

Commentary on selected Verses From Nagarjuna's The Refutation of Criticism

Nagarjuna — DIALECTICAL · Nagarjuna

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Comments on selected Verses From
Nagarjuna's The Refutation of Criticism
(Vigrahavyavartani)

Everything Is Just Appearance and Emptiness Inseparable.
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.

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L1: [CONTENTS] :L1

L1: [Selected Verses From Nagarjuna's The Refutation of Criticism]

Everything Is Just Appearance and Emptiness Inseparable.

Now what questions are there?

[Comments]

L1: [Selected Verses From Nagarjuna's The Refutation of Criticism]

\ Dependently arisen entities
\ Are called "emptiness,"
\ [For] that which is dependently arisen
\ Is that which has no inherent nature. (22)

\ One magical creation halts another,

\ One illusory being puts an end to
 \ The wrong views of his illusory opponent.
 \ When I refute the arguments of others, that is exactly what is happening. (23)

\ Another example: suppose a man falls in love with an illusory woman,
 \ Then another illusion comes along
 \ And shows the man what a fool he has been—
 \ That's my work. (27)

\ If I took a position,
 \ Then I would have a flaw.
 \ Since I take no position,
 \ I have no flaw at all. (29)

\ If the son is produced by the father,
 \ But the father is also produced by that very son,
 \ Then will you please tell me,
 \ Which one is the true "cause" and which the true "result?" (49)

\ If emptiness is possible,
 \ Then all objects are possible, all levels attainable.
 \ If emptiness is impossible,
 \ Then everything else is [impossible] as well. (70)

\ I prostrate to the Awakened One, the Buddha,
 \ Who taught that dependent arising and emptiness have the same meaning,
 \ And that this is the middle way path.

\ Your words are supreme, their meaning unsurpassed. (Concluding homage)

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By The Very Venerable Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche

The following transcript continues Rinpoche's series of teachings. This is from June 19, 1997.

'The one to whom we prostrate is the one who speaks words which cannot be refuted. We test these words and find them to be completely valid and irrefutable by any type of argument.'

Rinpoche wishes everyone tashi delek this evening, and makes the aspiration that we realize the ultimate truth, which is pure being free from all concepts about what that might be, that we realize also that the mode of appearances is that everything appears, but does not truly exist - like illusions, and dreams - and that, as a result of realizing these two, we help limitless sentient beings.

We will begin by reciting The Sixty Stanzas of Reasonings, and then Melody of the Eight Types of Nonduality.

[Recitation]

As before, please give rise in your hearts to the precious attitude of the great vehicle, mahayana, which is bodhicitta, the awakening mind. Tonight, from all of the topics that comprise the genuine dharma, we will explain some selected verses from Nagarjuna's The Refutation of Criticism. [See Page 11 for complete text.] It is one of the six collections of reasonings by Nagarjuna.

The first verse reads:

\ Dependently arisen entities
\ Are called "emptiness,"
\ [For] that which is dependently arisen
\ Is that which has no inherent nature. (22)

All entities that are arisen from causes and conditions are called emptiness; they are of the nature of emptiness. That which is dependently arisen, that which arises due to causes and conditions, has no inherent nature of its own. It has no independent nature. This verse demonstrates that whatever dependently arises is necessarily empty of true existence. Everything that is dependently arisen is pervaded by emptiness. There is nothing that is dependently arisen which is somehow outside of the scope of emptiness. Also, within the expanse of emptiness all different types of things arise due to the coming together of various causes and conditions.

For example, when we have a dream all of the different appearances that we see in a dream arise due to various causes and conditions. All of these appearances are empty. There is not one of these appearances which has any substance or any reality to it. Yet, within this emptiness, all of these appearances arise due to these various causes and conditions. Similarly, all of the appearances of this life, whatever they may be, arise due to the coming together of various causes and conditions.

Therefore, all of the appearances of this life are pervaded by emptiness of any inherent or substantial existence. Yet, within the expanse that is emptiness all of these various appearances arise due to the coming together of different causes and conditions.

