

Comment on Nagarjuna's Mahayanavimsika

Nagarjuna — OTHER · Nagarjuna

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Adoration To The Three Treasures
(Mahayanavimsika)
Nagarjuna's Twenty Verses on the Great Vehicle

Mahayanavimsaka of Nagarjuna
(Adoration To The Three Treasures)
From: <http://www.dabase.net/vimsaka.htm>
Edited by Vidhusekhara Bhattacharya
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Second translation from "Nagarjuna's Mahamudra Vision"

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

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L3: [Beings and Buddhas are not different, not the same.]

L3: [Everything, all things, beings and Buddhas are empty of inherent existence because dependently arisen.]

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 L2: [Colophon]

L1: [MAHAYANAVIMSIKA]
 L2: [Buddha represents total Liberation, the perfect union of compassion and wisdom beyond all conceptualization.]

\ #1.
 \ I make my obeisance to the Buddha who is wise, free from all attachment, and whose powers are beyond conception,
 \ and who has kindly taught the truth which cannot be expressed by words. (Note: Original verses are listed first.)

\ #1. I bow down to the all-powerful Buddha
 \ Whose mind is free of attachment,
 \ Who in his compassion and wisdom
 \ Has taught the inexpressible. (Note: Another translation.)

There are many ideas in this first verse. First Nagarjuna takes refuge and humble himself in front of the Buddha. Second, he mentions that the truth (dharmadhatu), the real nature of everything is beyond any conceptualization; it cannot be fully taught using words; and that

any description is necessarily flawed. Third, he mentions that the Buddha is both wise and compassionate; that he still combines both compassion and wisdom in his activities that are incommensurably powerful because of this. Fourth, he also mentions that the Buddha is totally Liberated because he is free from all attachment.

In short, the Buddha is totally Liberated because he has realized the Perfect Union of the Two Truths beyond all conceptualization, and still act out of compassion for the benefits of all sentient beings, but all of his actions are done while being aware of the non-dual nature of everything. And that is what gives such incommensurable powers to his activities; to act in accord with the real nature of everything.

All teachings are merely pointing at the moon, never the moon. No conceptualization can describe the real non-dual nature of everything; but still we need conceptualization to help in deconditioning ourselves.

L2: [Nirvana is not a real cessation, not a real change]

L3: [In reality there is no real samsara, no real liberation /cessation.]

L3: [Beings and Buddhas are not different, not the same.]

\ #2.

\ In the transcendental truth there is no origination (utpada), and in fact, there is no destruction (nirodha).

\ The Buddha is like the sky (which has neither origination nor cessation), and the beings are like him, and therefore they are of the same nature.

\ #2. In truth there is no birth -

\ Then surely no cessation or liberation;

\ The Buddha is like the sky

\ And all beings have that nature.

Contrary to what is said in the Abhidharma, realizing the real nature of everything is not about directly seeing the origination and cessation of things, or thoughts. There is no real origination or cessation of anything or beings or Buddhas. So there is no real rebirth in samsara, and no final cessation or Liberation. Liberation is not gained by ceasing something, like if those things really existed in the first place. There is no change of status between beings and Buddhas. Beings and Buddhas are not different, not the same; no two, not one.

All beings already have the potential to become a Buddha, already have the Buddha-nature, but most are not yet Buddhas because they are still in bondage to their illusions and conditioning; they have not yet realized the perfect Union of the Two Truths. It would be a grave mistake to think that they already are Buddhas and have nothing else to do, no merit to accumulate, no wisdom to develop, no duality to transcend.

L3: [Everything, all things, beings and Buddhas are empty of inherent existence because dependently arisen.]

\ #3.

\ There is no birth either on this or the other side (of the world). A compound thing (samskṛta) originates from its conditions.

\ Therefore it is sunya by its nature. This fact comes into the range of knowledge of an omniscient one.

