

Commentary on selected Verses From Nagarjuna's Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness

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Comments on selected verses from
Nagarjuna's Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness
(Shunyatasaptati)

The Logic That Refutes the Idea That Anything Is Truly Existent.
By The Very Venerable Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche

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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.

L1: [CONTENTS] :L1

L1: [CONTENTS] :L1

L1: [Selection of verses]

L1 : [The Logic That Refutes the Idea That Anything Is Truly Existent]

L1 : [Commentary on selected Verses From Nagarjuna's Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness]

L1: [Selection of verses]

- \ Entities do not exist
- \ In their causes, in their conditions,
- \ In aggregations of many things, or in individual things.
- \ Therefore, all entities are empty. (verse #3)

- \ Because it already exists, that which exists does not arise.
- \ Because it does not exist, that which does not exist does not arise.

\ Because they contradict each other, existence and nonexistence do not
 \ [arise] together
 \ Since there is no arising, there is no remaining or cessation either. (verse #4)

 \ Without one there are not many, and
 \ Without many there is not one.
 \ Therefore, dependently arisen entities [like these]
 \ Have no characteristics. (verse #7)

 \ [In the true nature] there is neither permanence nor impermanence,
 \ Neither self nor nonself, neither clean nor unclean
 \ And neither happiness nor suffering.
 \ Therefore, the [four] mistaken views do not exist. (verse #9)

 \ Without a father there is no son, and without a son there is no father. (i.e.
 like cause & effect)
 \ These two do not exist without depending on each other.
 \ Neither do they exist simultaneously.
 \ The twelve links are exactly the same. (verse #13)

 \ Composite and uncomposite [phenomena]
 \ Are not many, are not one,
 \ Are not existent, are not nonexistent, [and] are not both existent and
 nonexistent.
 \ These words apply to all phenomena [without exception]. (verse #32)

 \ [Defiled] actions have afflictions as their cause,
 \ And the afflictions themselves arise due to [defiled] actions.
 \ The body [also] has [defiled] actions as its cause,
 \ So all three are empty of essence. (verse #37)

 \ All formations are like unreal cities in the sky,
 \ Illusions, mirages, falling hairs,
 \ Foam, bubbles, phantoms,
 \ Dreams and wheels of fire—
 \ They have absolutely no core or substance to them. (verse #66)

 \ The unequaled Thus Gone One
 \ Explicitly taught that
 \ Since all entities are empty of any inherent nature,
 \ All phenomena are dependently arisen. (verse #68)

 \ When one understands that “this arose from those conditions,”
 \ The net of wrong views is lifted.
 \ One abandons desire, ignorance and aversion,
 \ And attains the undefiled state of nirvana. (verse #73)

L1 : [The Logic That Refutes the Idea That Anything Is Truly Existent]

By The Very Venerable Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche

~ 'Nagarjuna had five main types of reasonings with which he demonstrated that phenomena do not truly exist.'

The following transcript continues Rinpoche's series of teachings. This is from June 18, 1997.

Rinpoche wishes everybody tashi delek this evening, and makes the aspiration that all of us will develop ultimate awakening mind, which is the bodhicitta that understands the ultimate truth. It is by virtue of not understanding the ultimate truth that we are trapped in cyclic existence, which is marked by confusion and ignorance.

Rinpoche also makes the aspiration that our relative awakening mind will also increase and increase. Relative awakening mind, relative bodhicitta, is loving kindness and compassion for all sentient beings. By developing relative bodhicitta, we prevent ourselves from falling into the extreme of becoming attached to isolation, one-sided peace, or cessation.

By developing these two types of awakening mind, we will attain the precious state of buddhahood, which falls neither into the extreme of existence, nor into the extreme of one-sided peace, and we will be able to perform the benefit of countless living beings. Please give rise to the precious attitude of bodhicitta, the awakening mind, which is the essential aspiration of the great vehicle, the mahayana.

Tonight, Rinpoche will explain some verses from the protector Nagarjuna's text, Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness.

[See Page 9 for complete text.]

The first verse reads:

\ Entities do not exist
\ In their causes, in their conditions,
\ In aggregations of many things, or in individual things.
\ Therefore, all entities are empty. (3)

ENTITIES ARE, BY NATURE, EMPTY OF ANY TYPE OF SUBSTANTIAL EXISTENCE; therefore, they cannot

be found to exist in their causes and conditions or in the coming together of their causes and conditions. They cannot be found to exist in the coming together of many things, nor can they be found to exist in individual things. They cannot be found to exist in any one cause or any one condition. And if we examine very subtly, we see that even these causes and conditions do not have any true existence. It is impossible to find an entity that truly exists in any of these possibilities; therefore, entities are empty of inherent existence.

As an example, we can apply this logic to the suffering we experience as a result of thinking about the future. As a result of thinking about the future, we experience a lot of worry and anxiety, which is suffering. However, if we examine its nature, we will find that it doesn't really exist. It doesn't exist either in the coming together of all or any number of its causes and conditions, or in any one particular cause or condition that we might isolate. What is the main cause of suffering in thinking about the future? It is the future! Let us think about that. The future is something which does not exist. You can't find it anywhere. The future is something that is not here at all. Since the cause doesn't exist, the suffering doesn't exist either.