Similarly, after we pass away from this life and before we take birth in the next life, we experience the intermediate state, the bardo, and in that state all different kinds of appearances arise. All of these appearances arise due to the coming together of causes and conditions. None of them have any inherent or independent existence. Therefore, they are all pervaded by emptiness.

Within emptiness all these appearances appear and arise due to the coming together of causes and conditions. That is why it is said in the great vehicle, the mahayana, that the ten directions and everything in the ten directions are just one immense buddha field of infinite extent. Why?

Because everything in the ten directions is pervaded by emptiness, and within this expanse of emptiness, all of the various appearances arise due to the coming together of various different causes and conditions. These appearances are all just empty forms - they are inseparable form and emptiness.

In the same way, all appearances - what happened in past lives and what may happen in future lives, all appearances of actions and the effects of actions - appear due to the coming

together of various different causes and conditions. They are pervaded by emptiness, and within emptiness they all arise.

Those who believed that things really exist said to people who espoused the middle way, like Nagarjuna, "You say that all phenomena are empty. And if that is true, then your words are also empty. And all your reasonings are empty. How can your reasonings do anything? If your words and your reasonings are empty of any substance, then how do they have the power to refute the ideas of others? How do they have the power to describe what is the correct view?"

The answer that Nagarjuna gave to them is in this next verse, which says:

\ One magical creation halts another,
\ One illusory being puts an end to
\ The wrong views of his illusory opponent.
\ When I refute the arguments of others, that is exactly what is happening. (23)

It is as if you had one being who is a sort of magical creation, something which is just an appearance. This being is going around and looking at all these other magical creations and thinking that they are real.

Then, another magical creation comes along and says, "Oh, really! This stuff is not real; it is all just a bunch of magical tricks. It doesn't have any substance to it at all." Then the first magical creation says, "Oh, you're right, that's right." So, that is what this is like. None of these creations and none of these events have to be real in any way for this scenario to occur.

In the other example that is given, you have one illusory being, and it is looking at all this illusion, and it thinks that it is real. So, it has all kinds of problems because of that. Then another illusory being comes along and says, "This is really not real. This is all illusion. And here's why, for this, this, and this reason." Then, the first illusory being says, "Oh, that's right." And it realizes that everything is an illusion. And then its problems go away. That's all it is.

We can think of the example of the dream. We dream and in this dream we are confronted with all kinds of perils, like the threat of being burned by fire, or being drowned in water, or being chased by big fearsome tigers and lions. So we get very frightened because we don't know that we are dreaming. Then, along comes someone in the dream who says, "You're dreaming, don't be afraid, you're just dreaming. It's not a problem." So then we think that everything is okay. "I don't have to worry about this. I am just dreaming. Thanks to this nice person who told me all of this."

There is no real problem because the problem was that one was taking these appearances to be real. First of all, there is really not anything happening in this dream. Second, the person who comes along and tells us that all of this stuff is not real but just a dream is also just part of the dream. Their words are just part of the dream. All of the reasons for the fear are just part of the dream.

And then when we change our mind, when our mind is relieved, that is also part of the dream.

None of it has to be really happening for it to happen. It is just an illusory series of appearances.

In the same way, all of the appearances in the cycle of existence, all of the appearances in the three realms of existence, are just like an illusion and like a dream. They are mere appearances that are empty of any substantial existence or any inherent nature. Because we take these appearances to be true, we suffer. That is the problem.

But there is an antidote for that problem, and that antidote is the practice of the dharma. The dharma reverses our attachment to these appearances as being real. The crux of our problem is that we take these appearances to be real. That does not mean that the dharma itself, in order to serve as an effective antidote, has to be something real, either. The reasonings of the dharma do not have to be something real, because they are all equally illusory, equally mere appearance.

Let's recite this verse three times: [Recitation of preceding verse]

In case we don't understand it yet, we get another example:

\ Another example: suppose a man falls in love with an illusory woman,
\ Then another illusion comes along
\ And shows the man what a fool he has been -
\ That's my work. (27)

Here is another example of looking at an illusion and thinking that it is something real.

