

# 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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It would be good to sit in a comfortable and relaxed position. Likewise it is good to establish a good motivation in one's mind, such as 'In order to benefit sentient beings, I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice as best as I can'.

*1.2.2. Advice to strive for liberation (cont.)*

## 1.2.2.2. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF ATTAINING LIBERATION WITHOUT CULTIVATING AVERSION TO CYCLIC EXISTENCE

As this outline mentions, it is impossible to attain liberation without cultivating aversion to cyclic existence. Aversion can be also understood as feeling disgust for, or being repulsed by, cyclic existence. By repeatedly thinking about and contemplating the many sufferings and contaminated pleasures of cyclic existence, one can then develop a sense of distaste for, or be repulsed by, cyclic existence. It is only then that one can develop an authentic wish to achieve liberation. Without developing that sense of distaste or repulsion one cannot develop the aspiration to achieve liberation. It is similar to someone who is thirsty: when someone feels the discomfort or suffering of thirst then the wish to quench their thirst comes about naturally.

*Question:* If not doing any action at all in a context of ultimate existence brings about nirvana, why are impermanent suffering and so forth taught in the treatises.

*Answer:* It is done to produce aversion to the cycle of birth and death so that one will attain nirvana free from all activities of cyclic existence.

*How can anyone who has no aversion  
To this take an interest in pacification? 187  
Like [leaving home], it is also hard  
To leave worldly existence behind.*

It is good to bring the explanations contained in the verse and the commentary to a personal level, and remind ourselves of the importance, and indeed the necessity, of contemplating the disadvantages of cyclic existence or samsara, and the contaminated pleasures that are the causes for the sufferings of samsara. In that way we develop the distaste or disgust for cyclic existence that it is necessary for us to develop.

In worldly terms, we can use the analogy of living in a nice comfortable place, in a nice environment with many good companions: the wish to leave that place would not occur because everything is comfortable. The pleasures of cyclic existence are similar to the worldly pleasures of being attached to a good home, good companions and so forth. For as long as one does not see the disadvantages and the faults of cyclic existence the authentic determination to free oneself from samsara cannot occur, because one has attachment to it. One sees samsara as being pleasurable, so therefore in order to develop repulsion or distaste for samsara one must contemplate the reality of suffering in samsara, which is having a contaminated body and a contaminated state of mind.

When we investigate and analyse the situation from every angle we come to the sound conclusion that there is no real

lasting or stable happiness as long as we have a contaminated body that is subject to pain, beginning with birth, then sickness, aging and finally death. Also the external factors relating to our physical situation such as food and so forth are unstable. There are always problems with friends, and disputes arise, so there is no real lasting and stable companionship that is completely satisfactory.

Likewise internally there are also the sufferings that we experience in our mind, such as dissatisfaction, discontent, frustration, and the ups and downs that always occur in our mind. We experience this because of our contaminated physical aggregates. So it is good to remind ourselves that for as long as we have a contaminated body, the dissatisfaction and discontentment that we experience will be continuous. Wouldn't it be nice if it was possible to attain physical and mental aggregates such that we do not have to experience these shortcomings of sickness, disappointment in companionship and so forth? Wouldn't that be incredible? It is worthwhile to think along those lines.

There is in fact an immediate practical benefit from contemplating the disadvantages and sufferings of cyclic existence in particular. If we remind ourselves of the nature of cyclic existence, we realise that for as long as we have a contaminated body and state of mind then whatever we engage in will be unsatisfactory, and there is no real lasting satisfaction to be found.

If we remind ourselves constantly of the nature of samsara then we won't be too surprised whenever we face difficulties in relation to companionship, work, or any situation that brings us distress. We won't become too distressed or experience too much suffering because we will remember that this is the nature of samsara, and being in samsara means experiencing these different types of sufferings from time to time. Reminding ourselves of that fact helps our mind to lessen the suffering, or the immediate shock, that one would otherwise experience. It seems to really benefit our mind if we think along those lines.

Likewise reminding ourselves of the disadvantages of samsara and the sufferings that occur also helps to lessen our attachment to the pleasures of cyclic existence. Because we see the faults, attachment to the pleasures of samsara will be lessened naturally, and a sense of detachment can then arise in our mind.

One should also remind oneself of the quote from the sutras where the Buddha said that the nature of all gathering is that there will be a parting, and that that all meeting will result in separation.

As the commentary explains, the main point of the verse is the reason why it is necessary to develop a distaste for cyclic existence, and how to develop that.

How could anyone who has no aversion to cyclic existence take an interest in liberation or like an aspiration for liberation, which is the path that the pacification of suffering entails?

In explanation of the previous rhetorical question, the commentary continues:

If one isn't suffering from thirst, one will not feel a strong urge to drink in order to relieve their discomfort.

Until one experiences the great suffering of thirst the wish to quench that thirst will not naturally arise. The wish to quench one's thirst can arise so strongly that if two very thirsty people were to simultaneously see a glass of water, they may even fight over it. Or it can become a race to see who is the fastest to reach it. If the person who reaches the

water first happened to be a kind person, then he might drink some and leave one third for the next person. Situations like this are like tests to see how kind a person can be under desperate circumstances, as they show how much they are willing to spare for others.

Sharing food is another analogy that shows how kind or how mean someone is. If someone were to be given a portion of food to share with others, a person who is normally quite kind would take the portion of the food that is not so nice and leave the better part for another. However a selfish person would take the best part for themselves first, and leave the part that is not so nice for others.

The person who saves the better portion for someone else and takes the not-so-nice portion themselves is just basically showing their nature: they have established a mind of kindness, seeing others as being more important than themselves. Someone who has cultivated the thought of cherishing others would naturally want to give the better part no matter what it is to someone else, because they cherish others more than themselves.

The analogy in the commentary is:

Though one's home may contain little of worth, one cannot completely give up attachment to it. Similarly, it is difficult for those of limited intelligence completely to leave worldly existence behind because they are bound by attachment...

What this clearly indicates is that being attached to one's home even though it is not very worthy is really a very insignificant attachment compared to the desire or attachment one has for cyclic existence in general. Likewise those with limited intelligence who are engulfed by ignorance cannot develop a sense of detachment towards cyclic existence.

This brings to light the reason why some find it very difficult to overcome attachment or desire, even when they have meditated on the faults of the object. There are those who claim that they have meditated on the faults of an object of desire, but who still seem to experience desire in relation to that object. The fault is clearly that only the surface faults of the object have been seen, and the object of desire itself is still held dear to the heart. If one holds an object of desire as being something dear and then tries to see the surface faults, then of course one cannot develop a sense of real detachment towards the object. That is where the fault will arise. Holding the object itself dear to one's heart, while trying to meditate superficially on the faults of the object, simply does not work.

### **1.2.2.3. APPROPRIATENESS OF STRIVING FOR LIBERATION BECAUSE OF THE GREAT DISADVANTAGES OF CYCLIC EXISTENCE**

The rich and powerful, who are attached to the pleasure they derive from things, may not be able to give up their homes and strive in seclusion to attain liberation. However, it is surely fitting for those who are afflicted by sickness and poverty to give up their attachment to cyclic existence.

*One sees that some who are overwhelmed* 188  
*By suffering long for death,*  
*Yet entirely due to their confusion*  
*They will not reach the excellent state.*

As the commentary explains:

Some people who are overwhelmed by the suffering of poverty, of being separated from what is dear to them and the like, long to die by leaping into fire, water, or into an abyss and so forth in order to gain release.

Due to the immense suffering poverty, or being separated,

people become so distressed that they don't see any point in continuing to live. Many would have experienced the suffering of separation when one is separated from loved ones, which is quite intense. At that time one can also lose a sense of the meaning of life, thinking, 'What purpose is there to life?' and so forth. Likewise with the other types of sufferings. As mentioned here, these are reasons for one to feel disgusted with, and a distaste for, the sufferings of cyclic existence. However due to ignorance, some cannot develop the wish for liberation, and thus they end their life by jumping into water and so forth.

As the commentary continues:

In exactly the same way, by gaining certainty concerning the suffering of cyclic existence and abandoning attachment to the self, they could quickly attain the happiness of liberation...

The main point here is that even if one is not able to develop a very sound renunciation leading to the adoption of a life of seclusion and retreat and complete abandonment of worldly life, seeing the reality of the sufferings of cyclic existence should definitely kindle a strong wish to be free from samsara. At the very least one will develop the wish to not entirely depend on samsara, seeing it as being entirely pleasurable.

Rather, based on the reality of sufferings that one experiences and sees in others one develops a sense for the wish to be free from samsara. In fact this sort of advice is given specifically to those who are feeling quite content with their worldly pleasures, because they are wealthy and feel they have everything they desire. Such people may feel content with their worldly life and think they don't have to rely on anything else. However that contentment is an illusion, and so what is being described here is that one should meditate on the disadvantages of cyclic existence, because no matter how good the situation may seem, it is in fact in the nature of suffering.

The commentary says:

...entirely due to their extreme confusion about what to adopt and discard they will not reach the excellent state of nirvana

This points out that one may clearly experience and recognise the sufferings of samsara, and wish to be free from that, but has not yet developed the strong determination to achieve liberation, which is based on renunciation. That is because they still have not removed their ignorance of what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded. The commentary explains the point with the following analogy:

Without taking the medicine a patient will not be cured of his illness. Similarly, even if one suppresses manifest disturbing emotions to some extent, one will not gain liberation from cyclic existence except by employing the antidote which completely eradicates them.

