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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*

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As usual we set a good motivation for listening to the teachings such as, 'In order to benefit all mother sentient beings and liberate them from all suffering, I need to achieve enlightenment. For that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice as best as I can'.

## **CHAPTER XII REFUTING THE TRUE EXISTENCE OF THAT WHICH IS VIEWED**

The chapter has two main subdivisions:

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

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

This is subdivided into three main categories:

- 1.1. Why most ordinary people do not follow this teaching
- 1.2. Exposition of good explanations in brief
- 1.3. Advising those who seek emancipation to adopt good explanations

#### **1.1. Why most ordinary people do not follow this teaching**

This heading is subdivided into four:

- 1.1.1. Difficulty of finding a listener with the prerequisite qualities
- 1.1.2. Difficulty of understanding the meaning of the fundamental mode of existence
- 1.1.3. The profound is not taught for the sake of argument
- 1.1.4. Showing the comparative subtlety and coarseness of our own and others' teaching

##### **1.1.1. Difficulty of finding a listener with the prerequisite qualities**

This heading refers to finding a listener with the prerequisite qualities for listening, in particular to the subtle teaching of emptiness.

The three subdivisions of this category are:

- 1.1.1.1. Prerequisite qualities of the listener
- 1.1.1.2. Disadvantages of not possessing the prerequisite qualities
- 1.1.1.3. Eliminating arguments

##### **1.1.1.1. PREREQUISITE QUALITIES OF THE LISTENER**

Whether or not we are able to grasp and gain a deep understanding of emptiness is of course up to individual propensities. However at the very least we can feel fortunate about the fact that we have definitely heard unmistakable teachings describing emptiness. That is something we can rejoice in and feel happy about.

*Question:* Even though you have explained selflessness very clearly and extensively and the Tathagata fully understood and gave instruction on it, why do most people not follow this teaching?

*Answer:* Although the one who formulated it and those who elucidate it may be the perfect embodiment of greatness, a listener with great qualities is extremely hard to find.

It is rare indeed for someone to have a profound understanding of emptiness and then be able to explain it, but what is even rarer is a listener who has the qualities of being able to listen to such a teaching.

*Question:* What qualities does one need?

*Answer:*

*An unprejudiced, intelligent and interested  
Listener is called a vessel.* 276

*Neither the teacher's nor the student's  
Good qualities will be taken as faults.*

The first verse of the chapter covers the qualities that a listener of the profound view of emptiness needs. It also refers to a listener of any Dharma teachings. There are five qualities that a listener should have, and it is important that we pay attention to these qualities and check to see if we possess them, and, if not try to acquire them.

When people wish to go and listen to teachings from different sources, my main advice is that it is fine if you listen to teachings from other teachers. However it is important that you maintain whatever Dharma teachings you have already understood, and use them to gauge the validity of what one hears from other sources. The most important thing is not to lose whatever wisdom one has gained from the teachings one has already received, and to use them as the basis for receiving other teachings. If one goes to different teachers to further one's understanding, and if they are authentic sources then that is great, as it adds onto one's understanding and knowledge. One must be careful, however, not to lose what one has already obtained and achieved. That is very important.

If one does not have a sound basis and goes to different teachings, then the fault that could occur is that one may have doubts and uncertainty about what one has already heard before, while not acquiring any real new knowledge and clarity. As that may confuse one's mind, one must be very careful.

To return to the specific qualities needed by a listener, the text says:

One should be unprejudiced, without attachment to one's own position or aversion to others' positions.

1. *A mind free of prejudice:* One of the very important points is having a mind free of prejudice. That means, as explained here, not being strongly attached to one's own position (meaning one's own doctrine or one's own teachings) while generating aversion towards the positions of others. This is explained very clearly here. What we can explicitly understand for our personal practice is that we should be free from attachment to our own position, and aversion to the doctrine of others. What this also implies indirectly is that whatever teaching one listens to, one should use it as a practice to overcome attachment and aversion within oneself.

*Heart of the Middle Way says:*

One will never know peace

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While prejudice afflicts the mind.

As the text explains in these two lines, one will never know peace while prejudice afflicts the mind. One can relate the peace referred to here as the general peace of mind, or the peace of nirvana, the state of liberation. However it can also apply to the understanding of emptiness, as naturally abiding nirvana or peace is said to be emptiness. Therefore what is being implied here is that for as long as one holds prejudice in one's mind the realisation of emptiness cannot be obtained. Thus one must free one's mind from prejudice in order to gain the profound understanding of emptiness. Furthermore, whatever teaching one listens to has to serve the purpose of combating and overcoming the delusions in one's mind.

As the great masters have mentioned over and over again, when a teaching serves to subdue the mind by serving as an opponent to the delusions in one's mind, then the teachings have worked for oneself.

As the commentary says:

If one is not unprejudiced one will fail to understand a good explanation [so one must have an unprejudiced mind] because of thinking it is someone else's.

If one is prejudiced towards the teacher then that element of prejudice comes with the delusion of aversion. If one has an aversion towards a teacher then one will never be able to really gain knowledge from them, because there will always be the blockage of not being open to receiving the qualities of the teaching. Thus by being prejudiced, which results in aversion towards the expounder of the teaching, one will not derive the benefits of their knowledge.

2. *Intelligence*: Furthermore one has to have a keen interest, and intelligence.

One must have the intelligence to distinguish between good and bad explanations, otherwise one may reject correct explanations and adopt incorrect ones.

This is in line with what I mentioned earlier about the personal advice I give to people who want to go and listen to other teachers. As I mentioned there, it is fine to go off and listen to different teachers, but one has to have a good foundation within oneself, otherwise the fault mentioned here would arise.

3. *Having interest*: As the commentary explains:

A keen interest in good explanations is needed, for without that one will make no effort and simply be like the lifeless picture of a human being.

A portrait of a person will always remain a portrait, and if one does not have a keen interest in good explanations, or go out of one's way to gain any qualities or so forth one would be like a lifeless picture of a person.

4 and 5. *Being appreciative and attentive to the teacher and the teaching*: As the text says:

One should appreciate and be attentive to the teaching and the teacher.

In the Tibetan word for 'appreciate' there is an element of respect. So appreciation can also refer to respect.

A listener with these five qualities is said to be a vessel for the teaching. Someone with all these attributes will recognize the teacher's good qualities and fully understand the clarity and orderliness of the teaching, as well as the good intentions of other listeners. The teacher's lack of self-interest and the like will not be seen as faults and other than as they are, but only as virtues. Nor will the good qualities of the listeners be construed as faults.

When a listener has these five qualities then they will be able to anticipate the good qualities of the teacher and thus be fully able to understand the clarity, the orderliness, and the sequence of the teachings. Thus they will be able to relate to the teaching in a clear way. Without the five qualities one would not be able to derive the essence of the teaching from the teacher. If the teacher has the right qualities, but the listeners lack the five qualities then even the teacher's good qualities will be seen as faults, rather than as being able to benefit others. Whereas if the listener has these five qualities then even what are seeming faults can be seen as qualities. Thus there would only be of benefit for the listeners.

At this point one can also relate these five qualities of the listener to the qualities of the disciple that are mentioned in the Lam Rim teachings, such being free from the three faults and acquiring the six mental intentions. As mentioned earlier with other topics what is explained here in the *Four Hundred Verses* is related to the Lam Rim topics. It is very useful if we can see that relationship and then try to practice them hand in hand.

#### 1.1.1.2. DISADVANTAGES OF NOT POSSESSING THE PREREQUISITE QUALITIES

Although the teacher may be perfect, if the listeners lack the prerequisite qualities, they will not recognize their own faults but will consider faults as virtues and virtues as faults.

*He explained existence and its causes, 277*  
*The means to peace and peace itself.*  
*What people do not understand*  
*Is seen as the Subduer's [fault].*

The specific explanation of the faults, of the listeners not possessing the prerequisite qualities are explained in this section. For example, if I were to explain the faults of attachment and desire it would be hard for some to accept, and they wouldn't be really happy about it. But if they were to hear about the qualities of desire and attachment then that's something that would be very interesting, and they would be really happy to take that as being good advice.

The Subduer taught about worldly existence in the form of the five contaminated and suffering aggregates and about true sources, the cause of worldly existence.

This quote from the text relates to the first line of the verse. For us human beings worldly existence is the five contaminated and suffering aggregates, and the true sources are the causes for those who dwell in the worldly existence. Thus this first line covers the first two of the four noble truths, true suffering and true origination. True suffering in relation to living beings is the suffering that is experienced in relation to the contaminated

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aggregates, which are in the nature of suffering and are thus called true suffering. The causes for the contaminated aggregates are delusions and karma, which are true originations.

He taught about true paths, the means to peace, such as the eightfold path of the Exalted, and also about peace liberation and nirvana.

The list of the eightfold path of the Exalted is 1) correct view, 2) correct thought, 3) correct speech, 4) correct action, 5) correct livelihood, 6) correct effort, 7) correct mindfulness and 8) correct meditative stabilisation. The noble eightfold path includes the three higher trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom. The causes for peace or liberation, and the path leading to that is, as explained here, the eightfold path and so forth.

The main cause to achieve liberation is the three trainings, which are, as mentioned earlier, the training of morality, the training of meditative concentration and the training of wisdom. It is very important that we relate to these to our practice. In thinking about morality, one needs to find out what it is. How can one practise morality? What is meditative concentration? In this way we try to understand morality, meditative concentration and wisdom, and try to apply the understanding to our practice. It is said that wisdom leads us to gaining liberation. Contemplating how to obtain wisdom is crucial for our practice, for without wisdom it would be very hard for us to gain the further qualities and intelligence that are the causes for obtaining liberation.

Just by simply focusing on an object like the breath and being in a quiet meditative state, cannot in itself increase qualities in the mind. The three trainings refer particularly to the three higher trainings, or the three extra trainings. The higher training of wisdom relates to the wisdom of gaining special insight, the higher training of concentration relates to obtaining calm abiding and the higher training of morality refers to taking vows such as the self liberation vows and other vows based on that. Thus engaging in these three trainings becomes the ultimate means for obtaining the highest goals of liberation and enlightenment.

All three higher trainings are dependent on each other, and the later trainings are all related to the earlier trainings. In order to obtain special insight in relation to selflessness or emptiness one must first obtain the state of calm abiding, because without attaining calm abiding there is no possibility of attaining special insight. In order to achieve calm abiding one must first train in meditative concentration, so as to be able to concentrate, and thus further develop meditative concentration. To obtain calm abiding, one must first train in morality because without a moral basis one cannot attain calm abiding.

With a lack of morality a person is completely distracted and immersed in indulging themselves in the sensual pleasures. When one is completely immersed in the sensual pleasures, the mind is constantly busy with excitement. Thus, without morality there is no possibility for the mind to withdraw and concentrate, because it is always influenced by the excitement of sensual pleasures. To be able to sit and meditate one needs a solid foundation on which to be able to concentrate; one must

refrain from the very gross levels of sensual pleasures that distract the mind, and this is done by observing certain vows, and abiding by ethical codes. When we refrain from actively indulging physically, then we are mentally withdrawing from those pleasures, and thus the mind is able to concentrate.

