from another text:

Desire, anger and confusion are explained
To arise through conceptuality.

Here conceptuality refers particularly to an incorrect mental approach, which is a wrong conceptual mind or a faulty conceptual mind that exaggerates either the qualities or faults attributed to an object. It is due to an incorrect mental approach that the mind sees inherent existence itself. That is explained further on in the text.

However here the text is describing the function of the incorrect mental approach, which is a wrong conceptual mind that exaggerates the attributes of the object. It sees it as being either attractive or repulsive, and as a result desire and attachment and aversion arise respectively. So different emotions arise in the mind in relation to the object. The main point is that strong desire and strong anger are dependent on an incorrect mental approach that exaggerates the qualities and attributes of the object.

As the commentary explains:

The existence of disturbing emotions such as desire cannot be found apart from the conceptualizations of an incorrect mental approach and imputation by conceptuality, as a snake is imputed to a mottled rope.

This relates to the verse about desire, anger and confusion arising through conceptuality that was quoted above. The text calls that conceptuality an incorrect mental approach. In relation to an object, there can be an incorrect mental approach that exaggerates the positive qualities of an object, which then causes desire to arise. There is also the incorrect mental approach that exaggerates the faults of the object, which then causes anger or aversion to arise. An incorrect mental approach of indifference towards the object causes ignorance or stupidity to arise in the mind. Thus the three types of delusions arise in the mind in relation to three types of incorrect mental approach. The main point is that the qualities or faults of the object, or any aspect of indifference to it, are only due to a misconception, which is an incorrect mental approach of a conceptual mind.

As it further explains in the commentary it is like the analogy of a mind imputing a snake upon a rope. Even though the mind imputing the snake on the rope will totally believe that there is a snake there, you cannot find a real snake on the rope in any way. There is not a single atom of reality of a snake on the rope, as it is only the faulty mind that perceives the snake.

The commentary explains:

Their existence is simply reliant existence and they do not exist by way of their own entity. If they did, who with intelligence would hold they are imputed by conceptuality, which means the opposite in existence in terms of their own reality? Imputation by conceptuality and existence by way of a thing's own entity are contradictory.

That which appears to exist upon the object is merely imputed by an incorrect mental approach, and thus does not exist from its own side, by its own entity. As a counter measure the commentary explains that if that which appears to exist upon the object actually did exist, then the intelligent would hold the same view. Here 'the intelligent' means those who have understood reality and who see it as being mentally imputed rather than inherently existent. That is how those who have an intelligent mind perceive reality or

emptiness. It would be contrary to the actual reality, if they didn't perceive things in that way.

As the commentary further explains:

When the snake is imputed to a rope, neither the parts of the rope, that which possesses its parts, its continuum, nor that which possesses the continuum appropriately illustrate a snake. Similarly neither do the collection of the aggregates, that which makes up the collection, its continuum, nor that which possesses the continuum is appropriate as the person.

The main point is that a true snake does not exist in any part in any way upon a rope; it is only perceived as a snake by a wrong conceptual mind. Similarly a person is merely imputed upon the aggregates and within the aggregates you cannot find a person, nor does a person inherently exist in any one of the five aggregates. So the conclusion is that a person is merely imputed on the basis of the five aggregates.

The main point is that the root text is identifying the causes of the disturbing emotions or delusions as being an incorrect mental approach, or the conceptualising mind. These points were also explained in chapter 7, but this chapter is being more specific about those causes. Gyaltsab-je also quotes Nagarjuna's *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning*:

The world is caused by ignorance—
The Fully Enlightened One said so.
Therefore why is it not feasible
To say the world is conceptuality.

The main point is that everything is imputed by the conceptual mind.

1.1.2.3. REFUTING PROOF THAT DISTURBING EMOTIONS CANNOT BE ABANDONED

Some may doubt whether, even though we know they are bad, disturbing emotions can be abandoned. This section refutes such thoughts.

Assertion: Since men and women are bound together by mutual desire, one cannot give up women and thus cannot give up desire.

This is definitely a common worldly view.

