

Seventy verses on Sunyata

Nagarjuna — *DIALECTICAL* · Nagarjuna

source: https://web.archive.org/web/20060308195802/http://gileht.tripod.com/Nagarjuna_Shunyatasaptati.txt

Seventy verses on Sunyata
(Shunyatasaptati)
by Nagarjuna

From: Master of Wisdom (Tibetan Translation Series)
by Nagarjuna, Christian Lindtner (Translator)
Paperback: 413 pages ; Dimensions (in inches): 1.33 x 10.04 x 7.05
Publisher: Dharma Publishing; ISBN: 0898002869; (November 1997)

#1.

Though the Buddhas have spoken of duration, origination, destruction, being, non-being, low, moderate, and excellent by force of worldly convention, [they] have not done [so] in an absolute sense.

#2.

Designations are without significance, for self, non-self, and self-non-self do not exist. [For] like nirvana, all expressible things are empty (sunya) of own-being.

#3.

Since all things altogether lack substance — either in causes or conditions, [in their] totality, or separately — they are empty.

#4.

Being does not arise, since it exists. Non-being does not arise, since it does not exist. Being and non-being [together] do not arise, due to [their] heterogeneity. Consequently they do not endure or vanish.

#5.

That which has been born cannot be born, nor can that which is unborn be born. What is being born now, being [partly] born, [partly] unborn, cannot be born either.

#6.

A cause has an effect when there is an effect, but when there is no [effect] the [cause] amounts to no cause. It is inconsistent that [the effect] neither exists nor does not exist. It is illogical that [the cause is active] in the three times.

#7.

Without one, there are not many. Without many, one is not possible. Whatever arises dependently is indeterminable.

#8.

The twelve dependently arising members, which result in suffering, are unborn. They are possible neither in one mind nor in many.

#9.

Permanent is not, impermanent is not, not-self is not, self is not, impure is not, pure is not, pleasure is not, and suffering is not. Therefore the perverted views do not exist.

#10.

Without these, ignorance based on the four bad views is not possible. Without this [ignorance], the formative forces do not arise. The same [is true] for the [ten] remaining [dependently arising members].

#11.

Ignorance does not occur without the formative forces [and] without it the formative forces do not arise. Caused by one another, they are not established by own-being.

#12.

How can that which is not established by own-being create others? Conditions established by others cannot create others.

#13.

A father is not a son, a son is not a father. Neither exists except in correlation with the other. Nor are they simultaneous. Likewise for the twelve members.

#14.

Just as pleasure and pain depending on an object in a dream do not have [a real] object, so neither that which arises dependently nor that which it arises in dependence on exists.

#15.

Opponent: If things do not exist by own-being, then low, moderate, and excellent and the manifold world are not established and cannot be established, even through a cause.

#16.

Reply: If own-being were established, dependently arising things would not occur. If [they were] unconditioned, how could own-being be lacking? True being also does not vanish.

#17.

How can the non-existing have own-being, other-being, or non-being? Consequently, own-being, other-being, and non-being [result from] perverted views.

#18.

Opponent: If things were empty, origination and cessation would not occur. That which is empty of own-being: How does it arise and how does it cease?

#19.

Reply: Being and non-being are not simultaneous. Without non-being, no being. Being and non-being would always be. There is no being independent of non-being.

#20.

Without being there is no non-being. [Being] neither arises from itself nor from [something] else. This being so, this [being] does not exist: So there is no being, and [therefore] no non-being.

#21.

If there is being there is permanence; if there is non-being there is necessarily annihilation. When there is being, these two [dogmas] occur. Therefore [one should] not accept being.

#22.

Opponent: These [dogmas] do not occur due to continuity: Things cease after having caused [an effect]. Reply: As before [see v. 19], this [continuity] is unestablished. It also follows that the continuity would be interrupted.

#23.

Opponent: [No!] The Buddha's teaching of the path aims at showing origination and cessation, not sunyata! Reply: To experience the two as mutually exclusive is a mistake.

#24.

Opponent: If there is no origination and cessation, then to the cessation of what is nirvana due? Reply: Is not liberation this: that by nature nothing arises and ceases?

#25.

If nirvana [resulted] from cessation, [then there would be] destruction. If the contrary, [there would be] permanence. Therefore it is not logical that nirvana is being or non-being.

#26.

If a definite cessation did abide, it would be independent of being. It does not exist without being, nor does it exist without non-being.

#27.

The marked is established through a mark different from the marked; it is not established by itself. Nor are the [two] established by each other, [since what is] not established cannot establish the not-established.

#28.

In this [way], cause, effect, feeling, feeler, and so forth, the seer, the visible, and so forth — whatever may be — all are explained, without exception.

#29.

The three times do not exist (substantially) since they are unfixed and are mutually established, since they change [and] are not self-established, [and] since there is no being. They are merely discriminations.

#30.

Since the three marks of the conditioned — origination, duration, and cessation — do not exist, there is not the slightest conditioned or unconditioned [phenomenon].

#31.

The non-destroyed does not cease, nor does the destroyed. The abiding does not abide, nor does the non-abiding. The born is not born, nor is the unborn.

#32.

Composite and non-composite are not many [and] not one; are not being [and] are not non-being; are not being-non-being. All [possibilities] are comprised within these limits.

#33.

Opponent: The Bhagavat, the Teacher, has spoken of karma's duration, of karma's nature, and of karma's result, and also of the personal karma of living beings and of the non-destruction of karma.

#34.

Reply: Karma is said to lack own-being. [Karma] that is not born is not destroyed. From that again I-making is born. But the belief that creates it is due to discrimination.

#35.