Just as a patient clearly cannot be cured from an illness if they do not take a prescribed medication, similarly manifest disturbing emotions or delusions, although they may temporarily suppressed, will not be completely removed until and unless one completely eradicates the delusions at their root with the antidote, which is the realisation of emptiness. Without that wisdom of realising emptiness directly, one cannot overcome or eradicate the root of the delusions and thus one cannot achieve liberation.

These points were also clearly mentioned in previous chapters, and it is good to remind oneself that these chapters relate to what is being explained here. Also, on a personal level one should use these points as a reminder that one

needs to slowly develop that determination or longing to be free from samsara by contemplating the disadvantages of samsara again and again.

#### 1.2.2.4. MEANING OF THE FUNDAMENTAL MODE OF EXISTENCE SHOULD NOT BE TAUGHT FROM THE OUTSET

*Question:* If one is to strive for liberation which ends cyclic existence, advice on about meditation on suchness would be appropriate. Why did the Teacher [indicating the Buddha] also give advice on giving and ethics?

*Answer:* There is no fault in this.

*Giving is taught to the lowest* 189  
*And ethics to the middling.*  
*Pacification is taught to the best*  
*Therefore always do The best!*

As the initial question clearly states, meditation on emptiness serves as an antidote to overcoming the delusions from their very root. So the question asks why the Buddha did not just teach emptiness, which serves as the antidote to all our suffering. Why did the Buddha have to teach on other practices such as generosity and moral ethics and so forth?

The explanation in the commentary is:

One must lead others gradually, distinguishing between those of least, intermediate and best ability.

This ability can be either in relation to one particular being at different periods of time or the analogy of three different types of beings. There is the initial state where one has the least capacity, or the person of least intelligence, the intermediate state and the best state of intelligence or ability.

As the commentary continues in relation to three types of beings, or in relation to one person at the initial stage and with the least capacity:

Advice about giving is for those who at first are capable only of generosity but cannot give up killing and so forth.

The practices themselves have different levels of difficulty. For example, the later perfections are harder than the earlier practices, relatively speaking. So the advice on giving is directed to those of the least ability who, for the time being, are not ready to practise ethics and meditation. Those who may not be able to give up the negative deeds such as killing and so forth have the capacity to be generous, and for such beings the Buddha skilfully gave the practices of generosity.

The commentary continues:

Those of intermediate ability already practising generosity are taught about ethics, since they are ready to take birth as gods or humans.

Once someone has mastered the practice of generosity with no problem they will develop an interest in a good result for their future life. When the causes for a good rebirth are explained, they will begin to realise that one can attain a good rebirth such as a human being or in the god realms. When that wish to achieve such a good rebirth is developed then they become a suitable vessel for an explanation of the causes for achieving that state, which is ethics. Then they are ready to be given the teachings on ethics.

Those with the best ability are principally instructed in the meditation on emptiness or suchness, the means to pacify cyclic existence.

When one reaches a high level of intelligence or ability to practise, then instruction on meditation on suchness or emptiness is explained, which is the ultimate means to reach liberation from cyclic existence.

The commentary summarises the main point as:

Thus one should always endeavour to do the best and

think, "Why shouldn't I attain liberation?"

#### 1.2.2.5. STAGES BY WHICH TO LEAD ONE TO LIBERATION

If reality is explained to someone as yet unready for such an explanation, that person will deny actions and agents, thinking there is no difference between virtue and ill deeds, and they will go to bad rebirths.

*First prevent the demeritorious,* 190  
*Next prevent [ideas of a coarse] self.*  
*Later prevent views of all kinds.*  
*Whoever knows of this is wise.*

This is also the verse that was explained in the recent teachings by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. As mentioned previously a profound teaching such as emptiness can cause confusion for someone who is not ready to understand it. For example, if we were to take the *Heart Sutra* literally, without the capacity to understand the meaning behind it, then when it says, 'There is no eye, no ear, no smell, no taste no tactile feeling' and so forth, someone without an understanding of the implicit meaning might come to the profound misunderstanding that the teaching seems to defy actual experience. We do experience forms, we do see sights and we do smell things and we do feel things. Someone who takes the *Heart Sutra* literally might think, 'What a contradiction! How can the Buddha teach that these things do not exist? How could he say that there is no eye, no forms, no tastes, no tactile feelings and so forth?' Actually, what the *Heart Sutra* is explaining is that there are no inherently existent forms, and no inherently existent sounds and so forth. But a person without that understanding would hear it as being no form, and no sound at all, and so come to the wrong conclusions.

With such a great misunderstanding they might feel, 'Well that must mean that there is no karma as well. There is no virtue, so there is nothing then to strive for, because everything is just empty'. If a person develops such a misunderstanding then they will see no difference between virtue and ill deeds. Thus there will be nothing to stop them from committing ill deeds, and that will result in them going to lower rebirths.

As the commentary explains:

Initially, therefore, they should be taught about virtuous and non-virtuous actions and about cause and effect since that is easy to understand. As it is the proper time, they should thus be prevented from engaging in demeritorious misdeeds.

If a teaching on emptiness were to be given to a person who is liable to completely misinterpret and misunderstand it, then, in fact, rather than being of benefit for them it can become a cause to engage in unmeritorious deeds. Thus

...they should be prevented from engaging in demeritorious misdeeds.

This relates to general misdeeds, but in particular to the misunderstanding of emptiness. If one were to misunderstand the explanation of emptiness then that could lead them to believe there is no difference between virtue and non-virtue and thus give them the permission to engage in non-virtuous deeds willingly and intentionally. Thus rather than benefiting them it would harm them. So for beings who are liable to misunderstand or misinterpret the teachings on emptiness, the teachings on virtuous and non-virtuous actions in general, and on cause and effect should be given, as they are easy to understand and can be of benefit to them at that time.

Next the coarse self should be repudiated by refuting the referent object of twenty views of the transitory

collections by means of the five-fold analysis of the aggregates.

Once the disciple has been led into engaging in virtue and the teachings on cause and effect and so forth, then they come to a point where their intelligence has developed to the point where they can understand and accept the teachings on emptiness. Grasping at the self is divided into grasping at the coarse self and grasping at the a subtle self. One first teaches them how to overcome grasping at the coarse self through the teachings on the twenty views of the transitory collections and the five-fold analysis of the aggregates.

'Later', as the commentary reads:

when the mindstream has become receptive, selflessness of persons is taught...

Here 'selflessness of person' refers to subtle selflessness. By showing that even selflessness itself does not exist truly, all views conceiving extremes are prevented.

Whoever knows these stages of teaching is wise regarding the sequence in which trainees are led. It is like a skilled physician who prescribes a bland or oily diet to specific patients.

A skilled physician or doctor will prescribe a diet in relation to the patient's symptoms. According to the Tibetan medical treatises a bland diet should be prescribed for someone who is suffering from the bile element, but that same patient may later suffer from heightened wind elements called *lung*, for which an oily or fatty diet should be prescribed.

#### 1.2.2.6. INDISTINGUISHABILITY IN ENTITY WITH REGARD TO THE FINAL MODE OF EXISTENCE OF THINGS

*Question:* By what path is liberation attained?

*Answer:* By understanding that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence.

*Qualm:* Since there are limitless things, their realities are also limitless. Who could know them all? Moreover, it is said that one cannot attain liberation whilst there is a single phenomenon that one does not know and has not abandoned.

This is of course a reasonable doubt that some of us may have actually come up with. When we hear that in order to achieve liberation one has to see the non-inherent existence or emptiness of all phenomena, then one may naturally begin to think, 'If there are limitless phenomena, universes and so forth, and I have to see the non-inherent existence of them all, then how could I ever possibly attain liberation?' Furthermore when the teaching explains that unless one abandons the misconceptions in relation to all phenomena one cannot attain liberation, then again, since there are limitless phenomena how can one possibly overcome the misconceptions of all phenomena? This is a reasonable doubt.

*Answer:* There is no fault.

*Whoever sees one thing* 191  
*Is said to see all.*  
*That which is the emptiness of one*  
*Is the emptiness of all.*

The meaning of this verse has also been explained many times.

Whoever sees one thing's fundamental mode of existence  
Which is its emptiness of inherent existence is said to see  
the reality of all things.

This explanation could lead to another misunderstanding, so it is important to understand the point being made here. One should not misunderstand this point to mean that if one understands the emptiness of one phenomenon then one will naturally see and understand the emptiness of all

phenomena. This is best understood with the example of a vase. The classic syllogism is: a vase is empty, because of being an interdependent origination. Using the reason of interdependent origination one comes to realise the empty nature of the vase, meaning that one sees the lack of inherent existence of the vase. One can apply that same logical reason to any other phenomena, to understand that any phenomena that one focuses on, also lack inherent existence. The commentary refers to the sutra called the *King of Meditative Stabilisation* which says:

Through one all are known  
And through one all are seen

Here again one must understand the context. It does not mean that by knowing one phenomena one will naturally know all. What it does refer to is that when one knows the non-inherent existence of one phenomenon, then one is able to know the non-inherent existence of any other phenomena that one may focus on. One can use the understanding of the non-inherent existence of one phenomenon to understand the non-inherent existence of any other phenomena that one might focus on.