Answer:

*None is, as it were,
Bound to another.
It is unfeasible to separate
That which is bound together.*

179

As the commentary explains:

No man is intrinsically bound to a woman. Since anything inherent is irrevocable, whatever is intrinsically bound together should not be separable. Yet the case of that which should not be separable, separation is seen.

The point is elucidated very well here. Neither the man nor the woman is inherently existent therefore there cannot be any inherently existent bond between the two. If the bond between a man and a woman were to be inherently existent then that would imply that it is irrevocable and that they cannot be separated. However separation does take place—we all know of instances of it.

With a clear understanding of emptiness, and having meditated on it, we can see how it can really benefit the mind if we are able see the real nature of things and how they exist in reality. A person who is acquainted with viewing actual reality, and the actual nature of things, will not experience strong emotions of desire and anger in relation to changes in objects and so forth, because they have that understanding. The main point here is that bonds are

not inherently existent bonds to begin with. In this case the bond between a man and a woman is not itself inherently existent, nor are the factors that bind the man and the woman together inherently existent. Thus there cannot be an everlasting non-separable relationship, because the possibility of separation is always there, which is obvious.

We don't have to use much logic as we see separation all around us. The fact that there is separation is because there was never an inherently existent bond to begin with. Of course when one fails to see that, strong attachment arises for each other. Then later other emotions such as aversion and sadness and depression may arise if there is separation. If one were to have that understanding to begin with and contemplate it, then that can help to avoid such extreme emotions. This is a really important point for us to consider and contemplate. As the text explains 'that which should not be separable, separation is seen'. Even though the separation from a loved one is not desired, separation takes place, which of course no one likes.

The analogy given in the commentary is that it is like using one black and one white ox for ploughing. They are seen as being bound together because of the yoke and the harness that they share. But in reality the oxen are not bound together. Similarly, with relationships it appears that the couple are bound together. However the binding factor is only attachment and desire, and there is no truly or inherently existent bond there.

1.1.2.4. LACK OF CONTRADICTION IN SEEING MANY WHO HAVE NOT ABANDONED DISTURBING EMOTIONS.

Assertion: If the disturbing emotions are stopped by analysing in this way, why do most people appear not to have abandoned them.

A doubt may arise in some minds that as there are so many who have not abandoned disturbing emotions or delusions, then that might be a reason why disturbing emotions or delusions cannot be abandoned. This outline shows that there is no contradiction there.

A common doubt that some may have is in relation to a person who has been practising and studying the Dharma for a long time, but who still gets angry and seems to have attachment in their mind. Seeing such a person one may think that maybe it is not possible to overcome anger at all. These are all reasonable doubts, and the text explains how to overcome them in relation to our way of thinking. It is very good to ponder and pay attention to the points that are made here, as they help to pave the way to the understanding of emptiness—as they make the mind ready for understanding emptiness.

Answer: It is because they lack a strong belief in the profound teaching, [which refers to the teaching on emptiness].

The answer is the essence of the following verse.

Those with little merit 180
Do not even doubt this teaching.
Entertaining just a doubt
Tears to tatters worldly existence.

This verse points out that until and unless one gains an actual realisation of emptiness one cannot possibly overcome and uproot the delusions in the mind.

As the commentary explains:

Those with little merit do not even have a doubt regarding the two truths as asserted by Nagarjuna: that while dependent arising is empty of inherent existence, actions and agents are feasible. Since they do not wonder

whether this is so or not, how can they attain the liberation of having abandoned all disturbing attitudes and emotions?

'Those with little merit' refers to ordinary beings in cyclic existence, who from beginningless time have been acquainted with the wrong conceptual mind of grasping at the self. Being entirely dependent on that misconception, they don't even have a doubt about emptiness as illustrated by Nagarjuna, which as mentioned here is that while dependent arising is empty of inherent existence, actions and agents are feasible. What is being explained here is that while things are dependent arisings they are empty of inherent existence. Beings of little merit, as explained earlier, will not even begin to doubt whether that is the case or not. If they do not even have a doubt about that, then the possibility of being liberated from samsara is out of the question.

As the commentary further explains:

When emptiness is taught, simply entertaining the positive doubt that it might be so tears worldly existence to tatters...

