

Exposition of Bodhicitta

Nagarjuna — TANTRIC WORKS · Nagarjuna

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Exposition of Bodhicitta
(Bodhicittavivarana)
(a critique of Vijñānavāda)
attributed to Nagarjuna

Sub-section titles are in the form: L#: [...].
These can be used to regenerate the structure using a Word Processor.

Paragraph starting with '¢(i.e. ...' are usually added comments by me.

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L1: [Refutation of the fundamentals of the Vijñānavāda: trisvabhava, svasamvedana, asrayaparivṛtti, and alaya-vijñāna. In reality, vijñāna is dependent, momentary, illusory, and empty. (26-56)]

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L1: [Conclusion: The reader is encouraged to produce bodhicitta. (105-111)]

L1: [A final dedication of merit. (112)]

L1: [Introduction]

This regrettably neglected text comprises 112 stanzas (anustubh) introduced by a brief

prologue in prose. It has sometimes been grouped as a tantric work, but a glance at its contents shows how unwarranted such a classification is.

The Bodhicittavivarana is never mentioned or cited by Buddhapalita or Candrakirti. On the other hand it forms one of the basic authorities for Bhavya in his most mature work, the Ratnapradipa. It is never quoted in his earlier works, the Tarkajvala, Prajnapradipa, and [*Kara-]talaratna. Among other 'good' authors citing the Bodhicittavivarana are especially Asvabhava and Santaraksita. I have also come across scores of quotations by other commentators; fortunately several of these are in Sanskrit. It is my general impression that the Yuktisastika, Catuhstava, and Bodhicittavivarana are the most frequently quoted among all works ascribed to Nagarjuna in later Indian literature.

The style of the Bodhicittavivarana is similar to that of the Yuktisastika, Ratnavali, and Catuhstava. From a historical point of view the most significant feature of this text is its extensive critique of Vijhanavada; i.e. Buddhist idealism as testified in the Lankavatarasutra. Having seen how vehemently Nagarjuna attacks any kind of acceptance of svabhava, one would also expect him to have criticized those who might have thought themselves justified in maintaining the absolute existence of vijnana, or citta. But in the texts dealt with hitherto this happens only incidentally. The Bodhicittavivarana provides us with the missing link.

None of Nagarjuna's other works exhibit such a well-balanced and coherent structure as the Bodhicittavivarana. This is to some extent a natural consequence of the fact that the theme is at once simple and comprehensive: bodhicitta. It has a relative aspect consisting in the desire (prarthana) for the bodhi of all living beings, and an absolute consisting in the unlimited cognition of sunyata, or bodhi. The Bodhicittavivarana thus provides us with a compendium of the practice and theory of Mahayana addressed to Bodhisattvas, grhasthas as well as pravrajitas. It may indeed be said to be nothing but a vivarana of the celebrated formula of RA IV, 96: sunyatakarunagarbham ekesarh bodhisadhanam.

Sanskrit fragments apart, only two Tibetan versions of the Bodhicittavivarana are at our disposal. I have identified these in the section on sources and variants in Part I, using the abbreviations A, B, and C. B, as we would expect from the names of the revisers, is an excellent piece of work, and it forms the basis of my edition. Throughout I have carefully compared A and C. In a few cases A has proved invaluable, (for example, for verse 16, left out in B due to haplography (homoearcton)). C is a commentary of high standard. It quotes pratikas from all the 112 stanzas and explains all debatable points exhaustively. In a few cases, like A, it permits us to emend corruptions in B. I have, however, only registered variants in A and C when they affect the sense in such a way that it may possibly be more authentic than the one transmitted by B.

-- Lindtner

L1: [Prologue: The theme of this treatise is bodhicitta. Samvrtitah it is a yearning for the bodhi of all living beings; paramarthatah it is the realization of sunyata; i.e., bodhi.]

\ #It has been stated: "Due to the sameness [or] selflessness of phenomena, one's own mind — devoid of all entities, exempt from the skandhas, elements, sense-fields, and subject and object — is originally unborn; in essence empty."

\ #Just as the Buddhas, our Lords, and the great Bodhisattvas have produced the

thought of Great Enlightenment (maha-bodhicitta), thus I shall also, from now until [I dwell] in the heart of enlightenment, produce the thought of Great Enlightenment in order to save living beings unsaved, liberate those not liberated, console those not consoled, and lead to nirvana those who have not arrived at nirvana.

