
Study Group – *Aryadeva's 400 Verses*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

18 April 2006

Please sit yourself in a comfortable position and generate a good motivation.

The different types of motivations that one can generate are:

1. Engaging in spiritual or Dharma practices with the intention to merely gain some benefit in the present life.
2. The motivation to practise the Dharma in order to obtain a better rebirth in the next lifetime, so that one can continue to engage in Dharma practice. This is an advanced motivation.
3. Even more advanced is the motivation to obtain a good rebirth for practising Dharma so that one can obtain liberation from samsara.
4. The highest motivation is to generate the motivation to practise the Dharma in order to achieve enlightenment for the benefit for all sentient beings.

When the advice is given to generate a good motivation, it relates to the state of mind one needs to have before engaging in the practice, as well as during the practice and towards the end of the practice. If one already has what is called a contrived motivation of bodhicitta, meaning that it is generated with an effort, it is not necessary to generate a further motivation. One can just keep that good motivation of bodhicitta within one's mind prior to engaging in the practice, maintain it during the practice and towards the end of the practice. When it is advised to check one's motivation, and generate a good motivation it refers to someone who either does not have a clear motivation, or who has an inferior one.

The motivation to practice Dharma in order to benefit oneself in this life is not a bad motivation in itself. If one can gain some benefit for oneself, by refraining from harming others, then doing a deed with this attitude is of course not bad. However if one has a mere thought to benefit oneself only in this life, then whatever one engages in does not become a cause for one's future spiritual lives. Therefore in relation to thinking about future lives, it is said that the motivation to benefit only this life is inferior; one can transform it to an advanced motivation which is to benefit the next life.

Just wishing to obtaining a good future life is not sufficient either, as it is inferior compared to wanting to attain liberation for oneself. The state of being free from the sufferings of entire cyclic existence is the state of liberation.

The motivation to achieve liberation merely for oneself is inferior to the motivation of wanting to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. The

earlier motivations become an obstacle to developing the later more superior motivation. The lamas give advice to check one's motivation in relation to these different levels of motivations, and thus encourage us to generate the superior motivation.

What we call a contrived bodhicitta motivation is, of course, a superior motivation that one develops initially in order to engage in any kind of Mahayana practice. With a sufficient amount of practice, the contrived bodhicitta motivation will develop into a spontaneous bodhicitta motivation, which is even better. Initially when we haven't trained our mind it seems quite difficult to develop and maintain such motivations, therefore we need to be reminded, and to check our motivation again and again. However as we become more familiar with these different types of motivations and their benefits, then it naturally becomes easier to develop them.

It is a matter of becoming more aware and more familiar with these different types of motivations. The Lam Rim teachings mention that one needs to develop what is called a special virtuous state of mind, and within that virtuous state of mind we invoke the merit field. Then one engages in the practice of meditation and so forth. It says in the Lam Rim that what we call a special virtuous state of mind is developed in relation to generating the right type of motivation. Therefore as we familiarise ourselves, those states of mind should become easier to develop.

Normally we leave our mind in the state with which we are more familiar, which is focussed on worldly activities. Because we are so used to focusing on external worldly objects, which are merely to benefit our temporary needs, it seems inevitable that we do so, and we have a natural tendency to think about the temporary benefits just for ourselves. We think in that way because of the mindset with which we have been conditioned, but as we become more familiar with the superior motivations mentioned earlier, it will become more natural to develop them within our mind.

When I mentioned that the motivation to benefit this life is inferior, this is not to underestimate in any way the value of doing good deeds without a particular belief in future lives. There are those who live a very moral life, being very generous and helping others even though they don't have an understanding about future lives - some people are naturally very kind and generous to others. I am not saying that this is not valid. Furthermore I personally would not be able to say that leading a moral life and being generous without the particular intention to benefit future lives would not bring a good result for the future lives; I feel it can definitely bring good result for future lives.

What the teachings are indicating is that there are particular causes for obtaining a good future life with the eight freedoms and the ten endowments, which is a life that is suitable to practice the Dharma. One of the particular causes for attaining a precious human rebirth which has all these conditions to practice Dharma is by engaging in virtuous deeds accompanied with

aspirational prayers. The virtuous deeds are the practice of generosity, moral ethics and so forth. When done with the motivation to attain a good future life by making stainless prayers to attain a good future rebirth, it then becomes the cause for a precious human rebirth.

There are examples that emphasise the point about obtaining good results by engaging in virtuous deeds in this life, even without any intention to benefit future lives. We can see people who have an enormous amount of wealth and no financial problems even though they may have no interest in the Dharma. On the other hand we also see people who may be very interested in the Dharma, but who don't have much wealth and have difficulties supporting themselves. These are the results of the past; those who have the Dharma but no wealth are perhaps those who made prayers in the past but were not very generous. In this way we can see that depending on the causes there are definitely differences in the results that are obtained.

1.2.1.1.5. Refuting that it does not cause the brave ones to fear¹

This heading has two further sub-divisions:

1.2.1.1.5.1. Unfeasibility of only cowards fearing death

1.2.1.1.5.2. Unsuitability of doing negative deeds to safeguard one's life

1.2.1.1.5.1. Unfeasibility of only cowards fearing death

*If you consider future goals [8]
But not your waning life,
Who would call intelligent
Such selling of yourself?*

What this verse is referring to is the misconception that many hold, which is that it is only cowards who fear death, and that brave heroes never fear death. According to this view, we Buddhists may be the ones who are cowards. According to the worldly viewpoint those who give up worldly activities that gain wealth and fame, and who dedicate their life to engaging in spiritual practice are cowards. They are so afraid of death that they don't want to put any effort towards material gains, and instead dedicate their life to spiritual practice. This may be seen as a sign of being a coward according to a worldly point of view.

The explanation of the verse in accordance to the sub-heading says that it is only cowards who fear death. Thus those who are brave do not fear death. In order to gain fame and wealth and subdue enemies some may even bring harm upon themselves in combat and so forth. As not fearing death would be considered a sign of bravery, they risk their own lives just for some worldly gain such as fame or material gains.

The qualm arises, can it be accepted that it is cowardly to fear death, and brave if one doesn't fear death?

The answer is that it is not acceptable.

What we derive from the meaning of the verse is that one who uses their life just for material worldly gain such as wealth, fame and so forth is selling their precious life for a temporary gain. It is as if they are exchanging their life for temporary worldly gains, while their life is slowly being exhausted moment-by-moment. Although it may be considered as a great achievement by like-minded worldly beings, intelligent beings who have the wisdom-eye of Dharma will not consider that as being a worthwhile activity – for them it is a total loss.

We can use more contemporary examples. In our world we see suicide killings where people give up their life to destroy many other lives. The person who commits that act thinks there will be some gain from doing it, but where is the gain? When we look at it even from an ordinary perspective we see it as being foolish, don't we?

Because they have taken their own life, where is the gain for this life? If there is no gain for this life, what about future lives? In this case there will be no gain for the next life, because they have created so much negative karma by taking their own life and the lives of so many other beings as well. Spending our life to merely secure some material gain is a bit more subtle version of the same thing.