One may have a strong misconception that person, things and phenomena exist inherently, and that they do have an inherently existent self. When the teachings of emptiness are first heard and then analysed, one many develop the doubt, 'Oh maybe they are inherently existent, but then again they may not be inherently existent'. That is an even-handed doubt that leans to both sides. That equal doubt leads on to a correctly assuming doubt, which is that persons and other phenomena don't seem to be inherently existent. There is still no certainty yet, but when one comes to that correctly assuming doubt, it is said that one has a conceptual understanding of emptiness. That correctly assuming doubt then leads on to an actual understanding that things do not exist inherently. What is called a positive doubt in the text is a correctly assuming doubt, that things may not be inherently existent. Even that doubt, as mentioned here, will shatter cyclic existence. It is referred to as the tattering of cyclic existence because it shatters the misconception in one's mind that grasps at the self. So it is that ignorance which is being shattered, and thus it is a means of shattering cyclic existence.

The commentary further explains that:

...since to some extent the fundamental nature of the existence has become the mind's object.

This refers to the correctly assuming doubt or conceptual understanding of emptiness, or selflessness. The fundamental nature of existence of person and other phenomena has not entirely become the object of the mind, to the point that it is seen clearly and directly perceived, but the acquaintance the mind has with this understanding serves as a means to tear to tatters, or shatter, worldly existence.

As the commentary further explains:

Someone who has such a positive doubt will seek certainty, and by ascertaining the correct view through scriptural citations and reasoning, will attain liberation when disturbing attitudes and emotions come to an end.

The whole process is explained here. From a state of not even having a doubt through to accepting the fact that things may not be inherently existent, through to developing an equal doubt, which then further leads to a correctly assuming doubt (called a positive doubt here in the commentary), which can also be referred to as a conceptual understanding of emptiness.

We gain further understanding through the scriptural citations (meaning what is being explained in the scriptures), receiving teachings on emptiness, and then reflecting on them using the logical reasons as explained in the teachings. By using these logical reasons to understand emptiness a true seeker will find certainty, and having found certainty that all existence lacks inherent existence and is thus empty of inherent existence, one comes to the correct view of emptiness. Through that one will attain liberation, when all the disturbing emotions or delusions have been completely abandoned. 'When it comes to an end' means when it is completely abandoned. To reiterate, they 'will attain liberation when disturbing attitudes come to an end', refers to how liberation is actually attained.

1.2. Explaining extensively how to abandon disturbing emotions

This is sub-divided into four.

- 1.2.1. Advice to understand the meaning of emptiness
- 1.2.2. Advice to strive for liberation
- 1.2.3. Stages leading to the meaning of the fundamental mode of existence
- 1.2.4. Advice that disturbing attitudes and emotions can certainly be brought to an end

1.2.1. Advice to understanding the meaning of emptiness

This has five sub-divisions.

- 1.2.1.1. Advice to take an interest in the meaning of the fundamental mode of existence
- 1.2.1.2. Showing the need to understand emptiness in order to attain liberation
- 1.2.1.3. Showing the means to turn away from cyclic existence
- 1.2.1.4. Giving up fear of emptiness
- 1.2.1.5. Giving up strong attachment to ones position

1.2.1.1. ADVICE TO TAKE INTEREST IN THE MEANING OF THE FUNDAMENTAL MODE OF EXISTENCE

According to the Tibetan text the heading refers more to 'having respect for' rather than 'taking an interest in'.

The Subduer says of this teaching 181
There will be increase until liberation.
Anyone who lacks interest in it
Clearly has no sense.

As the commentary reads:

The Subduer said that from the first moment on the path of seeing until liberation there will be no decline, only increase in the direct perception of emptiness, concerning which even a doubt tears worldly existence to tatters

The second part of this is explained first in the Tibetan version of the commentary. It refers to the earlier point that even having a doubt about emptiness will tear worldly existence to tatters, and says that this was explained by the Subduer, or the Buddha.

The first part of the quotation from the commentary says that from the first moment of the path of seeing until liberation there will be no decline. This refers to the earlier point that from the first moment of generating a positive doubt, until the moment of gaining the direct realisation of emptiness (which is gained on the path of seeing) the understanding of emptiness will only increase further.

Furthermore as the commentary explains:

The practices of giving and so forth, conjoined with it will only increase.