\ #When a Bodhisattva, having practiced a course by way of mantras, has thus produced the bodhicitta that in its relative aspect has the nature of aspiration, he must by means of meditational development produce the absolute bodhicitta. Therefore I will reveal its nature.

L1: [The significance of developing bodhicitta. (1-3)]

\ #1.

\ Bowing to the glorious Vajrasattvas embodying the mind of enlightenment, I shall expound the development of the bodhicitta that abolishes [the three kinds of] existence [in samsara].

\ #2.

\ The Buddhas maintain that bodhicitta is not enveloped in notions conscious of a self, skandhas, and so forth, [but] is always marked by being empty [of any such notions].

\ #3.

\ [Those] with minds [only] tinged by compassion must develop [bodhicitta] with particular effort. This bodhicitta is constantly developed by the compassionate Buddhas.

L1: [Refutation of the belief in an atman, a permanent soul and a creator, as held by tirthikas . (4-9)]

\ #4.

\ When the self imagined by the tirthikas is analyzed logically, it obtains no place within the [five] skandhas.

\ #5.

\ If it were [identical with] the skandhas [the self] would not be permanent, but the self has no such nature.

\ And between things permanent and impermanent a container-content relationship is not [possible].

\ #6.

\ When there is no so-called self how can the so-called creator be permanent? [Only] if there were a subject might one begin investigating its attributes in the world.

\ #7.

\ Since a permanent [creator] cannot create things, whether gradually or all at once, there are no permanent things, whether external or internal.

\ #8.

\ Why [would] an efficacious [creator] be dependent? He would of course produce things all at once. A [creator] who depends on something else is neither eternal nor efficacious.

\ #9.

\ If [he] were an entity he [would] not be permanent, for things are perpetually instantaneous (since [you] do not deny that impermanent things have a creator).

L1: [Refutation of the existence of the skandhas, as held by the Sravakas. (10-25)]

\ #10.

\ This [empirical] world, free from a self and the rest, is vanquished by the [Sravakas'] understanding of the skandhas, elements, sense-fields, and subject and object.

\ #11.

\ Thus the benevolent [Buddhas] have spoken to the Sravakas of the five skandhas: form, feeling, apprehension, karma-formations and consciousness.

\ #12-13.

\ But to the Bodhisattvas [the Buddha], the best among those who walk on two legs, has always taught this doctrine about the skandhas:

\ "Form is like a mass of foam, feeling is like bubbles, apprehension is like a mirage, karma-formations are like the plantain, and consciousness is like an illusion."

\ #14.

\ The form skandha is declared to have the four great elements as its nature. The remaining [four skandhas] are inseparably established as immaterial.

\ #15.

\ Among these eye, form, and so forth are classified as [the eighteen] elements. Again, as subject-object these are to be known as the [twelve] sense-fields.

\ #16.

\ Form is not the atom, nor is it the [organ] of sense. It is absolutely not the active sense [of consciousness]. [Thus] an instigator and a creator are not suited to producing [form].

\ #17.

\ The form atom does not produce sense consciousness, [because] it passes beyond the senses.

\ If [empirical forms are supposed to] be created by an assemblage [of atoms], this accumulation is unacceptable.

\ #18.

\ If you analyze by spatial division, even the atom is seen to possess parts. That which is analyzed into parts — how can it logically be an atom?

\ #19.

\ Concerning one single external object divergent judgments may prevail. Precisely that form which is pleasant [to one person] may appear differently to others.

\ #20.

\ Regarding the same female body, an ascetic, a lover and a wild dog entertain three different notions: "A corpse!" "A mistress!" "A tasty morsel!"

\ #21.

\ Things are efficacious due to being like objects. Is it not like an offense while dreaming [i.e., nocturnal emission]? Once awakened from the dream the net result is the same.

\ #22.

\ As to the appearance of consciousness under the form of subject and object, [one must realize] that there exists no external object apart from consciousness.

\ #23.

\ In no way at all is there an external thing in the mode of an entity. This particular appearance of consciousness appears under the aspect of form.

\ #24.

\ The deluded see illusions, mirages, cities of gandharvas, and so forth. Form manifests in the same way.

L1: [Refutation of the fundamentals of the Vijñānavāda: trisvabhava, svasamvedana, asrayaparivṛtti, and alayavijñāna. In reality, vijñāna is dependent, momentary, illusory, and empty. (26-56)]

\ #25.

\ The purpose of the [Buddha's] teachings about the skandhas, elements, and so forth is [merely] to dispel the belief in a self.