When we work for some personal gain in this life such as wealth, fame and so forth it is done with the intention to benefit our future. Ultimately, however, our future in this life is to experience death. So, how can our material gains benefit our future after death? The meaning of the verse is that although one is exchanging one's precious life just for these temporary gains now, one can use one's life for a much greater purpose.

1.2.1.1.5.2. Unsuitability of doing negative deeds to safeguard one's life

This sub-heading arises from the qualm that may arise from the previous point: if it is not acceptable to give up one's life for temporary worldly gains then in order to protect one's life, is it acceptable to engage in negative deeds? Since it is important to sustain one's life, is it permissible or worthwhile to engage in negative deeds to sustain one's life? To counteract this qualm the next verse says:

*Why do you do ill deeds, [9?]
Pledging you as security?
Of course, like the wise, you must be
Free of attachment to yourself.*

Qualm: If one should protect one's life then is it permissible to engage in non-virtuous deeds to protect one's life?

Answer: It is not permissible.

The meaning of the verse is that if one engages in negative deeds, then that is similar to offering oneself as collateral in order to gain some temporary benefit. Through engaging in negative deeds now we are treating ourselves as collateral, because we have to repay with much more severe consequences later. If we engage in negative deeds, then although we may gain some temporary benefits and temporary pleasure now, we

¹ On the 28 March 2006 this was given as 1.2.1.1.5. Refuting that is not the cause of fear for a brave person

have to face much greater negative consequences in the future. For example, there are those who engage in wrong livelihood such as stealing. Now if someone has to steal in order to survive because they are starving and desperate, then that is understandable and could be acceptable.

However individual people engage in theft and robberies and steal just for the sake of gaining more wealth; that is clearly engaging in negative deeds out of excessive desire and attachment. In this life they may get some benefit, but even in this life they may face some negative consequences if they are caught. The consequences in the future life will definitely be very heavy. An example used in the commentary is, if one goes to a bar to drink, it is as though one is offering one's own body as collateral for the temporary pleasure of drinking. If someone engages excessively in drinking, becoming an alcoholic, then they are actually giving up their own life for the sake of some temporary pleasure.

The meaning of the second part of the verse is that unless one is wise like a foe destroyer who has abandoned attachment, then engaging in such negative deeds out of attachment will have negative consequences for oneself in the future.

One should consider one's desires and attachments as if they were another entity within oneself that has no compassion or love for oneself. One's desires and attachments do not bring any true happiness or true gain to oneself; they just bring about more suffering. Out of attachment to alcohol, someone who consumes alcohol excessively can completely destroy themselves, bringing so much suffering in this life and future lives. Therefore when we think of the attachment or desire within our mind we can relate to it as being like an entity which has no compassion for us. Thus we should not place any trust in the desires within our own mind.

The main point is that even though one may reason with oneself that one is engaging in desires to sustain one's life, the excessive desires that we may use as our excuse are, in fact, a means of bringing more suffering to oneself. They may seem to offer happiness, but they just bring more suffering in the future.

Let us take a drug dealer as a vivid example of someone who engages in a non-virtuous activity with the intention to sustain themselves. As far as they are concerned, they are in a trade that they feel will sustain and give them a good life. In some countries they are risking their own life, because if they are caught they will be put to death. In some other countries, if they are caught they will be imprisoned for life. So even though their initial intention was to do something to sustain them, in fact it becomes a cause to be doomed in this very life, either by being put to death or leading a very miserable life in prison for the rest of their lives. These are very clear examples of how excessive desire leads to non-virtuous deeds that bring about undesirable results and suffering for oneself. Therefore the main point made here is that we must be very diligent and careful in choosing what we want to do

in life to sustain ourselves, and make the right choices for our livelihood.

This is actually very practical advice about choosing a right livelihood, in which we don't endanger ourselves and our livelihood in this life. A drug dealer with a certain type of mind-set will take risks knowing that they may be caught and so forth, but they disregard that and the consequences they may face. They believe they can get away with it, can make good money, and everything will be fine. For someone who is more diligent and who can think out things more carefully, the dangers and the consequences if things go wrong would be clear. It is usually the case that initially things don't seem to go wrong but later on they do. So in that way we see that the ultimate result is more suffering for people who engage in such wrong livelihoods. Therefore this kind of advice is showing us how to choose what is best for our life, which is a very practical advice.

The next heading is 1.2.1.2. Contemplating and meditating on subtle impermanence.

*Transcribed from tape by Jenny Brooks
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
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to moment. The realisation of that is hindered by the erroneous state of mind perceiving phenomena and oneself as unchanging and permanent. The misconception of seeing things as having a permanent nature is what obstructs both oneself and other beings from perceiving the actual reality of life. Because of not being able to understand this reality, beings fail to understand the nature of themselves, which in this case relates to the subtle impermanence of life. Therefore in order to overcome this misconception one needs to meditate and generate awareness on subtle impermanence. As the verse indicates, because of not being able to ascertain the certainty of subtle impermanence, beings who know themselves are rare.

1.2.1.2.2. Inappropriateness of attachment to continuation because liking to live long and not wanting to be old is contradictory

The next verse is an explanation which serves as an answer to yet another qualm, or doubt, that arises in the mind. Even when the earlier doubt is cleared, one may think, 'Although the mind itself is momentary, the continuation of the mind lasts, therefore it is appropriate to be attached to the continuation of life'.

Qualm: Although life may be impermanent its continuation lasts, therefore is it suitable to be attached to the continuation of life?

Answer: It is not suitable.

You would like to live long [11]
But dislike old age.
Amazing! Your behaviour
Seems right to people like you

We have a general common misconception, that regards a later perceived object as being exactly the same object that we had seen earlier. This misconception arises because of the fact that in the later moment there is what is called a 'similar type' aspect of the previous object. When we relate to, for example, any external object that we may see such as the mountains, the sea, landscapes, etc. they are constantly changing from moment to moment. However because there is a similar type in the next moment, (in Tibetan it is called *rig da*, - *rig* is type and *da* is similar) it appears to be the same object although in reality we are not seeing the actual object that we first perceived.

When we are looking at a mountain or a tree, subtle changes occur each moment as we are looking at it, therefore each moment it is a different mountain or tree from the previous moment. The mountain or tree we see in each moment is not the same tree or mountain that we saw in the earlier moment. However when we see the similar type of mountain, tree or any other object in the next moment, we think we are seeing the actual object we saw earlier and refer to it as the actual object; this misperception leads us to think that the object has remained unchanged.

This can be related to ourselves and our life. As ordinary beings, we can only experience and relate to gross impermanence, such as when things fall apart, when mountains are flattened, trees cut down, houses collapse

and when death occurs. We see this and think that things have changed or do not exist anymore. That is the gross level of impermanence that we are relating to. On a subtle level each moment of existence is one of change from moment to moment, even though we may not perceive that.