When one engages in concentration, one must first of all deal with the gross level of excitement within meditative concentration. Being able to distinguish and overcome the gross levels of distraction can be done by developing calm abiding. Single-pointed concentration is being able to focus on an object single-pointedly for as long as one wishes. However there are still very subtle levels of distraction or excitement within oneself which can be overcome only by obtaining special insight. These subtle distractions are basically the two types of grasping, which are grasping at the self and grasping at phenomena. These two graspings are only overcome by acquiring special insight. That is how the three higher trainings subdue the mind so that one can achieve liberation.

He taught the four noble truths for those who seek liberation, but ordinary people who make no effort to hear, think and meditate are unaware that they do not possess all the qualities of a suitable vessel. Whatever they fail to understand correctly, they see as the Subduer's fault, saying he did not explain it in sufficient detail.

One must really pay attention to this, and reflect and see how a lack of understanding of the teaching is not the Buddha's fault. This does not relate solely to the time of the Buddha. When we look into our present day situation we hear many people making critical comments about a teacher. These people may go to a teaching given by scholarly geshe who have studied a lot, and who really know their subject. When they listen to the teacher these people complain that the teacher does not know how to teach, implying that the teacher lacks knowledge of the subject. One must understand that those who make these comments and complaints about real scholars are actually showing that what is really lacking is the ability from the listener's side to clearly understand what is being taught. Because they don't see that as a fault the blame goes to the teacher who, they say, doesn't have the skill or the knowledge to teach.

However, merely that does not mean the Teacher is to blame. A blind person's inability to see is not the sun's fault.

Explicitly, the Teacher being referred to here is the Buddha, and as he has an omniscient mind, he has the capacity, the skilful means, and the knowledge to propound the teaching exactly in accordance with the listener's capacity. Thus the Teacher, the Subduer, or the Buddha has full knowledge and understanding. However listeners who have not even the slightest qualities to reflect upon and grasp the teaching, might see it as the Subduer or the Buddha lacking the knowledge or skill of teaching.

As the analogy clearly illustrates, a blind person's inability to see is not the sun's fault. If a blind person cannot see in broad daylight they cannot say that there is not enough light to see. The fault lies in the blind person

not being able to see and not the fault of the sun not shining forth with enough light. The analogy is to be understood thus: those who are blind with ignorance lack the wisdom, and their lack of understanding is not the fault of the teacher who has the full qualities.

### 1.1.1.3. ELIMINATING ARGUMENTS

This is subdivided into two:

1.1.1.3.1. Proving the Subduer's omniscience

1.1.1.3.2. Showing that others' teachers are not authentic

#### **1.1.1.3.1. PROVING THE SUBDUER'S OMNISCIENCE**

This heading has three subdivisions

1.1.1.3.1.1. Appropriateness of being glad about the teaching of emptiness which annihilates suffering and its sources

1.1.1.3.1.2. Why there is no liberation in any teaching other than the Teacher's

1.1.1.3.1.3. Means to gain certainty regarding extremely hidden matters taught by the Teacher

#### **1.1.1.3.1.1. Appropriateness of being glad about the teaching of emptiness which annihilates suffering and its sources**

Even from the outline one can derive the meaning that the teaching of emptiness relates to gaining an understanding of the wisdom of emptiness. Once gained, this understanding annihilates suffering and its sources, and that relates to the first two noble truths.

*Assertion:* Although the Subduer's discussion of high rebirth is extremely clear, we do not understand or approve of his discussion of definite goodness, since the teaching that everything is without inherent existence refutes the very nature of things.

*Answer:*

*These strange people all agree that by  
Giving up everything one attains nirvana.  
For what reason do they dislike  
That which puts an end to all?* 278

The assertion is from the non-Buddhist schools who appreciate one part of the Buddha's teachings. However when it comes to the explanation of emptiness, and how things lack inherent existence, they are not able to understand that.

It is of course is extremely clear that even the non-Buddhist schools assert higher rebirth in god realms and so forth, and that they also have a particular means to achieve these higher rebirths. However even though they talk about liberation, the non-Buddhist schools do not present a clear method that leads to liberation. Also the liberation that they actually talk about does not even approach the liberation that is explained in the Buddhist teachings.

The Buddha explains clearly the method for obtaining liberation, which is gaining the realisation of emptiness. Through gaining the realisation of emptiness then the main cause of samsara, which is samsara itself as well as the causes for samsara, (which are the first two noble truths, the true sufferings and true originations) is overcome. True origination, in particular, is completely annihilated by the wisdom realising emptiness, and without the wisdom realising emptiness there is no possibility of removing true originations.

These strange Samkhyas, Vaisesikas and the like, who believe in liberation, all agree that one attains nirvana by giving up attachment to everything associated with disturbing emotions, such as pleasure, pain and so forth.

The non-Buddhist schools such as the Samkhyas and the Vaisesikas do believe in liberation and they also believe that one must give up attachment and all the disturbing emotions in order to attain liberation. So, they agree with us as far as accepting liberation, and that one must overcome disturbing emotions to obtain liberation, are concerned. Where we differ is explained in the following.

The second part of the explanation given in the text points out the absurdity of not liking the explanation of emptiness:

Why do they dislike it when the person and aggregates are said to be empty of existence by way of their own entities? The understanding of this destroys all that is associated with disturbing emotions. Therefore they should be glad.

This is pointing out the absurdity of, on the one hand, accepting liberation and that one must overcome all the disturbing emotions to achieve liberation, but not accepting a specific method of overcoming or annihilating the disturbing emotions or delusions. What they don't accept is the lack of inherent existence in relation to persons and phenomena. For as long as the grasping at the self of person and phenomena remain the delusions that are the obstacle to obtaining liberation will remain in the mental continuum. Thus liberation cannot be obtained.

What is being pointed out here is that if one wishes to achieve liberation then why wouldn't one naturally want to adopt the ultimate method for gaining liberation, which is the ultimate method for eliminating the disturbing emotions and delusions within one's mind? As the teachings explain, grasping at the inherent existence of a person is grasping at the self, and grasping at the inherent existence of phenomena, such as the aggregates and so forth, is grasping at phenomena. For as long as that grasping is there the delusions will remain in the mind. And in order to overcome that one must gain an understanding of the lack of inherent existence in relation to both the person and phenomena. That understanding of the lack of inherent existence then becomes the wisdom, the knowledge that is the direct antidote for overcoming the subtle obscurations in the mind and thus obtaining liberation.

As the commentary quotes from the sutra;

Sutra says:

In nirvana there are no phenomena.

Whatever does not exist then never existed.

The suffering of those with ideas of existence and non-existence

Who act accordingly will not be pacified.

Since only the Buddha's words contain undistorted statements about suchness, and Samkhyas and so forth do not make even the slightest mention of it, one should recognize it [the Buddhas words] as a unique teaching.

### 1.1.1.3.1.2. Why there is no liberation in any teaching other than the Teacher's

*Question:* If these strange people all agree that one attains nirvana by giving up everything, what difference is there between you and the Followers?

*Answer:* They are different in that they merely have the wish to give everything up but do not know how to do so.

*How will one who does not know  
The means to give it up, do so?* 279  
*Certainly, therefore, the Subduer said  
There is no peace in any other [teaching].*

How can those belonging to other systems give up cyclic existence while they cling to the wrong methods? They do not know that the means to give it up is to understand that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence. Therefore certainly with this in mind the Subduer said, "The first practitioner of virtue has come about thus. The second and third have come about thus. The fourth has come about thus. Others' doctrines lack such practitioners of virtue." On account of this he said, "There is no peace in any teaching other than this."

This is referring to the stages of realising emptiness that are gained along the path. In essence, what is being explained here is how the Buddha's teaching clearly explains the method of gaining the realisation of emptiness. His clear explanation of how things are empty of inherent existence is the ultimate method for attaining liberation. This, in summary, is what is being explained here. As the great master Nagarjuna explained, without gaining the realisation of emptiness there is no possibility of gaining liberation.

Because the non-Buddhist schools do not have any explanations of emptiness there could not be any realisations gained from an understanding of emptiness, and thus liberation cannot be obtained. The uniqueness of the Buddha's teaching is in the explanation of voidness or emptiness, which is the ultimate means for gaining liberation, and the only way to gain liberation is explained clearly in the Buddha's teachings.

To understand further of how the realisation of emptiness serves as the ultimate technique for attaining liberation: the main obstacle to attaining liberation is the subtle delusion of grasping at a self. For as long as there is a grasping at the self all the faults of samsara of cyclic existence will ensue from that grasping at the self. Thus in order to overcome the grasping at the self one must develop the wisdom that completely contradicts the wrong view of the grasping at the self. The only thing that can completely annihilate grasping at the self is that which completely contradicts that view of grasping at a self. Without overcoming the wrong conception of grasping at the self one cannot overcome the actual grasping at the self itself. Thus to completely overcome the grasping at the self one must have an understanding of selflessness, which is the direct opponent of the wrong view. Thus gaining that realisation of selflessness becomes the ultimate means and technique for completely eradicating the delusions of grasping at a self at the very subtlest level. That then becomes a cause to attain liberation.

### 1.1.1.3.1.3. Means to gain certainty regarding extremely hidden matters taught by the Teacher

*Whoever doubts what the Buddha said  
About that which is hidden  
Should rely on emptiness  
And gain conviction in him alone.* 280

Phenomena can be categorised into three types: obvious phenomena, which can be perceived directly, slightly hidden phenomena, and hidden phenomena.

An example of obvious phenomena is a vase, which is called an obvious phenomena because one does not have to rely on any inference or reasoning in order to perceive it. One basically perceives a vase with the direct perception of the eye-consciousness, and one does not need more than this direct perception to prove the existence of a vase.

However the nature of the vase such as its impermanence or its empty nature cannot be perceived directly with the eye-sense perceptions, or any other direct perceptions. These aspects of the vase are not obvious phenomena, as they can be only perceived through inference or reasoning. Thus they are called slightly hidden phenomena.

The subtleties of karma, which is the subtleties of the cause and effect sequence that takes over many lifetimes is said to be very hidden phenomena. We cannot perceive them through general inference, reasoning or logic. Rather one must refer to the Buddha's teachings and accept the Buddha as an omniscient mind. We can then gauge the authenticity of the Buddha's teachings and accept the workings of the subtleties of karma on that basis.

I will leave the explanation of this for our next session. I covered this particular topic when I taught the tenets.<sup>1</sup> From my side I felt that I gave quite a good explanation, and soon after that His Holiness visited and he referred exactly to the points that we had covered earlier in our sessions. It would be good if you could refer to this section of the tenets notes and then maybe in the next session when we come to the explanation of the points it will be easier.

The three types of phenomena, how one perceives these different levels of phenomena, how they relate to the citations of the Buddha's teachings, how it is free from the three types of reasonings and the three types of investigations are actually very important points which come up in many other parts of the teachings. So it is very useful and important that we can have a good understanding of this.

*Transcribed from tape by Jenny Brooks  
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Edited Version  
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<sup>1</sup> On 19 June 2001.

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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*

23 October 2007

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As usual we sit in a proper, comfortable position and set an appropriate motivation in our mind such as, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice'.