Then there is reference to another sutra called the *Meditative Stabilisation of Gaganaganja* which says:

Whoever through one phenomenon knows  
All phenomena are like illusions, mirages and are  
inapprehensible.

The commentary says:

It is like the following analogy: by drinking one drop of sea water you know the rest is salty. "That which is the emptiness of one thing is the emptiness of all".

The statement, 'The emptiness of one thing is the emptiness of all', could again lead to a misinterpretation. It is not saying that the emptiness of one object such as a vase is the emptiness of another, such as a pillar. It does not mean that that the emptiness within pillar and the emptiness within the vase is one and the same thing. Rather it is referring to the nature of all emptiness. The emptiness of a vase, for example, is that it is a mere negation of true existence. Likewise the emptiness of a pillar is the mere negation of true existence. So as far as their entity or nature is concerned, there is no difference in the mere negation of the inherent existence or true existence of both objects.

The analogy that is used is that 'It is like the space in different receptacles [or vessels]'. There are many different vessels and the space within each of the vessels is defined as the mere negation of obstruction. As far as its entity is concerned the space in all the many different vessels is the same in as much as it is the mere negation of obstructiveness. So in that way the space is the same. Again, going back to the pillar and the vase, it is not saying that the emptiness within the vase is also the emptiness within the pillar. As far as the objects are concerned they are separate, and thus the emptiness within each are based on the separate objects. However the entity of emptiness itself is the same.

The commentary also mentions that when we view phenomena there are many different aspects that appear to us, such as different colours, for example blue and yellow and so forth. These different colours or different aspects of phenomena are separate entities, and each phenomenon is separate and distinct. However as far as the entity or the nature of the emptiness within these phenomena is concerned, they are all the same, in that the emptiness is the mere negation of true existence. So to that extent it is the same entity.

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As always we will sit in a comfortable and relaxed position, We should also make sure that our motivation for receiving the teaching is not one that is focussed merely on personal benefit, but we should also generate a motivation with the intention to listen to the teachings and practise, as best as one can, to benefit all beings.

It is essential that we train our mind from the very outset to make sure that we are free from intentions that focus solely on personal benefit. That then helps to overcome the self-cherishing mind. If, from the very outset, we can familiarise our mind with seeing the faults of just cherishing oneself, then that will help us to overcome that attitude and generate a stronger and stronger attitude of wishing to benefit other sentient beings. This is also true for any practice in which we engage.

## 1.2.2.7. LACK OF CONTRADICTION IN TEACHING THE NECESSITY OF ACCUMULATING MERIT THROUGH GIVING AND SO FORTH

Question: If everything is to be given up because of being empty, why does sutra say that one should show respect and create merit?

This question indicates that some sutras explain that one should give up attachment to everything, because of the view that everything is merely empty. However there are other sutras which explain that engaging in such practices as showing respect to ordained Sangha and holy objects creates merit. The question indicates that there seems to be some contradiction there.

Answer: There is no contradiction.

*Tathagatas speak of attachment to practices  
To those who want a high rebirth.  
That is disparaged for those who want freedom –  
What need to mention other [attachments]?* 192

To give a very literal explanation of the verse, what is indicated in the first two lines is that the tathagatas, or the buddhas, explain that practices involving attachment to certain goals are for those who wish to obtain a higher rebirth in the next lifetime. Here, attachment to practices refers to the practices that accumulate merit specifically to obtain a higher rebirth in the next lifetime. These practices are prescribed for those who have such an attachment.

The third line of the verse refers to these practices involving accumulating merit for a higher rebirth being disparaged by those who wish to obtain self-liberation. The last line says that if practices involving the accumulation of merit for higher rebirths are disparaged for those who wish for self-liberation, then there is no need to mention that they will be disparaged by those who wish to achieve enlightenment. As the commentary further explains:

To those who fear bad rebirths and want a high rebirth, and who are incapable of meditating on subtle production, disintegration and so forth, Tathagatas speak of attachment to practices like giving and [so forth]...

Some beings have the capacity of wishing for a higher rebirth but are incapable of meditating on 'subtle production, disintegration and so forth', which refers to subtle impermanence and emptiness. These people are not ready to hear about the immense sufferings of the lower realms, but when they hear of the results of a good rebirth in the next lifetime, they have a strong desire or wish to achieve that. For beings with such capacity, the practices such as giving and so forth are explained.

If such an aspiration for merely a high rebirth is disparaged in those who seek liberation ...

As mentioned earlier, there are beings of lower level capacity, who do not yet have the capacity to contemplate subtle phenomena such as emptiness and also the sufferings of the lower realms, but who do have the wish to achieve a good rebirth in the next lifetime. They believe in future lives and thus wish to achieve a good rebirth in the next lifetime. For such beings the practices involving giving generously and so forth are explained. However these practices are disparaged by those who seek liberation. That being the case, what need is there to mention attachment to wrongdoing. If even good meritorious actions are disparaged, then there is no need to mention actual negative deeds.

## 1.2.3. Stages leading to the meaning of the fundamental mode of existence

This is sub-divided into five:

- 1.2.3.1. Suchness should not be taught to the unreceptive
- 1.2.3.2. Means to understand suchness
- 1.2.3.3. Necessity of teaching it through various approaches
- 1.2.3.4. Advice to strive to understand suchness
- 1.2.3.5. Through familiarisation in this way, nirvana can definitely be attained

### 1.2.3.1. SUCHNESS SHOULD NOT BE TAUGHT TO THE UNRECEPTIVE [OR THE UNRIPE]

*Assertion:* If all suffering is stopped by understanding emptiness, it would be appropriate to teach only suchness [or emptiness].

*Answer:* That is not so [as] it depends upon differences in receptivity.

*Those who want merit should not  
Always speak of emptiness.  
Doesn't a medicinal compound  
Turn to poison in the wrong case?* 193

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

If emptiness is explained to those who are not receptive, it will cause misfortune [or downfall].

One of the misfortunes or faults would be that they would reject emptiness. Another misfortune or fault would be that by misunderstanding emptiness to mean that everything is non-existent, they would go to bad transmigrations. As the commentary continues:

Therefore those with compassion who want the merit of caring for others should never speak about emptiness without first examining the recipient.

Those who have compassion for other sentient beings, and who wish to lead them to the right goals, should not be explaining emptiness at the very outset, when listeners are not suitable vessels or recipients, and would be liable to fall into the faults of either rejecting emptiness entirely, or misunderstand it, and come to the conclusion that everything is non-existent.

Doesn't even an appetizing and potent medicinal compound turn to poison when given to the wrong

patient? It is like giving someone who has not been poisoned an antidote to poison and thereby killing them.

Emptiness should not be taught to those who are unreceptive. Rather the practices that help to cultivate an understanding of emptiness should be presented first. As mentioned earlier, these are the practices of engaging generosity and so forth. The commentary also quotes from the text by Matrceta, which says:

[Only] unstained cloth [is good for] dyeing.  
[Likewise] the mind must be properly developed  
By first speaking of giving and so forth,  
Then one should meditate on the teaching.

Matrceta is also known by his Tibetan name, Lopon Tayang. Initially, he was a non-Buddhist and was referred to as the great master with the melodious sound, as he had very elegant and melodious speech, and thus could really influence and convert others. Later, when he converted himself to Buddhism he was also known by other names. Even before he became Buddhist, he was known as Matrceta, which means one who is very reverent to his mother. He also had other names which referred to being very reverent to his father. So apparently he was known to be very respectful towards his parents. After he became a Buddhist, he was known as Lopon Pawo—the great courageous Pandit. He has since been revered as a great master and scholar, and he composed many texts.

As the verse from Matrceta indicates, only unstained cloth is good for dyeing. This relates to the procedure for removing stains from a cloth in order to make it suitable for dyeing. First one needs to remove the dirt from the cloth which, if it stained quite badly would involve washing it many times, and rinsing it and so forth until the very subtle stains are removed. Only then would it be suitable for dyeing.

Using that as an analogy, it is explained that the mind must be properly developed with the practices of generosity and so forth, before it is suitable to receive teachings on emptiness. According to the analogy of removing the stains from the cloth, the very gross stains are removed in the first washing, and only in the second and third attempt at washing can the stubborn stains be removed. Likewise in developing the mind, the very gross level of the delusions or faults of the mind, have to be dealt with first. When the gross levels of the delusions and so forth have been removed, one can then deal with the subtle delusions and faults of the mind. That is how the analogy is understood to be the meaning of how one engages in the practice.

One must examine the recipient.

In a very practical sense the main point being made here is that one must be skilled in speaking to others. One should not talk about profound or difficult things initially, and then scare people away. Rather, one should talk gently, about sensible things that they can understand and relate to. When you gain their confidence on practical and realistic things, then you can come to more difficult points, which they then would be able to accept.

### 1.2.3.2. MEANS TO UNDERSTAND SUCHNESS

At the outset one should teach in accordance with how ordinary people accept that things exist.

*Just as a barbarian cannot be* 194  
*Guided in a foreign language,*  
*Ordinary people cannot be guided*  
*Except by way of the ordinary.*

This explains that the teaching on conventional phenomena

should be presented first, because ordinary beings can relate to phenomena in accord with their normal perceptions. From there ultimate phenomena can be introduced. That is how one should guide and lead others.