The next verse reads:

- \ Because it already exists, that which exists does not arise.
- \ Because it does not exist, that which does not exist does not arise.
- \ Because they contradict each other, existence and nonexistence do not [arise] together
- \ Since there is no arising, there is no remaining or cessation either. (4)

We can develop a reasoning using this logic. We can say that suffering is not something that ever arises. Why? Because, it doesn't arise from being existent when its cause is present. And it doesn't arise from being nonexistent when its cause is present. And it doesn't arise from being both existent and nonexistent when its cause is present. And it doesn't arise from some other possibility. Let's look at these four.

If you say that something arises, then it either has to exist at the time of its cause or not exist at the time of its cause. Those are the only two possibilities. If something exists at the time of its cause, then it doesn't need to arise. It doesn't make any sense that it would arise when it already exists. How could it exist at the time of its cause? If it existed at the time of its cause, then one would not be producing the other; the result would not rely on the cause to exist. It would already be there, so arising would be something nonsensical.

The next possibility is that the thing does not exist at the time of its cause. If that were true, then what you would be saying is that the cause does not have power to do anything, because, by the time the result comes around, the cause is gone. There would be no connection between the two. So we would see all kinds of things arising without cause, like flowers arising in space, because causes would have no power to do anything.

A thing does not arise from being both existent and nonexistent at the time the cause is present. That doesn't make any sense. That has all the faults of the previous two reasonings. And, there is no other possible way for a thing to arise. Therefore, suffering is not something that arises. And if it does not arise, then suffering is not something that truly exists.

NAGARJUNA HAD FIVE MAIN TYPES OF REASONINGS WITH WHICH HE DEMONSTRATED THAT PHENOMENA DO NOT

TRULY EXIST. One of them was this, to examine whether or not, at the time of the cause, the result either existed or did not exist.

For example, suffering in a dream is not something that arises from being existent at the time of its cause, from being nonexistent at the time of its cause, from being both existent and nonexistent at the time of its cause, or from being neither existent nor nonexistent at the time of its cause. Suffering in a dream is something that never really happens. It is just a mere appearance. If we think about this type of example, it will help us to understand. To understand that phenomena never really arise, or never come into being, is difficult. But if we think about a dream it will become easier, because in dreams we have all types of appearances that never really happen, that never really come into being.

ANOTHER ONE OF NAGARJUNA'S REASONINGS IS TO EXAMINE A PHENOMENON TO

DETERMINE WHETHER IT
EXISTS AS SOMETHING THAT IS ONE OR MANY.

This next verse shows how these ideas of one and many are really just dependently arisen and, therefore, not truly existent:

- \ Without one there are not many, and
- \ Without many there is not one.
- \ Therefore, dependently arisen entities [like these]
- \ Have no characteristics. (7)

A dependently arisen entity, anything that has arisen in dependence on other things, has no characteristics, which means that it has no substantial essence. It is not something that truly exists because it is neither one unitary thing nor is it the coming together of many things.

We can take this flower as an example of something that is neither one nor many, like all phenomena. This flower is clearly not one, unitary, indivisible thing, because it has many parts. On the other hand it is not many indivisible things because each of these parts in turn has many parts. Since it is not one, unitary, substantial, indivisible thing and since it is also not many unitary, substantial, indivisible things, it does not truly exist.

All dependently occurring appearances have no substantial essences because they are BEYOND BEING EITHER ONE INDIVISIBLE THING OR MANY INDIVISIBLE THINGS. For examples we have the dependently occurring appearances that we see in dreams. All of the things that we see in dreams are appearances. At the time we are dreaming, they look real, but in fact they have no substantial essence. They have no inherent nature, because they are neither one thing, nor are they many.

We might think that the afflictions, the afflicted mental states, are things that are real, that the kleshas are things that have substance to them. We might think that, because there are mistaken views, wrong ways of seeing things, which then give rise to emotional afflictions in our minds. But these wrong views do not really exist either. There is really no such thing as a wrong view. Mistaken views, which appear in our minds, are just mere appearances.

That is demonstrated in the next verse:

- \ [In the true nature] there is neither permanence nor impermanence,
- \ Neither self nor nonself, neither clean nor unclean
- \ And neither happiness nor suffering.
- \ Therefore, the [four] mistaken views do not exist. (9)

All of these mistaken views, these thoughts of permanence and impermanence, self and nonself, clean and unclean, etc., are dependently existent thoughts. They depend on the existence of correct views. To have an idea of a mistaken view, you have to have an idea of what a correct view is. So there is nothing that is inherently mistaken.

Things can only be mistaken in dependence on something that is correct. Therefore, a mistaken view is only dependently arisen, and never truly arises. It is not something that ever truly happens. Moreover, if we examine these thoughts of mistaken views to determine

whether or not they are some kind of entity, then we must conclude that these thoughts individually are neither one thing nor the coming together of many things. Therefore, they have no essence. Wrong views or thoughts of wrong views are things that never truly arise and which have no substantial essence.

Four basic types of mistaken views are described. One of them is to take what is impermanent to be permanent. But if we look at impermanence and permanence we can see that both of them are only dependent ideas. There is no way that anything can be permanent without one's having some idea of what impermanence is.

Similarly, if you were to say that something is impermanent, impermanence is not something that is truly existent because that depends on permanence. So neither of these inherently exists.

The next type of wrong view is to take that which is clean to be unclean. But again, what is clean? Clean means that which is not unclean.

And unclean is that which is not clean. So you can never find out what either of these things is. It just goes back and forth. They don't truly exist.

The third mistaken view is to take that which is not a self to be a self. Again, what is nonself? It is that which is not a self. Well, what is a self? It is that which is not a nonself. You cannot figure it out. You cannot find out what these things inherently are.