\ #3. Neither Samsara nor Nirvana exist,
\ But all is a complex continuum
\ With an intrinsic face of void,
\ The object of ultimate awareness.

There is no real birth, no real inherent existence, no real cessation because everything is dependent on its own causes and conditions. And there is no exception to that; no first cause, no final effect. Note: See Nagarjuna's Karikas for more details on this.

"Whatever depends upon conditions is empty of every intrinsic reality. What excellent instructions could be more amazing than this."

-- from Tsong Khapa, Praise of Dependent Origination.

L3: [Everything is like an illusion, non-dual, already calm and pure.]

\ #4.
\ All things by nature are regarded as reflections. They are pure and naturally
quiescent, devoid of any duality, equal, and remain always and in all circumstances in the
same way (tathata).

\ #4. The nature of all things
\ Appears like a reflection,
\ Pure and naturally quiescent,
\ With a non-dual identity of suchness.

Nothing really exist; everything is empty of inherent existence. So we should look at everything as if they were like illusions.

There is no absolute basis for any discrimination. What we call good, bad, neutral, or desirable, undesirable and indifferent, are all like illusions. In that sense, everything is already calm and pure if seen for what they really are. That is the meaning of everything being non-dual: not two, not one. Nothing is essentially wholesome or unwholesome. There is no exception to this. Even the consciousness and the mind is an illusion. There is no real basic consciousness that needs to be purified from bad stains, no basic consciousness that is the source of all illusions, or samsara and that is Liberated at the end.

Things do not exist and are empty; there is nothing in the first place to be empty. Emptiness itself is just another illusion, another temporary antidotes, another adapted skillful means, another raft that need to be left on the shore.

L3: [In the same way that they imagine a self, worldlings also imagine good, bad, neutral, samsara and Nirvana.]

\ #5.
\ In fact, worldlings attribute atman to what is not atman, and in the same way
they imagine happiness, misery, indifference, passions and liberation.

\ #5. The common mind imagines a self
\ Where there is nothing at all,
\ And it conceives of emotional states -
\ Happiness, suffering, and equanimity.

Nothing really exist, everything is empty of inherent existence. But most people think things and people really exist, and have real characteristics that make them desirable, undesirable, or neutral. So they get attached to some, repulsed by other, and indifferent to

the rest.

Everything is like that, even samsara and Nirvana. They are imagined to be real but are all merely like illusions.

That is the real cause of all the conditioning, attachment, fears, suffering; to think that things and beings are inherently existing.

L3: [But there is no real unwholesomeness, wholesomeness, six-realms, causality / karma, samsara, Nirvana.]

\ #6.

\ Birth in the six realms of existence in the world, highest happiness in the heaven, great pain in the hell,

\ -- these do not come within the purview of truth (cannot be accepted as true);

\ nor do the notions that unmeritorious actions lead to the extreme misery, old age, disease, and death, and meritorious actions surely bring about good results.

\ #6. The six states of being in Samsara,

\ The happiness of heaven,

\ The suffering of hell,

\ Are all false creations, figments of mind.

Nothing really exist; everything is empty of inherent existence; everything should be looked at as if like illusions. Even the elements of the law of Dependent Origination, the elements of the Wheel of Life, the law of karma, they all should be seen as empty of inherent existence. There is no real unwholesome or wholesome actions, no real accumulation of real karma, no real rebirths, no real six realms with their characteristics. All of these teachings should be interpreted with more wisdom -- realizing the emptiness of inherent existence of all of their elements and relations. There is no absolute laws, only adapted skillful means. Absolute actions are not the real cause of suffering; the real cause of suffering is thinking that things really exist and have real characteristics, and getting attached to them.

L2: [The real difference between beings in samsara and Buddhas: ignorance / the bondage of false notions]

L3: [Samsara]

L4: [Samsara is due to false notions about reality, not due to real unwholesome or wholesome actions.]

\ #7.