If karma had own-being the body created by it would be permanent. So karma would not result in suffering and would therefore be substantial.

#36.

Karma is not born from conditions and by no means from non-conditions, for karma-formations are like an illusion, a city of gandharvas, and a mirage.

#37.

Karma has klesas as its cause. [Being] klesas, the karma-formations are of impassioned nature (klesatmaka). A body has karma as its cause. So [all] three are empty of own-being.

#38.

Without karma, no agent. Without these two, no result. Without these, no enjoyer. Therefore things are void.

#39.

When — because the truth is seen — one correctly understands that karma is empty, karma does not arise. When [karma] is no more, what arises from karma arises no more.

#40.

Just as when the Lord Tathagata magically projects an apparition and this apparition again projects another apparition-

#41.

In that case the Tathagata's apparition is empty (not to mention the apparition [created] by the apparition!). Both of them are but names, merely insignificant discriminations.

#42.

Just so, the agent is like the apparition, and karma is like the apparition [created] by the apparition. By nature [they are] without significance: mere discriminations.

#43.

If karma possessed own-being, there would be no nirvana nor deeds [of an] agent. If [karma] does not exist, the pleasant or unpleasant result created by karma does not exist.

#44.

'Is' and 'is not' and also 'is-is not' have been stated by the Buddhas for a purpose. It is not easy to understand!

#45.

If form is material (bhautika) in itself, it does not arise from the elements (bhuta). It is not derived from itself—It does not exist, does it? —nor from anything else. Therefore it does not exist [at all].

#46.

The four [great elements] are not [found] in one [element], nor is one of them [found] in [any of] the four. How can form be established With the four great elements as [its] cause?

#47.

Since it is not conceived directly, [it seems form does] not exist. But if [you maintain it to be conceived] through a mark, that mark, born from causes and conditions, does not exist. And it would be illogical [if form could exist] without a mark.

#48.

If mind could grasp form, it would grasp its own own-being. How could a [mind] that does not exist (since it is born from conditions) really conceive absence of form?

#49.

Since one moment of mind cannot within [the very same] moment grasp a form born (as explained), how could it understand a past and a future form?

#50.

Since color and shape never exist apart, they cannot be conceived apart. Is form not acknowledged to be one?

#51.

The sense of sight is not inside the eye, not inside form, and not in between. [Therefore] an image depending upon form and eye is false.

#52.

If the eye does not see itself, how can it see form? Therefore eye and form are without self. The same [is true for the] remaining sense-fields.

#53.

Eye is empty of its own self [and] of another's self. Form is also empty. Likewise [for the] remaining sense-fields.

#54.

When one [sense-field] occurs simultaneously with contact, the others are empty. Empty does not depend upon nonempty, nor does non-empty depend upon empty.

#55.

Having no [independent] fixed nature, the three [namely, indriya, visaya, and vijñāna] cannot come into contact. Since there is no contact having this nature, feeling does not exist.

#56.

Consciousness occurs in dependence on the internal and external sense-fields. Therefore consciousness is empty, like mirages and illusions.

#57.

Since consciousness arises in dependence on a discernible object, the discernible does not exist [in itself]. Since [the conscious subject] does not exist without the discernible and consciousness, the conscious subject does not exist [by itself].

#58.

[In a relative sense] everything is impermanent, but [in the absolute sense] nothing is permanent or impermanent. [If there] were things, they would be either permanent or impermanent. But how is that [possible]?

#59.

Since the entities 'desire', 'hatred', and 'delusion' arise through perverted views

about pleasant and unpleasant, desire, hatred, and delusion do not exist by own-being.

#60.

Since one [may] desire, hate, and be deluded regarding the very same [thing], [the passions] are created by discrimination. And that discrimination is nothing real.

#61.

That which is imagined does not exist. Without an imagined object, how can there be imagination? Since the imagined and the imagination are born from conditions, [they are] sunyata.

#62.

Through understanding the truth, ignorance, which arises from the four perverted views, does not exist. When this is no more, the karma-formations do not arise. The remaining [ten members vanish] likewise.

#63.

The thing that arises in dependence upon this or that does not arise when that is absent. Being and non-being, composite and non-composite are at peace — this is nirvana.

#64.

To imagine that things born through causes and conditions are real the Teacher calls ignorance. From that the twelve members arise.

#65.

But when one has understood by seeing fully that things are empty, one is no longer deluded. Ignorance ceases, and the twelve spokes [of the wheel] come to a halt.

#66.

Karma-formations are like the city of gandharvas, illusions, mirages, nets of hair, foam, bubbles, phantoms, dreams, and wheels made with a firebrand.

#67.

Nothing exists by virtue of own-being, nor is there any non-being here. Being and non-being, born through causes and conditions, are empty.

#68.

Since all things are empty of own-being, the incomparable Tathagata teaches dependent co-origination regarding things.

#69.

The ultimate meaning consists in that! The perfect Buddhas, the Bhagavats, have [only] conceived the entire multiplicity in reliance upon worldly convention.

#70.

The worldly norms [dharma] are not violated. In reality [the Tathagata] has not taught the Dharma. Not understanding the Tathagata's words, [fools] fear this spotless discourse.

#71.

The worldly principle, "This arises depending on that," is not violated. But since what is dependent lacks own-being, how can it exist? That is certain!

#72.

One with faith who tries to seek the truth, one who considers this principle logically

[and] relies [upon] the Dharma that is lacking all supports leaves behind existence and non-existence [and abides in] peace.

#73.

When one understands that "This is a result of that/" the nets of bad views all vanish. Undefined, one abandons desire, delusion, and hatred and gains nirvana.

[End]

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