This will be explained further on in the commentary, however we can take a vase as an example. In order to introduce the ultimate phenomena within a vase, first the vase itself should be established in a conventional way. That is done, as the scriptures indicate, by first giving a definition of what a vase is and then establishing the attributes of a vase, how it is a functional phenomena, has a spout and so forth. When the phenomenon called vase is completely understood on a conventional level, then one goes into further explaining the non-inherent existence of a vase, showing that it does not exist inherently. Because the existence of a vase on a conventional level has been already established and understood, its non-inherent existence can be understood better.

The first two lines of the verse use the analogy of a barbarian, who can be defined as a person who comes from a remote, uncivilised place in relation to the arts, poetry and all of the normal studies that are done in a civilised city; people from remote areas, for example, have not mastered those skills. If you try to speak to them using civilised language, they will not be able to understand you. So in order to speak with people who come from uncivilised areas, one must use whatever language and norms they have in order to communicate with them. Thus the meaning here is that initial teachings should be in keeping with conventionally accepted things like generosity and so forth. As the commentary says:

Ordinary people cannot be guided to an understanding of ultimate truth unless they understand the ordinary, namely the explanation of how conventional things exist.

Prior to teaching the ultimate nature of things, one must first convey explanations of the conventional existence of phenomena, and based on that understanding, one can then guide them to understanding the ultimate nature of things. The reason for explaining conventional phenomena first is because an understanding of conventional phenomena serves as a basis for understanding the ultimate nature of phenomena. Thus conventional phenomena becomes the method for understanding the ultimate. Aryadeva then quotes Chandrakirti's *Supplement to the Middle Way*, which says:

Conventional truth is the means;  
Ultimate truth, the outcome of the means

I've given an explanation of these lines many times before. Their main point is that, as the commentary mentions:

One should teach ultimate truth based on an acceptance of conventional existence in one's own system.

The analogy presented in the commentary is:

One cannot make a child understand in a foreign language.

### 1.2.3.3. NECESSITY OF TEACHING IT THROUGH VARIOUS APPROACHES

This heading indicates the reasons why the Buddha gave teachings in many different ways.

*Teaching existence, non-existence,* 195  
*Both existence and non-existence, and neither*  
*Surely are medicines for all*  
*That are influenced by the sickness.*

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse thus:

As a means of guiding the world [or worldly beings], to eliminate views of non-existence, the Teacher [or the Buddha] told trainees that everything exists ...

As the commentary explains, the Buddha taught that things do exist, in order to eliminate the wrong view that things do not exist.

... and to eliminate conceptions of true existence, he taught that there is no true existence.

The Buddha did this to remove another extreme view, which is that if things were to exist then they must be truly existent. In order to eliminate this wrong conclusion, the Buddha taught that there is no true existence.

In relation to conventional awareness and analytical awareness he taught existence and non-existence ...

What this refers to, as explained in the Madhyamaka text, is that the existence of things is established by conventional awareness. Thus conventional awareness establishes the existence of phenomena. However it is analytical awareness, (also referred as wisdom) that establishes non-existence, which refers to non-inherent existence or non-true existence. This establishes the ultimate nature of phenomena, which is emptiness. In other words analytical awareness or wisdom establishes emptiness.

When viewing the existence of phenomena in a conventional way, then things exist because they are established by conventional awareness. Thus things do exist, and that is what we call existence. With regard to non-existence, in the state of complete absorption on emptiness such as the meditative equipoise of an arya who is on the path of seeing, for example, nothing but emptiness appears. Conventional phenomena do not appear to an arya who is in single-pointed meditative equipoise on emptiness. Thus for a higher being it is as if external things do not exist, because the only thing that appears to that higher being is emptiness. The non-appearance of any other conventional phenomena is the establishment of emptiness for such a being. That is how it should be understood.

The text then continues:

...and to eliminate the two extreme views of existence and non-existence, he taught that both things and non-things are not truly existent. Surely these are simply medicines to remove all views influenced by the sickness of wrong thinking. Therefore everything the Teacher [or the Buddha] said is a means to attain nirvana, taking into consideration individual trainees.

As explained here clearly, in every instance whatever the Buddha taught is an ultimate means to guide a particular trainee to a certain level of attainment.

#### 1.2.3.4. ADVICE TO STRIVE TO UNDERSTAND SUCHNESS

Showing how things are free from the extremes of existence and non-existence by teaching that they exist, do not exist and so forth is teaching on the ultimate. Correctly perceiving the ultimate with supramundane wisdom leads to the attainment of the supreme state of liberation.

*Correct perception [leads to] the supreme state, 196  
Some [slight] perception to good rebirths.  
The wise thus always expand their intelligence  
To think about the inner nature.*

The main point of the first line, as explained in the commentary, is that it is by correctly perceiving the ultimate with supramundane wisdom (which is the analytical

wisdom that is gained on the path of seeing,) the direct perception of emptiness leads the trainee to achieve the state of liberation.

The explanation of the second line of the verse is:

Perceiving it to some extent with the mundane wisdom arising from meditation or from hearing and thinking leads to good rebirths.

To what extent does the understanding of the ultimate or emptiness benefit the trainee? Those who realise emptiness directly have supramundane wisdom, which refers here to the wisdom of those who have obtained the arya path. Therefore those who have obtained the arya path and who have the realisation of the direct perception (or understanding) of emptiness have the wisdom of the ultimate, and can therefore be led to achieving the ultimate or supreme state of liberation.

Whereas mundane refers to those below the path of seeing, who perceive emptiness to some extent. This means that they have a slight understanding of emptiness, conceptual or otherwise, that arises from meditation, or from hearing or thinking about emptiness. Such an understanding will lead the trainee, to at least achieve a good rebirth in the next lifetime.

As explained in other teachings as well, the benefits of studying and hearing about emptiness, and then thinking and contemplating and meditating on emptiness will, at the very least, definitely protect oneself from lower rebirths. Not only does it protect one from unfortunate or lower rebirths in the next lifetime, but an understanding of emptiness can help one gain (at the very least) a good and higher rebirth in the next life time.

As the commentary continues:

Thus the wise constantly expand their intelligence to think about the inner nature - emptiness.

For the reasons explained earlier, someone who contemplates and thinks about those benefits of understanding emptiness will constantly expand their intelligence to think about inner nature, which here means emptiness. Thus thinking about how things lack inherent existence, or lack true existence, or lack a truly existent self, one gains liberation and enlightenment as the ultimate result. At the very least, one will be free from lower rebirths and obtain a good rebirth in the next lifetime.

#### 1.2.3.5. THROUGH FAMILIARISATION IN THIS WAY, NIRVANA CAN DEFINITELY BE ATTAINED

This is sub-divided into two:

1.2.3.5.1. Actual meaning

1.2.3.5.2. Why some do not gain release although release is gained by understanding suchness

##### 1.2.3.5.1. ACTUAL MEANING

*Through knowing reality, even if now 197  
One does not attain nirvana,  
One will certainly gain it effortlessly  
In a later life, as it is with actions.*

As the commentary explains:

Even if one does not attain nirvana in this life by knowing the reality of dependent arising free from extremes of elaboration, through familiarity with the understanding of suchness, one will certainly attain it effortlessly in a later life merely by virtue of remaining in seclusion.

The analogy is:

It is like an action performed out of ignorance, the effect of which will be experienced upon taking rebirth.

What the analogy is referring to is that as we study the workings of karma, we come to realise that the results of some actions that are performed now don't necessarily have to be experienced right away, or even later in this life. Rather, the results of some actions will be experienced, or will ripen, in a future life.

Just as that is true for general actions and their results, so too the practices concerned with training one's mind to understand emptiness and familiarising oneself with those practices, are a cause to achieve liberation. Even if one does not gain liberation in this lifetime as a result of one's training and practice, that effort will not go to waste. Rather the merit or the positive influence from that meditation, thinking, contemplating and so forth, will accumulate to result in obtaining liberation in future lifetimes.

As the commentary concludes:

What intelligent person would not strive to understand suchness?

This rhetorical question indicates that they would. The commentary then uses this analogy:

After eating a ripe mango, if you plant its stone, you'll get fruit later.

So you enjoy the mango now and then you engage in the action of planting the seed (or stone), and you will be able to enjoy the fruit again later in the future. Practising in this life is similar to that.

Then the commentary quotes from the *Fundamental Treatise Called Wisdom*, or *Root Wisdom*. Those who studied the *Madhyamakavatara* will remember that at the very beginning of the text it says that hearers and solitary realisers are born from buddhas. At that point a doubt is raised, and that same point is also raised there.

The *Fundamental Treatise Called Wisdom* says:

When consummate Buddhas do not appear  
And Hearers too have come to an end,  
The wisdom of Solitary Realizers  
Manifests independently.

As explained at the beginning of the *Madhyamaka* text, after hearing the Buddha's teachings his disciples, who are in the category of disciples known as hearers and solitary realisers go into seclusion or practise realising what has been taught. Saying that the hearers and the solitary realisers are born from the buddhas indicates that their realisations and achievements are obtained as a result of the Buddha's teachings. The doubt that is raised is why is it that the hearers on receiving the teachings of the Buddha, go on to practise and then obtain their goal of liberation in their own lifetime, while the solitary realisers seem to take much longer. They are reborn again and again, and take much longer to obtain the goal of liberation.