\ It is owing to false notions that beings are consumed by fire of passions even as a forest is burnt by forest conflagration and fall into the hells, etc.

\ As illusion prevails so do beings make their appearance. The world is illusory and it exists only on account of its cause and conditions.

\ #7. Likewise the ideas of bad action causing suffering,

\ Old age, disease and death,

\ And the idea that virtue leads to happiness,

\ Are mere ideas, unreal notions.

Most people think things and beings really exist inherently and have real characteristics;

they develop attraction and attachment for some and repulsion for other. From this conditioning and investment are accumulated; and since all of this is based on an error about the real nature of everything, then it necessarily leads to more mistakes, bad investments, misplaced expectations, devastating deceptions and suffering. But the real nature of everything is that nothing is inherently existing because everything is dependently arisen. The whole world and its beings are like bad investments (five aggregates) based on illusions; their whole existence is based on ignorance.

L4: [Beings are fooled by the creations of their own mind.]

\ #8.
\ As a painter is frightened by the terrible figure of a Yaksa which he himself has drawn, so is a fool frightened in the world (by his own false notions).

\ #8. Like an artist frightened
\ By the devil he paints,
\ The sufferer in Samsara
\ Is terrified by his own imagination.

Most people create things by giving names to some regularities, like giving a name to a figure in the clouds, and then later forget that they are merely names, and think they are really existing. They develop attachment or fear and repulsion, or indifference, etc., in relation to those illusions. They are fooled by their own creations. So not only are they ignorant of the true nature of reality (emptiness), but they are forgetting that they are the ones who have created all of those illusions. It is all dependent on the mind, but they are blind to the way their own mind works. That is what is explained by the Wheel of Life (Dependent Origination). It is our own actions that create the conditions for the next rebirths, for the aggregates that will in turn condition our next perceptions and actions.

L4: [Creating more and more complex illusions they do not know the real way out of suffering.]

\ #9.
\ Even as a fool going himself to a quagmire (swamp, quicksand) is drowned therein, so are beings drowned in the quagmire of false notions and are unable to come out thereof.

\ #9. Like a man caught in quicksands
\ Thrashing and struggling about,
\ So beings drown
\ In the mess of their own thoughts.

Being stuck in the cycle of samsara because of believing in our own created illusions, the only thing we find to do is to create more and more things (accepting or rejecting, more and more discrimination, more and more concepts, theories, systems -- complexification), thus creating more and more causes for suffering. We have lost track of the cycle itself, and of the primary cause of everything. By resisting and fighting we are just aggravating our situation, creating more causes for suffering. Just like getting more and more deep into quicksand.

We add concepts on top of concepts (complexification) until we are completely overcome by this ocean of concepts. Thinking that there must be something solid under all of this, that something must be there on the base: "that which is not just merely labeled by the mind" as Lama Zopa says. Thinking we are giving names to real things. As the world is getting more

and more complex, the people are getting more and more stressed, obsessed, disconnected with the present.

That realization is the cause of the great compassion. We are all trapped like this in samsara, nobody is better than another because of that. Nobody can say he is superior by holding a different view that is also just another illusion. We are all equal.

L4: [Suffering is due to believing in "inherent existence" and getting attached to our own creations and false knowledge.]

\ #10.

\ The feeling of misery is experienced by imagining a thing where in fact it has no existence.

\ Beings are tortured by the poison of false notions regarding the object and its knowledge.

\ #10. Mistaking fantasy for reality

\ Causes an experience of suffering;

\ Mind is poisoned by interpretation

\ Of consciousness of form.

But in fact the primary cause of all this is the belief in inherent existence, believing things really exist, are permanent, satisfactory, when they are all empty because dependently arisen. We believe in things, in real impartial perception and objective knowledge. And we get attached to those created things. And then we want to protect, so we study more and create more concepts. We are just creating more causes for suffering. Since we think things and knowledge are real, and since their true nature is that they are not absolute, then we necessarily suffer when we are confronted with reality: continual impermanence or interdependence. We invest in things (or views) thinking we can control everything, thinking they could be sort of permanent, and then "smack"; it is never like that. We are ignoring the true nature of everything. No wonder everything eventually fails.