The fourth mistaken view is to take that which is unhappiness to be happiness. Well then, what is happiness? It is that which is not unhappiness. What is unhappiness? It is that which is not happiness.

And so again these things are just dependently existent. They are not truly existent. They are not inherently existent. They exist only from the perspective of our thoughts, which bring along with them the concepts of their opposites. When we see something that is clean or dirty, it is just as when we see something clean or dirty in a dream. You see something and you say, "Oh, this is clean." But you can only say that because you have some idea of what dirty is. You see something that is dirty and you say, "Oh, this is dirty." But you can only say that because you have some idea of what clean is. Nothing is inherently clean or dirty. Just as when you see something clean or dirty in a dream.

Since these four mistaken views do not really exist, that which arises from them - the three main afflictions: ignorance, desire-attachment, and aversion- - also do not really exist. They have no substantial essence. They are unborn. They never really arise.

We might think that the twelve links of cyclic existence really exist, that dependent arising is something real, that there really are things that are produced by other things.

And we might think that there are things that are produced by that which produces them:

- \ Without a father there is no son, and without a son there is no father.
- \ These two do not exist without depending on each other.
- \ Neither do they exist simultaneously.
- \ The twelve links are exactly the same. (13)

Normally, the way that the twelve links of dependent arising is traditionally explained is

that from the earlier ones come the later ones.

First there is ignorance. Then there is action taken in ignorance. Then, as a result of that action, there is a consciousness which is born in a womb somewhere in cyclic existence.

And on and on, like that. So the later ones depend on the earlier ones. But actually, the earlier ones are just as dependent on the later ones as the later ones are on the earlier ones. Really you can't say which one produces the other one. So ignorance is just as dependent on action taken in ignorance as this action is dependent on the ignorance. If we go all the way to the end then we would say that birth is just as dependent on aging and death as aging and death are dependent on birth.

How can we demonstrate this to be true? In worldly life, take the example of a father and son.

Normally we say that the father produces the son and that the son is produced by the father. But if you think about it, then there is no way that you could ever have a father without there being a son. No one is ever called father before there is a son, before there is a child. The father is just as dependent on the son as the son is dependent on the father. So which one is the producer and which one is the produced? You can't really say. You can make the same analysis with a mother and daughter. It is the same exact thing.

We can also think about how the eye perceives form in a dream. No form in a dream exists before you see it. And similarly, the eye that sees does not exist before the form that is seen is there. These two are equally dependent on each other. They are only existent in the sense that they are mutually dependent, and neither of them exists in any independent way.

Because the Buddha taught that composite phenomena, which come into being as a result of different things' coming together, do not truly exist, we might then be inclined to think that uncomposite phenomena truly exist, but they don't.

This is taught in the next verse which says:

\ Composite and uncomposite [phenomena]
\ Are not many, are not one,
\ Are not existent, are not nonexistent, [and] are not both existent and
nonexistent.
\ These words apply to all phenomena [without exception]. (32)

If we made a reasoning out of this, we would say that no composite phenomenon has any substantial existence because composite phenomena are neither one thing nor the coming together of many things. They neither exist, nor do they not exist.

The last line says that these words apply to all phenomena without exception, which means that the reasonings in this verse may be applied to anything. For example, we can say that all of the mental states which afflict us, all of the kleshas, have no substantial essence because they are neither one thing nor the coming together of many things. Therefore, they are BEYOND EITHER EXISTENCE OR NONEXISTENCE. We could say that all of the difficult times that we meet in this life have no substantial existence. They don't really exist, because they are neither one thing nor the coming together of many things. And therefore they transcend both existence and nonexistence.

For example, the suffering, the hard times, the difficult experiences that we have in a

dream don't really exist. But we think that they do. So we are tricked. We are confused into thinking that they truly exist, so we suffer. When we consider the suffering we experience from difficult circumstances during the day, there is no difference. We know that once we wake up from a dream, we will realize that these difficult experiences were really nonexistent. The suffering that we experience during the day is of the same nature. It is only because we think that these appearances of suffering are real that we suffer; we don't suffer as a result of the appearances themselves.

We might think that the cycle of existence is real, that existence is real because the body seems something real. We might think that the actions that the body takes are real and that the afflictive mental states which propel those actions are real.

The next verse refutes these notions:

\ [Defiled] actions have afflictions as their cause,
\ And the afflictions themselves arise due to [defiled] actions.
\ The body [also] has [defiled] actions as its cause,
\ So all three are empty of essence. (37)

The karma* that we accumulate, the actions which are defiled by our afflicted mental states of either desire or anger or indifference/apathy, don't truly or inherently exist because they depend on afflictive mental states to occur. They are completely dependent on something else for their existence. They are not inherently existent or independently existent in any way. Similarly, afflictive mental states rely on actions as their cause. When you take an action out of desire or anger or indifference, what does it produce? It produces more desire or more anger or more indifference.

~ *Editor's note: Karma is, by definition, action and the results of actions motivated by fundamental ignorance of the true nature of things, the consequent clinging to self and phenomena as dualistically and truly existent, and the afflictive mental states that arise from dualistic clinging.

Similarly, another way to think about this is that the result of these actions is some sentient being, some consciousness somewhere. And if there were no sentient being, how could there be any afflictions? How could there be any afflicted mental states? In that way too, the afflictions arise as a result of actions. So the afflictions are not something inherently existent. They are completely dependent on something else.