\ By establishing [themselves] in pure consciousness the greatly blessed [Bodhisattvas] abandon that as well.

\ #26.

\ According to Vijñānavāda, this manifold [world] is established to be mere consciousness. What the nature of this consciousness might be we shall analyze now.

\ #27.

\ The Muni's teaching that "The entire [world] is mere mind" is intended to remove the fears of the simple-minded. It is not a [teaching] concerning reality.

\ #28.

\ [The three natures] — the imagined, the dependent, and the absolute — have only one nature of their own: sunyata. They are the imaginations of mind.

\ #29.

\ To [Bodhisattvas] who rejoice in the Mahayana the Buddhas present in brief the selflessness and equality of [all] phenomena [and the teaching] that mind is originally unborn.

\ #30.

\ The Yogacarins give predominance to mind in itself. [They] claim that mind purified by a transformation in position [becomes] the object of its own specific [knowledge].

\ #31.

\ [But mind] that is past does not exist, [while] that which is future is nowhere discovered. [And] how can the present [mind] shift from place [to] place?

\ #32.

\ [The alayavijnana] does not appear the way it is. As it appears — it is not like that. Consciousness essentially lacks substance; it has no other basis [than insubstantiality].

\ #33.

\ When a lodestone is brought near, iron turns swiftly around; [though] it possesses no mind, [it] appears to possess mind. In just the same way,

\ #34.

\ The alayavijnana appears to be real though it is not. When it moves to and fro it [seems to] retain the [three] existences.

\ #35.

\ Just as the ocean and trees move though they have no mind, the alayavijnana is active [only] in dependence on a body.

\ #36.

\ Considering that without a body there is no consciousness, you must also state what kind of specific knowledge of itself this [consciousness] possesses!

\ #37.

\ By saying that a specific knowledge of itself [exists] one says it is an entity. But one also says that it is not possible to say, "This is it!"

\ #38.

\ To convince themselves as well as others, those who are intelligent [should] always proceed without error!

\ #39.

\ The knowable is known by a knower. Without the know-able no knowing [is possible]. So why not accept that subject and object do not exist [as such]?

\ #40.

\ Mind is but a name. It is nothing apart from [its] name. Consciousness must be regarded as but a name. The name too has no own-being.

\ #41.

\ The Jinas have never found mind to exist, either internally, externally, or else between the two. Therefore mind has an illusory nature.

\ #42.

\ Mind has no fixed forms such as various colors and shapes, subject and object, or male, female, and neuter.

\ #43.

\ In brief: Buddhas do not see [what cannot] be seen. How could they see what has lack of own-being as its own-being?

\ #44.

\ A 'thing' is a construct. Sunyata is absence of constructs. Where constructs have appeared, how can there be sunyata?

\ #45.

\ The Tathagatas do not regard mind under the form of know-able and knower. Where knower and knowable prevail there is no enlightenment.

\ #46.

\ Space, bodhicitta, and enlightenment are without marks; without generation. They have no structure; they are beyond the path of words. Their 'mark' is non-duality.

\ #47.

\ The magnanimous Buddhas who reside in the heart of enlightenment and all the compassionate [Bodhisattvas] always know sunyata to be like space.

\ #48.

\ Therefore [Bodhisattvas] perpetually develop this sunyata, which is the basis of all phenomena; calm, illusory, baseless; the destroyer of existence.

\ #49.

\ Sunyata expresses non-origination, voidness, and lack of self. Those who practice it should not practice what is cultivated by the inferior.

\ #50.

\ Notions about positive and negative have the mark of disintegration. The Buddhas have spoken [of them in terms of] sunyata, [but] the others do not accept sunyata.

\ #51.

\ The abode of a mind that has no support has the mark of [empty] space. These [Bodhisattvas] maintain that development of sunyata is development of space.

\ #52.

\ All the dogmatists have been terrified by the lion's roar of sunyata. Wherever they may reside, sunyata lies in wait!

\ #53.

\ Whoever regards consciousness as momentary cannot accept it as permanent. If mind is impermanent, how does this contradict sunyata?

\ #54.

\ In brief: When the Buddhas accept mind as impermanent, why should they not accept mind as empty?

\ #55.

\ From the very beginning mind has no own-being. If things could be proved through own-being, [we would] not declare them to be without substance.

\ #56.

\ This statement results in abandoning mind as having substantial foundation. It is not the nature of things to transcend [their] own own-being!