The response is that it is not as if the solitary realisers do not obtain their goal of liberation. Even if they do not obtain the goal of liberation in that very lifetime, having received the teachings and going off in seclusion and practising, they will be reborn again and in a future lifetime will obtain their goal of liberation. That explanation in *Fundamental Treatise Called Wisdom* is backed up with a quotation of verse 197 from *Four*

*Hundred Verses*. Those students who studied the *Madhyamaka* can refer back to those notes.<sup>1</sup>

The conclusion is that the purpose of the Buddha's teaching is of course to obtain liberation as a result of hearing the teachings and practicing them. The ultimate goal or intention is to lead the disciples to liberation, but that does not necessarily mean that the disciples have to obtain liberation within that single lifetime. If liberation is obtained in future lifetimes, that is also a suitable reason for the Buddha to give the teachings on suchness.

What we take away from this explanation as personal advice is that by reflecting on the explanations given in the text, one understands importance of familiarising oneself with the explanations of emptiness, as part of the process of gaining a full understanding and realisation of emptiness. Any continuous effort that we put in now will definitely lead to positive results, if not liberation in this lifetime then definitely a better rebirth in our next life time, and will stop unfortunate rebirths in the future lifetimes. Ultimately, it will lead to achieving liberation.

What is the benefit of making any attempt to understanding suchness or emptiness? It is the ultimate or the supreme goal that one can attain, which is liberation. If that is not obtained immediately then the next best result that one can certainly obtain is a good rebirth. One will obtain liberation, if not this lifetime then in future lifetimes, as a result of the continuous effort that we put into understanding emptiness. This is backed up with the quotes from the *Fundamental Treatise Called Wisdom*, as well as verse 197 from *Four Hundred Verses*.

Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright  
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Edited Version

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<sup>1</sup> See teachings of 12 March 2002 and 19 March 2002.



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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*

10 July 2007

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### **1.2. Explaining extensively how to abandon disturbing emotions**

#### **1.2.3. Stages leading to the meaning of the fundamental mode of existence**

##### **1.2.3.5. THROUGH FAMILIARISATION IN THIS WAY,**

**NIRVANA CAN DEFINITELY BE ATTAINED**

##### **1.2.3.5.2. WHY SOME DO NOT GAIN RELEASE ALTHOUGH RELEASE IS GAINED BY UNDERSTANDING SUCHNESS**

*Question:* If there are many who understand suchness [or emptiness] why does one not see people who are released from worldly existence?

This question is in relation to the doubt that if it is true that one obtains liberation by realising emptiness, then why do we not see many who are liberated?

*Answer:* Though one does see some, mere intention does not create results. The coming together of causes and conditions does, yet this is very rare.

What this indicates (which is also the main point of the following verse) is that even though there may be many who wish to achieve liberation, that mere wish in itself cannot serve as a cause to bring about the result of liberation. There are many causes and conditions that have to come together to achieve that end.

*Accomplishment of all intended Actions is extremely uncommon. 198*  
*It is not that nirvana is absent here*  
*But conjunction and the released are rare.*

The first two lines of the verse explicitly state that it is very uncommon to obtain goals just by merely wishing to achieve them. This is actually a very important point that we should take as personal advice. We all have grand wishes and we want to achieve high realisations and so forth. However, as indicated here, merely having a wish without acquiring the appropriate causes and conditions to achieve that goal, doesn't bring those results. This is something that one has to keep in mind; if one wishes to achieve a goal, one must acquire the causes and conditions.

As indicated here in commentary the coming together of causes and conditions will bring about the result of realisation and ultimately liberation, however this is very rare. What is being indicated here is that although the results can be obtained by the accumulation of causes and conditions, being able to accumulate all the necessary causes and conditions is very rare or, according to the literal meaning of the Tibetan term, very difficult.

As the commentary further explains:

The accomplishment, merely through intention, of actions that result as intended is extremely uncommon not only in the case of liberation but in all cases.

It is clearly explained here how it is also very difficult to obtain all the causes and conditions for a desired worldly result, let alone achieving the causes and conditions for liberation. With normal mundane wishes such as the wish to obtain wealth, if we don't actually engage in the causes and conditions to obtain money, we will never gain any. The necessary causes and conditions to obtain money are to get a good job! If one merely has a wish for a good job but does not do anything about finding that job, that again will not bring about the result of having a good job. Thus to obtain money there are many causes and conditions involved in obtaining that result. One cannot obtain something just with a mere wish. This is actually very sound and practical advice.

As the commentary continues:

It is not that no one aspires to attain nirvana in the Buddha's teaching, but that causes and conditions – external conditions such as a spiritual friend, and internal ones such as the correct mental approach – very seldom combine and come together, which is why the released are rare.

What is being clearly explained here is that by hearing the Buddha's teaching and by studying it, the wish or aspiration to achieve liberation will definitely occur. The reason why liberation is difficult to obtain isn't because no one aspires to achieve liberation, but because it is difficult to meet with the necessary external and internal conditions, either because they are rare or because it is hard for them to come together.

As explained here, the external conditions rely on a spiritual friend or a spiritual teacher and the internal conditions involve having the correct mental approach. With regard to the internal conditions, we may wish for liberation, yet we normally engage in incorrect mental approaches on a daily basis. This refers to all the delusions and so forth with which we are most familiar. Thus the internal conditions of a correct mental approach are very difficult for us to gather.

The reason, according to the commentary is 'why the released are rare', which means that those who are to obtain liberation are very rare.

One of the correct mental approaches in relation to achieving liberation is cultivating detachment. When we look into how much we engage in the correct mental approach, which is detachment, we may find that that is very seldom, whereas the opposite, which is attachment, occurs rapidly, and continuously. Thus rather than acquiring the causes and conditions for liberation, we are acquiring the causes and conditions to further ourselves from that goal.

In relation to the external condition of finding 'spiritual friend', an authentic spiritual friend is one with all the characteristics intact, i.e. a spiritual friend who has a realisation of emptiness. So when we look into the qualities required to be an authentic spiritual friend, we see that, actually, that also can be very difficult to find.

#### **1.2.4. Advice that disturbing attitudes and emotions can certainly be brought to an end**

*Question:* How can one be sure there is an end to this multitude of disturbing attitudes and emotions which

have continued to occur for so long, since beginningless time?

*Answer:*

*On hearing that the body lacks good qualities, 199  
Attachment does not last long.  
Will not all disturbing attitudes  
End by means of this very path?*

In relation to the first line in the Tibetan version, the commentary explains:

... the body lacks good qualities in that its nature is to disintegrate non matter how long it is cared for with all kinds of things, that it is ungrateful and difficult to nurture, ...

This translation says 'difficult to nurture', but the Tibetan says, 'difficult to understand the nature of the body'. Even though it is difficult to understand the nature of the body, when this is explained to the intelligent, who know how to think analytically, then their attachment to their body will not last long. As explained in the commentary it is the nature of our body that although it has all these faults, ordinary beings only see its attractiveness and contemplate that.

This obscures the reality of the body, which is that it lacks good qualities and that it is in its nature to disintegrate and so forth. Here 'the intelligent' refers to those who have an understanding of emptiness. When the nature of the body is described to such intelligent beings, they are immediately able to overcome attachment to their body, because of their intelligence and ability to use analytical wisdom.

Similarly why should it not be possible to end all disturbing attitudes and emotions through the path that consists of meditating on dependent arising free from extremes of elaboration?

Here, the commentary explains that just as it is possible to overcome long-standing attachment to the body, other attachments or delusions can also be overcome. When the text refers to 'the path that consists of meditating on dependent arising' this refers to the path of seeing. In other words, through the direct realisation of emptiness, one can definitely overcome all other disturbing emotions.

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

As the outline explains, our life in samsara is said to be beginningless. There is no one point that we can say is the beginning of our life. However even though that is the case, there can be an end to samsaric life. That is explained with an analogy that we have also referred to in the past.

*Question:* How can the continuity of rebirths occurring since beginningless time come to an end?

*Answer:*

*Just as the end of a seed is seen 200  
Though it has no beginning,  
When the causes are incomplete  
Birth, too, will not occur.*

As the commentary explains:

Although a seed, such as a barley seed, has no beginning, its end is seen when it is burnt by fire and the like.

This is quite an explicit analogy which refers to the continuum of a seed. A seed is the result of a previous seed. Likewise, that seed will have had a previous seed. In this way, when we go back to trying to find the first seed, the beginning of any continuum of a seed, we find that we cannot possibly trace it back, and be able to say 'This seed is the beginning of the continuum of a seed'. However there can be an end to the continuum of a particular seed when, for example, it is burnt by fire, so that it doesn't have any potential to sprout anymore. As the commentary reads:

Similarly the causes for birth in worldly existence are made incomplete by eliminating all conceptions of a personal self. Thus though the strength of the antidote, rebirth in worldly existence due to contaminated actions and disturbing attitudes and emotions will not occur again.

As clearly explained here, just as with the earlier analogy of the cessation of a seed, cessation of worldly or samsaric existence (even though there is no beginning) can be achieved by eliminating all conceptions of a personal self. When grasping at the self, which is the main or root cause of cyclic existence is overcome, then as explained here, cyclic existence ceases. As the commentary also explains:

Thus though the strength of the antidote, rebirth in worldly existence due to contaminated actions and disturbing attitudes and emotions will not occur again.

A further analogy is:

Once a butterlamp's fuel is exhausted it will not burn.