Here the example is an illusory woman. Someone sees an illusion of a beautiful woman created by a magician and thinks that it is real, causing all types of things to arise in their mind as a result of that. Then, the example shows another illusion created by a magician that comes along and points to this illusory woman and says that this is just an illusion.

This is not something real and you are making a mistake to think that it is. But just because the illusory being who comes along and is able to show this person that the woman is not a real woman - that she is just an illusion - does not mean that the illusion doing the explaining is something real, or that the words that this second illusion speaks are something real. They are just as illusory as the woman. But they still have the ability to reverse this person's thought that this illusory woman is something real.

According to the prajnaparamita sutras, which are the sutras of the transcendent perfection of wisdom, samsara, the cycle of existence, is empty of any inherent or substantial existence. Nirvana, the transcendence of suffering, is also empty of any inherent existence. Samsara, the cycle of existence, is just appearance and emptiness inseparable. Nirvana is just appearance and emptiness inseparable. None of the sentient beings, none of us have any substance. We are just appearance and emptiness inseparable. The buddhas are just appearance and emptiness inseparable. Everything is just appearance and emptiness inseparable. And yet, when a suitable person hears the words of the dharma, then they can reverse their clinging to all of these things, ourselves included, as being real. They can understand that it is all just like illusions - that it is all just appearance and emptiness inseparable.

Then the opponents of Nagarjuna said to him, "Nagarjuna, you go around refuting everyone else's view. What about your view? You have a view. You talk about emptiness as being the ultimate truth. That view also has a flaw, because, as it is a view, it can also be refuted."

Nagarjuna responded with a verse which states that if he had a position, then he would have a flaw:

\ If I took a position,
\ Then I would have a flaw.
\ Since I take no position,
\ I have no flaw at all. (29)

Nagarjuna said that when he taught about the ultimate truth being empty of all elaborations and of all the different thoughts about what it might be, he was refuting everyone else's ideas, but that he had no ideas to posit himself. If he had some description of what the ultimate truth was, he said, "Then I would have a flaw. I would have a concept about what ultimate truth is. But I don't have any concepts of what ultimate truth is because it is beyond concepts. I don't have any view."

Nagarjuna refutes all propositions. He refutes all ideas, and he cuts through all objects of focus.

These three things. If Nagarjuna had some view or some proposition, then he would have a flaw.

But he doesn't. If he had some idea, then he would have a flaw, but he doesn't. If he had any object of focus - in terms of the ultimate truth being this or that - then he would have a flaw. But he doesn't.

Therefore, he has no flaw.

In the tradition of Nagarjuna, all views, all propositions are refuted, but nothing is proposed in their place. All ideas are refuted, but nothing is thought of in their place. All objects that could be focused on are cut through, but nothing is focused on in their place. Nagarjuna refutes the idea that things truly exist, but he does not say anything else. That is the end of the discussion. The reason Nagarjuna does things in this way is that the ultimate truth is something in which there are no names at all. So there is nothing that can be said about it. The ultimate truth transcends all convention, all concepts, all terms. And so no term can be applied to it. That is why Nagarjuna, once he refutes the views of others, does not propose anything himself.

There were those who believed that things truly exist because they thought there were really causes and there were really results; there were things that did the producing, and that there were things that were produced. The next verse is a response to that type of view. It says:

\ If the son is produced by the father,
\ But the father is also produced by that very son,
\ Then will you please tell me,
\ Which one is the true "cause" and which the true "result?" (49)

Normally, we would think that the father produces the son. We would say that the father is the producer, and the son is the produced. But if we think about it, then there is no father before there is the son. Because there is a son, then we call somebody father. And so the son is the cause of this conventional term of father being applied. Therefore, if you try to say that there really is a producer and there really is a produced - well, which one is it?

Which one is the producer, which one is the produced?

You really can't say. Either way, if you look at it in another way, then you are wrong. This is Nagarjuna's response to this type of belief.