The realisation of emptiness itself as well as the practices that are conjoined with that understanding, such as the practices of generosity and so forth, will only increase from that time onwards until liberation is reached.

Anyone who lacks interest in [or, as indicated in the Tibetan version, respect or veneration for] the meaning of emptiness clearly has no sense, and shows how very foolish he or she is.

This is also referred to in earlier parts of the text, and here it says that there could be no one more foolish than the person does not pay attention to, or respect, such a profound and worthy realisation as the understanding of emptiness, which will lead to the freedom from all bondage, and sufferings, and thus liberation. That is the definition of being wise.

It is further explained that:

Worldly practices come to an end once they have yielded their fruit...

This means that worldly practices bring only temporary results to be experienced here in cyclic existence.

...but an understanding of emptiness leads to the practice of giving and so forth to the city of omniscience.

This means that practices done with an understanding of emptiness, will lead one to complete enlightenment.

Transcribed from tape by Jenny Brooks
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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Study Group – *Aryadeva's 400 Verses*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

29 May 2007

As always, we will sit in an appropriate comfortable and relaxed posture, and then allow our mind to be free from external distractions. We then set our mind to focus on the teachings, and generate a positive motivation such as, 'In order to liberate all sentient beings from all suffering I need to achieve enlightenment. For that purpose I will listen to the teachings and try to put them into practice as best as I can'.

1.2.1.2. SHOWING THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND EMPTINESS IN ORDER TO ATTAIN LIBERATION

As we go through the text outlines, it is good to reflect on the actual meaning of each. Try to use whatever understanding you have gained so far to refer to the points in the text. For example, this outline refers to showing the need to understand emptiness. At that point, one reflects on whatever understanding one has of emptiness. The heading then refers to showing the need to understand emptiness in order to attain liberation. Again, one reflects on whatever one has understood about what liberation means. Reflecting on the actual meaning of what is presented in the text helps us to gain further understanding for our personal practice.

Question: Does one meditate on emptiness, although things are not empty, to free oneself from desire, or does one view them that way because they actually are empty of true existence?

Answer:

*One does not regard that which is not empty 182
As empty, thinking [thereby] to gain nirvana.
Tathagatas say that nirvana
Will not be attained through wrong views.*

The verse shows the need for gaining a really sound understanding of emptiness, which should be a really deep understanding and not be just a vague understanding. It was explained in the *Madhyamika* or the *Middle Way* text, which we have studied, that the view of the inherent existence of phenomena is like believing that an illusory woman conjured by a magician is an actual being. We view things as being inherently existent in a similar way. What is being implied is that phenomena are entirely free from inherent existence, but because they appear as being inherently existent, that is what we actually believe to be the case.

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Once one has an understanding of that which is empty as empty, one familiarizes oneself with it.

Emptiness here refers to the emptiness of inherent existence. Therefore as a means to obtain liberation, one meditates on the emptiness of inherent existence. So negating inherent existence, and thus seeing things as being empty of inherent existence is the means to obtain

liberation. As the commentary says:

One who holds this view does not understand the emptiness of the person and aggregates but thinks of them as truly existent.

Meditating on emptiness by simply thinking that things are just empty will not achieve liberation. To hold the view that persons and aggregates are truly existent while at the same time implying emptiness is not a means of gaining liberation. As the commentary continues:

Tathagatas say one will not reach nirvana by means of wrong views misconceiving the fundamental nature of existence. The Teacher [the Buddha] said [in a sutra], "All phenomena are empty in that they do not exist inherently."

All phenomena can be categorised into living beings and other phenomena. Holding that phenomena (beings and the environment) are truly existent, while at the same time asserting that they are empty, is missing the point. If one holds to the view that things are truly existent, and also implies that they are empty, then one can come to the extreme and wrong conclusion that they might be empty of any existence.

The word 'empty' does not really get to the heart of the meaning of what it is empty of. To come to the actual understanding of emptiness, one needs to completely negate phenomena as being truly existent. One needs to understand that phenomena are empty of inherent existence. What things are empty of is inherent or true existence, and that is the understanding that one needs to gain with the explanation of emptiness. If one were to hold that things are truly existent, then, as the Buddha said, 'One will not reach nirvana with those wrong views'. As mentioned in the commentary the Teacher said that all things are empty of inherent existence. As the commentary concludes:

No matter which of the three states of nirvana one enters, one must become learned [skilled] in the meaning of emptiness.