## **1.1. Why most ordinary people do not follow this teaching**

### **1.1.1. Difficulty of finding a listener with the prerequisite qualities**

#### **1.1.1.3. ELIMINATING ARGUMENTS**

##### **1.1.1.3.1. PROVING THE SUBDUER'S OMNISCIENCE (CONT.)**

###### **1.1.1.3.1.3. Means to gain certainty regarding extremely hidden matters taught by the Teacher**

This heading explains how to gain a certainty about extremely hidden phenomena. As explained last week, extremely hidden phenomena are phenomena or objects that cannot be seen directly with our senses or understood through inference. So, to establish their existence we have to rely upon the speech of valid beings such as an enlightened being, e.g. citations from the Buddha. Thus 'extremely hidden matters' refers to very subtle phenomena.

*Question:* If he is omniscient he must have super-knowledge of hidden things such as the size of Mount Meru and the continents, but how can one be sure of that?

*Answer:* One can ascertain it with the help of inference.

*Whoever doubts what the Buddha said* 280  
*About that which is hidden*  
*Should rely on emptiness*  
*And gain conviction in him alone.*

The word 'omniscient' at the beginning of the question refers to the Buddha's omniscient mind. This means that the Buddha is able to see all existence even in its subtlest aspects. For example when we look at an object such as a vase, we see it as a concrete object, but our cognition fails to see the subtle atoms within the object. Whereas when the Buddha looks at any object, he sees it in its entirety, even to the subtlest level of the smallest atoms.

In order for an object to exist as a concrete object, it has to gather all the causes and conditions. Seeing things at their subtlest level refers not only to seeing the subtlest atoms, but also to seeing where each atom may have been gathered from, and at what time and from which place it was gathered. All of these subtleties are seen simultaneously when an object is viewed by an omniscient mind. That is because there are no obstructions whatsoever in the Buddha's mind. That is what 'omniscient mind' refers to. Whereas an ordinary sentient being's mind is filled with obstructions, either to liberation or to omniscience, and having those obstructions prevents ordinary beings from seeing the subtlest level of phenomena.

## **Establishing the validity of extremely hidden phenomena**

In the answer to the question posed at the beginning of this heading, 'inference' refers to understanding hidden phenomena. We can see the physical aspect of a clock directly with our eyes, with our visual perception. However, we cannot see the impermanence of the clock directly with our eyes. For that we have to rely on another factor, which is inference. Inference refers to cognising an object by depending on logical reasoning. Therefore that which can be perceived through logical reasons is perceived through inference. Those students who have been coming to classes for some time will recall that we covered mind and cognition when we studied *lo rig*, which is basically about mind and awareness, while the explanations according to the Prasangika point of view of awareness and cognition were covered when we studied the Middle-Way text, the *Madhyamakavatara*.

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

One might wonder whether what the Buddha has said is true or not regarding the size of the abodes, bodies and lifespans of the six kinds of gods of the Desire Realm and so forth from whom one is separated by time and place, and regarding the size of the human physical world and so on, all of which are hidden to common beings.

We might doubt whether things that are not directly seen by human beings are true or not. Thus one may doubt whether the Buddha's explanations of different realms e.g. the god realms, the size of the world, the different universes and so forth are in fact actually true. So:

To dispel such doubts one should take as example the fact that the features of the two truths which are very subtle and difficult to understand—the teaching that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence together with the feasibility of all actions and agents—are actually as he explained.

One must try to really pay attention and get to the nitty-gritty of that explanation to understand it.

Understanding through this that the extremely hidden things he taught are just as he described, one should gain conviction that he alone is omniscient.

The Buddha explained the two truths, which are slightly hidden phenomena, comprehensively and with great clarity, and we can ascertain the validity of what he said with our own reasoning. As he taught about slightly hidden phenomena with such accuracy and clarity we can therefore accept what taught about extremely hidden phenomena.

As the commentary further explain:

Having ascertained dependent arising free from fabricated extremes through correct reasoning without relying on scriptural citations as proof, one should ascertain extremely hidden things relying on the Buddha's words as reason.

Dharmakirti said that one uses citations from the Buddha's teachings as a reasoning to understand other hidden phenomena. One can cite the Buddha's explanations of how all products are impermanent, and all phenomena are selfless as a means of gauging the validity of other parts of his teachings. One can assert the validity of all products being impermanent and all phenomena being selfless through one's own reasoning, e.g. we can give a valid reason why products are impermanent. Thus what Dharmakirti is explaining is that by establishing the validity of slightly hidden phenomena, one can validate extremely hidden phenomena. That is Dharmakirti's main point.

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## Establishing the validity of slightly hidden phenomena

How can we validate slightly hidden phenomena through our own reasoning?

Do you think that products being impermanent and phenomena being selfless can be validated through reasoning? What do you think? Why are products impermanent? What would the reason be?

*Student: Because they are causes.*

Being a cause and being impermanent are equally subtle, so how can you use having a cause as a reason to prove that products are impermanent? You have to give a reason such as, sounds are impermanent, because they are a functional phenomenon, for someone who has understood products to be something, but who has not yet realised that they are impermanent.

### Why is it important to establish a reason?

One should be able to readily assert a logical reasoning as cited in the teachings to prove, for example, that products are impermanent. Without being able to establish those reasons, one could not then be able to understand emptiness, because emptiness itself is understood by establishing a reasoning.

When a logical reason is given to establish that products are impermanent, then the wrong conception of products being permanent is removed. Likewise when the reasons for phenomena being selfless are established, then the wrong conception of viewing phenomena as having a self is removed. In other words, when you prove that products are not permanent, and that phenomena do not have a self then you prove that such conceptions are wrong conceptions.

Thus when the correct reason for products being impermanent is established, the wrong conception of grasping at permanence is harmed. That grasping at permanence is harmed with the correct reasoning of products being impermanent. Likewise, when the correct reason for phenomena being selfless is established, then the wrong conception in relation to that grasping to a self is harmed. It is harmed by establishing the correct reasons for phenomena to be selfless, which by its very establishment contradicts the perception of grasping at a self. It is by removing that wrong conception that one gains the correct view establishing selflessness and emptiness.

What that further establishes is that if these wrong conceptions such as grasping at permanence and grasping at an inherently existent self, are harmed, then through the appropriate antidote such a wrong conception can be eradicated from one's mind.

### Applying this logic to specific examples

When the possibility of abandoning the wrong conception of grasping at the self is seen, then it is possible to establish the possibility of obtaining liberation. This is said to be the sound reasoning that establishes liberation, or nirvana. In establishing that possibility one first has to see that it is possible to eradicate the wrong conception of grasping at the self, which obstructs the attainment of liberation or nirvana. In order for that to be established one must first establish that the conception of grasping at a self is a wrong conception.

The validity of nirvana or liberation is established through sound logical reasoning that eradicates the wrong conception of grasping at the self. Furthermore, when the two types of grasping at an inherent extent self, i.e. grasping

at the self of person and grasping at the self of phenomena, have been eradicated then what still remains is a residue of their imprints. These imprints cause the faulty appearance of phenomena appearing as inherently existent even though one doesn't believe that to be the case. Even though the two types of grasping at the self have already been eradicated, that faulty appearance of inherent existence is still there because of the imprints that have been left in the mind. That obstruction is the obstruction to omniscience, and the faulty appearance can be removed through further development of wisdom, together with perfecting the accumulation of merit. With those two combined, one can completely eradicate the faulty appearance, and obtain the state of omniscience. That is how the state of omniscience or enlightenment can be established through sound reasoning.

When one uses sound and logical reasoning to establish that products are impermanent and that phenomena are selfless, then the attainment of the realisation of impermanence and selflessness proves the validity or incontrovertibility of the Buddha's words. In other words, the Buddha's words are proven to be incontrovertible by gaining the realisations and understanding for oneself. When one gains that understanding for oneself then that automatically proves the Buddha's words to be incontrovertible.

When the Buddha's words in relation to the impermanence of products and the lack of an inherently existent self of phenomena are established well, then one can very easily establish the validity of obtaining a high status in future lives, such as obtaining rebirth as a god or a human. As far as our perception goes, those mundane attainments in cyclic existence are extremely hidden phenomena, because of the fact that it takes many causes and conditions to obtain the high status of being reborn in the god realms or the human realm. Many specific karmic causes and conditions have to take be acquired, such as training in morality and generosity and so forth, in order to attain the goal of a high status rebirth. Because of those subtleties the causes for a good rebirth are extremely hidden phenomena, even though it is a mundane attainment.

When citations from the Buddha in relation to the ultimate goals of liberation and enlightenment are established through sound logical reasoning, then other extremely hidden phenomena can be established automatically, because of the fact that when a very high level of attainment is established through sound reasoning, then mundane goals are easily understood as being valid.

This ultimately proves through logical reasons that the Buddha, is incontrovertibly a valid being; meaning a being who is able to perceive all levels of phenomena directly and who, with compassion, is solely devoted to benefit all sentient beings. That is what valid being means.

Thus:

Having ascertained dependent arising free from fabricated extremes through correct reasoning without relying on scriptural citations as proof, one should ascertain extremely hidden things relying on the Buddha's words as reason.

Here are the logical reasons that establish the validity of citations from the Buddha's teachings. In the syllogism, 'The citation "through generosity one accrues wealth and through morality one obtains high status" is incontrovertible in its meaning, because the meaning of these words cannot be invalidated by any of the three kinds of cognitions used to investigate them', the predicate is that the citations are valid

or 'incontrovertible', and the reason is 'because it can not be invalidated when investigated using the three kinds of cognitions'. Thus the Buddha's statements can be established as being incontrovertible with those reasons and in that way one generates strong faith in the Buddha.<sup>1</sup>

As the commentary further reads:

Regarding the general presentation of this, the explanations of Dignaga and his spiritual son are like those of the great trailblazers [some other translations use 'charioteers']. In this context objects can be understood through the presentation of four kinds of valid cognition

Dignaga and his spiritual son established two types of cognition: direct cognition and cognition through inference. However the explanation here is based on a text called *Tsiksel* (another teaching on valid cognition) in which four types of valid cognition are established.

These four kinds of valid cognition (which are listed in footnote 9 on page 366) are direct valid cognition, inferential valid cognition, valid cognition through appraisal and valid cognition through scripture. Valid cognition through appraisal refers to establishing or proving that something is valid through the use of examples or analogies. Valid cognition through scripture is what we have been referring to earlier; that citations from the Buddha are valid or incontrovertible. However valid cognition through appraisal and valid cognition through scripture is said to be subsumed into inferential cognition.

#### **1.1.1.3.2. SHOWING THAT OTHERS' TEACHERS ARE NOT AUTHENTIC**

*Those who find it hard to see* 281  
*This world are ignorant of others.*  
*Those who follow them will be*  
*Misled for a very long time.*

While the Buddha is established as being a valid being, because he is able to perceive directly all levels of phenomena (obvious phenomena, hidden phenomena, slightly hidden phenomena and extremely hidden phenomena) with his omniscient mind, teachers or expounders of other doctrines are unable perceive very hidden phenomena. What is being established here is how other beings lack that omniscient ability.