And the body, is that something real? Is that something independently existent? No, it exists as a result of actions. The body is the fruit, the ripened result, of taking certain actions in the past. Based on whatever actions you take in the past, you wind up with some kind of body. So this body is not something inherently or independently existent either.

Therefore, since these three - afflictions, actions, and the body - are dependently existent, what does that say? It says that really they don't truly exist. They don't exist in the ultimate sense.

They don't have any substantial essence. In terms of what is true reality, they don't exist.

It is like the body you have within a dream. You dream and you have different types of things running around in your mind. You dream that, because of whatever is going on in your mind, you do all types of different things. All of these doings are just mere appearances.

They have no substance. They are not real.

To illustrate how it is that phenomena are mere appearances due to the coming together of causes and conditions while having no material substance, many different examples are given in the next verse.

It says:

\ All formations are like unreal cities in the sky,
\ Illusions, mirages, falling hairs,
\ Foam, bubbles, phantoms,
\ Dreams and wheels of fire - They have absolutely no core or substance to them.
(66)

All formations are lacking inherent substance, because they are just mere appearances that arise due to the coming together of causes and conditions. They are like unreal cities in the sky, like illusions, like mirages, like falling hairs that one sees when one has an eye disease, like foam and bubbles, like phantoms and appearances in dreams; and like wheels of fire, which one sees when a torch is spun around in space at night and produces the appearance of a wheel that really isn't there.

The next verse reads:

\ The unequaled Thus Gone One
\ Explicitly taught that Since all entities are empty of any inherent nature,
\ All phenomena are dependently arisen. (68)

Why is it that the Buddha taught that phenomena are dependently arisen? It is because they are empty of any inherent nature. Since they are empty of any inherent nature, the Buddha taught that they are dependently arisen.

If phenomena were truly existent, what would that mean?

It would mean that they existed independently of any causes and conditions. It would mean that they existed in a permanent fashion that didn't depend on anything else. If phenomena were really like that, there would be no reason to teach about dependent arising, because nothing would need to arise in dependence on anything else. It is because phenomena do not have any inherent essence of their own, that they are not independent and, therefore, have no other way to exist but dependently, that the Buddha taught dependent arising. The Buddha taught that they rely on different causes and conditions for their appearance.

The last verse talks about the advantages of understanding this truth of dependent arising. It says:

\ When one understands that "this arose from those conditions,"
\ The net of wrong views is lifted.
\ One abandons desire, ignorance and aversion,
\ And attains the undefiled state of nirvana. (73)

When you understand dependent arising, you are no longer ensnared in the net of wrong views, which entail either thinking that things are really substantially existent or that there is just nothing at all. Samsaric beings cling to one or the other of these thoughts. Dependent arising shows that none of the things that you might think of are substantially existent. So, you are led to an understanding of the true reality, which is freedom from all of these different types of ideas. When that happens, you naturally abandon desire, ignorance, and aversion. You abandon all of the mental afflictions and attain the state of nirvana, which is not stained by any of them.

This has been a brief explanation of some important verses from Nagarjuna's Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness. What we need to do is compare the reasonings used in these verses with the reasonings used in the verses from the Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning. If we do that, then understanding both of them will become easier.

This is also connected with what is expressed by Götsangpa, the great yogi, in his song The Eight Flashing Lances.

[Next Rinpoche gives the transmission for Götsangpa's song: Melody of the Eight Types of Non-Duality (analysis). See Page 10 for complete text.] (see in another file)

This song takes eight pairs of opposites and shows that in the true nature of things, these opposites do not truly exist. The nonexistence of these opposites is described by the terms duality and equality, equality in the sense that all things are in their true sense equal. This is taught in both the great vehicle, mahayana, and in the tantric vehicle, vajrayana. It is taught in both vehicles that, in terms of true reality, nirvana and samsara are indistinguishable, unidentifiable, and inseparable. This is easy to understand if we think about a dream. We may think things' appearing in a dream to be very contradictory to each other, but in reality these things do not exist. Therefore, there is no difference among them.

For example, if we dream of being bound up in iron chains, and then of being set free, these two events appear to be opposite to each other, but in reality there were no such occurrences. None of it ever really happened. In terms of true reality, neither state - being bound or being unbound - had any substance, so there was no essential difference between them. You might also dream of seeing something that seems very clean and pure, and in the same dream of seeing an appearance that looks completely disgusting and very dirty. But these are just appearances; there is no substance to them. It is only from the perspective of our thoughts that there is clean and dirty - from the perspective of true reality there is no such distinction. That is why true reality is said to be devoid of two: because none of these distinctions actually exists. It is also said to be the equality of all the mental distinctions which are made in thought but which are not real.

It is taught that samsara and nirvana are indistinguishable, that they are not separable in any way. If we think about the nature of a dream, we will understand what the root of our confusion is. All of the appearances in a dream are appearance and emptiness inseparable. They appear but they are empty of any substance at the same time. Yet we take them to be true and real, because we are not aware of their true nature. We have a dream and we think that everything in that dream is real. We interact with it as though it were real and so we

suffer as a result. If, on the other hand, we have a dream, and at the same time we know that it is just a dream, then whatever happens is not a problem. Whatever happens we know to be merely a dream appearance. Whatever it is an appearance of, we know that it is merely appearance and emptiness inseparable. None of the distinctions that we see and hear in the dream really exist. Then, what is the true nature? The true reality is beyond there being any distinction or not being any distinction. The true reality is beyond any of these thoughts that we might have about it.