L1: [All internal and external dharmas are pratityasamutpanna, or sunya. To understand this is to realize the absolute bodhicitta, or liberation from the bonds of karma due to the klesas. (57-72)]

\ #57.

\ As sweetness is the nature of sugar and hotness that of fire, so [we] maintain

the nature of all things to be sunyata.

\ #58.

\ When one declares sunyata to be the nature [of all phenomena] one in no sense asserts that anything is destroyed or that something is eternal.

\ #59.

\ The activity of dependent co-origination with its twelve spokes starting with ignorance and ending with decay [we] maintain to be like a dream and an illusion.

\ #60.

\ This wheel with twelve spokes rolls along the road of life. Apart from this, no sentient being that partakes of the fruit of its deeds can be found.

\ #61.

\ Depending on a mirror the outline of a face appears: It has not moved into it but also does not exist without it.

\ #62.

\ Just so, the wise must always be convinced that the skandhas appear in a new existence [due to] recomposition, but do not migrate [as identical or different].

\ #63.

\ To sum up: Empty things are born from empty things. The Jina has taught that agent and deed, result and enjoyer are [all only] conventional.

\ #64.

\ Just as the totality [of their causes and conditions] create the sound of a drum or a sprout, [so we] maintain that external dependent co-origination is like a dream and an illusion.

\ #65.

\ It is not at all inconsistent that phenomena are born from causes. Since a cause is empty of cause, [we] understand it to be unoriginated.

\ #66.

\ That phenomena [are said] not to arise indicates that they are empty. Briefly, 'all phenomena' denotes the five skandhas.

\ #67.

\ When truth is [accepted] as has been explained, convention is not disrupted. The true is not an object separate from the conventional.

\ #68.

\ Convention is explained as sunyata; convention is simply sunyata. For [these two] do not occur without one another, just as created and impermanent [invariably concur].

\ #69.

\ Convention is born from karma [due to the various] klesas, and karma is created by mind. Mind is accumulated by the vasanas. Happiness consists in being free from the vasanas.

\ #70.

\ A happy mind is tranquil. A tranquil mind is not confused. To be unperplexed is

to understand the truth. By understanding truth one obtains liberation.

\ #71.

\ It is also defined as reality, real limit, signless, ultimate meaning, the highest bodhicitta, and sunyata.

\ #72.

\ Those who do not know sunyata will have no share in liberation. Such deluded beings wander [among] the six destinies, imprisoned within existence.

L1: [A Bodhisattva who has thus become a Buddha is motivated by karuna (that is, by the power of his previous pranidhanas) to apply all possible means (= upayakausalya) in order to rescue all beings from samsara. (73-104)]

\ #73.

\ When ascetics (yogacarin) have thus developed this sunyata, their minds will without doubt become devoted to the welfare of others, [as they think]:

\ #74.

\ "I should be grateful to those beings who in the past bestowed benefits upon me by being my parents or friends.

\ #75.

\ "As I have brought suffering to beings living in the prison of existence, who are scorched by the fire of the klesas, it is fitting that I [now] afford them happiness."

\ #76.

\ The sweet and bitter fruit [that beings in] the world [obtain] in the form of a good or bad rebirth is the outcome of whether they hurt or benefit living beings.

\ #77-78.

\ If Buddhas attain the unsurpassed stage by [giving] living beings support,
\ what is so strange if [those] not guided by the slightest concern for others receive none of the pleasures of gods

\ and men that support the guardians of the world, Brahma, Indra, and Rudra?

\ #79.

\ The different kinds of suffering that beings experience in the hell realms, as beasts, and as ghosts result from causing beings pain.

\ #80.

\ The inevitable and unceasing suffering of hunger, thirst, mutual slaughter, and torments result from causing pain.

\ #81.

\ Know that beings are subject to two kinds of maturation: [that of] Buddhas [and] Bodhisattvas and that of good and bad rebirth.

\ #82.

\ Support [living beings] with your whole nature and protect them like your own body. Indifference toward beings must be avoided like poison!

\ #83.

\ Though the Sravakas obtain a lesser enlightenment thanks to indifference/ the
bodhi of the Perfect Buddhas is obtained by not abandoning living beings.

\ #84.

\ How can those who consider how the fruit of helpful and harmful deeds ripens
persist in their selfishness for even a single moment?

\ #85.

\ The sons of the Buddha are active in developing enlightenment, which has
steadfast compassion as its root, grows from the sprout of bodhicitta,
\ and has the benefit of others as its sole fruit.