As the commentary reads in explanation of the verse:

Non-Buddhist teachers who have difficulty in discerning even the way coarse cause and effects operate in relation to the physical environment and inhabitants of this world are ignorant regarding other subtle matters.

Here, we can refer to the earlier chapters that went into great detail refuting the non-Buddhist schools' assertions, such as the absurd assertion that certain impermanent phenomena are permanent, the different citations of time, and assertions about a self, partless atoms and so forth. Their assertions show that even coarse phenomena, not to mention the subtleties of reality, are obscured for the expounders of the non-Buddhist theses.

Coarse phenomena, like the physical environment and so forth are mentioned in the commentary as 'physical environment and inhabitants'. So if even the very coarse reality of phenomena is obscured from their view then there is no need to mention not being able to properly establish

the subtleties of phenomena. As the commentary further reads:

People who follow them will thus come under the influence of innate and intellectually formed attitudes which must be given up, and they will be misled for a very long time. Those interested in their own good should leave false teachers.

The term 'innate and intellectually formed attitudes' is in relation to wrong conceptions of the ultimate nature of phenomena. These misconceptions are either innate or intellectually-acquired, and if people cannot give them up, these wrong conceptions will be further reinforced, and thus 'they will be misled for a very long time.'

Innate and intellectually acquired attitudes, specifically refers to the innate and intellectually acquired misconceptions of grasping at the self. These misconceptions have been explained earlier<sup>2</sup>, however to reiterate the main points: Innate grasping means the grasping at a self that we have had from beginningless time as an ordinary person. We didn't acquire it intellectually as we have it naturally within us. Whereas intellectually acquired means that which is acquired through other external sources i.e. doctrines, philosophies and so forth.

One must remember that all of the explanations given here should be taken as personal advice. Even though 'people who follow them', may sound like it is referring to other beings and that we are talking about someone else, in fact, we should take this as personal advice, and not be influenced by innate and intellectually acquired attitudes. As followers of a correct tenet of Buddhism, we do not have intellectually-acquired or intellectually formed wrong conceptions. They would have been removed by adhering to the correct explanations of selflessness, however we still have the innate grasping at a self, and if we allow our attitudes to be influenced by that innate grasping at a self, then we will be misled and liberation and enlightenment will be out of reach for a long time. Thus we who strive to achieve the goals of liberation and enlightenment must be constantly conscientious, and beware of being misled by the wrong conception of, specifically in our case, innate self-grasping.

The last line of the explanation in the commentary is:

They should trust and value the true one.

Again we should take that as personal advice and relate it to our personal practice. Being aware of our situation and our conditions right now, we should rejoice and feel very fortunate that we have come into contact with the unmistakable teachings, and teachers who propound the teachings. It is indeed rare to find teachings that explain how products are impermanent and that all phenomena are selfless. These teachings, being valid, incontrovertible and unmistakable, lead us to the ultimate goals. We must realise that we are extremely fortunate to come into contact with the teachings and the teachers who propound them and feel happy about that. Being aware of that, we must take advantage and try to use our time and energy to understand them, and then put them into practice. On a daily basis we should also make strong aspirational prayers such as, 'In this life and in all future lives may I never be separated from the true sources of the teachings and the teachers who propound these teachings'.

<sup>1</sup> This is covered at greater length in the teaching of 19 June 2001. Also see footnote 8 on page 366 of the text.

<sup>2</sup> See *Madhyamakavatara*, 25 March 2003

While we are extremely fortunate to have these conditions of having the unmistakable teachings and the teachers who explain them in an unmistakable way, it could be easy for us to just take it for granted and not do much with these perfect conditions. What a waste if we were to just let the opportunity go! Rather, we should seize this opportunity to really try and gain an understanding, and then reflect again and again on the teachings that explain selflessness and emptiness. Think about the reasonings the teachings give: why things lack an inherently existent self, establishing how things are selfless and lack a permanent nature. Then, the more we familiarise our mind with the reasonings that are given in the teachings, and reflect upon them and their validity, the stronger the imprint on our mind, and on that basis one day we may be able to gain the actual realisations of selflessness and emptiness. In this way it can be useful for us.

It is very meaningful for us to relate to these teachings while we have the resources and the means to do so and try to really reflect upon them and use them in our daily practice. When we use it for our practice then we can begin to see a shift in our mind and we begin to really have some sort of warm feeling from reflecting on these teachings. The mere fact of reflecting on these teachings can give a confirmation, felt in one's heart, which then becomes very meaningful. Whatever validity we gain in our mind becomes a good experience for us at our level. In order for our practice to be pure and authentic, particularly at our level, it is very important to reflect on the impermanent nature of phenomena, particularly the impermanence of our life.

As we all recall from the Lam Rim teachings, not reflecting on impermanence is one of the main faults of becoming complacent in our Dharma practice, as not reflecting on impermanence will initially make us not even think about the Dharma. Even if we were to think about the Dharma, we might not engage in it. Furthermore, even if we engage in the practice of Dharma, we may not be able to keep its continuity if we don't reflect on impermanence again and again. Continuity and pure Dharma practice do not come about if we don't reflect on impermanence. Thus, to encourage us in our practice initially, and then to secure our practice, and to keep the continuity of our practice, we must all reflect on impermanence again and again.

By reflecting on the teachings and trying to put them into practice, we are able to subdue our delusions. Even on a gross level, if we are able to subdue the manifest level of our delusions, it brings a great relief to our mind. We can immediately experience the positive effect of reducing the intensity of the delusions in our mind, even on a manifest level. That is something which really seems to help our mind; we can see a change and a shift take place in our life. That is something you should be able to experience from your practice.

### **1.1.2. Difficulty of understanding the meaning of the fundamental mode of existence**

This heading which is sub-divided into five:

- 1.1.2.1. Why emptiness is feared
- 1.1.2.2. Faults of impeding others' understanding of emptiness
- 1.1.2.3. Taking care not to lapse from the view of suchness
- 1.1.2.4. Stages leading towards suchness
- 1.1.2.5. Recognising suchness

#### **1.1.2.1. WHY EMPTINESS IS FEARED**

This heading has three sub-divisions:

- 1.1.2.1.1. Why some, although seeking liberation, follow the Forders
- 1.1.2.1.2. Recognising a person who fears emptiness
- 1.1.2.1.3. Why childish people fear emptiness

#### **1.1.2.1.1. WHY SOME, ALTHOUGH SEEKING LIBERATION, FOLLOW THE FORDERS**

*Question:* Why do those who seek liberation follow the Forders? [which refers to non-Buddhist schools, such as the Samkyas]

*Answer:* Because they are afraid to listen to teaching on emptiness.

*The unwise take no delight in letting  
Their mind follow a guide  
Who has done that which is  
Most difficult-attained nirvana.* 282

As mentioned previously, those who are not prepared to hear the teachings on emptiness can easily misinterpret what emptiness means, believing that nothing exists. So when the *Heart Sutra* says that there is 'no form' and so forth, they misinterpret that as saying that no form exists at all, and likewise no other phenomena exist at all. Thinking that nothing exists, and losing all sense of reality, believing that they are losing everything, they develop fear in the mind.

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

To be taken care of by a spiritual friend and go to the city of Nirvana, having rid oneself of the stains of conceiving things as truly existent, is very difficult. Though one with great compassion who did what was difficult to do has come to guide them, unwise people take no delight in letting their minds follow this guide because they fear emptiness.

That is all quite clearly illustrated` and can be understood without further comment.

#### **1.1.2.1.2. RECOGNISING A PERSON WHO FEARS EMPTINESS**

This identifies the type of people would be afraid of emptiness.

*Question:* Who is afraid? [of emptiness]

*Answer:*

*When it is not seen, fear does not begin.  
When seen, it stops completely.  
Thus one can say with certainty:  
Those who know a little are afraid.* 283

As the commentary explains:

People like cowherds, who see neither virtues nor faults in it, can hear about emptiness a hundred times without beginning to feel afraid, because they do not regard it as either beneficial or harmful.

This is very vividly explaining that people who have no concern about whether it is beneficial or not can hear, for example, 'form is empty...' and so forth from the *Heart Sutra* many times, but it doesn't really have any effect on their mind, because they take no personal interest in it and thus don't see any benefit or fault.

As the commentary further reads:

When one perceives emptiness directly through a gradual process of hearing, thinking and meditating,...

This refers to the gradual process of acquiring the realisation of emptiness, which is by first hearing about it through teachings, and then thinking, contemplating and analysing it, and then meditating on it. Through that gradual process one then perceives emptiness directly.

Then:

...fear stops completely because one is free from conceptions of a self which are the cause of fear.

This is really a very important point that one should keep in mind. What causes the fear and where does it come from? It is very explicitly mentioned here that the conception of a truly existent self is the cause of fear. When that is removed all fear naturally subsides. It is the misconception of the self that brings that natural grasping at the self, which promotes that notion of 'me' being very important. The self-interest is always saying, 'me', 'what should I do for myself?' 'What will happen to me?' Thus all the fears come about through having a very strong concern about the 'me' or the 'I'.

As the commentary states:

Thus one can say with certainty that fear arises in people who have only a little knowledge of emptiness.

It is also explained in other teachings that those who are beginning to gain some understanding of emptiness, will initially be fearful. That fear is, in fact, initially seen as a good sign because it means that the explanation of emptiness is doing something to one's mind, that it is beginning to alter one's strong view of an independent and inherently existent self. The initial fear that occurs is said to be from a sense of losing everything. It is said that when Lama Tsong Khapa was giving teachings, one of his disciples started to develop that fear and started to hold on to his monk's shirt. When Lama Tsong Khapa saw this he pointed it out saying, 'That's a good sign', meaning that the disciple is getting something. Of course we cannot relate our meagre understanding of emptiness to the high level of understanding that a direct disciple of Lama Tsong Khapa would have gained. However that sort of external analogy proves that gaining some understanding of emptiness can bring fear to the mind.

The commentary then provides an analogy to illustrate the point:

A well-trained person is not afraid to mount a mad elephant...

The term 'mad elephant' can also refer to a wild elephant. Someone who is trained and is skilled in mounting a mad or a wild elephant, would have no fear because they have mastered the mad elephant mounting technique. Likewise trainees who engage in the gradual process of understanding emptiness by hearing it again and again, reading it, then further analysing the teachings on emptiness, and then using that understanding to contemplate and meditate on it will become skilled in the meaning of selflessness or emptiness, and then all fears in relation to understanding emptiness will cease. Otherwise there might be the fault of not being able to identify the object of negation. When the self is negated, the existing self is completely negated; it is the object of negation – an inherently existent person, and not the person itself – that has to be removed in order to understand emptiness. If the person itself is completely negated, that is an extreme view and thus then those fears and misunderstandings will arise.

...nor is an extremely stupid person.

This refers to a person who does not know the dangers of mad or wild elephants, and who doesn't have the skills of mounting a mad elephant. Such a stupid person would have no fear, but that is dangerous, because there is no knowledge of the risks at all.

Finally:

Yet someone who knows a little about the dangers and benefits involved feels frightened.