Another more vivid example is the perception we have right here of this room and gathering. In reality, more than half an hour has passed since we first gathered here, but when we look around and see the same objects and people, it appears as though nothing has really changed. We think, 'I see the same people around me, the same objects, and the teacher is the same'. This is however a false notion. When we consider the fact how more than half an hour has already passed, that is already a change. During that time, subtle momentary changes have constantly occurred as well.

Another very good analogy of impermanence, even for subtle impermanence is when we look at the time. As we are looking at the clock, the seconds constantly tick away, without stopping even for a moment. That is the reality of every functional object: it does not last; it goes on changing moment by moment.

Verse 11 serves as an answer to the earlier doubt, stating that this is an erroneous state of mind and therefore such a misconception should be overcome. The verse says that if you think that it is suitable to be attached to the continuation of life, then that contradicts what you dislike as a result of the continuation of life, which is becoming old and feeble, with white hair, wrinkles and so forth. The verse says that if you do not wish to experience old age, then how could it be reasonable for you to be attached to the continuation of life? Holding on to the view that it is suitable to be attached to a continuation of life, is only considered suitable for you and like-minded beings, but not for the wise. The verse indicates that for the wise who have the 'wisdom eye' which in this case means having the understanding of subtle impermanence, holding such a wrong view is not considered suitable.

1.2.2. Inappropriateness of grieving only at others' death while overlooking the disadvantages of not being free from fear of death oneself

This heading has two further sub-divisions:

1.2.2.1. A brief explanation

1.2.2.2. Extensive explanation by answering objections

1.2.2.1. A brief explanation

Qualm: Old age and death can be regarded as an unwished-for suffering when it occurs to others, but can I not accept it for myself?

This doubt arises when there is an experience of suffering, such as when death happens to a loved one, for example, one's own child, but one still believes that it will be fine for oneself, thinking, 'I don't mind experiencing old age and death myself'.

Answer: It is inappropriate to have such a view.

*Why do you grieve at death
On account of your son and others?
When the one that laments is a victim
How is that not reprehensible?*

[12]

The meaning of the verse is that just as you would lament and suffer the death of your loved ones, such as your own son, it is suitable for you to recognise the sufferings that you will experience at your own death, especially as you have committed many negative deeds. The indication is, because you are in a situation in which you are creating negative karmas, and you will definitely experience death, it is suitable for you to consider the sufferings that you will experience at the time of death.

This verse has two main points of advice.

1. Generating an awareness of one's own death. This verse actually indicates the absurdity of our mind, where we think that even though we feel suffering and grief when others die, 'It shouldn't be any problem for me'. Not fearing death is a misconception which hinders our practice of Dharma. With this misconception we are led into engaging in worldly negative deeds as mentioned earlier, which are related only to the benefits of this lifetime. When we are attached only to this life and spend all our time and energy in sustaining this life, then we naturally engage in negative deeds. This verse helps to counteract this misconception as well as the misconception that one will not experience the suffering of one's own death.

2. Overcoming grief. This verse is also practical advice for those who may be experiencing extreme grief and suffering because of the death of a loved one, for example one's own child. When someone dear in our life passes away, one can be overpowered by that grief and it can become an obstruction to engaging in virtuous deeds and so forth. The verse indicates that it is natural for loved ones to die, because that is the nature of an impermanent phenomenon. There are the subtle changes throughout life and eventually the gross change of death occurs. So rather than being overly consumed by grief, one can engage in virtuous deeds that will help those who have died, as well as using the experience to generate an awareness of one own death.

The Buddha has said in the sutras...

'For those who develop an understanding of the reality of impermanence and meditate upon that, that person will not experience great shock or grief when they are separated from loved ones, through death or any other circumstances.' So, by meditating repeatedly one generates an awareness, of how things change from moment to moment on gross and subtle levels.

To generate the awareness of impermanence the Buddha explained four points in the sutras:

1. The end result of being born, is to die;
2. The end result of a gathering, is to disperse;
3. The end result of reaching a high status is to fall to the low;
4. The end result of accumulation - wealth and so forth, is exhaustion.

When we really think about these four main points that are raised in the sutras, we realise that this is really how things are. Contemplating and meditating on these aspects of impermanence can reduce great suffering in one's own mind.

How these four points are of use

There is a story that relates to these four points. There was once a family who were familiar with the recitation of the sutras. They memorised these four points and recited them repeatedly within the family. All of them, particularly the parents, wherever they went and in whatever actions they engaged in, would be reciting these four points. A magician wanted to test their faith and how much they understood the meaning of what they were reciting. He took the opportunity one day when the son was in the forest collecting wood. The magician found the place where the child had left his belongings, and conjured a dead child, who looked just like the son. When the other children saw that conjured dead child, they went back to the father saying, 'Oh, we saw that your son has died'. The father continued to recite the four points so the magician asked him, 'Don't you feel any grief?' To which the father replied, 'A son came without having asked him to come and then left without having been asked to go. All phenomena are in the same nature, so there is no reason for me to be shocked and grief-stricken about that'. When the mother was asked whether she felt any grief on the account of her son's death, she replied in the same way as the father and quoted another saying, 'In the evening there are a lot of birds that gather on a tree to roost, and in the morning they all fly away and disperse. All phenomena are similar in that way'. The magician asked the boy's sister the same thing, and she replied saying, 'In the markets many people gather during the day, but towards the evening when everything is closed, all people are dispersed and gone. All phenomena are similar'. The following verses pick up on the themes of this story.

They are covered under the following sub-headings.

1.2.2.2. The extensive explanation by answering objections

This is further divided into six subdivisions.

- 1.2.2.2.1. Refuting the appropriateness of grief because one's son went to the next world without asking
- 1.2.2.2.2. Inappropriateness of being very attached to one's son
- 1.2.2.2.3. Inappropriateness of grieving over a dead person (in this case a son) in front of other people
- 1.2.2.2.4. Inappropriateness of grieving for a dead relative to ensure a close relationship with surviving relatives
- 1.2.2.2.5. Inappropriateness of attachment to being with relatives and so forth
- 1.2.2.2.6. Inappropriateness of attachment to the seasons' marvels

We will discuss the verses relating to these sub-headings next Tuesday evening.

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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

2 May 2006

As usual we will sit in a comfortable position and generate the positive motivation, ‘In order to liberate all sentient beings from suffering I need to achieve enlightenment, and for that purpose I will listen to the Dharma. Having done so may I use whatever wisdom I receive from listening to the Dharma to engage in the practice of subduing my own mind.

1.2.2. Inappropriateness of grieving only at others’ death while overlooking the disadvantages of not being free from fear of death oneself (cont.)

1.2.2.1. A brief explanation (cont.)

Qualm: It is appropriate to grieve over a loved one’s death, such as one’s son, but I need not worry about my own death.

Answer: This is not acceptable.

Why do you grieve at death [12]
On account of your son and others?
When the one that laments is a victim
How is that not reprehensible?