QUESTION: Can you say something more about the term that is translated as "characteristics?" And also the term that is translated as "substantiality?"

RINPOCHE: Characteristics are basically what defines things. For example, if you have a dream of something clean, what tells you that it is clean?

These are its characteristics. These are things which are imputed by thought. Nothing in the appearance itself is clean from its own perspective, but it is because of A, B, and C that it is thought to be something clean. The A, B, and C are its characteristics, the characteristics of cleanliness.

Similarly, we can dream of something and say, "Oh, this is dirty." From its own perspective it is neither clean nor dirty, but, because of A, B, and C, we say that it is dirty. A, B, and C are the characteristics that we say dirtiness has. That is what characteristics means.

Then the term substantial, as in substantially existent, is a translation of the Tibetan word rang bzhin, which means "by its nature," or "by its essence." When we say that something is substantially existent or naturally existent, essentially existent, what we mean is that it does not exist in dependence on anything else. It exists from its own side. It exists without depending on other causes and conditions.

For example, if a dream fire were really existent or substantially existent, then it would have to burn something. It would have to perform the function of burning something. But it doesn't. It is just a mere appearance. It is not something real or substantially existent. Also, if we think about self and other, if self and other were substantially or inherently existent, then they would exist without depending on each other. But we can see that self and other are just dependently arisen concepts.

They don't exist independently or inherently. We can see quite easily that nothing is inherently self and nothing is inherently other. These are merely dependent concepts that arise because we think about things in relation to ourselves. When we think about this [Rinpoche points to himself] it is "I." Somebody else looks at this [still pointing to himself] and it is "you," it is "other." I look at this and I say "I." You look at this and you say "you."

So what is this? Sometimes it is "I." From my perspective it is "I." From your perspective it is "other." From my perspective that [Rinpoche points at another person] is "other." From his perspective it is "I." So what is it? It is neither.

These concepts are only dependently existent. Self and other are not inherently or independently existent.

From understanding this, we will understand the true equality of self and other, that in the true nature there is no such distinction. A great siddha named Dombé Heruka sang a verse in

which he said, "From the dharmakaya, where self and other are of the nature of equality, I have compassion for all beings who still cling to ideas of good and bad." Dharmakaya is true reality. It is the expanse of true reality. What is that? It is the equality of, or the lack of any distinction between, self and other. Having realized that, Dombé Heruka feels compassion for all beings who are still confused and still think that self and other really exist and, therefore, cling to ideas of some things being good and some things being bad.

The characteristics which tell us that this is "I," and the characteristics which tell somebody else that this is "other," do not truly exist. They exist only in dependence on something else. It is like that.

QUESTION: Would Rinpoche kindly comment on how we may understand compassion in light of these teachings on emptiness? Is compassion something that is truly existent, or is it also only dependently existent?

RINPOCHE: Yes, compassion does not inherently exist; it is dependently arisen. Compassion, first of all, depends on there being other sentient beings for whom we may feel compassion. When we generate compassion, we think about how all sentient beings, in our past lives, have been our parents and so have been very kind to us. As a result of feeling gratitude for that kindness, we feel compassion towards them, we feel that we want to help them. This compassion depends on them and it depends on our own thinking and our own process of cultivating compassion and remembering it and being mindful of wanting to be compassionate towards others.

QUESTION: Rinpoche mentioned FIVE TYPES OF REASONINGS THAT NAGARJUNA USED TO DEMONSTRATE THE

TRUTH OF EMPTINESS. He explained two of them. Could he describe what the other three are?

RINPOCHE: Last night and tonight, we have actually gone over a few of these different reasonings. The first one is dependent arising. Phenomena do not truly exist because they are dependently arisen. The second one is that phenomena do not truly exist because they are neither one nor many. The third is to analyze the cause to see whether or not the result exists at the time of the cause or does not exist at the time of the cause.

The fourth way to demonstrate emptiness is to look at arising itself. This one is called the Vajra Thunderbolt Reasoning. It says that phenomena do not truly arise because they are never really born. We can say that they are never born because we can demonstrate that they are not born from any of the four possibilities. They do not arise from themselves. They do not arise from something different from themselves. They do not arise both from themselves and from something different from themselves.

And they don't arise from something that is neither themselves nor different from themselves - in other words, they don't arise without any cause.* That's the fourth possibility.

~ *Editor's note: Therefore phenomena do not ultimately arise, are not ultimately born, and if they do not arise or are not born, they do not, therefore, truly exist. And if they do not truly exist, then they are said to be empty of inherent existence, and therefore are said to be empty. Therefore all phenomena are appearance and emptiness inseparable.

The fifth reasoning is called the examination of cause and effect together, and it is also called the reasoning that looks at the four possibilities. But, these are four different possibilities [from those discussed above]. By examination it demonstrates that one result does not arise from one cause or many causes and that many results do not arise from one

cause or many causes. That's what the five reasonings are.

If we consider these five reasonings in terms of stages, they would be in this order. First, you would use the reasoning that examines the essence, or the substance, of phenomena - which is the one that sees that they are neither one nor many. Then you would look at the cause and see that phenomena neither exist at the time of their cause nor do they not exist at the time of their cause. Then you would look at the cause and result together, which is the examination of those last four possibilities. Then you would look at arising, the Vajra Thunderbolt Reasoning, and see that phenomena do not ever really arise, because they do not arise from any of the first set of four possibilities that we mentioned. And finally, you would understand that phenomena are just mere appearances because they are dependently arisen.