Someone who knows about the dangers, who has some skills but is not really skilled yet, would fear mounting a mad elephant. This illustrates that with someone who is in the process of understanding emptiness, and who has had not yet realised emptiness directly, but has some conceptual understanding, may initially have some fear.

The earlier points made in the teaching about valid cognition, and how to prove the Buddha to be a valid being and how to establish the reasoning of obvious, slightly hidden and extremely hidden phenomena were explained in the teachings on *lo rig* (mind and mental factors) and *drup ta* (tenets). It is good to refer to those teachings again to freshen the mind with those explanations.

It is really hard at our level, to validate the possibility of obtaining a good rebirth in a future lifetime. In order to validate and establish that in our mind, and also for others, but especially for oneself in our practice, we need to rely on citations from the Buddha's teachings. Then when we gain an understanding of the Buddha as being a valid being, we can accept his sayings as being valid as well, thus proving to our mind that it is possible to obtain a good rebirth in the next lifetime.

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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*

30 October 2007

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As usual it would be appropriate to set a proper motivation, such as the bodhicitta motivation.

If, when one hears the word bodhicitta one feels emotional to the point of uncontrollable tears, then that would be a good sign of progress. If the mere word 'bodhicitta' alone can instil such a deep emotional feeling within oneself, then the benefit of actually developing bodhicitta can surely be seen.

### 1.1.2.1. WHY EMPTINESS IS FEARED (CONT.)

#### 1.1.2.1.3. WHY CHILDISH PEOPLE FEAR EMPTINESS

*Question:* Why do they fear emptiness?

*Answer:* Because of a lack of familiarity.

This preamble indicates that a lack of familiarity with meditating on emptiness brings about fear.

*Childish beings are certainly only familiar with that which involves them. Because of unfamiliarity they fear that which extricates them.* 284

It is good to further develop the question in the preamble to relate it to one's understanding and practice. If as indicated here, ordinary beings fear emptiness, because of lack of familiarity with it, then what does it mean to be familiar? How does one become familiar with emptiness? Thinking like this makes it a personal quest.

As the commentary explains:

Childish beings are certainly only familiar with innate and intellectually formed conceptions of a self which involve them in cyclic existence.

Innate and intellectually acquired misconceptions of a self have been explained earlier. Ordinary beings are already very familiar with the innate misconception of an inherently existent self, which is further strengthened by the intellectually acquired misconception; it is these mistaken concepts that lead an individual into the cyclic existence. And:

Since such childish beings have no previous familiarity with a teaching that extricates one from the cycle of birth and death, they fear emptiness.

Childish beings are led into cyclic existence because of their familiarity with innate and intellectually acquired misconceptions of a self. As childish beings are constantly engaged and immersed in cyclic existence, they find it difficult when they come up against something that opposes cyclic existence. They will naturally be fearful of losing what they have been familiar with over countless life times.

When one is familiar with something over a long time, then anything opposing that familiarity is difficult to accept. It brings fear because it is difficult to let go of an object that one is very familiar with. To give a contemporary example, for someone who has a drinking habit, the more they drink, the more familiar they become with that habit, and the more familiar with it they are, the more addicted they become.

Trying to overcome the drinking habit then is very difficult, and it is the same with addictions to any other kind of substances. Similarly, at a broader level, as explained in the text, childish or ordinary beings are familiar with cyclic existence, and that which opposes cyclic existence brings about fear, because it is difficult to accept change. As emptiness opposes the root cause of cyclic existence, they therefore fear emptiness.

From our own experience we come to realise that we are very familiar with the pleasures of cyclic existence. When the shortcomings and disadvantages of cyclic existence are explained, and even when we accept the fact that indulging in, and being immersed in the pleasures of cyclic existence keeps us in cyclic existence, it is still very hard to feel a sense of disenchantment with cyclic existence. Even though we know and understand the faults of cyclic existence intellectually, whenever we meet a desirable object we are drawn towards it. We might acknowledge the faults of samsara, and try to distance ourselves from the causes, but still we find it very difficult to avoid it.

It is very important to apply the understanding we get from this explanation to one's daily practice. There are many who claim to have meditated for many years yet don't see much change in their mind, or they may have done other practices for many years, but somehow there is no change. As a consequence, such people may come to the wrong conclusion that the fault lies in the technique of the teaching. What one should come to realise after reflecting on our deeply rooted attachment to samsara, is that it's not the fault of the teachings, but rather the fault lies in not being able to apply the teachings properly. That is what we should identify as being the main fault, not the teaching or the practice itself.

One should derive the main essence of the commentary, which is how the doctrine of emptiness instils fear, why it instils fear, and how the explanation of emptiness is a means to oppose cyclic existence. The wisdom realising emptiness, is the realisation that phenomena don't have an inherently existent self, and that wisdom directly opposes the grasping at an inherently existent self. Emptiness is the direct opposite of the misconception which grasps onto an inherently existing self.

As explained previously, grasping at an inherently existent self is what keeps beings in samsara from lifetime to lifetime. For as long as they grasp at a self they will remain in cyclic existence. That which opposes grasping at the self is the understanding of selflessness. Thus, directly opposing that misconception of an inherently existing self, opposes all the associated misconceptions of cyclic existence. When we understand this, then we come to understand how the wisdom realising selflessness or emptiness is the ultimate technique to free one from cyclic existence.

As to why emptiness instils fear, one must understand that it is because it opposes the misconception of grasping at the self that we are so familiar with, that we so completely are immersed in and hold onto so tightly. At the same time we have no familiarity with the teachings on emptiness. When there is a suggestion that grasping at the self does not exist then that naturally brings fear, as we have a sense of losing what we have. Basically we're not familiar with emptiness, and we are very familiar with grasping at an inherently existing self. So when the teachings on emptiness are presented, that brings about fear.

One should therefore give up doctrines that are wrong and unwholesome.

This refers to those doctrines that oppose the realisation of selflessness. This line also indicates that realised beings will not give teachings on emptiness or selflessness to those who are not receptive to them. Thus one should not give teachings on emptiness to beings that are not receptive to them

#### 1.1.2.2. FAULTS OF IMPEDING OTHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF EMPTINESS

This subdivision refers to the faults that exist if one obstructs others from meditating on emptiness. The previous outline explained how it is a fault to explain emptiness to those who are not ready for it, as it can bring about fears and so forth, and a misunderstanding of the whole teaching. This heading asks if it is a fault to obstruct those who are ready to receive teachings on emptiness, or who are meditating on emptiness.

Emptiness should be taught to those who, because they feel grateful to the Tathagata, are suitable vessels, but who, because of their great fear, are tempted to reject it.

*If someone who is shrouded in  
Complete ignorance and impedes suchness  
Will not even attain good fortune,  
What need to mention liberation?* 285

The verse indicates that the suitable vessels to receive teachings on emptiness are those who appreciate and respect the Tathagata (meaning the Buddha) making salutations and offerings, but who still have a strong fear of the pitfalls of cyclic existence. Suitable vessels are those who wish to overcome samsara, and who also have the intelligence to be able to adopt the teachings on emptiness.

More specifically it can relate to the specific realisation one needs to have to enter the path, which is renunciation, i.e. a strong and deeply spontaneous wish to overcome the sufferings of the lower realms and entirely abandon cyclic existence. Such beings are suitable vessels because, they have an intense wish to be free of cyclic existence, thus they are ready to hear the teachings on selflessness, which are the main means to overcome cyclic existence. It is good to understand and relate to that. As we are all engaged in society, and we have to coexist with others it is good to remember their limitations, and not explain too much.

Someone who not only has a total disregard for emptiness but is completely shrouded in ignorance and impedes teaching, hearing and thinking about suchness out of jealousy, meanness and the like will not even attain the good fortune of a high rebirth. This being so, what chance is there of such a person attaining liberation, since such actions are grave ill deeds?

This is a vivid illustration of a person who does not accept emptiness and who has a mind that is engulfed with ignorance, which prevents them from seeing the incredible value of emptiness. Rather than seeing that value they impede the teaching, which can mean when others give teachings, or are hearing and thinking about emptiness, they feel upset out of jealousy or just because they are mean. Such negative emotions arise in relation to the ignorance of emptiness. Such beings will not obtain good fortune, meaning a higher rebirth, and if they cannot obtain a higher rebirth because of their state of mind and attitudes, then there is no chance whatsoever for them to obtain liberation.

Rejecting dependent arising free from fabricated extremes [which relates to emptiness] is a more serious

ill deed than killing a hundred million people, so one must take care in this matter to avoid deceiving oneself.

This graphically illustrates that rejecting emptiness or criticising it out of jealousy, miserliness and so forth is a great misdeed. As the commentary says, one must avoid deceiving oneself, meaning that one must be careful not to fall into the category of criticising those who are practising and meditating on emptiness, or teaching emptiness. As we all have faith in the teachings on emptiness we may not have that danger. Nevertheless it is possible, and we must always be alert to a critical mind arising in ourselves. There is a great danger especially in relation to criticising others out of jealousy. That sort of critical mind can very easily arise within ourselves, and it is something we must be wary of and not deceive ourselves about, meaning that we must protect ourselves from that great danger.

If we can relate being shrouded in the ignorance to ourselves then, as indicated here in the teachings, it is because of that very fact of being engulfed in ignorance that all of the faults, such as criticising others out of jealousy and miserliness, come about. If we can identify that ignorance within ourselves, then we can see how we are in danger. Therefore we must always protect ourselves.

#### 1.1.2.3. TAKING CARE NOT TO LAPSE FROM THE VIEW OF SUCHNESS

Whatever understanding one may gain, intellectually or otherwise, one must be very careful not to let that decline or lapse.

*Lapsing from ethics is preferable  
To lapsing from the view. 286  
Through ethics one gains a high rebirth;  
The supreme state is reached by means of the view.*

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse thus:

Since denying emptiness is most detrimental to oneself and others, a lapse in ethical conduct is preferable.

Denying emptiness can bring very great danger and harm to oneself and others. The Tibetan word fault *la-i* has the connotation of being easier. What is being indicated here is that lapsing from ethical conduct is relatively less serious than denying emptiness. The reason the commentary gives is:

...for while the result of ethical conduct is a high rebirth, the view that understands emptiness takes one to the supreme states of liberation and enlightenment.

For someone practising moral ethics, even very well, the highest goal they can reach is a higher rebirth in the next lifetime; one can not achieve a higher status than that. Whereas, the realisation of emptiness will take one to the supreme state of liberation and ultimately enlightenment. Compared with the temporary goal of higher rebirth, the supreme goals of liberation and enlightenment are much more valuable. So the main point is that realising emptiness is much more valuable compared to following moral ethics.

Sutra says:

A lapse in ethics is preferable;  
A lapse in view is not.

#### 1.1.2.4. STAGES LEADING TOWARDS SUCHNESS

The wise only teach the view of suchness after carefully examining the vessel. It is also said:

Taught to fools, it confuses them  
And does not further peace.  
When snakes drink milk  
Their poison only increases.

The first two lines of this verse relate to emptiness and the last pair of lines are the analogy. When poisonous snakes drink milk it only increases their poison rather than decreasing it. The analogy illustrates the fact that when emptiness is taught to those who are not intelligent, then rather than benefiting them and bringing peace, it just brings more confusion.