In order to overcome this doubt the text explains that just as suffering is experienced when others die, it will be exactly the same for oneself when one faces death. Given the fact that one has engaged in negative deeds and non-virtuous activities, there will be great suffering at the time of death. Therefore it is erroneous to think that one need not worry about one’s own death; in fact one should be concerned about one’s own death.

In terms of putting it into practice, the main point of the teaching is that we need to be concerned about our own death, and generate a fear of death now, so that it becomes an impetus for us to engage in the practice of Dharma. Then there will be no grief or suffering at the actual time of our own death. In other words, having fear and concern now about our own death serves as preparation for our own future death.

How does one prepare for one’s own death? So that we will not have to experience suffering and grief at the time of death, we can prepare by purifying the negative karmas that we have already accumulated in the past, and by further engaging in accumulating virtuous karmas. In reality we are preparing not only for our immediate death in this lifetime, but we are preparing for what happens after death.

The fear that the teachings talk about is specifically the fear of the lower realms in the future life; it is not so much the fear of the actual experience of death itself, but what will happen after death. If one has not purified negative karmas then that will be a cause to go to the lower realms, therefore that is the main fear that has to be generated. In relation to the death of others, one tries to overcome extreme grief by contemplating the fact that it is the nature of impermanence and samsara that others have to die. It is likewise with oneself; because one is in samsara and in the nature of being impermanent, one will have to experience death. Therefore one should contemplate the need to prepare for death now

As we contemplate the meaning of the teachings it becomes apparent that generating an awareness of impermanence is crucial for leading a good life. It is quite comforting, because when we contemplate and generate an awareness of impermanence, it actually brings a certain amount of calmness and peace to our mind. Maintaining an awareness of impermanence actually allows us to cope with a lot of difficulties in life, not getting too distressed or shocked when things go wrong. There are so many experiences we have during our life, the ups and downs, times when things go well and times when things don’t go well, but if we are able to maintain an awareness of impermanence one seems to be able to cope better with these ups and downs in one’s life. So this becomes the reason and necessity for gaining a good understanding, meditating and then generating the awareness of impermanence throughout our life.

1.2.2.2. The extensive explanation by answering objections

1.2.2.2.1. REFUTING THE APPROPRIATENESS OF GRIEF BECAUSE ONE’S SON WENT TO THE NEXT WORLD WITHOUT ASKING

This is subdivided into two.

1.2.2.2.1.1. The actual explanation

1.2.2.2.1.2. But for one’s own confusion implicitly he did not ask to go.

(The literal translation of the Tibetan word *te-muk*, translated here as confusion, is ignorance. So the heading means because of one’s ignorance implicitly he did not ask to go.)

1.2.2.2.1.1. The actual explanation

Qualm: Though it is improper to grieve over my own death,² it is nevertheless reasonable to grieve when the son whom one is attached to goes to the next world without asking. (So the doubt is, that because one has strong attachment for one’s own son, shouldn’t that be a good reason to grieve his loss?)

Answer: Even that is not reasonable.

If, unrequested, someone has [13]
Become your son, it is not

¹ Although not read out on the night this verse is included as a point of reference to the discussion that follows.

² Translator: I think there is a misprint here and it should read as improper to grieve about dying rather than the ‘proper’ used in the text.

*Unreasonable if he leaves
Without having asked.*

The reason why it is not reasonable or suitable to grieve over a son's death if he leaves without asking, because of the fact that the son came into this world without having been asked. Because he came without having been asked, the natural consequence is that he will go without asking to leave. If you can accept the fact that the son came into this world without have been asked for, then one should be able to accept the fact that he will leave without having asked to leave, which is a natural outcome. So there is no reason to feel astonished, or shocked and grieve about it.

The main point is to see the absurdity of the extremes where one is extremely pleased when a son is born without having been asked, and then extremely sad and grief-stricken when the son leaves without having asked. If a son came without having been asked to come, then it should be natural to accept that he will leave without asking to go. One must train one's mind to be free from the extreme emotions of being overly excited and pleased when a son is born, and being extremely sad and grief-stricken when the son dies. One needs to contemplate the nature of impermanence in which things come into existence and then cease to exist. It is the natural outcome for life and other phenomenon as well.

There is also the example given in *Yogic Deeds of the Bodhisattvas*.

1.2.2.2.1.2. But for one's own confusion, implicitly he did ask to go

Because of ignorance or confusion one does not realise it, but in fact the son implicitly did ask to go. Though it seems the son leaves without having asked, in reality you have failed to notice the many signs indicating his passing over to the next life.

Only because of your confusion [14]
You did not notice your son's [indications].
His enthusiasm to go
Is shown by his growing old.

A more literal translation could be willingness instead of enthusiasm. So the meaning of the verse is, the son's willingness to go to the next life is actually shown through various signs of ageing, such as the hair turning white, wrinkles starting to form on the forehead and so forth. These are signs indicating that the son is preparing to go into the next life, and the fact that these signs have not been understood, is only because of your ignorance.

1.2.2.2.2. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF BEING VERY ATTACHED TO ONE'S SON

This outline comes from the story that Geshe-la told last week. In the story the loss is illustrated with a son, but in fact it relates to a son, daughter, any relatives or loved and dear friends.

There are three sub-divisions:

1.2.2.2.2.1. Reasons for the inappropriateness of extreme attachment to one's son

1.2.2.2.2.2. Inappropriateness of attachment whether he is obedient or disobedient

1.2.2.2.2.3. Unfeasibility of a father's attachment to his son being steadfast without depending on the other factors.

The explanation of the following verses relates to the theme of attachment, which is mixed with what we call love in worldly terms. These verses are actually indicating what we call love for a son or a daughter or any loved or dear one is actually an attachment that is combined with love.

1.2.2.2.2.1. Reasons for the inappropriateness of extreme attachment to one's son

Qualm: Although my son shows willingness to go to the next life, because of my great attachment to my son it causes me grief.

Answer: Attachment to one's son is not appropriate.

A son does not love (his father) [15]
As much as his father loves him.
People in the world go down;
Thus, a high rebirth is hard to find.

In fact the doubt indicates its own absurdity. 'Even though I accept that my son showed all the signs of ageing and so forth preparatory to going into the next life, I still feel grief and therefore I suffer, because I have so much attachment to my son.' Using this as a reason for it being appropriate to experience suffering actually shows how strong attachment to a loved one, or son, becomes a cause for the misery and suffering that is experienced later on.

Furthermore when we relate this to our own experience it becomes quite clear that the stronger the attachment that we have to an animate or inanimate object the more suffering we experience when we have to give that object up. The amount of anguish in one's mind is dependant on how attached we are to the object, so therefore it becomes clear that if we don't wish to experience anguish or misery in our mind then we have to lessen that attachment and practise detachment.

In order to overcome the doubt about whether it is appropriate to experience great misery and suffering because of one's attachment, the answer is explained in the verse by way of explaining how one should overcome one's attachment to one's son. The attachment one has to one's son is very much one-sided: one feels he is so precious, loving and good, but in fact this same attitude is not returned from the son. The same amount of what we call love, which is in fact love mixed with attachment, is not shown to the father from the son's side, therefore the relationship is very much one-sided and unbalanced.