L3: [The Mahayana path]

L4: [With compassion, seeing that all beings are stuck like that, we should engage ourselves onto the Mahayana path: accumulating both merit and wisdom together.]

\ #11.

\ Seeing these helpless beings with a compassionate heart one should perform the practices of the highest knowledge (bodhicarya) for the benefit of them.

\ #11. Dissolving figment and fantasy

\ With a mind of compassionate insight,

\ Remain in perfect awareness

\ In order to help all beings.

Understanding this from our own experience, and seeing how all sentient beings are trapped the same way, without being able to save themselves, just creating more and more causes for suffering, we should have compassion without limits. From this great compassion, and out of loving-kindness for our equals, we should develop the desire to help them all. Then we should realize that we need to become a Buddha to be able to really help them all. Because while we are still at the mercy of those illusions, there is a great chance that we will not do much more than to create more causes for suffering. So we should take the resolution to become a Buddha. And the way to do it is through using both the method and the wisdom; we

need both. That is the Mahayana Way.

So we should engage in the practice the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, accumulating both merit and wisdom. We accumulate merit by using antidotes to fight strong egoistic tendencies and immorality, by developing compassion and loving-kindness, by studying dependent origination by observing our own mind in meditation, by developing deep concentration, and slowly de-programming our whole view of the universe and of the self. In brief by using a raft, a path.

We accumulate wisdom by slowly understanding that everything is empty of inherent existence. This is done progressively by going to a more and more subtle understanding of the nature of everything, pushing the limits of what we accept as empty further and further. So we accumulate merit by doing the right actions to deprogram ourself, and we accumulate wisdom by realizing that this path, and the elements of this path are also empty. We cannot have one without the other. We need both while on the path. But, at the end, even this duality of Dependent Origination vs Emptiness is transcended with The Union of The Two Truths. This whole Mahayana approach is resumed in the mantra OM MANI PADME HUM. Tantrayana is just a progressive adapted method to do it faster. But it is totally useless without a strong basis in Mahayana.

Note: Bodhicharya is a Sanskrit word. "Bodhi" means awakened or enlightened. "Charya" means action. "Bodhicharya" is to engage in the action of helping oneself and all others through awakening compassion and wisdom. -- from www.bodhicharya.org

Note: Shantideva's Bodhicarya Avatara = The Bodhisattva's Way of Life

Note: Enlightened Conduct (bodhicarya, byang-chub-kyi spyod-pa). Enlightened Conduct, motivated by an Enlightened Attitude of Bodhicitta, entails acting with loving-kindness and compassion towards all sentient beings. More specifically, it refers to the actions involved in perfecting our practice of the six perfections (paramita, pha-rol-tu-phyin-pa). These six are generosity, discipline of moral self-control, patience, enthusiastic perseverance, meditative concentration and wisdom.)

L3: [Buddhahood]

L4: [Perfecting these two accumulations one become a Buddha free from the bondage of false notions]

\ #12.

\ Having acquired requisites thereby and getting unsurpassable bodhi one should become a Buddha, the friend of the world, being freed from the bondage of false notions.

\ #12. So acquiring conventional virtue

\ Freed from the web of interpretive thought,

\ Unsurpassable understanding is gained

\ As Buddha, friend to the world.

To become a Buddha and be able to help all other sentient beings, one need to accumulate both merit and wisdom. So one need both the method, compassion and bodhicitta, and wisdom (realizing emptiness). So this path is not about renunciation or isolation from the world, but about wanting to help all other sentient beings, by becoming a friend of the whole world, by wanting to free all sentient beings from the traps of those false notions, to free them from ignorance.