*For the unreceptive, conceptions of a self are best; 287  
To teach them selflessness is not.  
They would go to bad rebirths,  
While the extraordinary attain peace.*

The commentary states:

It is best to teach the uneducated and unreceptive that there is a self in accordance with their conceptions of a self...

For those who are uneducated, meaning those who don't have much intelligence and who are unreceptive to the teachings on selflessness, teaching that there is a self, in accordance with their conception of a self, is much better. The reason for that is:

...for their attachment to the self will cause them to give up harmful behaviour, making it easier for them to find a happy rebirth.

When there is a very strong misconception of grasping at the self then that can produce attachment to the self, which naturally brings attachment to what is conducive to the self. Because of this, that which is immediately conducive to the self is having good status, i.e. a good rebirth and the good conditions associated with that rebirth. For such people, teachings on obtaining higher rebirth are very attractive, and will be readily accepted, because that is conducive to their strong attachment to the self. Such beings are receptive to teachings that explain the causes to obtain a higher rebirth (such as a human or god rebirth) and are likely to engage in practices such as keeping morality and so forth, basically abiding by the law of karma, and creating virtuous karma. You are already aware that virtuous meritorious karma leads to a good rebirth in the next lifetime and non-meritorious negative karma leads to unfortunate rebirths. These teachings on karma, which present the causes to obtain higher rebirth, are very suitable for a person with a tendency to have a strong attachment to the self. If we are inclined to create virtue because of attachment to the self, and wishing for happiness, we may engage in good deeds to acquire those results. Thus, some good temporary results can be obtained from grasping at the self.

Having explained why such beings are suitable to receive teachings on an existent self, the commentary next shows the faults of explaining emptiness and selflessness to such beings.

It is not good to teach them emptiness, for they will ruin their three doors by rejecting or misunderstanding it. Thus teaching emptiness has a disadvantageous as well as an advantageous aspect. On the one hand, rejecting it through lack of appreciation or denying cause and effect because of taking non-existence to be the meaning of emptiness leads to a bad rebirth.

If teachings on emptiness are given to those who are not suitable, their misunderstanding could result in extremes. It might lead them to the misunderstanding that nothing exists, and that cause and effect, or karma, doesn't exist, and thus lead them to the grave misdeed of completely denying karma, creating the negative karma to be reborn in the lower realms. That is an ill effect!

On the other hand, the extraordinary who have mastered suchness attain peace.

This line indicates the advantageous aspects of teaching on emptiness: those who are receptive to teachings on emptiness will be able, by gaining full understanding of emptiness, to gain the realisations that lead them to the ultimate state of peace, liberation or enlightenment.

I suppose we would put ourselves in the category of those who are receptive to teachings on emptiness!? If we do, then we must make sure that we live up to that position, and make an effort to gain an understanding of emptiness. Not only that but we should make the effort to put it into practice. Whenever there is a category to choose from, we naturally choose to be in the better category, don't we!? That is of course an ideal.

#### 1.1.2.5. RECOGNISING SUCHNESS

This heading has two sub-divisions

1.1.2.5.1. Recognising the fundamental mode of existence

1.1.2.5.2. Why fear arises in the weak

##### 1.1.2.5.1. RECOGNISING THE FUNDAMENTAL MODE OF EXISTENCE

One must definitely understand suchness to reach enlightenment in any of the three vehicles.

*There is no other door to peace, 288  
And it destroys wrong views.  
That which is the object of  
All Buddhas is called selflessness.*

As the commentary explains:

Since the root of worldly existence cannot be cut without understanding emptiness, there is no other door to peace.

This is a point where we incorporate the understanding we gained from our studies of the Madhyamika, which explained very elaborately that there is only one door to peace or liberation, as is indicated here.

...there is no other door to peace. Dependent arising's lack of inherent existence is called the fundamental mode of existence,

'There is no other door to peace', means that there is only one door to peace, and this refers to the realisation of emptiness, which is the one door leading to the peace of the nirvana or enlightenment. More specifically, one must definitely understand suchness to realise enlightenment in any of the three vehicles. That is the main point that was explained so elaborately in the Madhyamika teachings - the realisation of emptiness is the one technique which leads to the goals of all the three vehicles, the hearer, solitary realiser and bodhisattva vehicles.

Other teachings show how the realisation of emptiness is referred to as the mother, and bodhicitta is like the father. So wisdom is the mother and method is the father. To explain that further, in the caste system in India, if the father is of Brahmin caste then naturally his child is a Brahmin. Likewise if the father is a king, then his child is also naturally from the royal caste.

Whatever the caste of the father the son is of the same caste as his father, whereas the mother can produce children belonging to different castes. For example, a mother can have three children by three different fathers, and the nationality of the father determines the nationality of the child. If one of the children is fathered by a Tibetan the child would be Tibetan, although nowadays, of course, some would say, 'I am half and half'. In India, for example, a mother could have a son of the royal caste, a son of the

Brahmin caste, and a son of the warrior caste. However the father can father only a child of one caste.

The meaning we derive from this analogy is that practising the method side, which in the great vehicle is bodhicitta, produces the ultimate goal of enlightenment. In the lower vehicle the method produces only liberation. Whereas the realisation of emptiness can produce three different types goals, which is liberation for the hearer and solitary realisers, and enlightenment for the bodhisattvas. When one develops renunciation, and along with that the strong wish for personal peace, to be freed from cyclic existence, and that strong determination is infused by the realisation of emptiness, then that brings about the goal of self liberation. Within the great vehicle, one first develops a sense of great love, wishing all beings to be free from samsara and ultimately free from cyclic existence, and when that attitude is infused with the realisation of emptiness, then that brings about the goal of enlightenment.

The main point from this explanation is that whatever goal one intends to achieve from the three vehicles, the only cause to achieve any of these goals is the realisation of selflessness. Without that one cannot attain the goals of either self liberation or enlightenment. The one door to the achievement of that ultimate goal is the realisation of suchness or emptiness.

Having explained that there is no other door to peace, the commentary continues:

Dependent arising's lack of inherent existence is called the fundamental mode of existence, ultimate truth, emptiness and selflessness, and is the object of Hearer and Solitary Realizer Exalted ones and of all Exalted Buddhas. Understanding it destroys wrong views holding to extremes.

Here 'holding to extremes' refers to grasping at a truly existent self.

#### 1.1.2.5.2. WHY FEAR ARISES IN THE WEAK

*The unreceptive are terrified* 289  
*Just by its very name.*  
*What so-called strong man is seen*  
*Who does not frighten the weak?*

As the commentary explains:

Selflessness must not be taught to the weak-minded for the very word "emptiness" terrifies the unreceptive. Does one see any so-called strong man who does not frighten the weak? For instance, just the sight of a lion or tiger frightens small animals.

The very word 'emptiness' terrifies those who are very strongly attached to the self, other phenomena, worldly existence, and cyclic existence.

For such beings with very strong attachment, who believe one hundred percent in that reality, the mere word 'empty' brings a strong fear to their mind, because it immediately distances them from what they perceive as being reality. The reason it instils fear in the unreceptive is because the power of the word 'emptiness' is so great, because of what it stands for. Let alone the actual realisations, even the name of emptiness is very powerful. To illustrate that, we use the example of the fearsome beast. When animals or humans hear the word 'lion' that brings about fear because of what lions stand for. When animals have an indication that there is a lion around they immediately have fear in their mind because of the power that lions have, but they would not have fear of animals of their own kind. Even with humans, if

we feel we are equal we have no fear, but we fear the more powerful.

#### 1.1.3. The profound is not taught for the sake of argument

This section has three subdivisions:

1.1.3.1. Although not taught for the sake of debate this very teaching burns up wrong contentions

1.1.3.2. Why this is so

1.1.3.3. Appropriateness of compassion for those following the wrong path

#### 1.1.3.1. ALTHOUGH NOT TAUGHT FOR THE SAKE OF DEBATE THIS VERY TEACHING BURNS UP WRONG CONTENTIONS

The Buddha did not teach emptiness for the sake of argument or debate, but the explanation of emptiness, by its very nature, eliminates wrong contentions or wrong views.

*Assertion:* Since this teaching destroys all wrong views, it should be taught to the unreceptive in order to defeat its opponents.

*Answer:*

*This principle is not taught* 290  
*By Tathagatas for the sake of debate,*  
*Yet it burns up others' contentions*  
*As a fire does its fuel.*

The actual question in relation to the assertion is that if teaching on emptiness destroys all wrong views it shouldn't be taught to the unreceptive.

Tathagatas do not teach this principle only to outshine opponents in debate but as the door to liberation.

The purpose of the Buddha teaching suchness is to show the door to liberation.

Nonetheless this teaching of emptiness burns up others' wrong contentions...

Even though not intended to defeat others through debate, explaining emptiness naturally burns up the wrong contentions of others by its very nature. The analogy is that:

...just as fire consumes its fuel without formulating the intention to burn.

The analogy is quite vivid. It is not as if the fire has an intention to burn up timber and so forth, but by its very nature when fire burns it consumes and burns up fuel. The commentary gives another quote from the sutras:

The Master also says:

Like the dew on the tip of the grass  
When it meets with the rays of the sun,

Here the analogy is that the dew on the tip of the grass will naturally evaporate when it meets with the sun. Even though the sun has no intention of drying up the dew it naturally does so.

Opponents' arguments and errors  
Evaporate when they meet you."

Here the 'you' refers to explanations of emptiness.

We will conclude here. There are not many verses left in this chapter. It would be good to reflect on the explanations given so far in this chapter, because as you would have noticed, there are many profound explanations that will be helpful for our own practice.

*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*

6 November 2007

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By withdrawing our mind from external distractions and focussing on the subject of the teachings, we generate a positive motivation such as, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice'.

The benefit of generating a bodhicitta motivation is not only limited to fulfilling an immediate purpose to benefit from listening to the teachings, but it also leaves a very strong imprint to actualise that promise in the future.

*1.1.3. The profound is not taught for the sake of argument (cont.)*

### **1.1.3.2. Why this is so**

This is sub-divided in two sections:

1.1.3.2.1. Actual meaning

1.1.3.2.2. Why the exalted do not experience fear

#### **1.1.3.2.1. ACTUAL MEANING**

*Question:* How does this teaching burn up others' contentions, when understanding of it arises in the mind of someone with interest in it?

*Answer:*

*Whoever knows this teaching*

*Will not relish others.*

*Thus to me this teaching seems*

*Like the door to destruction.*

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The answer to the opening question is something that we must reflect on for our own practice. Gaining the realisation of emptiness will definitely remove all misconceptions and, as the commentary says, 'burn up others' contentions'. We actually have extreme wrong views, because grasping at the self is the cause for all other wrong views to arise in the mind. That which destroys grasping at the self is the realisation of emptiness, so once one gains a realisation of emptiness, which is a direct opponent to the grasping at the self, then naturally all wrong conceptions and contentions will be completely removed. Reflecting on this will generate the determination to develop the realisation of emptiness for the purpose of combating grasping at the self.

As the commentary explains:

Whoever comes to know the nectar-like taste of this teaching, the emptiness of inherent existence, through hearing, thinking and meditating will not relish views adhering to the true existence of things.