As has been clearly explained, emptiness must be completely understood, and one must be skilled in understanding emptiness if one wishes to achieve one of the three states of nirvana.

1.2.1.3. SHOWING THE MEANS TO TURN AWAY FROM CYCLIC EXISTENCE

Question: If things are empty of inherent existence, it is appropriate to teach suchness. What is the use of teaching how the world of sentient beings and environments comes into existence?

This question clearly asks why, if the main understanding one needs to gain to achieve liberation is emptiness, did the Buddha not teach just on emptiness? Why did he teach about the environment and so forth? As the commentary explains the answer is that:

Emptiness cannot be understood without an explanation of how the world comes into being. Therefore explaining it is essential as a means for understanding suchness.

'Explaining it', refers to the explanation of how the world comes into being, but when the text mentions the world, the environment and so forth, it is specifically referring to

the relative truth (there being two truths, relative truth and ultimate truth). What is being explained here is that in order to understand ultimate truth, one first needs to have a good understanding of relative truth.

Whatever contains teaching 183
About the world speaks of engagement.
Whatever contains elucidation
Of the ultimate speaks of disengagement.

As the commentary explains:

Scriptures teaching about action caused by ignorance and so forth, the world of sentient beings and environments describe the stages by which one engages in cyclic existence. Their purpose is to refute belief in causeless production or production from incompatible causes, which is based on conceptions of true existence.

The Buddha's teachings on the environment, the world system and so forth are specifically to explain how things are not causeless, but are produced from compatible causes. Things are produced from causes but not incompatible causes. Thus the explanation of the twelve interdependent links is that from ignorance (which is the cause), actions or karma results. From this beginning the links are explained in sequence, and they show how things come into existence through compatible causes and conditions. Thus the Buddha explained clearly how the process of engaging in samsara takes place.

Through the explanation of the twelve interdependent links he showed how engagement in samsara is not without cause or from incompatible causes, but rather through the specific causes that bring about specific results. The first link of the twelve interdependent links, ignorance, is the cause of actions, and the actions that are produced from that leave imprints upon the consciousness, which is the third link and so forth. As the commentary explains:

They are thus a means for understanding suchness [or emptiness]. Those scriptures elucidating the ultimate, the emptiness of inherent existence of phenomena, describe the stages by which one disengages from cyclic existence.

It is explained clearly here that without understanding the basis, one cannot jump to the next step of understanding emptiness. Through the explanations given in the text, one comes to understand that we engage in samsara through the cause and effect sequence, which is basically an understanding of karma. Based on that understanding of the cause and effect sequence, one then further searches for how to be free from samsara, which is through the understanding of emptiness.

The next point that one gets from this explanation is how emptiness is the key to freeing oneself from samsara: without an understanding of emptiness, one cannot obtain liberation. That is the main point that one should derive from this explanation, which should be used in one's analytical meditation to further clarify one's understanding. There is a verse further on in the text that explains clearly how, for an understanding of emptiness, one needs to have a thorough understanding of relative truth, which serves as a basis to understand ultimate truth. By following this process, one can obtain ultimate

cessation.

As the teachings explain, an intelligent person gains an understanding of the teachings and progresses along the path by thoroughly analysing and investigating the process of how one comes into samsara. Then they know how to reverse that process and be free from samsara. That whole process must be thoroughly analysed. If an intelligent person, for example, was to experience unease and suffering from a headache, they would analyse in this way: 'Why do I experience a headache? There must be a cause for me to suffer in this way. So what is the cause of the suffering?'. By analysing in that way, and using the teachings as a means to analyse the process, they gain an understanding that, 'The underlying cause of the suffering that I experience from a headache is a result of the delusions and karma that have been created in the past'.

What is the main delusion which influences one to engage in the karma that brings about such suffering? As they investigate further, they come to understand and realise that it is the grasping one's self and other phenomena as being truly existent that is the main culprit. Then as the intelligent being investigates further, they check and analyse whether it is possible to overcome grasping at self and other phenomena.