Also, the goal is not about Liberation for self, but to be able to take rebirths in order to help all sentient beings in the six realms by using skilful means adapted to each of them particularly. By becoming a Buddha, free from those illusions, one can find the right ways to help them all.

L4: [Buddhahood is realizing the Union of The Two Truths beyond all conceptualization, beyond all discrimination: the inseparability of dependent origination and emptiness; their non-duality: not two, not one.]

- \ #13.
- \ He who realizes the transcendental truth knowing the pratityasamutpada (or the manifestation of entities depending on their causes and conditions),
- \ knows the world to be sunya and devoid of beginning, middle or end.
- \ #13. Knowing the relativity of all,
- \ The ultimate truth is always seen;
- \ Dismissing the idea of beginning, middle and end
- \ The flow is seen as Emptiness.

Buddhahood is the Perfect realization of the Union of The Two Truths; the realization of the inseparability or non-duality of dependent origination (conventional truths) and emptiness (ultimate / sacred truth). From this we know that there is no absolute basis for any discrimination. Things are not inherently existing, but they are still dependently arisen and functional; so there is no absolute basis for complete non-discrimination either. The Middle Way consists of not accepting anything as absolute or discriminating with ignorance, nor rejecting everything or refusing all discriminations based on wisdom.

L4: [Then the real non-dual nature of samsara and Nirvana is directly seen – the fact that everything has always been pure, that it was just a matter of directly seeing this.]

- \ #14.
- \ The samsara and nirvana are mere appearances;
- \ the truth is stainless, changeless, and quiescent from the beginning and illumined.
- \ #14. So all samsara and nirvana is seen as it is -
- \ Empty and insubstantial,
- \ Naked and changeless,
- \ Eternally quiescent and illumined.

With Buddhahood one realize that there is no difference between samsara and Nirvana, or between beings in samsara and Buddhas. They are not different, but still not the same. There is also the realization that everything is non-dual: not two, not one. That there is no absolute pure and impure, that everything is, in that sense, already calm, pure, liberated.

L4: [Then all illusions, attachments, fears are automatically dropped, without going to the other extreme of nihilism.]

- \ #15.
- \ The object of knowledge in dream is not seen when one awakes. Similarly the world disappears to him who is awakened from the darkness of ignorance.
- \ The creation of illusion is nothing but illusion. When everything is compound there is nothing which can be regarded as a real thing. Such is the nature of all things.
- \ #15. As the figments of a dream
- \ Dissolve upon waking,
- \ So the confusion of Samsara
- \ Fades away in enlightenment.

Once the real non-dual nature of everything is directly seen, once the realization of the Union of the Two Truths is fully accomplished, then one is not fooled by the creation of his own mind anymore, and all attachments and fears are automatically abandoned. The accumulated karma is seen for what it really is and has no more determining influence. Even perceptions based on accumulated karma are transcended and nothing is believed to be really inherently existing anymore. Even the whole process of samsara is transcended. Even ignorance itself is seen as just another illusion. The result is perfect calm, equanimity, and the possibility to help all other sentient beings without creating more karma.

L2: [Ignorance of real nature of everything, or wisdom]

L3: [Nothing really exist and change because there is no real origination]

- \ #16.
- \ One having origination (jati) does not originate himself. Origination is a false conception of the people.
- \ Such conceptions and (conceived) beings, these two are not reasonable.
- \ #17. The nature of beings is unborn
- \ Yet commonly beings are conceived to exist;
- \ Both beings and their ideas
- \ Are false beliefs.

Things and beings do not really exist inherently because they are all dependently arisen, dependent on causes and conditions.

L3: [All discrimination are relative, dependent on the mind, never absolute.]

- \ #17.
- \ All this is nothing but mind (citta) and exists just like an illusion.
- \ Hence originate good and evil actions and from them good and evil birth.
- \ #18. It is nothing but an artifice of mind
- \ This birth into an illusory becoming,
- \ Into a world of good and evil action
- \ With good or bad rebirth to follow.