If we look at this question in terms of a gross view, in terms of a continuum, then we say that the father produces the son. But if we analyze that continuum in terms of the individual moments, which are completely distinct, and then try to find the exact point at which the producer produces and what is produced is produced, then we will see that there is no way that one can come before the other. They exist only in dependence upon each other. Therefore, one cannot exist before the other one does. Therefore, it is nonsensical to speak of one of them being the producer. If the producer does not exist before the produced, then how can it be the producer of the produced?

Another criticism that was brought against the followers of the middle way, and against Nagarjuna in particular, by other Buddhist and by non-Buddhists alike, was that, if phenomena were really empty, if there were nothing that was truly existent, then that would mean that there would be no such thing as cause and effect, there would be no such things as past and future lives, there would be no such thing as the three jewels, there would be no such thing as attaining buddhahood.

In response to that, Nagarjuna composed this verse:

\ If emptiness is possible,
\ Then all objects are possible, all levels attainable.
\ If emptiness is impossible,
\ Then everything else is [impossible] as well. (70)

Here Nagarjuna argues that the actual situation is just the reverse of what these people claimed. Only because phenomena are empty of true existence can all of these different kinds of appearances manifest. If phenomena were truly existent, solid, and unchanging, then there could not be a cause and a result with respect to these phenomena, because nothing would ever change. You could not possibly attain buddhahood or any other level of realization, as nothing would ever change.

Everything would be independently existent - not affected by causes and conditions. And therefore no change would be possible.

If we think about this in terms of past and future lives, we can understand that it is only because they are empty of true existence that there can be past and future lives. It is dependent upon there being this life that we can have any idea of a past life and a future life. This life is now and the past life is before now, and the future life is after now. If there were no now, then how could the past before now and the future after now exist? It is only because these things are dependently existent that we can have any concept of them as having any existence at all.

And similarly, this present life depends just as much on the past and the future. For if there were no idea of past and future, you would have no idea of what now was - as now is something which is not the past and not the future. It is now. Now, this life, is just as dependent on past lives and future lives, as past and future lives are dependent on this one.

Similarly, virtue is dependent upon nonvirtue; nonvirtue is dependent on virtue. Happiness is dependent upon unhappiness; and unhappiness is dependent on happiness.

Therefore, we can have ideas, we can have concepts of cause and effect, we can have the result of performing virtuous actions being happiness; and the result of negative actions being suffering. And also, because phenomena do not truly exist, we can practice the dharma, and the dharma can be a remedy for suffering and the afflictions. The afflictive mental states are only the result of certain causes and conditions. Suffering is the result of certain causes and conditions. Therefore, the dharma, which is also just the result of certain causes and conditions, and therefore also a mere illusion, is able to alter the causes and conditions that are the cause of the afflictive mental states and suffering. It can change them, eliminate them, be a successful antidote for them. It is only because these things are the results of causes and conditions that all of this is possible - that it is possible for the dharma to be an effective antidote.

The last verse reads:

\ I prostrate to the Awakened One, the Buddha,
\ Who taught that dependent arising and emptiness have the same meaning,
\ And that this is the middle way path.
\ Your words are supreme, their meaning unsurpassed. (Concluding homage)

This is a prostration to the Buddha, because the Buddha taught dependent arising. That is the reason why Nagarjuna prostrates to the Buddha.

Also, Nagarjuna points out to us that dependent arising, emptiness, and the middle way path, which is free from all extremes, have the exact same meaning. They are the same teaching. The teaching of the middle way, the teaching on emptiness, and the teaching on dependent arising, all have the same import and the same meaning. Because the Buddha taught this, the Buddha's words are supreme, and the meaning of the Buddha's words is unsurpassed. For this reason, Nagarjuna prostrates to the Buddha.

The Buddha taught that dependent arising and emptiness have the same meaning and are inseparable. This is not something that can be harmed or refuted by reasoning. Because the Buddha's teachings about dependent arising and emptiness cannot be defeated by reasoning, Nagarjuna prostrates to the Buddha. This is the manner in which homage is paid in a tradition grounded in reasoning. The one to whom we prostrate is the one who speaks words which cannot be refuted. We test these words and find them to be completely valid and irrefutable by any type of argument. For that reason we prostrate to that person - not for any other reason.