These five reasonings are the root of all the reasonings in the six collections of reasonings of Nagarjuna. [Nagarjuna wrote six different texts in which he expounded the view of the middle way.] There are many different branches of these reasonings, and many different ways you could use them, but they all stem from these five.

QUESTION: What is the reason why the father and the son cannot exist simultaneously? If you see them side by side, they seem to exist simultaneously.

RINPOCHE: The reason that they cannot exist simultaneously is that they no longer have the relationship of produced and producer. It is in that context that they don't exist simultaneously. If you are trying to say that one is the producer of the other, and then you find that you can't say that, then you might say that maybe they exist simultaneously. But you can't say that because then how could they be cause and result? Two things that exist at the same time don't have the relationship of cause and result. The cause has to come before the result. If they both exist at the same time, then they cannot be cause and result.

When we say that, the world's response would be, "Of course, the father exists before the son! It would be dumb to say that he didn't." But then the world is making the mistake of thinking that one's mental continuum viewed over time is one thing.

What you are saying is that what existed before the son was born, and then the father that exists after the son is born, are the same thing. You are saying that the person as he was before the son was born and the person as he is after the son is born are exactly the same thing. But, of course, that is not the case. The way that phenomena are is just like in a movie. Movies are a very good example. We watch a movie and we see a person and we say, an hour later, that that person has shown up on the screen again and looks like the same person. And so we say, "There is that person again." But really, a movie is just a series of frames. There is just one frame after another, and there is no connection between any of the frames.

Really there is absolutely nothing that is the same between one frame and another frame that appears an hour later, but we think that there is. We confuse these different things to be the same thing.

Another example would be going to a river and losing our hat. Our hat flows away down this river. Then, we come back a year later and we say, "I lost my hat in this river." But, all the water from then is completely gone. That is the mistake of taking many things and confusing them to be one. Or we can look at this butter lamp. We can light the lamp and then come back in a few hours and say, "Oh, the lamp is still lit." But really, the flame that

was there when we first lit the lamp disappeared immediately and was replaced by another flame. Here is a completely different flame. Again, that is what is called mistaking things in a continuum to be the same thing. Really there is no such thing as a continuum, because a continuum presupposes that something carries over from one moment to the next. But nothing, absolutely nothing, carries over from one moment to the next. It is just like a number of finger snaps in a row. Here is a continuum of finger snaps, but each snap is completely different from the last.

Similarly, each moment relies on its own causes and conditions to come about and is replaced by something else which relies on completely different causes and conditions. For this reason, we can understand that things can exist neither as one thing nor as many things. That their true nature is beyond both one and many. So they are empty of any true existence.

In a dream, we have appearances of many different things. We have appearances of things which look like they are one thing and we have appearances of things that look like they are many things. For example, we can see mountains or people or all different kinds of things. Some things look like they are one, some things look like they are many. But really, none of these things are either one or many.

QUESTION: If nothing carries over from one moment to the next, then how can there be a concept or memory of a continuum?

Translator: What I asked Rinpoche I broke down into two parts. I said, "If there is no such thing as a continuum and there is really nothing that carries over, then, first, how do we remember past things? And, second, why do we have the thought that there is a continuum?"

RINPOCHE: In Buddhism there are different explanations of memory, depending on which philosophical school a person belongs to. One philosophical tradition is called the Mind Only school (Cittimatra). What they say is that there are two aspects to any experience. One is an outward facing aspect which experiences all the different things that are perceived, and one is an inward facing aspect which is called self-awareness, which means that the mind is aware of its own experience. The mind is aware of its experiences, and so it can remember the past.

But according to the middle way, there is no assertion that there is self-awareness of the mind.

What the middle way says is that memory, just like everything else, is merely the coming together of causes and conditions. It is the mere coming together of causes and conditions, just as, if you had a mirror and you had the proper causes and conditions, then a reflection would arise in the mirror. Everything is just like that. It is the mere coming together of causes and conditions. Things do not need a basis of any kind or some kind of foundation. Causes and conditions just come together in one moment, and then different ones come together in another moment, and that's how all phenomena are.

The second part of the question was, "Why is it that we think that there is a continuum, if there really isn't one?" We think that there is such a continuum because the moments of the past and the future look alike; they are similar. For example, this butter lamp looked the same five minutes ago as it does now. Because things look the same, we think that they are, in fact, the same thing. Even though absolutely nothing carries over from one moment to the next, because one moment looks similar to the next, then we confuse it to be exactly the same as the former one. It's like that.

QUESTION: I want to ask a question about energy.

We have been thinking about appearances, such as a flame, and how we perceive them. But what about the concept of the transfer of energy, or the conservation of matter and energy, and the fact that energy is neither gained nor lost. We know about that. Wouldn't that be a continuum?

Translator: The way I have phrased the question was: These days scientists talk about energy or power, and believe that power is something that doesn't diminish. For example, the power that propels a rocket, which is thought not be expended but converted into something else. I don't know how else to describe it. But what I have emphasized is that power or energy is thought to be something that is neither lost nor diminished.

RINPOCHE: Maybe we could relate that to the power that exists within the expanse of equality for all different kinds of appearances to arise. All different kinds of appearances can arise. Appearances of being clean and appearances of being dirty. Appearances of all different kinds of things. They can all arise because of this power which is inherent in the true nature.

Questioner: I was thinking, would this be the same? I was thinking that mind equals energy, since energy equals power, as far as the translation. Is that correct?