When the fuel of a butter lamp is exhausted it cannot burn any longer. It is similar with worldly existence. Involuntary rebirth in worldly existence or samsara under the influence of delusions and contaminated actions will cease when the root cause of self-grasping is overcome. That can be clearly understood with the earlier analogy. So it is good for us to use that analogy to reflect on how we can view samsara.

The commentary also quotes from the works from the master Buddhapalita:

Though seeing transmigrators as empty,  
Since you wish to remove their suffering  
You have toiled for a long time.  
This is most amazing!

Master Buddhapalita was renowned as a most skilled scholar, particularly of the Madhyamika or Middle Way. Even hearing or uttering the name 'Buddhapalita', is said to remove a lot of negative karma from our mind. This quote from Buddhapalita explicitly refers to the great deeds of a bodhisattva. It explains that even though for them involuntary samsaric rebirth has ceased through the wisdom realising emptiness, like a fire that destroys the seeds of delusions and karma, bodhisattvas (who have achieved that wisdom) out of their great love and compassion for sentient beings, voluntarily take rebirth into cyclic existence over and over again, in order to

benefit sentient beings. So in order to work for the benefit of sentient beings, bodhisattvas voluntarily come back into cyclic existence. That is said to be because of their great prayers and aspirations to benefit sentient beings. As it says, 'This is most amazing!'

Gyaltsab Je explains that:

The deeds of Bodhisattvas, who are concerned with the welfare of sentient beings though they see that transmigrators do not exist inherently, are most amazing.

Even though only a short explanation is given here, it refers to the most amazing fact that even though all the causes and conditions to come into cyclic existence have ceased through having developed the wisdom realising emptiness, and using that to completely overcome the root causes, the fact that bodhisattvas voluntarily come back into cyclic existence is most amazing.

As is also mentioned in other teachings, bodhisattvas cannot bear the suffering of sentient beings and come back into cyclic existence to benefit sentient beings, through their prayers and aspiration. This shows the power of the prayers and aspirations that we make now. So if we make strong prayers and aspirations to benefit sentient beings then, when we gain realisations of emptiness, we will not become immersed in the bliss of those realisations. Rather, we are constantly reminded to come back again to continue to benefit sentient beings. Thus the power of prayers and aspirations are illustrated here. The personal advice is, as mentioned in the commentary:

Therefore, one should emulate them.

These points have been explained earlier in other teachings, however it is good to reflect on the main points again. A bodhisattva, who has gained direct realisations of emptiness, could not be involuntarily reborn into cyclic existence, because the causes to be reborn into cyclic existence have completely ceased. Yet they do choose to be reborn again due to their prayers and aspirations to benefit sentient beings. That is why, as it is as explained here, 'This is most amazing!'

The summarising stanza by Gyel-tsap Rinpoche is:

Develop recognition that through contaminated  
action,  
Even to attain the best states as gods and humans is  
imprisonment.  
Though familiarity with meditation on dependent  
arising free from extremes,  
Make yourself a suitable vessel for the Great Vehicle.

What is being indicated here is that the mind has been made suitable to receive the teachings of emptiness through the earlier explanations and the teachings on emptiness contained in this chapter.

## 2. Presenting the name of the chapter

*This is the eighth chapter from the Four Hundred on the Yogic Deeds, on training the student.*

It is good to put everything into the context of how the whole text is a presentation leading an individual being to enlightenment by presenting the **basis**, which is the Two Truths; the **method** which is the paths of the

accumulation of merit and wisdom; and the **results**, which are the two types of enlightened buddha bodies to be obtained. Thus in the context of the whole path leading to enlightenment, we can see how the basis, which is the Two Truths (conventional truth and ultimate truth) is being presented.

Now we go more specifically into presenting ultimate truth which then leads into the accumulation of merit and wisdom, which in turn leads to the ultimate result.

### 3.2.2. EXPLAINING THE STAGES OF THE PATHS DEPENDENT ON ULTIMATE TRUTH<sup>1</sup>

This is sub-divided into two:

3.2.2.1. Extensively explaining ultimate truth

3.2.2.2. Showing how to meditate on settling [the procedure between] spiritual guides and students by way of [explaining] the purpose of the chapters and eliminating remaining counter-arguments by misguided opponents

#### 3.2.2.1. EXTENSIVELY EXPLAINING ULTIMATE TRUTH

As the definition explains, that which is in accordance to the actual mode of existence, or how things actually exist, is ultimate truth. Whereas, that which appears to be reality, but which contradicts the actual mode of its existence is what is called a conventional truth.

This section is sub-divided into three categories:

3.2.2.1.1. General refutation of true existence by refuting permanent functional phenomena

3.2.2.1.2. Individual refutation of truly existent functional phenomena: Refuting the self

3.2.2.1.3. Refuting the inherent existence of production, duration and disintegration, the characteristics of products

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<sup>1</sup> The numbering of this heading refers back to the initial structure of the text outlined on 7 March 2006 and 14 March 2006. The numbering of each chapter starts anew to keep the number of digits under control.

The text has four subdivisions:

1. Meaning of the title

2. Translators prostration

3. Meaning of the text

4. Colophon or conclusion

Section 3 'Meaning of the text' has two subdivisions:

3.1 An overview of the text

3.2 Specific explanation of the different chapters

The specific explanation of the different chapters has two outlines:

3.2.1. Explaining the stages of the path dependent on illusory conventional truth

3.2.2. Explaining the stages of the path dependent on ultimate truth

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## CHAPTER IX: GENERAL REFUTATION OF TRUE EXISTENCE BY REFUTING PERMANENT FUNCTIONAL PHENOMENA<sup>2</sup>

The chapter is sub-divided into two main categories:

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

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

This heading is sub-divided into three main sub-divisions:

- 1.1. Refuting permanent functional phenomena in general
- 1.2. Refuting them individually
- 1.3. Arguing the unsuitability of refuting true existence

#### 1.1. Refuting permanent functional phenomena in general

This is sub-divided into two:

- 1.1.1. Actual meaning
- 1.1.2. Refuting the rejoinder

##### 1.1.1. Actual meaning

By cleansing the mindstream with the flowing water of means by which to understand suchness, the previous chapters have made it a vessel fit for the nectar of suchness.

The earlier chapters dealt mainly with conventional reality or conventional truth. In order to understand ultimate truth, one must first establish what conventional truth is, as it is only with a sound understanding of conventional truth that one attempt to understand ultimate truth.

The remaining chapters will explain how products which arise and disintegrate do not have even the slightest essence of inherent existence.

*All are produced for their effect* 201  
*Thus none are permanent.*  
*There are no Tathagatas other than*  
*Subduers [who know] things as they are.*

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse thus:

In the world it is accepted that when a laborer works hard for his wage, it is for the result and not because it is his nature to do so.

Even though the work someone engages in might be difficult, hard and so forth, and therefore not something that he would naturally engage in, he does the work because of the result that he obtains, which is the wage. It is not as if he is addicted to work and just wants to work without any reason! He works in order to gain a wage. That is what is widely accepted. I think that the analogy is to be understood as meaning that receiving wages is not something that occurs naturally, but only as a result of work that is carried out.

As the commentary further explains:

Similarly all external and internal functional phenomena do not arise of their own accord. Since they are produced solely through a multifarious aggregation of factors consisting of interrelated causes

and effects, functional things are produced for their effects.

The main thing being refuted here is inherent existence, or the permanent existence of functional things. Of course, functional things are not permanent, and here, when inherent existence is refuted, it is refuted as a consequence of seeing that if functional things were to be inherently existent, then that would be similar to seeing them as permanently existent. That is what is being refuted.

Within the schools of Buddhist tenets, those who accept inherent existence are the lower Buddhist schools below the Svatantrika. The Sautrantika, Vaibashika and Cittamatin (or Mind Only) schools are the Buddhist tenets who accept inherent existence. The Middle Way school does not accept inherent existence. So according to the Madhyamaka school, accepting inherent existence would be similar to accepting permanent existence, meaning that functional things would also be permanent. So, just as receiving a wage is an effect of having engaged in the work to achieve that result, similarly, all functional phenomena come about as a result of many factors coming together.

As mentioned in the commentary:

...factors consisting of interrelated causes and effects, functional things are produced for their effects....

Just as with the analogy, all functional phenomena are products or effects of their causes. They arise because of their causes and cannot arise from their own side or inherently. What is also being explained here is the fact that 'interrelated causes' has a deeper meaning. Not only do the causes themselves have to depend on the effects but the effects depend on the causes. What this connotes is that the causes, which are the causes of the effects that are produced, are not inherently existent, and also the effects themselves are not inherently existent. Rather, they are inter-dependent. Thus the effects and their causes all arise because of an interdependent relationship. That again rules out any possibility of either the causes or the effects having inherent existence.

...functional things are produced for their effects...

This means that that functional things are produced to bring about their effects, which shows their inter-relationship.

Thus they are not permanent, inherently produced or truly existent. They do not have an essence able to sustain analysis, nor do they exist as things in and of themselves.

Then the commentary explains the second part of the verse:

Only Subduers because they have the abilities of perfected body, speech and mind, directly know impermanence, emptiness and all things without exception as they are. Since no one else does, there are no other Tathagatas.

What is being explained clearly here is that only someone who has the complete ability to know is suitable to be called a tathagata.