In relation to other kinds of relationships, when we feel a very strong attachment to someone, and when they say, 'I am very attached to another person' that initial strong attachment should become less, when we realise that the other person does not love us, or is not attached to us as much. We often do hear people complaining, 'Oh I really do love that person so much, but I don't feel any love or response from them' and that then starts to make them feel uncomfortable.

A further explanation of this verse is that continuously being attached to one's son is similar to the situation where people engage in so many inappropriate activities because of their attachment to their loved ones. They try to prove their love or attachment to the other, and engage in creating negative karma, so their attachment to the loved ones becomes a cause to fall to the lower realms. Because so many beings in the samsaric world are completely immersed in constantly creating the negative karma that makes them fall to the lower realms, it is very rare for beings to obtain a higher rebirth, let alone liberation.

Having understood that reality one should thus strive to overcome attachment and respect elders, both in lay society and towards one's Gurus and other enlightened beings. Respecting elders can refer in the worldly sense to one's parents, etc. and in the supermundane to one's teachers and enlightened beings. One must replace attachment with respect for one's loved ones and elders, and generate faith in one's teachers. This will overcome the contrary feelings of attachment and so forth.

1.2.2.2.2.2. Inappropriateness of attachment whether he is obedient or disobedient

Qualm: It is appropriate to show love and concern for the son because he is obedient and acts according to one's wishes.

Answer: That is inappropriate.

When he is disobedient [16]
No one will call him lovable.
In that case attachment is
Nothing but a transaction.

It is common amongst worldly beings that what we call love, which is strong attachment, is focused on a son or any child who is obedient and acts in accord with the parents' wishes, and that they express less love or attachment to those who are not obedient and who don't act in accordance with the parents' wishes. When we look into the situation closely this seems to be the reality of most worldly relations. If the other behaves or acts in accordance with one's wishes then one has a stronger love or attachment to that person, but as soon as they don't accord with one's wishes then the love and attachment decreases. That is, of course, inappropriate in terms of the relationship between the parents and children. It is more appropriate if the love is there regardless of whether they are obedient or not. However it seems that when we look into what we call love for a son or daughter, it is very much based on whether they are obedient or not.

Having attachment to a son or loved one who is obedient is inappropriate, as it is similar to using one's love or attachment as a trading object. If they are obedient then in return you show your love or attachment, which means if they were not obedient then you would not show your love. What we call love in the worldly sense is based on whether others are behaving in accordance to one's wishes. What we call attachment and love is very much like a transaction, something that is used like a

trading object; you are trading your love or attachment in return for their obedience.

1.2.2.2.2.3. Unfeasibility of a father's attachment to his son being steadfast without depending on the other factors

Qualm: A father's attachment to his son is steadfast, irrespective of whether he is obedient or disobedient.

The doubt that is indicted here is that attachment itself seems to be quite stable and strong, because whether the son is obedient or not there is still attachment. In other words, it may seem appropriate to have attachment to the son because attachment is actually very stable.

Answer: Attachment is actually not steadfast and stable.

Suffering caused by separation [17]
Is quickly gone from human hearts
See, too, attachment's instability,
Indicated by suffering's end.

I think the literal translation looks at attachment and its instability as indicated by the end of suffering.

The main indication here is overcoming the doubt that attachment is steadfast or stable. The suffering that is caused by separation from the object of one's attachment, in this case one's son, is actually not stable, because that attachment itself quickly passes from the hearts of human beings; attachment felt from the heart actually fades away very quickly.

The explanation of the last part of the verse is that if the bonds of attachment were not to loosen, then the result of attachment, which is suffering, would not cease. But in reality the suffering caused by attachment can be overcome and the suffering does stop. So if the suffering that is a result of attachment ceases, then the causes of the suffering, which is attachment, must also cease. Therefore attachment is not stable.

The main point here is that since suffering is a result of attachment, and suffering can be overcome, then it is natural that the cause of that suffering, which is attachment, can also cease. To clarify this point there is an analogy given in the commentary which Geshe-la feels would be good to relate.

Once a king was crossing the river with some ministers, and at a certain point some sort of evil spirit caused havoc and capsized the boat. One of the ministers had his son with him and fearing that everyone including his son might die, he gave himself up to the spirit as a token to let the others go. He entrusted his son to the king, asking the king to look after his son and take care of his wellbeing.

When the king and the others reached the opposite shore safely, the son initially felt great grief on account of his father's death. However the king took great care of the late minister's son looking after him well, and he grew up to be very strong and intelligent lad. Eventually, the son not only overcame his grief over his father's death, but in fact began to see it almost as an advantage. It was because of his father's death that he was put into the king's care, which meant he received a better education,

and everything worked out very well for him. So what was once a loss later turned into an advantage.

We may have similar cases here in Australia, when rich parents pass away then the children, who may have not been doing so well financially, receive wealth as an inheritance. They might initially feel some grief, but then later may feel happy that they inherited quite a lot of wealth. It is possible that people think in that way.

1.2.2.2.3. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF GRIEVING OVER A DEAD PERSON (IN THIS CASE A SON) IN FRONT OF OTHER PEOPLE

What this sub-division indicates is that in some cultures, and it might also be the same here in the west, when a very close member of the family dies (either one's spouse or one's parents) then for a certain period of time after their death the family have to wear certain clothing to indicate their grief. Sometimes in Tibet they would have to put their hair in a certain position as an indication that someone has died in the family, and wear a certain kind of clothing. This is something that is practised in many cultures to conform to worldly customs and traditions.

Qualm: It is inappropriate to grieve a loved one's death, such as one's sons, but, 'In order to conform with worldly tradition and so forth I still have to indicate that I am grieving and that should be appropriate'.

Answer: It is inappropriate.

Knowing it is of no benefit, [18]
Still you have injured yourself.
Your make yourself a hypocrite,
Which also is improper.

The qualm that is raised is that though it is inappropriate to grieve in one's heart over a dead son or any other relative, for the sake of convention and to conform with worldly views, one must beat one's heart and so forth. In some cultures like in Tibet and other eastern cultures when someone dies the surviving close relatives act quite frantically as if they have gone a bit mad, pulling their hair, beating on their chests and wailing loudly, all of which is to be a sign that they are really grieving a lot. What I have seen here at funerals, is people walking very slow and solemn, some are held by their arms on either side and need support just to walk.

The reason why many follow that custom over a long time is just to conform to the tradition, because if one was not to follow that tradition one may be seen as being insensitive or heartless. So just to conform with the views of others, one has to show the appearance of being really sad and so forth, when one may not really be feeling it inside.