Then, they come to the realisation that grasping at self is a misconception, and as such it has no sound basis. So there is no solid foundation for that mind-set to remain firm, because it is based on a faulty state of mind. As it is a misconception it is based on faulty states of mind and thus it can be overcome. There are reasons, techniques and methods to overcome that faulty state of mind and thus overcome that misconception.

Then they see that it is possible to gain the ultimate cessation of liberation, and the elimination of the causes of one's suffering, by completely eradicating and eliminating that misconception. That is how an intelligent being investigates and studies.

It is good to also follow on that line of reasoning and use it as much as possible in one's analytical meditation and investigation.

1.2.1.4. GIVING UP FEAR OF EMPTINESS

Objection: If all things are empty there are many unwanted consequences, since by denying the existence of objects, actions and agents, even liberation will not exist.

Answer:

Thinking, "Nothing exists, what is the use?" 184
You may be afraid.
But if actions did exist,
This teaching would not be a prevention.

This verse is the presentation of the unique point of the Prasangika Madhyamika or Consequentialists, which is that there is not even an atom of inherent existence in phenomena, and therefore phenomena is completely empty of inherent existence.

All other schools below the Prasangika present reality as having some inherent existence, or some existence from its own side. For example the school immediately below, the Svatantrika Madhyamika, present that there is some

inherent existence from the phenomena's side, as well as some conceptualisation or imputation from the mind. The schools below the Prasangika Madhyamika school assert that when one searches for a phenomenon, there should be some findability on the basis, and that one can find that there is some existence from its own side. If there was no inherent existence from its own side, they say, then things would not exist at all. 'How could one posit things to be existing?' they ask, 'because the doer, the actions and the results would not exist'.

It is only the Prasangika who say that there is not an atom of inherent existence, and that things are merely labelled by the mind. This is said to be a very fine point. Because it is such a subtle point, it is a very difficult point to grasp and understand. Thus it is only the highest Buddhist school which presents that point, and it can be understood only by intelligent beings who reach that fine point.

The Prasangika Madhyamika school asserts that there is not even an atom of inherent existence. Yet, even though there is no inherent existence, it does not contradict the existence of phenomena, it does not contradict that there is a doer, the action and the result. The schools below the Prasangika would say that if you search for something and cannot find something upon the basis, then that means that it cannot exist. Whereas the Prasangika Madhyamika school asserts that the very fact that you cannot find something when you search for it upon the basis shows that there is no true existence or inherent existence. The very fact that you don't find anything when you search upon the basis, means that there is no inherent existence.

The lower Buddhist schools would say that when you search on the aggregates of a person, you will find a person there. Whereas the Prasangika Madhyamika school say, that if you search for a person upon the basis, you will not find a person there, because neither the individual parts nor the combination of the aggregates is a person.

As the commentary explains the verse:

You who fear emptiness, may be frightened by thinking, "What is the use of striving for liberation, since things do not exist if they are empty of inherent existence?" But if actions existed ultimately, it would not be possible for anyone to prevent cyclic existence by understanding the teaching of emptiness, since actions and agents are not feasible in a context of inherent existence.

As explained here, one may imply that there is a fear of things being empty of inherent existence. However if things were to be ultimately existent, then one could not possibly overcome cyclic existence with the understanding of emptiness.

... since actions and agents are not feasible in a context of inherent existence.

This means that if the doer, the action itself and the results were to be inherently existent, then the teachings of emptiness and so forth could not overcome cyclic existence and allow the attainment of liberation.

Thinking the aggregates are truly existent is like thinking a mirage is water.

Believing a mirage to be water is the analogy used to illustrate how believing the aggregates to be truly existent is a total fabrication of the mind.

1.2.1.5. GIVING UP STRONG ATTACHMENT TO ONE'S OWN POSITION

This is an important point to keep in mind.

While attached to your own position 185
And disliking others' positions
You will not approach nirvana.
Neither [kind of] conduct will bring peace.