As clearly mentioned here, 'to know' means realising the teaching on emptiness, which is seeing that phenomena lack inherent existence. The process of gaining the realisations of emptiness and the lack of inherent existence is through hearing, thinking and contemplation. Through hearing the teachings and explanations one gains a certain level of understanding. Then one uses

one's own intelligence and analytical wisdom to investigate further and analyse the meaning of what one has heard. Through this analysis one investigates whether that understanding actually corresponds to the facts or not. When one gains a level of confirmation through that analysis, one uses that as the object of meditation, and meditates on the meaning that one has gained from analysis. That is how, as one's meditation progresses, one gradually gains the realisations and ultimately attains primordial wisdom.

Without first hearing and then contemplating the meaning, one cannot possibly meditate on the meaning. The great Kadampa masters as well as Lama Tsong Khapa said that the more one hears the teachings, the more one is able to analyse the teachings, and the more one is able to analyse the teachings the more meaning one has to meditate upon. Thus the result of meditation, which is to gain realisations, increases. In this way one gains the ultimate realisations. By following that tradition we come to understand that the process of gaining realisations begins with hearing the teachings.

After having heard the teachings, not just once or twice but again and again, we gain a conceptual understanding through hearing. Then we use what we have understood from hearing as a basis to analyse the teachings. As we analyse the teachings more profoundly we gain an understanding from ultimate analysis, and we then meditate upon the meaning that we get from our ultimate analysis. We may have faith in the teaching and think, 'Yes, everything is empty', but if we try to meditate just with those words, we wouldn't know what we are supposed to focus on. Not knowing where to begin we may end up quite confused, and start to develop doubts because we are not clear about what being empty means.

So after hearing the explanations about emptiness, and how things are empty of inherent existence, we begin by contemplating the faults of perceiving things as inherently existent. If things were inherently existent, then what sort of faults would arise from that? In this way we need to first identify and then contemplate the object of negation i.e. inherent existence. Once one comes to clearly see the faults of inherent existence, then one begins to see how things are empty of inherent existence, or empty of true existence. Once we gain an affirmation of how things are empty of inherent existence, then we can meditate upon that meaning. When we begin to understand the process of how things lack inherent existence, then we will know what to meditate on.

It is good for us to really consider the process of study and practice and relate to these explanations personally. Then we gain some sort of certainty about the tradition we are following, which is to gain realisations that are the combination of analytical meditation and contemplative meditation. We also gain a greater understanding about why these two forms of meditation should be combined, as that is said to be essential.

Then the commentary mentions that through that process of

... hearing, thinking and meditating [one] will not relish views adhering to the true existence of things.

The 'views adhering to true existence' are the wrong views that are propounded by the non-Buddhist schools. One 'will not relish it' means that one will not hold these views as being true and important.

As the commentary further mentions:

The Master Aryadeva therefore says that this teaching of emptiness seems to him like the door and means to the destruction of wrong views.

This relates to the last two lines of verse 291. There Aryadeva is making a personal comment about how the process of understanding the emptiness of inherent existence (which is thinking, hearing and meditating) is the ultimate means to abstain from adhering to or relishing wrong views. As indicated in other teachings by the great masters, the noble or superior beings, experience great joy when they relate to the Buddha's words. Aryadeva himself makes a personal comment about how this is really the ultimate method and how the explanation on emptiness gives him great personal satisfaction and joy.

As the commentary further reads:

Alternatively he says it with texts on emptiness in mind, in that the words of the Buddha that teach emptiness also seem like this to the Master.

An alternative way to explain the above statement is that Aryadeva is affirming the Buddha's teaching on emptiness, which explains the true nature of all existence exactly as it is. Aryadeva says this with conviction, as a result of his own analysis.

#### 1.1.3.2.2. WHY THE EXALTED DO NOT EXPERIENCE FEAR

*Question:* Why does emptiness not cause the Exalted fear?

*Answer:* Because they have destroyed the seed of attachment to the self.

*For those who think there is* 292  
*In reality no self and abide in this thought,*  
*How will existence cause pleasure*  
*Or non-existence cause fear?*

The term 'the Exalted' in the preliminary question refers to the aryas who have realised emptiness directly. As explained previously, aryas are called exalted or superior because they are superior in their level of realisation. Compared with the understanding of emptiness by ordinary bodhisattvas, (i.e. those on the path of accumulation and preparation) and of those ordinary beings on the path of the lower vehicle, the aryas have a much more profound realization of emptiness. Having a superior realisation means having the direct realisation or perception of emptiness. Whereas the ordinary beings on the path only have a conceptual understanding and have not yet attained the direct realisation of emptiness.

Another interpretation of superior or exalted is having surpassed the grip of grasping at the self or true existence. Ordinary beings are still in the grip of grasping at true existence, whereas once one reaches the superior state, the grip, which is grasping at true existence, is loosened. How? Through the realisation of emptiness. Why? Ultimately because the realisation of emptiness, directly opposes the grasping at true existence, and thus the grip is released.

Although it may not be the case that all aryas 'have destroyed the seed of attachment to the self yet', that can also imply that they are sure to destroy the seed of attachment in the future. This indicates that they will definitely destroy the seed of attachment.

Because they have destroyed the seed of attachment to the self, then:

Since they have no attachment to views of a self or hostility toward selflessness ...

You can interpret destroying the seed of attachment to mean that the continuum of the realisation that supreme arya beings have gained will now be the ultimate opponent to completely overcome the seed of attachment (which can also mean a subtle imprint). That's one way you could answer this in debate. Even though not all aryas have actually overcome the seed of attachment, it can be applied to those who are still on the path, because of that certainty of overcoming the seed of attachment.

If we were to take it literally as explained here in the teaching, then we can relate the seed to mean the intellectually acquired misconception of inherent existence, which is definitely overcome by all aryas. Furthermore, one can also relate it to overcoming fear. Prior to gaining the realisation of emptiness directly, there is a lot of fear in relation to the attachment to the self. Higher beings however will definitely have no fear.

Referring again to the commentary:

... how will those who think that external and internal phenomena are in reality selfless and who abide in a direct understanding of this be pleased by the existence of the self or frightened by selflessness?

Again this is referring to exalted beings or superior beings. This rhetorical question implies that such beings would have no fear in relation to the existence of a self, nor would they be frightened by selflessness. 'Pleased by the existence of the self', refers to an inherently existent self. Superior beings are not pleased and they do not adhere to the existence of a truly existent self. Thus they are not frightened of selflessness. That is the main point.

The reason is then given:

Fear therefore does not arise in those who have direct understanding of selflessness because they have eliminated the cause of fear.

Fear in relation to either the lack of an inherently existing self or to selflessness is completely eliminated through the understanding of selflessness or emptiness. What we can derive from this explanation is that the real cause of fear is a strong grasping at the self. The stronger the grasping at the self, the more fear we will experience in relation to the self. Whether things are going well or not, it is all in relation to the self that we adhere to as being inherently existent. Thus the real cause of all our fears is the grasping at the self. So if we wonder why others have so much fear, or why we have so much fear, then that is the answer. It is because we have the cause of fear within us—grasping at an inherently existent self.

As the commentary explains, superior beings have no fear because they have overcome the causes of fear by gaining the direct understanding or realisation of selflessness.

### 1.1.3.3. APPROPRIATENESS OF COMPASSION FOR THOSE FOLLOWING WRONG PATHS

*Seeing the many Forders* 293  
*Who are seeds of futility,*  
*Who would not feel pity*  
*For people who long for a teaching?*

As the commentary explains the verse:

The Forders' many venomous snakes drive their students into thorny thickets of wrong views holding things to be truly existent, the seed of uninterrupted futile suffering in cyclic existence...

According to the explanations in the teachings, the main cause of being in cyclic existence is grasping at a truly existent self. As long as the grasping at a truly existent self is there, the continuum of that grasping will keep us in cyclic existence for aeons and aeons. What keeps us in this seemingly endless cycle is grasping at a truly existent self and that which we call the continuum. In other words the grasping at a truly existing self serves as a cause for an exactly similar continuum to continue into the next instant. And for as long as those instants occur as a consequence of grasping at the truly existent self, samsara remains. As the Forders expound wrong views, the seed of an uninterrupted futile suffering in cyclic existence continues.

...daily killing their life force of virtue consistent with liberation.

If you take 'their life force of virtue consistent with liberation' literally, it applies to the virtue that we create in relation to the right views, and which thus become a cause for liberation. However it also refers specifically to the first path, which is the path of accumulation. The first path is referred to as the life force of virtue consistent with liberation, because the path of accumulation is the beginning of the main cause to be developed, which will ultimately result in liberation. The definition of the path of accumulation indicates that it is the life force of virtue consistent with liberation. However we can also take this literally as referring to all the virtues consistent with the right view that leads to liberation.

So as the commentary further explains:

Seeing this and knowing the nature of these teachings, who with a Bodhisattva's disposition would not feel pity for those who long for a teaching that will liberate them from cyclic existence?

This is yet another rhetorical question, indicating that the bodhisattvas will definitely have great pity or compassion for those who, because they naturally long for true peace and liberation, yearn for a teaching that will liberate them from cyclic existence. As individuals wanting true peace they seek liberation so that they will be free from cyclic existence. But through the misfortune of having met teachers who expound wrong views that increase their misconceptions, they are led further into cyclic existence rather than being liberated. Seeing that reality, a bodhisattva will have immense compassion and love, because on one hand, these beings long for liberation and to be free from cyclic existence, but on the other hand they are kept in cyclic existence because of the misfortune of meeting with expounders of wrong views.

As the commentary concludes:

Therefore one must show sentient beings the path of non-inherent existence so that they will not be ravaged by the Forders' snakes.

When we read these texts, it is really very useful for us to take the time to read them over and over again, and try to derive the real meaning of what has been explained, and not to just skim over it. When one skims over a text, one will miss the points and not derive the real meaning. Even someone who is considered to be quite skilled in the understanding of teachings and so forth, may still lack the intense derivation of the meaning of the text if they do not read it carefully. This particular text is of course a complex one, but if we use our time and energy in trying to derive its meaning, even where the meaning is quite deep, then through our practice and familiarity with trying to understand a teaching like this we will find the rest of the teachings with simpler explanations really very easy to read and understand. When we take the time, we can find the deep meaning of the words in this teaching.

If we take the time, to read each line of the text and derive its meaning, we will then naturally go into a very contemplative state, where our mind will be very focussed. Thus the more we concentrate and focus on deriving the meaning from the text, the more understanding we will get from it. In fact, there will be no difficulty in us spending time in reading texts because we will be so engrossed in them. To give a mundane example, it is like someone who is watching an interesting show or their favourite show on TV, or a movie. They seem to be so engrossed and are completely focussed, and if someone distracts them, they say, 'Please leave me alone, I want to concentrate on the show so that I don't miss anything'. They don't appreciate being disturbed because they are so engrossed. Similarly with the teaching and text, once we can derive some meaning from reading the text, we will be quite engrossed and will thus be able to focus on the teaching.