\ #86.

\ Those who are strengthened by meditational development find the suffering of
others frightening.

\ [In order to support others] they forsake even the pleasures of dhyana; they even
enter the Avici hell!

\ #87.

\ They are wonderful; they are admirable; they are most extraordinarily excellent!
Nothing is more amazing than those who sacrifice their person and riches!

\ #88.

\ Those who understand the sunyata of phenomena [but also] believe in [the law of]
karma and its results are more wonderful than wonderful, more astonishing than astonishing!

\ #89.

\ Wishing to protect living beings, they take rebirth in the mud of existence.
Unsullied by its events, they are like a lotus [rooted] in the mire.

\ #90.

\ Though sons of the Buddha such as Samantabhadra have consumed the fuel of the
klesas through the cognitive fire of sunyata, the waters of compassion still flow within
them!

\ #91-92.

\ Having come under the guiding power of compassion they display the descent [from
Tusita], birth, merriments, renunciation, ascetic practices, great enlightenment,
\ victory over the hosts of Mara, turning of the Dharmacakra, the request of all
the gods, and [the entry into] nirvana.

\ #93.

\ Having emanated such forms as Brahma, Indra, Visnu, and Rudra, they present
through their compassionate natures a performance suitable to beings in need of guidance.

\ #94.

\ Two [kinds] of knowledge arise [from] the Mahayana to give comfort and ease to
those who journey in sorrow along life's path— so it is said. But [this] is not the ultimate
meaning.

\ #95.

\ As long as they have not been admonished by the Buddhas, Sravakas [who are] in a
bodily state of cognition remain in a swoon, intoxicated by samadhi.

\ #96.

\ But once admonished, they devote themselves to living beings in varied ways. Accumulating stores of merit and knowledge, they obtain the enlightenment of Buddhas.

\ #97.

\ As the potentiality of both [accumulations], the vasanas are said to be the seed [of enlightenment]. That seed, [which is] the accumulation of things, produces the sprout of life.

\ #98.

\ The teachings of the protectors of the world accord with the [varying] resolve of living beings. The Buddhas employ a wealth of skillful means, which take many worldly forms.

\ #99.

\ [Teachings may differ] in being either profound or vast; at times they are both. Though they sometimes may differ, they are invariably characterized by sunyata and non-duality.

\ #100.

\ Whatever the dharmas, stages, and paramitas of the Buddhas, the omniscient [Tathagatas] have stated that they form a part of bodhicitta.

\ #101.

\ Those who thus always benefit living beings through body, words, and mind advocate the claims of sunyata, not the contentions of annihilation.

\ #102.

\ The magnanimous [Bodhisattvas] do not abide in nirvana or samsara. Therefore the Buddhas have spoken of this as "the non-abiding nirvana/"

\ #103.

\ The unique elixir of compassion functions as merit, [but] the elixir of sunyata functions as the highest. Those who drink it for the sake of themselves and others are sons of the Buddha.

\ #104.

\ Salute these Bodhisattvas with your entire being! Always worthy of honor in the three worlds, guides of the world, they strive to represent the lineage of the Buddhas.

L1: [Conclusion: The reader is encouraged to produce bodhicitta. (105-111)]

\ #105.

\ [In] Mahayana this bodhicitta is said to be the very best. So produce bodhicitta through firm and balanced efforts.

\ #106.

\ [In this] existence there is no other means for the realization of one's own and others' benefit. The Buddhas have until now seen no means apart from bodhicitta.

\ #107.

\ Simply by generating bodhicitta a mass of merit is collected. If it took form, it would more than fill the expanse of space!

\ #108.

\ If a person developed bodhicitta only for a moment, not even the Jinas could calculate the mass of his merit!

\ #109.

\ The one finest jewel is a precious mind free of klesas. Robbers like the klesas or Mara cannot steal or damage it.

\ #110.

\ Just as the high aspirations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in samsara are unswerving, those who set their course on bodhicitta must make [firm their] resolve.

\ #111.

\ No matter how amazing [all this seems], you must make efforts as explained. Thereafter you yourself will understand the course of Samantabhadra!

L1: [A final dedication of merit. (112)]

\ #112.

\ Through the incomparable merit I have now collected by praising the excellent bodhicitta praised by the excellent Jinas,

\ may living beings submerged in the waves of life's ocean gain a foothold on the path followed by the leader of those who walk on two legs.

[End]