The main point being elucidated here is how it is extremely important to overcome a strong attachment to one's own view as being a superior view. It refers to those who are following a school of Madhyamika or Middle Way thought developing a strong attachment to the explanation of emptiness that is presented by that school. By holding that explanation as being superior and developing attachment towards it, one may develop an aversion toward the views that are presented in the lower Buddhist schools, as well as any other school that presents a view of true existence. Doing this will prevent any progress in one's spiritual development towards, achieving liberation as it will only become a cause to keep one longer in cyclic existence.

The main causes for keeping us in cyclic existence are attachment and aversion. These delusions keep us in cyclic existence, and thus developing attachment to one's own position, or to feel superior, and developing aversion towards other views, can only serve as a means to prolong one's existence in samsara.

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Thinking the thesis of emptiness which stops cyclic existence is supreme and others are wrong, you may be strongly attached to your own position and antagonistic to others'. You will not approach the liberation of nirvana until you discard this strong attachment to your own thesis, emptiness, and your dislike for an antagonism toward others' theses. Peace can never be attained through conduct based on the idea that both adopting and discarding are truly existent.

This clearly illustrates that having a strong attachment to one's own thesis, in this case a thesis that is presenting emptiness clearly, considering it to be supreme, and having an aversion towards others' views, will prevent one from achieving liberation. The main advice here, which we can take as personal advice, is that for as long as you hold onto your own view as supreme and develop attachment towards it, and condemn others' views with aversion, you can never obtain liberation. So one must overcome such attitudes.

1.2.2. Advice to strive for liberation

This has seven sub-divisions:

1.2.2.1. With effort liberation is easy to attain

1.2.2.2. Impossibility of attaining liberation without cultivating aversion to cyclic existence

1.2.2.3. Appropriateness of striving for liberation because of the very great disadvantages of cyclic existence

1.2.2.4. Meaning of the fundamental mode of existence should not be taught from the outset

1.2.2.5. Stages by which to lead [a disciple]

1.2.2.6. Indistinguishability in entity with regard to the final mode of existence of things

1.2.2.7. Lack of contradiction in teaching the necessity of accumulating merit through giving and so forth

1.2.2.1. WITH EFFORT LIBERATION IS EASY TO ATTAIN

We can reflect on the main point of this sub-division, which is that while it is easy to obtain liberation, we won't do so unless we make an effort.

Assertion: We cannot attain the perfect happiness of nirvana, because it is extremely difficult to do so, but we enter cyclic existence because it is easy to acquire without effort.

Answer:

Not acting brings about nirvana; 186
Acting again brings worldly existence.
Thus, without complication, nirvana
Is easy to attain, but not the latter.

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Understanding about not doing actions, whether they are virtuous or non-virtuous activities, brings about nirvana. Worldly existence is brought about by doing various virtuous and non-virtuous actions.

What one derives from the explanation from the commentary is that the process of acquiring the causes to achieve liberation is unlike worldly activities. One does not require needless physical and verbal exertion to acquire liberation, as it is mainly a mental task.

After gaining a certain understanding of emptiness, one goes into secluded retreat and meditates upon the understanding of emptiness. By first achieving the meditative state of calm abiding and developing that to acquire special insight, and then combining calm abiding with special insight, one further meditates on emptiness. That then becomes the cause for achieving liberation. In secluded retreat one completely refrains from worldly activities, such as engaging in the physical exertion in acquiring worldly things and so forth, or verbal activities. In contrast to the worldly activities, that is much less taxing on one's physical body and speech. It only requires mental stabilisation and completely removing oneself from all other activities.

'Worldly existence or existence in samsara is brought about by doing various virtuous and non-virtuous actions'. Any worldly activity, whether it be virtuous or non-virtuous, becomes a cause for us to be re-born in samsara. The virtuous activities that we engage in become causes for us to take a higher rebirth in cyclic existence. The non-virtuous activities that we engage in become the causes for rebirth in the lower realms. With a worldly motivation, when one engages in any virtuous or non-virtuous activity, it only becomes a cause to remain in samsara.

Going into seclusion to develop calm abiding followed by special insight and combining the two in contemplating emptiness is a means of refraining from any kind of worldly activity – virtuous or non-virtuous. One bases

one's practice in seclusion on the three trainings. In an ethical sense the very fact that one is in seclusion, is the training in morality. Meditating on calm abiding and special insight is the training of concentration and developing the wisdom of emptiness is the training of wisdom.