#### 1.1.4. Showing the comparative subtlety and coarseness of our own and others' teaching

This heading has two sub-divisions:

1.1.4.1. General explanation of why those of inferior intelligence value others' teaching but not the Buddha's

1.1.4.2. Specific explanation

##### 1.1.4.1. GENERAL EXPLANATION OF WHY THOSE OF INFERIOR INTELLIGENCE VALUE OTHERS' TEACHING BUT NOT THE BUDDHA'S

As the outline indicates, this is a question as to why some value the teachings of other teachers, or the expounding of other views, but do not value the teachings of the Buddha. What is the reason? The text will answer those questions.

*Question:* Why, despite their inclination toward virtue, do people mostly follow Forders' systems and not the Buddha's teaching?

*Answer:* Because it is subtle and hard to understand.

*The teaching of the Sakyas,* 294  
*Nirgranthas and Brahmins are perceived*  
*By the mind, the eyes and the ears.*  
*Thus the Subduer's teaching is subtle.*

Even though the commentary will explain it further a general overview of the verse is that the teaching of the Sakyas refers to the Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings, while the Nirgranthas and the Brahmins are non-Buddhist schools. Being perceived by the mind, means that Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings are understood or perceived by analysing them with the mind, in particular with wisdom. Thus mind refers to the primordial wisdom within one's mind, through which one perceives the Shakyamuni's teachings. Whereas the teachings of the non-Buddhist Nirgranthas are perceived by visual perception, and the Brahmins' teachings are mainly perceived by the ears. Because of these differences in how the teachings are perceived, the Shakyamuni's teachings are indicated here as being more profound and subtle.

It is not as if these followers of other non-Buddhist schools do not have an inclination to virtue, as they do in fact engage in a lot of virtuous activities. But although they favour accumulating virtue they follow other non-Buddhist teachings. Why is that so? The immediate and direct answer is 'because it is subtle and hard to understand'.

As the commentary explains:

Since the teaching of the Sakyas, the Nirgranthas and Brahmins is understood by the mind, the eyes and the ears respectively...

The Subduer's textual system is more subtle and thus most people do not follow it.

The sun-like view, the understanding of non-inherent existence, is said to illuminate one's mindstream. It destroys all the thickets of unwholesome views. Seeing all products as being like dreams makes one's mindstream stainless. All this must be understood through meditative equipoise, and thus the Sakyas' teaching is subtle.

'The sun-like view' is an analogy. Just as the sun's rays are able to illuminate everything and eliminate darkness, the understanding of non-inherent existence, or the wisdom realising emptiness eliminates the darkness of ignorance within oneself. It illuminates one's mindstream so that one is able to understand the ultimate nature of one's own mind. Thus, 'it destroys all the thickets of unwholesome views' or wrong views. As the text explains, 'Seeing all products as being like dreams makes one's mindstream stainless'.

As that realisation is gained only through meditative equipoise, one has to make an effort because, as mentioned earlier, it is only through the proper process, ultimately through meditative equipoise, that one gains the realisation of emptiness. Thus the Sakyas' teaching is subtle.

Why are the Buddha's teachings more subtle and profound? It is because that which eliminates the darkness of ignorance, which is grasping at true existence and grasping at a self, is eliminated through gaining the realisation of emptiness. Thus the teaching of emptiness illuminates the true nature of our mind by destroying the darkness within one's mind. That is not achieved instantaneously, but rather through the gradual process, as mentioned earlier, of hearing, thinking and then ultimately meditating on it. Because of this gradual

process and the continuous exertion of effort needed to gain that realisation it is much more subtle. Thus the ultimate result of the realisation one gains from these teachings, is much more subtle.

Moreover the ultimate means of purifying our negative karma is through that process of hearing, studying, contemplating, analysing and meditating and thus gaining the ultimate realisation of emptiness. The non-Buddhist schools are quite different to that.

Since the practices of Nirgranthas consist of a lack of hygiene and physical pain caused by the sun and wind, they can be understood by merely seeing them...

For the non-Buddhist school called Nirgranthas the means of purifying negative karma is to endure a lot of physical pain and suffering, such as by exposing themselves to the heat of the sun or to the wind. They believe that the mere enduring of physical hardships is the means to purify one's negative karma. The endurance of physical pain is something you can see, and thus much easier to understand, compared to the Buddha's teachings.

Since Brahmins take recitation of the Vedas alone as the essence of their practice and their means of purification, they can be understood by hearing and are therefore easier to comprehend. This will be further explained in the following section.

#### 1.1.4.2. SPECIFIC EXPLANATION

This explanation has three sub-divisions:

1.1.4.2.1. Those seeking liberation should not try these systems

1.1.4.2.2. How those of inferior intelligence develop respect

1.1.4.2.3. Why those systems are not excellent teaching

##### 1.1.4.2.1. THOSE SEEKING LIBERATION SHOULD NOT TRY THESE SYSTEMS

*Assertion:* If ordinary people engage in outsiders' practices because they may be perceived by coarse forms of awareness, it is right for you to do so too.

*Answer:* It is not right.

*Brahmin practices are said  
Mainly to be an outward show.*

*The practices of Nirgranthas  
Are said to be mainly stultifying.*

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The meaning of the verse is explained thus:

Since most Brahmin practices such as recitation, burnt offerings, auspicious incantation, repentance, confession and so forth are mainly an outward show for the sake of reward and respect...

Brahmin practices mainly involve recitation of certain verses from their texts. They indicate that the mere recitation of these scriptures and the hearing of this recitation is sufficient to rid one of all negativities and so forth. Then they engage in burning offerings similar to fire pujas, and making offerings to the deities. So 'auspicious incantation' refers to reciting auspicious verses. Repentance and confession are mainly outward show because of their immediate goal for performing the reading and making the offerings is the mundane reward of a payment from those who seek that service. So

Brahmins do their practice mainly as a service for a reward. Outwardly they may seem very pompous and very religious, but in fact their practice is done only for mundane goals.

As the commentary then further explains:

...it is said that they should not be performed by those who seek liberation.

Here the personal advice that we need to derive is that even though the non-Buddhist Brahmins are used as an immediate example of those who perform activities, rituals and so forth for the sake of temporary gain of respect and reward, that is not something those seeking liberation should follow. We really need to take this as personal instruction and advice for ourselves, and make sure that our own practices do not become similar to that. Whatever we do, meditating or practising a ritual, or puja or whatever, if we regard ourselves highly because of being able to do these practices or meditations and so forth well, and if we are not careful to check our motivation, there could be a worldly concern mixed in with our practices. When our practices are mixed with the worldly concerns, then it becomes similar to the practices of the non-Buddhist schools. As people who are interested in seeking liberation and enlightenment that is not what we should seek. As the commentary further explains:

Similarly it is said that most of the Nirgranthas' practices, such as allowing their hair to become matted and employing the five fires, are stultifying. Therefore those who seek liberation should avoid them completely.

That is quite explicit and clear.

#### **1.1.4.2.2. HOW THOSE OF INFERIOR INTELLIGENCE DEVELOP RESPECT**

*Brahmins are revered* 296  
*Because they adopt the orthodox.*  
*Nirgranthas are pitied*  
*Because they adopt the deluded.*

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Brahmin practices are mainly for outward show. Thus some unintelligent people revere Brahmins because they adopt orthodox practices such as reciting the Vedas and so forth. They revere and pity Nirgranthas because they adopt painful and deluded forms of behavior such as mortifying the body through sun and wind.

This is as explained previously.

#### **1.1.4.2.3. WHY THOSE SYSTEMS ARE NOT EXCELLENT TEACHING**

This outline indicates the main point of this section, by explaining why the teachings of other schools are not excellent, or not the right teachings.

*Suffering is a maturation* 297  
*And thus is not virtuous.*  
*Similarly, birth too is not virtuous,*  
*Being a maturation of actions.*

As indicated previously, the practices that the Nirgranthas follow are the severe mortification of the body by enduring the suffering and pain from extreme heat and cold and the wind. They even light fires between

their fingers in order to endure the pain of having their fingers and so forth burnt. They see these practices of mortification as being the ultimate practice of purification.

The Brahmins propound that if one pays respect to the Brahmin and make offerings, one will be born as a Brahmin. That very fact of being born as a Brahmin is a result of a practise of revering and respecting the Brahmins. That is their practice.

With respect to the Nirgranthas the commentary explains:

Painful sensations such as mortification of the body are not virtuous but are instead, like the suffering in the hells, the maturation of non-virtuous actions.

What is being clearly explained here is that the painful experiences received from mortifying the body cannot in themselves be a virtuous practice. In fact the pain that one experiences from this extreme practice is nothing more than the maturation of non-virtuous actions that one has created in the past. Just as experiencing the sufferings of the hell realms is the maturation of past non-virtuous actions, so too the pain that one experiences under these circumstances are also the maturation of non-virtue.

With respect to the Brahmins the commentary states:

Similarly, because it is a maturation of past actions as are eyes and so forth, birth as a Brahmin is not something virtuous enabling the attainment of liberation.

The Brahmins believe that by revering Brahmins one will take birth as a Brahmin, and is then virtuous. Moreover that virtuous act of revering Brahmins and so forth, is the way to obtain liberation. That is refuted here with the argument that being born as a Brahmin is nothing more than the maturation of past actions—it is the maturation or the ripening result of past actions. The five sense faculties that we have with our contaminated body, is a maturation or a ripening result of past actions. The Brahmins' rebirth is exactly like that and thus not a cause for liberation.

The remaining verses of the chapter establish what the right 'excellent' teaching is. Having refuted the view of the non-Buddhist schools that their practices lead to high status and liberation or enlightenment, it has to be established what the right practice or the 'excellent teachings' are that will lead to the goals of liberation and enlightenment. The following verses are quite profound and we will leave them for the next session.

Normally we have a discussion after four sessions, followed by a test. The discussion seems to be useful because you can share ideas and get a clear understanding through discussion. So we will leave the next session for discussion, and maybe the exam can be done later on after further sessions. So we will continue with the teachings the week after the discussion.

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# **DISCUSSION**

**Block 5 2007**

## **Week 1 (16 October 2007)**

1. List the Eight-fold path of the Exalted. [4]
2. Explain how the three higher trainings are dependent on each other. [3]
3. Explain the ultimate method for overcoming the disturbing emotions and delusions within one's mind. [2]

## **Week 2 (23 October 2007)**

4. What are extremely hidden phenomena and how are they established?
5. Inference refers to what and how does one understand phenomena through inference?
6. a) What are the two types of grasping?  
b) What remains after these two have been eradicated?  
c) What does this remainder cause?
- \*7. The explanation here is based on a text called *Tsiksel* in which four types of valid cognition are established. What are these four cognitions? Explain the last two.

## **Week 3 (30 October 2007)**

8. Why does emptiness instill fear in ordinary beings? [2]
9. Who are the suitable vessels to receive the teachings on emptiness? [2]
10. What are the teachings most conducive to those who have a strong misconception of grasping to the self? . [2]
- \*11. Why should teachings on emptiness not be given to those who are not suitable? [2]

## **Week 4 6 November 2007**

12. Describe and discuss the process, mentioned in the commentary, needed to gain realisations of teachings on emptiness.

\* These questions won't be on the exam