The explanation in the verse uses an analogy of the extreme case when the mourners start pulling out their hair and beating their chest and wearing very solemn uncomfortable clothes, in some cases not eating for many days because of their grieving. When these sorts of traditions or customs are followed to that extreme the person who is doing so would actually know inside themselves that this is not really comfortable. They may think, 'If I could get away with not having to do this, I would rather do that'. They actually feel uncomfortable

with the custom, but still they go ahead and follow it. That is actually being hypocritical and they are deceiving themselves, because inside they know it is not comfortable, or useful, but still they outwardly go through all of that grieving process. In an extreme case it is putting up with a lot of suffering without really wanting or needing it, just to conform with the views of others. That is being like a hypocrite.

In Tibetan hypocrisy is called *yo-gyu*, which is one of the four wrong livelihoods - portraying a quality when in fact there is no quality within oneself. That is normally what we call hypocrisy. This case is similar to showing false qualities, because one is following a tradition and custom with which one does not feel really comfortable, just for the sake of pleasing others and in order not be blamed or criticised by them. Putting up with all of this is similar to pretending to have qualities one doesn't have, so in that sense it is hypocrisy.

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Edited Version

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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

9 May 2006

It is good to begin by focusing your mind inward, keeping it free from distractions, and generate a good motivation to receive the teachings. You can think, ‘By receiving these teachings may I be able to develop the wisdom to achieve enlightenment for the sake of liberating all sentient beings from samsara.’

1.2.2.2.3. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF GRIEVING OVER A DEAD PERSON (IN THIS CASE A SON) IN FRONT OF OTHER PEOPLE

The doubt that was answered in verse 18 is whether in order to mourn a loved one it is appropriate to inflict sufferings upon oneself to show one’s grief. This verse indicated the inappropriateness of harming oneself in mourning, even for the sake of conforming to public expectations.

1.2.2.2.4. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF GRIEVING FOR A DEAD RELATIVE TO ENSURE A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH SURVIVING RELATIVES.

Qualm/objection: Even though I may agree that self-torment is of no benefit, nevertheless in order to ensure a good relationship with surviving relatives, I must endure that suffering.

Answer: That is inappropriate

People in this world wander, [19]
Full, as it were, of suffering.
Why fill with suffering
People who already suffer?

This verse deals with the doubt as to whether it is appropriate to endure suffering if it is to maintain a good relationship with relatives. The verse refutes that doubt by indicating how beings who are born in a male or female body in samsara undergo many types of sufferings again and again, just by the mere fact of being born in samsara. As if there was not enough suffering already, why add extra suffering? In other words, what point is there in enduring extra suffering in addition to the many sufferings that are already being experienced in samsara.

The analogy given to portray this unnecessary added suffering is, ‘like rubbing salt onto a sore wound’. Having a sore wound is bad enough, but if salt were to be rubbed into it even greater pain would be experienced. Likewise enduring the suffering of mourning is just an extra suffering on top of the already existing sufferings experienced in samsara. So why inflict that extra suffering upon oneself? It is far better and more worthwhile to use one’s time and energy to develop methods for removing all the sufferings of samsara and obtain liberation.

1.2.2.2.5. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF ATTACHMENT TO BEING WITH RELATIVES AND SO FORTH

This is subdivided into two:

1.2.2.2.5.1. Actual explanation

1.2.2.2.5.2. Inappropriateness of attachment to lasting friendships

1.2.2.2.5.1. Actual explanation

Qualm/objection: Even though parting from a close one causes suffering, it is nevertheless appropriate to be attached to a close one because, having met, being together gives joy and happiness.

Answer: That is not appropriate.

If meeting is a joy to you [20]
Why is parting not also a joy?
Do not meeting and parting
Both seem to go together?

In order to overcome that doubt, the main point being raised in this verse is in relation to the Buddha’s quote, ‘the end result of all meeting is separation’. The explanation of the verse is that if one considers meeting and being together with a close one as joy, then since the end result of being together is separation, why not consider separation as a joy as well? In retrospect, if one cannot accept separation as a joy, then it would be foolish to regard meeting and being together with a loved one as a source of joy and happiness, because it will end in separation. Thus one should not be attached to meeting and being together with a close one.

Because separation and meeting are inter-related, separation is a natural outcome of a meeting. When one comes into existence, then the other will naturally follow. The very fact that there is a meeting means that separation will follow sooner or later. If one can accept the fact that separation comes as a natural result of a meeting, then there will be less suffering when it happens. Failing to notice or acknowledge and understand this brings sorrow in one’s mind.

The analogy given in the text is, whenever there is an auspicious sign, naturally an inauspicious sign will follow. Also, a poisoned meal may be tasty when consumed, but it will bring great discomfort and suffering later. Becoming ill and feeling discomfort afterwards is a natural consequence of eating poisonous food.

Thus for those who experience the obvious suffering of separation, it is important to meditate on impermanence. The suffering that comes from separation is experienced when one fails to understand that meeting is an impermanent phenomena. The impermanent nature of a meeting is that it naturally changes into separation.

The reason why we fail to understand this is because we have the erroneous view of seeing things as being permanent. When things meet, whether it is a meeting with other beings or meeting with fortune and the like, it is experienced with an erroneous view of permanence. There is a mistaken view that it will last for a long time. So, when the change that becomes a separation actually occurs, it is a shock for the mind, and cannot be accepted. The mind becomes very heavy and sad, and it becomes very difficult for one to bear that mental suffering. This comes about because of not being able to understand the

impermanent nature of things.

We can see those who meditate on impermanence and practise it in their daily life do not experience great loss and sadness when things change, and neither do they experience strong excitement when good things happen. So, there is a stable mind in which there is an acceptance for whatever happens, whether it be good or bad, or whether it comes and goes out of existence. That kind of stable mind is definitely a mind that is calmer and more peaceful and joyful. When we see that, then it becomes obvious that meditating on impermanence and putting it into practice definitely has benefits for the mind.

The suffering that is experienced because of failing to gain some sort of understanding and awareness of impermanence is very obvious, especially when it comes to the suffering of separation. The suffering is very obvious, whether it's a separation from parents or one's spouse, or one's children. That sort of suffering whether it comes from a natural consequence such as death, or because of some disagreement in the relationship, is really a very strong suffering. We may not really be able to relate to this kind of suffering sometimes if we haven't experienced it ourselves. But when we actually experience it ourselves, then we can get a real understanding of the agony it brings to one's mind. When we look around, we see so many examples of suffering as a result of problems within the family, relationships and so forth, either because of the fear of separation, or when separation actually occurs. So if we don't prepare our mind now to be able to deal with a situation like that, then we will experience the same kind of suffering that others experience. When we look around and see that there are so many others experiencing suffering, it is obvious that the same type of suffering will definitely fall upon oneself. Rather than just ignoring it, and looking at it as a spectator when others are suffering, one should use that as an example and ask oneself, 'How will I deal with separation when it happens to me?'

Then we come to the main point mentioned in the verse: the more awareness we generate about the nature of separation, the less suffering we will experience when a separation occurs. That is something which we must definitely prepare for now, because it is definitely going to happen. Separation will happen sooner or later, and one will definitely have to experience it one day. Therefore it is worthwhile and appropriate that we devote some time and energy now to prepare for what will be experienced in the future.