By refraining from any activity, virtuous or non-virtuous, and meditating upon emptiness based on the three trainings, liberation is easy to obtain. As mentioned in the text:

Thus by giving up the performance of all actions, nirvana is easy to attain without complication.

The Tibetan word that has been literally translated here as 'complication' could also mean 'without doubt'. So without complication or without doubt implies with ease.

On the other hand, the pleasures of cyclic existence are not easy to gain.

In contrast to being in seclusion and refraining from all activities, the pleasure of cyclic existence is not easy to gain. This implies that one has to exert a lot of effort to gain the pleasures in samsara.

The commentary summarises the main point in this way:

Therefore it is unreasonable for the wise to give up striving for nirvana, which is attained without the need for tiring exertion, and instead strive for cyclic existence, which is acquired through all kinds of tiring exertion.

As explained earlier, the causes for obtaining liberation require much less exertion, as they require being in seclusion and refraining from all physical and verbal activities and just engaging in peaceful meditation. In comparison this is much less work than having to engage in the causes to gain the pleasures of cyclic existence. So a wise person, someone who is intelligent, should not give up striving for nirvana which has so much profit, and so much gain. The very process of gaining nirvana is much easier and less tiring.

Whereas the results from the pleasures of samsara are not stable, and one has to exert oneself much more to obtain that result. It is much more tiring. What wise person would engage in that? The question implies that one should not. We can use ourselves as an example, reflecting on how tiring it is when we have to think about gaining worldly status, wealth and so forth. We have to go through so much effort and worry, thinking how best we can achieve our worldly goals.

The next session on 5th June, will be the discussion. There will be no teachings on 12 June and on 19 June it is the exam.

Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
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DISCUSSION

BLOCK: **2**

WEEK: **6**

5TH JUNE 07

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1. Why is it beneficial to be afraid of cyclic existence?
 2. What attitude can we hold to prevent experiencing shock and anxiety to us when bad things happen?
 3. Like the foolish builder who erects a wall and then immediately destroyed it, why do we continue to make efforts in things that are bound to perish?
 4. How does pride affect the ability to have compassion?
 5. What problems can occur if renunciation is not cultivated gradually?
 6. 'It is appropriate to enjoy sensual pleasures because they are a result of previous virtuous actions.'
Discuss
 7. What is a good way of ensuring that we are detached about our practice and its results?
 8. Describe the perception of the wise who have had the direct realization of emptiness (using the 'mechanical devices' analogy)
 9. **'Just as friendship between people
Who disagree does not last long,
Desire does not last long
When the faults of all things are
recognised?**
Explain the main point of the analogy used in this verse.
 10. What proves that separation in a relationship is inevitable?
 11. What does it mean to have reached a 'correctly assuming doubt' about inherent existence?
 12. If the main understanding one needs to gain to achieve liberation is emptiness, why did the Buddha not teach just on emptiness? Why did he teach about the environment and so forth?
 13. "If everything is empty of inherent existence then what is the use of striving for liberation?" How does the Prasangika School answer this objection?

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EXAM

NAME:

BLOCK:

1

WEEK:

7

19TH JUNE 07

MARK:

/17

1. Why is it beneficial to be afraid of cyclic existence? [2]

2. What attitude can we hold to prevent experiencing shock and anxiety to us when bad things happen? [2]

3. Like the foolish builder who erects a wall and then immediately destroyed it, why do we continue to make efforts in things that are bound to perish? [2]

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4. How does pride affect the ability to have compassion? [2]

5. What problems can occur if renunciation is not cultivated gradually? [2]

6. What is a good way of ensuring that we are detached about our practice and its results? [1]

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7. **'Just as friendship between people
Who disagree does not last long,
Desire does not last long
When the faults of all things are
recognised?**

Explain the main point of the analogy used in this verse. [2]

8. If the main understanding one needs to gain to achieve liberation is emptiness, why did the Buddha not teach just on emptiness? Why did he teach about the environment and so forth? [2]

9. "If everything is empty of inherent existence then what is the use of striving for liberation?" How does the Prasangika School answer this objection?