Moreover the Teacher said [referring to the Buddha], "Whatever is produced inevitably ceases, for aging

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<sup>2</sup> For ease of reference each chapter starts the numbering anew.  
Chapters 8 and 9

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and death are conditioned by birth.” Thus, since production is for the sake of disintegration, nothing endures by way of its own entity.

This points out the very nature of production is that it will disintegrate, and that disintegration is also dependent on the production, so therefore:

... nothing endures by way of its own entity.

This means that there is nothing which is inherently sustaining from its own side.

As the commentary further reads:

Some refute permanence and true existence by virtue of autonomous reasons. The unfeasibility of this is explained in Candrakirti’s commentary.

What is being explained here is that even though permanence and true existence are refuted by the Prasangika, they cannot be refuted with autonomous reasons. This refers to the structure of a syllogism, where there is a subject, a predicate, and a reason. The lower Buddhist schools, the schools below the Prasangika, use a reasoning known as autonomous reasons to prove impermanence or the lack of true existence and so forth. However according to the Prasangika, one does not use autonomous reasons.

As the commentary further explains:

There is no commonly appearing subject, such as a sprout, posited by tenets, in relation to which a direct valid cognition perceiving it is valid, since all except Prasangikas assert that it is valid in relation to a sprout existing by way of its own character. Prasangikas assert this is impossible.

What is being explained here is that there is no commonly appearing subject. For example, if we take the syllogism, ‘a sprout is impermanent, because it is produced’ then the subject is the sprout. According to the lower Buddhist schools, it has to be a valid cognition perceiving it as valid. In other words, the validity of the sprout is established as it appears to the valid cognition. Thus it is said to be valid.

Whereas the Prasangika ‘assert that it is valid in relation to a sprout existing by way of its own character’. What this means is that according to the Prasangika, the validity of the sprout is not established solely by how it appears: it appears to be inherently existent (or to exist by its own characteristics), and that cannot be established as valid. Thus the manner of how to establish the subject (which is a sprout), is different in the lower Buddhist schools compared to how the Prasangika assert it. These points have been explained earlier, so is good to revise the notes from previous teachings.<sup>3</sup>

The main point here is that according to the Prasangika, when a valid cognition establishes a sprout, for example, when the eye perception establishes the validity of a sprout, it establishes it by seeing the characteristics as existing from their own side, however the validity of the sprout as existing does not have to be a wrong consciousness. The validity is just in seeing the sprout, and it doesn’t have to be correct in every way, in that it

doesn’t have to establish the correctness of it not existing from its own side.

For the lower Buddhist schools, the sprout is established as valid and unmistakable, as it appears to the consciousness. Thus when a sprout appears, it appears unmistakably to exist from its own side, and is thus established as being valid. According to the lower schools, validity is established when one establishes the validity of a sprout and the consciousness perceives the sprout as being unmistakable.

However according to the Prasangika, in that case one would have to then accept that the sprout does exist from its own side (or with its own characteristics), which cannot be the case.

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

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<sup>3</sup> This material was covered extensively between 18 May 2004 and 21 September 2004.

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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*

17 July 2007

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## 1.1. Refuting permanent functional phenomena

### 1.1.2. Refuting the rejoinder

Having established that functional things are impermanent and that there cannot be permanent functional phenomena, the text then specifically refutes the non-Buddhist schools through the use of assertions.

*Vaisheshika Assertion:* Although things that are produced for their effect are not permanent, functional things—from space to the mind, which lack both the feature of being produced and that of being producers; and the smallest particles, which, though they are producers, are not produced—are permanent and truly existent,

*There is not anywhere anything* 202  
*That ever exists without depending.*  
*Thus never is there anywhere*  
*Anything that is permanent.*

We agree with the Vaisheshika that things that are produced for their effect are not permanent. However they also assert that all functional things from space to mind are permanent phenomena.

The Vaisheshika basically assert that all phenomena are included within the following categories of existence: substance, quality, activity, generality and particularity. Substance is further sub-divided into nine: which are the four elements - earth, water, fire, and air, together with space, time, direction, self and mind. Among the category of substance, the last five, from space to mind, are asserted as being both a substance as well as permanent phenomena. The Vaisheshika state that space, time, direction, self and mind are pervasive substances because they pervade everywhere, while the four elements are only partial because they do not pervade all existence. Furthermore, these five substances are considered as permanent phenomena because they 'lack both the feature of being produced and that of being producers'. They establish that substances arise independently, serve as a basis of other phenomena, and so have some functional features. Yet are permanent phenomenon, according to the Vaisheshika.

So, these phenomena - space, time, direction, self and mind - are said to be substance but to lack both the features of being produced and being producers. Whereas the four elements - earth, water, fire, and air - are producers and are produced. However all asserted as functional permanent phenomena.

The smallest particle is also asserted as being a permanent functional phenomenon. Because it is the smallest particle it does not produce any further. The smallest particle is a functional permanent phenomenon; it is not produced, and truly existent. So, they not only assert that it is permanent, but also that it is a truly existent phenomenon. In fact all five categories of substantial existences are asserted as being permanent phenomena, and furthermore truly existent phenomena. As stated in the assertion, all 'are permanent and truly existent'.

The verse refutes that view. As the commentary explains:

Never, at any time or at any place, is there any chance of finding a functional thing that does not depend on relatedness [or dependentness].

This is explaining that there is no time or place where a functional thing does not depend on relatedness, or does not depend on causes. In other words a functional thing is always dependent on its cause and there can never be a time when the functional thing is not dependent on its causes. Therefore, as the commentary reads:

Thus never is there anywhere a permanent functional phenomenon.

This is because a functional thing, by its very nature, is dependent on a cause and therefore cannot be a permanent phenomenon.

Functional phenomena are established as being impermanent phenomena for the reason that they have relatedness. As explained earlier, this means that any functional phenomena has to relate to its causes for it to be produced, and therefore for it to exist.

They are also called functional phenomena because they have a function. Establishing them as being a functional phenomenon negates functional phenomena as being permanent, as well as being truly existent phenomena. If it was a truly existent phenomenon then that would mean it is a phenomenon that does not depend on anything, and which exists from its own side, or which has inherent existence. If we were to assert a truly existent phenomena, we would have to assert a functional phenomenon that does not depend on anything. Thus negating functional phenomenon as being permanent phenomenon is at the same time negating functional phenomena as being truly existent phenomena.

The negation of a functional phenomenon as being a permanent phenomenon should be understood thus: if a functional phenomenon were to be a permanent phenomenon then it would have to be a phenomenon which never changed from moment to moment. However a functional phenomena does change from moment to moment - there are grosser and subtle levels of change that take place all the time. Thus it cannot be a permanent phenomenon.

Likewise the reason why a functional phenomenon is negated in being a truly existent phenomenon is because of the fact, if it were to be a truly existent phenomenon then it would have to be a phenomenon that did not depend on its causes and its conditions for it to be produced. And since a functional phenomenon does depend upon causes and conditions, it cannot be an independent phenomenon and it cannot be a truly existent or inherently existent phenomenon that does not depend on anything. That is how it is negated and that's what we need to understand.

By thinking along these lines one comes to the actual understanding of what is being explained and that will be useful for us. Rather than leaving this as a dry explanation from the text, if we can actually use it in our practice to meditate upon this meaning then we have derived a practice from hearing the teaching. As explained in the teachings we use what we hear in the teaching for analysing, and the wisdom that we gain from analysing for meditation. That is the process of how we should use this material to practice.

What we hear from the teaching on this point is that functional things are not permanent and are not truly



Then the commentary mentions these two lines from a sutra:

Phenomenon with causes and conditions are known.  
Phenomena without causes and conditions do not exist.

### 1.2.1.2. REFUTING THE REJOINER

*If the unproduced is permanent* 204  
*Because impermanent [things] are seen to be*  
*products,*  
*Seeing that the produced exists*  
*Would make the permanent non existent.*

What is being further refuted here is the absurdity of the assertions. The commentary begins the refutation in this way:

If on seeing that a pot and pleasure are impermanent and produced...

This relates to the assertions of the non-Buddhist schools that a partless particle is a permanent phenomenon. As mentioned before according to these schools all substances are permanent phenomena, so therefore a partless particle is a permanent phenomenon. They would establish that a vase is an accumulation of many partless particles. An accumulation of partless particles into one thing, such as a vase is an impermanent phenomenon, because they see functional things such as a part and pleasure as being impermanent, and produced by seeing. They also assert, as it reads here:

...one asserts that the self and so forth are by implication permanent...

That is how they assert the self to be permanent. Because things such as parts and pleasures are impermanent phenomenon they establish by implication that the self is a permanent phenomena, which is an absurd statement.

The following lines of the commentary point out this absurdity and thus refute the non-Buddhist schools.

...it would follow that because of seeing that pot and so forth are produced and exist, whatever is permanent like the self should be non-existent like a sky-flower.

This is refuting the non-Buddhist schools by pointing out the absurdity saying that that if you were to establish the earlier part then by implication one would also have to establish that a self is non-existent phenomenon like a sky-flower.

### 1.2.2. Refuting three un compounded phenomena as substantially existent<sup>3</sup>

This is sub-divided into two:

#### 1.2.2.1. General refutation

#### 1.2.2.2. Specifically refuting permanent omnipresent space

##### 1.2.2.1. GENERAL REFUTATION

Assertion: The treatises of knowledge say space, individual analytical cessations, and non-analytical cessations are permanent and substantially existent. Any refutation of this is invalidated by your own assertions.