Things and beings do not really exist inherently because they are all dependent on the mind merely labeling them. The distinctions between good and bad actions, good and bad rebirths, pure and impure, are all relative to the mind conceiving them; they are never absolute. All discrimination are conditioned by accumulated habits and investments. And that is the whole point about samsara, and the possibility of Liberation.

L3: [When everything is seen as empty because dependent on the mind, then everything becomes calm and pure – that is Nirvana]

- \ #18.
- \ When the wheel of the mind is suppressed, all things are suppressed.
- \ Therefore all things are devoid of atman (independent nature), and consequently they are pure.
- \ #19. When the wheel of mind ceases to turn

\ All things come to an end.
\ So there is nothing inherently substantial
\ And all things are utterly pure .

Liberation is not gained by reversing or stopping the Wheel of Dependent Origination, but by seeing through the whole process, by seeing that everything is empty of inherent existence because dependently arisen (dependent on other causes and conditions, and on the mind). Nirvana is not a true cessation, but a direct realization of the real nature of our own mind, and thus of everything.

Karikas - Section 25 - An Analysis of Nirvana :

24. The cessation of accepting everything [as real] is a salutary (siva) cessation of phenomenal development (prapanca);

No dharma anywhere has been taught by the Buddha of anything.

Praise of Dependent Origination, Tsong Khapa

"Buddha, I praise you, because you explained how anything which comes into being is dependent on other things, and is totally devoid of any essence.

Whatever depends upon conditions is empty of every intrinsic reality.

What excellent instructions could be more amazing than this..."

L3: [But ignoring this is the cause of all conditioning and suffering – that is samsara]

\ #19.
\ It is due to thinking the things which have no independent nature as eternal,
atman,
\ and pleasant that this ocean of existence (bhava) appears to one who is enveloped
by the darkness of attachment and ignorance.

\ #16. Idealizing things of no substance
\ As eternal, substantial and satisfying,
\ Shrouding them in a fog of desire
\ The round of existence arises.

On the other hand, ignorance of the real non-dual nature of everything is the cause of all attachments, fears, conditioning, bad investments, the whole five aggregates, and of all deception and suffering coming from those mistakes.

L2: [The need for a path based on reality, on non-duality, the Middle Way -- Mahayana]

L3: [To get out of this samsaric cycle we need both virtuous methods (like Bodhicitta) and wisdom (emptiness) together: the Middle Way, the Mahayana. Why? Because only then is it in accord with the non-dual nature of everything.]

\ #20.
\ Who can reach the other side of the great ocean of samsara which is full of water
of false notions without getting into the great vehicle (Mahayana) ?
\ How can these false notions arise in a man who thoroughly knows this world which
has originated from ignorance ?

\ #20. This great ocean of samsara,
\ Full of delusive thought,
\ Can be crossed in the boat Universal Approach.

\ Who can reach the other side without it?

So how do we remove this ignorance, these false notions, and attain perfect Enlightenment?
By following a path that is in accord with this real non-dual nature of everything, by
adopting the Middle Way, the Mahayana Path.

\ Here ends the Mahayanavimsika of Acarya Nagarjuna.

L2: [Colophon]

\ The Twenty Mahayana Verses, (in Sanskrit, Mahayanavimsaka; in Tibetan: Theg pa
chen po nyi shu pa) were composed by the master Nagarjuna.

\ They were translated into Tibetan by the Kashmiri Pandit Ananda and the Bhikshu
translator Drakjor Sherab (Grags 'byor shes rab).

\ They have been translated into English by the Anagarika Kunzang Tenzin on the
last day of the year 1973 in the hope that the karma of the year may be mitigated.

\ May all beings be happy!

See also:

A Study of Nagarjuna's Twenty Verses on the Great Vehicle (Mahayanavimsika) and His Verses
on the Heart of Dependent Origination
R. C. Jamieson / Hardcover

[End]

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