1.2.2.2.5.2. Inappropriateness of attachment to lasting friendships

Qualm/objection: The time spent together is long, so therefore it is appropriate to cherish being together now.

Answer: The periods spent together are not long.

When the past is beginningless [21]
And the future endless,
Why do you notice being together
But not the separations, though they be long?

That kind of erroneous view can arise for example with relationships. There are those who think that they have

had a very long relationship with someone, such as for twenty or thirty years, but when that comes to an end, they lament and experience great suffering.

Whatever length of time may have been spent together at this present time, it is very short in relation to the past in samsara, which is actually beginningless, and the future continuum of the mind is endless. Therefore, 'How can you assert or assume that the time that you spend together now is a long time when in fact, it is actually just a moment in comparison to the past and future?'

1.2.2.2.6. INAPPROPRIATENESS OF ATTACHMENT TO THE SEASONS' MARVELS

Qualm: The suffering of separation and so forth vanishes when one experiences the good times of the seasons, such as nice scenery, beautiful flowers, enjoying watching the moon or sunsets.

Answer:

Time, [consisting of] instants and so forth, [22]
Is certainly like an enemy.
Therefore never be attached
To that which is your enemy.

In Australia we talk about the different things that happen in the different seasons. When we think in that way, we have the erroneous view of being attached to the different times, thinking that one can overcome one's sufferings and so forth by experiencing the marvels of the different seasons. That view can cause a strong attachment, particularly in relation to the experiences of the different times and seasons that occur in this life. However having such a strong attachment can be a hindrance to one's passing over to the next life. If one overcomes attachments to things such as one's wealth, belongings and relationships and so forth, but is attached to the seasons and times and marvels of this world, which are connected to the experience of joy in this life, then that can be a hindrance to obtaining a good rebirth for the future life. Therefore this verse particularly emphasises the point of overcoming those attachments that are related to the time and the seasons.

The erroneous view is that even though there are other sufferings, one can overcome that by experiencing the seasonal good times. The second part of the verse indicates how to overcome that wrong view. To overcome attachment to what we call the marvels of different times, we must consider how a good time is in itself a factor that shortens our life, because each moment that we spend marvelling something is a moment gone from our life. In other words, in each second we enjoy something, we are actually moving closer to our death. Therefore in that regard time is an enemy that is robbing us of our precious life. Therefore marvelling something is not only a waste of time, but it is also actually a big obstacle to our own practice. Contemplating in that way can overcome attachment towards having a good time.

1.2.3. Advice to make effort to practise the path to liberation, giving up attachment to bad actions

This heading is divided into two-subdivisions:

1.2.3.1. Inappropriateness of relying on punitive action regarding what must be done

1.2.3.2. Advice as to the appropriateness of giving up bad actions and to live in seclusion from the very start

1.2.3.1. Inappropriateness of relying on punitive action regarding what must be done

Qualm/objection: Though all that has been said earlier is reasonable, separating from one's family is very hard. Because I cannot bear to be separated from my dear loved ones, I am not able to go into the forest to meditate.

Answer:

*Fool, because you fear separation, [23]
You do not leave home.
Who that is wise does under punishment
What must certainly be done?*

Allowing fear of separation from one's family and loved ones, which hinders oneself from going into seclusion in order to practice the Dharma, is like being a fool. Fear of separation from one's family arises out of attachment. When one does not accept the reality of separation it can be seen as being like a punishment; when death occurs where one will definitely have to be separated from one's loved ones, wealth and everything else. Rather than leaving it to involuntary circumstance when death takes away everything, which is like a punishment, it is best to give up one's attachments to one's home, relatives, loved ones and so forth now, and go into seclusion to practise the Dharma. That would be an action taken up by the wise ones.

It is clear that if one fails to generate an awareness of impermanence, then this erroneous view will definitely prevail. We will always be led into believing that we can hold on to our dear loved ones, our wealth and so forth. By being attached to these objects, one will not accept the fact that one will have to separate from them. The point emphasised here is that death will definitely separate us from all of the objects that we are attached to. If we can voluntarily train our mind in detachment towards the object that we are normally attached to now, then that in itself is a preparation for death. Then at the time of death, one will not experience great suffering. Therefore be wise and train in cultivating detachment now. In general, one's practice can be as simple as generating a kind mind and showing love and concern to others. Then, based on that, one can listen to Dharma teachings, which leaves positive imprints in our mind. We can then put the wisdom one has gained from listening into practise and lead a righteous life. That is the best way to prepare for death so that we don't experience great suffering at the time. Then when the actual separation occurs, we will be able to deal with it.

1.2.3.2. Advice as to the appropriateness of giving up bad actions to live in seclusion from the very start

Seclusion or isolation can refer to an actual place, as mentioned in the instructions on preparing to develop calm abiding. An appropriate place is a quiet place that is free from dangers, distractions, noise and so forth. Such secluded or isolated places are actual places where one develops calm abiding and so forth during retreats.

However the main seclusion being emphasised here is a seclusion of one's mind and seclusion from physical misdeeds. Secluding or isolating one's mind from distractions and conceptual thoughts, and isolating one's body from negative physical actions (what we call bad behaviour) can be practised anywhere. Even living in the environment where we are now, where we are surrounded by other people and a busy life, one can still practise secluding one's mind from conceptual, negative thoughts, and seclude one's physical body by refraining from bad physical behaviours. This can definitely be practised. Therefore one does not need take seclusion or isolation in the literal sense of an isolated place, otherwise one may think, 'If I'm in a city, then I am not able to practise'. That is not the case.

In fact, being in a secluded place is not sufficient if one's mind is continuously distracted. The main point here is to have isolation within one's mind. If someone goes to an actual secluded place to engage in the practice of meditation, they may be practising the physical seclusion where their body is not engaging in normal worldly activities, but if they allow their mind to be continuously distracted, then their mind will not be in seclusion. If their mind is continuously wandering into the town and city, then their mind is in the city. Therefore real seclusion has to be a seclusion of one's mind, keeping it free from engaging in worldly distractions.

Qualm/objection: I will first take care of my worldly affairs by bringing up my son, teaching him all the skills so he can take care of my affairs, and then I will be ready to go into seclusion and meditate.

Answer: That is not appropriate.

*You may think you must obviously [24]
Go to the forest once this has been done.
Whatever you do must be left behind.
What is the value of having done it?*

Having reflected on the meanings of the earlier verses, one comes to the point where one feels that one must definitely go into seclusion to meditate and practise, but then one thinks, 'Before doing that I need to have my affairs in order. If I have a son, I need to raise him well and teach him all the right ways of dealing with worldly activities. Then I will be able to place my affairs in the hands of my son, and then I'll be free to go off and meditate and practise the Dharma'.