Answer: That is not so.

*That space and so forth are permanent* 205  
*Is a conception of common beings.*  
*For the wise they are not objects perceived*  
*Even by conventional [valid cognition].*

The verse is refuting the assertion by initially making a point against the Buddhist view. The Buddhist schools say that there are no functional phenomena, and the non-Buddhist

schools respond by quoting from the sutra *The treatises of knowledge* which says that three things, space, individual analytical cessations and non-analytical cessations are permanent and also substantially existent. 'So', they argue, 'If you say that these things are not functional permanent phenomena, does that not go against the sutra saying that they are?'

The Buddhist school says, 'That is not so, and it does not harm our assertions'. To explain this the commentary reads:

Not understanding the significance of applying the term "space" to mere absence of obstructive contact and so forth, common people think that uncompounded space and so forth are permanent [functional phenomena].

Although it is true that in the sutras there is a reference to space as well as analytical cessation and non-analytical cessation being permanent phenomenon, that is an explanation for common beings who can only accept a limited explanation of those entities.

**Space** is a mere absence of obstructiveness. The definition of space is the mere absence of obstructive contact.

**Analytical cessation** is the cessation that is gained from applying the appropriate antidotes. Through the constant application of antidotes one overcomes particular delusions within one's mental continuum, and then obtains analytical cessation.

**Non-analytical cessation** refers to those things that are abandoned not because of an antidote, but because of the mere absence of the conditions for that thing to arise. So certain delusions or instances are overcome due to the lack of conditions at that time, but if the conditions were right they might arise.

These three are explained in the topic of suchness in the *Treasure of Knowledge*, as being functional permanent phenomena, and this is accepted by the lowest Buddhist school, the Vaibashikas. Being the lowest Buddhist school implies that the intelligence of the Vaibashika is of a limited level. Thus some, although not all, of the Vaibashika school assert that space, for example, is a permanent phenomenon as well as a functional phenomenon. They assert that it is a functional phenomenon because the text says it has the function of allowing things to move about in space. As that is a function of space, therefore space is a functional phenomenon.

Although they assert space as being a permanent phenomenon there are also other phenomena such as a vase that they accept as impermanent phenomena. So they do accept impermanent phenomena. In other words, permanent phenomena is not synonymous with functional phenomena, as there are impermanent phenomena which are also functional phenomena. As explained here, it is because of their limited intelligence and their lack of capacity to understand fully what is being explained to them at that level, that the Vaibashika accept this point. That is why they are referred to here as 'common people'.

The Vaibashika Buddhist schools also assert that functional permanent phenomena such as space are substantially existent phenomena. That is what has to be refuted by the highest Buddhist schools. Therefore as the commentary explains:

Those who are wise concerning the suchness of functional phenomena, far from thinking they exist ultimately, do not regard permanent functional phenomena even as objects perceived by conventional valid cognition.

<sup>3</sup> The published text says 'Refuting three substantially existent uncompounded phenomena'



What is being explained here is that beings who have an understanding of suchness or emptiness would not see functional phenomena as being permanent as well as existing ultimately. Asserting functional permanent phenomena is also establishing phenomena as being truly existent, or as existing ultimately. That is what has to be refuted.

As explained here, a being who has an understanding of emptiness or suchness will not view functional phenomena as being permanent. Nor would they view them as being ultimately existent phenomena. So, as the text states:

Only that which does not change is termed permanent.

What is really established as being permanent is that which does not change from moment to moment.

What sutra says is not primarily stated to establish [a substantial existence but to refute an existence of permanent functional things].

What is being explained in that specific quote in the sutra about space, analytical cessation and non-analytical cessation as being a functional permanent phenomenon is uttered only to specific beings who have a limited intelligence. Because of their limited intelligence, they would not understand higher teachings on non-true existence or the non-inherent existence of phenomena. To such beings permanent phenomena such as space and so forth are explained as being functional permanent phenomena, but they are not explained as the ultimate object to establish for themselves in their meditation. Rather, because of their general limited knowledge and intelligence, it is explained in this way as a means to later guide and lead them on to further stages of understanding.

#### 1.2.2.2. SPECIFICALLY REFUTING PERMANENT OMNIPRESENT SPACE

Assertion: Space is permanent, because it is omnipresent. Whatever is impermanent like a pot is not omnipresent.

Perhaps a literal translation from the Tibetan word translated here as 'omnipresent' would be 'pervade'. Space is permanent because it pervades throughout all directions.

Answer: The following refutes permanence by refuting omnipresence. It is contradictory to assert that space is omnipresent but partless.

*A single direction is not present* 206  
*Wherever there is that which has directions.*  
*That with directions clearly*  
*Also has other directional parts.*

The assertion that space is permanent is an assertion of the non-Buddhist schools. Actually this assertion seems quite logical, because space, particularly un compounded space, is a permanent phenomena, which is accepted even by the Buddhist schools in our own system. Un compounded space is omnipresent in the sense that it is pervasive, whereas a functional phenomena like a pot, an impermanent phenomenon, is not pervasive. That is obvious, and of course, seems logical.

However while they assert that space is omnipresent or pervasive, at the same time they accept that space is what they call directionless (or partless), and that is what has to be refuted. Even though the non-Buddhist schools assert that space is permanent that is also accepted in our own system. However what is being refuted specifically is that space is partless. As commentary explains:

The part of space contiguous to an eastern pot is not present wherever there is space which has directions,

such as where there is a western pot. If it were, the western pot would be in the east and the eastern pot in the west.

If there is a pot in the east and a pot in the west then if one were to say there is no pots in space you would have to assume and thus imply that the space in the eastern pot also pervades the space in the western pot and *vice versa*. Thus there would be no difference in the space in those two opposite directions. It would be similar to saying that the pot in the west is also in the east and the pot in the east is in the west, which is an absurd statement.

The non-Buddhists come to understand the refutation, and want to counter that point. Thus, as the commentary reads:

If to guard against such a fallacy [they assert] that the part of space which is in the east is not in the west, Then directional space very clearly must have other parts.

This clearly connotes that there must be parts to space. So if you were to accept that space does have parts then one should not accept permanent functional things. So as the Buddhist system says, by default you cannot then accept functional permanent phenomena.

Then the commentary summarises the point with a quote from a sutra:

"Kasyapa permanence is one extreme, so-called impermanence is another extreme". The belief that ultimate truths are permanent functional phenomena is foreign [or contrary] to this teaching [meaning the Dharma].

Thus as this sutra explains, believing that ultimate truths are permanent functional phenomena is completely contrary to the main point of the teachings.

*Transcribed from tape by Jenny Brooks*  
*Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett*  
*Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*  
*Edited Version*

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# Tara Institute Study Group 2007 - 'Aryadeva's 400 Verses'

## **DISCUSSION    Block 3**

### **Wk 1 (26 June 2007)**

1. Thinking about all the suffering in this life will make you depressed and unhappy. Give a case against this statement.
2. Avoid teaching emptiness to someone who is not mentally prepared. What is the reason for this Bodhisattva vow?
3. The emptiness of one thing is the emptiness of all. Explain how this statement could be misunderstood.

### **Wk 2 (3 July 2007)**

4.     **Tathagatas speak of attachment to practice  
To those who want higher rebirth  
This is disparaged for those who want freedom-  
What need to mention other attachments?**

Explain this verse. Does this mean that the practices of the lower beings should not be engaged in?

5. What are the practices that help cultivate emptiness? Explain the analogy of the unstained cloth.
6. Why is conventional phenomena explained first, before ultimate phenomena? Give an example.

### **Wk 3 (10 July 2007)**

7. Detail two of the causes and conditions required to attain liberation.
8. Life in samsara is said to be beginningless. However even though that is the case, there can be an end to samsaric life. Explain using an analogy.
9. Explain the analogy of earning a wage and functional phenomena.
10. What is the difference between the way the Pasangika and the lower Buddhist schools establish the sprout.

### **Wk 4 (17 July 2007)**

11. What is the definition of functioning phenomena?
12. Uncompounded space as pervasive phenomena is accepted, even by the higher Buddhist schools. So what assertion by the non-Buddhist schools about space, do the Prasangika refute? How do they refute this assertion?

**Tara Institute Study Group 2007 - 'Aryadeva's 400 Verses'**

**Exam**

**Name:**

**Block: 3**

**Mark:**

**Week: 6 (31 July 2007)**

1. Thinking about all the suffering in this life will make you depressed and unhappy. Give a case against this statement. (2)

2. Avoid teaching emptiness to someone who is not mentally prepared. What is the reason for this Bodhisattva vow? (2)

3. The emptiness of one thing is the emptiness of all. Explain how this statement could be misunderstood. (2)

4. What are the practices that help cultivate emptiness? Explain the analogy of the unstained cloth. (2)

5. Why is conventional phenomena explained first, before ultimate phenomena? Give an example. (3)

6. Detail two of the causes and conditions required to attain liberation. (2)

7. Life in samsara is said to be beginningless. However even though that is the case, there can be an end to samsaric life. Explain using an analogy. (3)

8. Explain the analogy of earning a wage and functional phenomena. (2)

9. What is the difference between the way the Pasangika and the lower Buddhist schools establish the sprout. (4)

10. What is the definition of functioning phenomena? (1)