Translator: Energy is power. Correct.

Questioner: And energy is also mind?

RINPOCHE: The greatest power, according to the mahayana, which is the great vehicle, is the [power that is inherent in the] true nature of mind, which is of the nature of clear light. Of the true nature of mind there are many different explanations. The true nature of mind is said to be that which pervades all things and, yet, is beyond all things. It pervades all things and, yet, is beyond there being anything there to pervade or there being anything that pervades. In the mahamudra and dzogchen teachings, there are also many different explanations. In the vajrayana there is also the explanation of the true nature as being bliss and emptiness inseparable. If we analyze the question according to the middle turning of the wheel of dharma, according to the middle way, then power or energy is, again, just another concept. It is just a thought. Its true nature is beyond any ideas of whether it exists or doesn't exist or is both existent and nonexistent, or neither existent nor nonexistent. Its true nature is beyond all of these different kinds of things. Thoughts about power are simply dependently existent. To say that there is energy that always exists, how could that be true? Thoughts about the existence of anything, energy and power included, depend on there being some idea of nonexistence. Such a thought can not describe true reality. Similarly, if you say that energy is something that is nonexistent, that depends on an idea of something being existent. No thought, one way or the other, can describe the true nature.

For example, we could have a dream of there being energy that was either existent or nonexistent. We could have a dream of energy being great or small. But in the true nature, what is really there? None of these things. So it is like that.

In the vajrayana, there are explanations of the great power of the inseparable bliss emptiness of the true nature. That is an explanation from the perspective of talking about and establishing things as existent. But this explanation is according to the middle way. In the highest school of the middle way, the Consequence Middle Way school (the Prasangika),

everything is refuted. The reason that they are able to refute everything, from their way of thinking, is that everything is just a thought. Everything is just an idea. Even to say that there is nothing is still just an idea. To say that there is great energy is one idea. To say that there is no such thing is another idea. The point of all of this, from the standpoint of the middle way, is to get past all conceptualizing about the way things are.

For example, in the song, Melody of the Eight Types of Nonduality, the second verse is about visions of yidam deities on the one hand and very fearsome appearances of bad demons on the other hand. Apparently these are both powerful things in different directions. But neither of them truly exists. So let's sing this song again! [Melody of the Eight Types of Nonduality] Now we will meditate according to the way we did yesterday, which is to recite the verses one by one, and then meditate a bit on their meaning, one at a time, and then rest in a state that is free from any thoughts at all.

[Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness/Meditation] This is a mode of meditation that is called analytical meditation. First we recite a verse.

Then we think about the meaning of that verse until we have gained a degree of certainty about it. Then we rest the mind evenly in that certainty.

Now, in order to dedicate the merit of the virtue we have accumulated by teaching, listening to, and reciting the teachings, let us recite the last verse from the Sixty Stanzas of Reasonings three times.

[Sixty Stanzas of Reasonings, last verse].

L1 : [Commentary on selected Verses From Nagarjuna's Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness]

¢(i.e. RÉSUMÉ:

¢-- All dharmas are empty.

¢-- Proof 3: examine whether or not, at the time of the cause, the result either existed or did not exist. They cannot be separate, nor overlapping.

¢-- Proof 2: examine a phenomenon to determine whether it exists as something that is one or many.

¢-- Transcending the dualities of the four traditional perversions.

¢-- Transcending causality / the Wheel of life

¢-- Transcending the four extreme positions: the tetralemma

¢-- Transcending samsara / the cycle of karma and the five aggregates

¢-- Everything is merely imputed by the mind, illusions.

¢-- Transcending the duality dependent origination vs emptiness: The Union of The Two Truths

¢-- Seeing the real nature of everything ==> no more attachments to those illusions ...

\ Entities do not exist
\ In their causes, in their conditions,
\ In aggregations of many things, or in individual things.
\ Therefore, ALL ENTITIES ARE EMPTY. (3)

¢(i.e. ALL DHARMAS ARE EMPTY.)

\ Because it already exists, that which exists does not arise.
\ Because it does not exist, that which does not exist does not arise.
\ Because they contradict each other, existence and nonexistence do not [arise]
together
\ Since there is NO ARISING, there is NO REMAINING OR CESSATION either. (4)

¢(i.e. PROOF #1 : We can develop a reasoning using this logic. We can say that suffering is not something that ever arises. Why? Because, it doesn't arise from being existent when its cause is present. And it doesn't arise from being nonexistent when its cause is present. And it doesn't arise from being both existent and nonexistent when its cause is present. And it doesn't arise from some other possibility. -- that is the Tetralemma.

¢ Nagarjuna had five main types of reasonings with which he demonstrated that phenomena do not truly exist. One of them was this, to examine whether or not, at the time of the cause, the result either existed or did not exist.)

\ Without ONE there are not MANY, and
\ Without many there is not one.
\ Therefore, dependently arisen entities [like these]
\ Have NO CHARACTERISTICS. (7)

¢(i.e. PROOF #2 : Another one of Nagarjuna's reasonings is to examine a phenomenon to determine whether it exists as something that is one or many. This verse shows how these ideas of one and many are really just dependently arisen and, therefore, not truly existent. A dependently arisen entity, anything that has arisen in dependence on other things, has no characteristics, which means that it has no substantial essence. It is not something that truly exists because it is neither one unitary thing nor is it the coming together of many things.