The verse refutes that, indicating that it is not appropriate to have such a view. Even though you may plan so that you can go into seclusion when you have settled all your affairs, such as bringing up your son and so forth, all of those worldly affairs that need to be taken care of have to come to an end. In other words, there is no real lasting effect of completing anything worldly. Therefore since all worldly activities themselves come to an end, and all the gains from worldly activities also have to come to an end at the time of death, there is no real value in obtaining the gains from worldly activities.

That being the case, rather than spending so much time and energy in trying to settle worldly affairs, which have no real valued end result, and which have to be left behind anyway, it is far better to put one's time and

energy into engaging in the practice of the Dharma from the very start, and practise detachment. Furthermore, worldly activities involve trying to subdue one's enemies and trying to please one's friends or close ones, which is never-ending. One can never completely please one's close ones and so-called enemies can never really be subdued. As soon as one enemy is subdued, another enemy arises. Therefore, one can spend one's whole life trying to subdue one's enemies and please one's friends, trying to settle what can never be settled.

Another fact is that even though one's plan is to complete all one's worldly activities so that one has time to go out to meditate and practise in seclusion, in reality death could happen at any time. It is a fact that death does not have a specific time and can occur at any given time. When death will occur can never be predicted for any one person and it could happen at any time. So even though one may have a plan in one's mind, death may already approach before being able to accomplish that plan, which means that one would not have had the time to practice the Dharma in seclusion. Therefore this verse is emphasising that one should overcome that erroneous view of settling one's worldly affairs first before going into seclusion. Rather, one should start from the very beginning.

The analogy that is given portrays the similarity of our actions to washing spoiled fruit in order to use it. If it is spoiled, then no matter how much you wash it you will still be unable to consume it, so why waste energy in trying to clean it. It is better to throw it out when one notices that it is spoilt and no good, isn't it?

1.3. The benefits of meditating on impermanence

Doubt: Having a sense of strong attachment to the 'I' and 'mine', there is a fear that arises from actually committing oneself to go into seclusion.

*Whoever with certainty has [25]
The thought, 'I am going to die,'
Having completely relinquished attachment,
Why would they fear even the Lord of Death?*

This verse overcomes an erroneous view or doubt, which is that having considered the great importance of going into seclusion, one hesitates to go because of the fear of attachment to what we call the self or 'I', and to the belongings, which are what is called 'mine'. Reflecting on the reality of death can also overcome the fears that are related to the attachments of what is called 'I' and 'mine'.

The best antidote to overcome the fears in relation to 'I' and 'mine' is to meditate on impermanence, particularly on death and impermanence. Reflecting on all the earlier indications about death: how death is certain, but the time of death is uncertain and that death can occur at any time, one then will naturally come to terms with accepting death. When one reaches that point, then that will naturally overcome the fears in relation to the self and everything else that is related to the self, i.e. belongings. The fear of death itself is a strong attachment to what is called a self, so when one comes to terms with accepting death, that naturally has the effect on being

able to let go of what we consider as our self. Meditating on death and impermanence will naturally reduce attachment to the self in relation to the body and the belongings; one will overcome the fears in relation to the self and belongings, which includes attachments to relationships and so forth. Thus one will develop the courage to be able to go into seclusion and meditate, giving up one's home and so forth. By doing so one will overcome not only the fears that are related just to the self and to belongings, but death itself and what will happen after death.

These are the crucial points that are summarised in this chapter, which is to contemplate and meditate upon death and impermanence. As one meditates on death and impermanence, then the mind becomes fearless and more courageous, and able to face any kind of circumstance that involves practising the Dharma, whether it be going into seclusion or whatever else necessary. When death itself is experienced, it is said that there will actually be fearlessness in one's mind. In fact, instead of fear, there will be a joy, which the teachings indicate is similar to the joy of a child going back home.

In summary the explanation in the text places emphasis on the importance of meditating on death and impermanence by recalling the various types of meditations that help to bring that awareness of death and impermanence, such as thinking about the certainty of death and the uncertainty of its timing. Nothing but a spiritual practice of the Dharma helps at the time of death. So when we contemplate death in these various ways we develop a firm ground or basis on which to generate all the realisations on the path. Then the text quotes from Geshe Potowa who said that 'since the path to generating insights is blocked until an awareness of death and impermanence has arisen in the mind, continually meditate on course and subtle impermanence'. So Geshe Potowa is emphasising the point that without an awareness of death and impermanence, it is impossible to gain other further realisations along the path. Therefore it is crucial to develop that awareness in one's mind, which then serves as the basis to develop other realisations.

It is customary in Sanskrit or Tibetan texts to have the chapter's name at the end. Therefore the concluding lines in the actual root text are:

*This is the first chapter of the Four Hundred on
the Yogic Deeds, showing the means to abandon the
belief in permanence*

The commentary likewise explains that this concludes the first chapter on generating awareness of impermanence. The main obstacle to generating an awareness of impermanence is a the wrong view or belief in permanence. Therefore this chapter has dealt with overcoming the erroneous view of permanence. That concludes this chapter.

Next week will be a discussion evening, so please engage in a meaningful and good discussion. After that there will be the exam, so prepare for the exam so you can do it well.

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DISCUSSION

NAME:

BLOCK:

2

WEEK:

5

16TH MAY 06

MARK:

1. 'It is cowardly to fear death, and brave not to fear death'. Discuss.
2. Compare the two perspectives [Buddhist and worldly] of gain and loss in this life.
3. What is wrong with engaging in some small non-virtue in order to gain benefit and pleasure now? Give an example to support your answer.
4. What is wrong with thinking 'I will have a long life'?
5. How is an understanding of subtle impermanence possible if it's imperceptible?
6. List the four points of impermanence taught by Lord Buddha.
7. In general terms, explain the point of the verses dealing with the appropriateness and inappropriateness of having grief when someone dies.
8. What is it about attachment that causes us pain?
9. How does one train to be able to deal with separation of a loved one?
10. '*...once I have my worldly affairs in order then I will have time to go off and meditate and practice the Dharma.*' Discuss this and other possible wrong ideas about making priorities in life. Furthermore, can worldly activities / city life and seclusion / isolation be mutually inclusive?

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EXAM

NAME:

BLOCK:

2

WEEK:

6

23RD MAY 06

MARK:

/29

1. 'It is cowardly to fear death, and brave not to fear death'. Discuss. [2]

2. Compare the two perspectives [Buddhist and worldly] of gain and loss in this life. [4]

3. What is wrong with engaging in some small non-virtue in order to gain benefit and pleasure now? Give an example to support your answer. [3]

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4. How is an understanding of subtle impermanence possible if it's imperceptible? [3]

5. List the four points of impermanence taught by Lord Buddha. [4]

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6. In general terms, explain the point of the verses dealing with the appropriateness and inappropriateness of having grief when someone dies. [2]

7. What is it about attachment that causes us pain? [4]

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8. How does one train to be able to deal with separation of a loved one? [3]

9 '*...once I have my worldly affairs in order then I will have time to go off and meditate and practice the Dharma.*' Discuss this and other possible wrong ideas about making priorities in life. Furthermore, can worldly activities / city life and seclusion / isolation be mutually inclusive? [4]