¢ All dependently occurring appearances have no substantial essences because they are beyond being either one indivisible thing or many indivisible things.)

\ [In the true nature] there is neither permanence nor impermanence,
\ Neither self nor nonself, neither clean nor unclean
\ And neither happiness nor suffering.
\ Therefore, THE [FOUR] MISTAKEN VIEWS DO NOT EXIST. (9)

¢(i.e. TRANSCENDING THE DUALITIES OF THE FOUR TRADITIONAL PERVERSIONS - AN.IV.49 : We might

think that the afflictions, the afflicted mental states, are things that are real, that the kleshas are things that have substance to them. We might think that, because there are mistaken views, wrong ways of seeing things, which then give rise to emotional afflictions in our minds. But these wrong views do not really exist either. There is really no such thing as a wrong view. Mistaken views, which appear in our minds, are just mere appearances.

¢ Since these four mistaken views do not really exist, that which arises from them—the three main afflictions: ignorance, desire-attachment, and aversion—also do not really exist. They have no substantial essence. They are unborn. They never really arise.)

\ Without a father there is no son, and without a son there is no father. (i.e.

like cause & effect)

\ These two do not exist without depending on each other.
\ Neither do they exist simultaneously.
\ THE TWELVE LINKS ARE EXACTLY THE SAME. (13)

¢(i.e. TRANSCENDING CAUSALITY / THE WHEEL OF LIFE : like the theory of dependent origination. -- We might think that the twelve links of cyclic existence really exist, that dependent arising is something real, that there really are things that are produced by other things. And we might think that there are things that are produced by that which produces them. ...)

\ Composite and uncomposite [phenomena]
\ Are not many, are not one,
\ Are not existent, are not nonexistent, [and] are not both existent and nonexistent.
\ THESE WORDS APPLY TO ALL PHENOMENA [WITHOUT EXCEPTION]. (32)

¢(i.e. TRANSCENDING THE FOUR EXTREME POSITIONS - TETRALEMMA : Because the Buddha taught that composite phenomena, which come into being as a result of different things' coming together, do not truly exist, we might then be inclined to think that uncomposite phenomena truly exist, but they don't.

¢ If we made a reasoning out of this, we would say that no composite phenomenon has any substantial existence because composite phenomena are neither one thing nor the coming together of many things. They neither exist, nor do they not exist.

¢ The last line says that these words apply to all phenomena without exception, which means that the reasonings in this verse may be applied to anything.)

\ [Defiled] actions have afflictions as their cause,
\ And the afflictions themselves arise due to [defiled] actions.
\ The body [also] has [defiled] actions as its cause,
\ SO ALL THREE ARE EMPTY OF ESSENCE. (37)

¢(i.e. TRANSCENDENCE OF SAMSAARA / THE CYCLE OF KARMA AND THE FIVE AGGREGATES: We might think that the cycle of existence is real, that existence is real because the body seems something real. We might think that the actions that the body takes are real and that the afflictive mental states which propel those actions are real.)

\ All formations are like unreal cities in the sky,
\ Illusions, mirages, falling hairs,
\ Foam, bubbles, phantoms,
\ Dreams and wheels of fire—
\ THEY HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO CORE OR SUBSTANCE TO THEM. (66)

¢(i.e. EVERYTHING IS MERELY IMPUTED BY THE MIND.)

\ The unequaled Thus Gone One
\ Explicitly taught that
\ SINCE ALL ENTITIES ARE EMPTY OF ANY INHERENT NATURE,
\ ALL PHENOMENA ARE DEPENDENTLY ARISEN. (68)

¢(i.e. TRANSCENDING THE DUALITY DEPENDENT ORIGINATION vs EMPTINESS: One implies the other;

one cannot exist without the other; they are interdependent. They are not different, not the same.

¢ Why is it that the Buddha taught that phenomena are dependently arisen? It is because they are empty of any inherent nature. Since they are empty of any inherent nature, the Buddha taught that they are dependently arisen.

¢ If phenomena were truly existent, what would that mean? It would mean that they existed independently of any causes and conditions. It would mean that they existed in a permanent fashion that didn't depend on anything else. If phenomena were really like that, there would be no reason to teach about dependent arising, because nothing would need to arise in dependence on anything else. It is because phenomena do not have any inherent essence of their own, that they are not independent and, therefore, have no other way to exist but dependently, that the Buddha taught dependent arising. The Buddha taught that they rely on different causes and conditions for their appearance.)

\ When one understands that "this arose from those conditions,"
\ The net of wrong views is lifted.
\ One abandons desire, ignorance and aversion,
\ And attains the undefiled state of NIRVANA. (73)

¢(i.e. SEEING THE REAL NATURE OF EVERYTHING ==> NO MORE ATTACHMENTS TO THOSE ILLUSIONS ...:

The last verse talks about the advantages of understanding this truth of dependent arising. When you understand dependent arising, you are no longer ensnared in the net of wrong views, which entail either thinking that things are really substantially existent or that there is just nothing at all. Samsaric beings cling to one or the other of these thoughts. Dependent arising shows that none of the things that you might think of are substantially existent. So, you are led to an understanding of the true reality, which is freedom from all of these different types of ideas. When that happens, you naturally abandon desire, ignorance, and aversion. You abandon all of the mental afflictions and attain the state of nirvana, which is not stained by any of them.)

\ Under the guidance of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, adapted by Ari Goldfield from a translation in Nagarjuna: Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nagarjuna, Christian Lindtner, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 31-69. May 17, 1997.

[End]