The Buddha Shakyamuni himself said that nobody should accept anything as true before they had analyzed it themselves. He said, "You should only accept what I say, based on your own analysis of it, not out of respect for me." He compared the situation to a merchant buying gold. A merchant buying gold would never accept the gold just on faith, but would test it by their own means to see if it were real. And if it were real, they would buy it, and if it were not real, they would not buy it.

If, on the other hand, it is a tradition in which you believe what the teacher says - because you have faith in that teacher, and faith in that teacher as being great, then you believe what the teacher says on faith - then that is a tradition that is based on faith.

Now what questions are there?

If there are questions about The Refutation of Criticism, or about the Seven Delights, please ask.

Question: Rinpoche, dependent arising is often used to show that an entity's true nature is emptiness. Yet cause and effect is proven not to occur as in the argument about arising. Are not dependent arising and cause and effect basically the same thing? And if so, how can both arguments be used? In Western philosophy this sort of sounds like circular reasoning, which is rejected as false reasoning. So if it is true, how, coming from the standpoint of Western philosophy, can I better understand?

Rinpoche: Nagarjuna refutes the true existence of cause and effect, that cause and effect is something real. He refutes dependent existence as being something real, but he does not attempt to deny that there is the mere appearance of things arising due to merely apparent causes and merely apparent conditions, just like what happens in a dream. Dependent existence is like the moon that appears in a pool of water. First you have the moon in the sky, then you have a cloudless night, and you have a clear pool of water on the ground. Dependent on that, you have an appearance of the moon in the water, which is just a mere appearance, just a reflection. Dependent existence is like the eye that sees and the form that is seen in a dream. Dependent existence is like bondage and liberation in a dream. Dependent existence is like clean and unclean in a dream.

What these examples are trying to point us to is the understanding that all phenomena are just appearance and emptiness inseparable. There are many different examples given of empty forms, forms which appear but have no substantial or true existence. The ultimate truth is equality, the complete freedom from all of these elaborations of causes and conditions and all of those different kinds of things. These refutations that Nagarjuna addresses to his opponents are also appearance and emptiness inseparable, just like illusions and just like magical creations, which are taught in this text.

Question: Could you please say some more words about how to take illness to the path?

Rinpoche: First we start out by understanding that thoughts like, "I am really sick," or "I am just a little sick," or "I am sick," or "I am not sick," are all just dependently arisen; they exist only in dependence on each other. Which is to say that they don't really exist. So it is like having experiences in a dream. You can have a dream and think, "Wow, I am really sick," or "I am just a little sick," or "I am not sick," or "I am just sick," or "I am a sicko," or whatever, but all of these thoughts in the dream are just dependently existent, which is to say that they are not truly existent. Sickness is not something that truly exists, it exists only in dependence upon our thoughts.

So we need to realize that, and this is part of the process of gaining certainty about the view. Because the view is that appearances are just illusions. They are just appearance and emptiness inseparable, just like the appearances that arise in dreams. Different things can appear in dreams; none of them have any reality. They are just appearance and emptiness inseparable. Gaining certainty in the view means gaining certainty about this understanding of the mode of appearance. In terms of the mode of ultimate reality, the mode of ultimate reality is the equality of all these different kinds of things, which is emptiness. So we gain certainty about that, and then we rest in meditation. We rest the mind in meditative

equipoise within this emptiness, within the emptiness of all these different kinds of ideas. That is how to take illness to the path.

So the yogis in Tibet have a saying, "My body is not sick, my thoughts are sick." The body is not really sick, our thoughts are sick. So when you think about it, think about a dream. Think about when you have a dream of being sick. Your body has no sickness; your thoughts are the ones that are sick. And so that helps us realize that sickness is only something that exists in our thoughts. It's really not something truly existent.

According to the middle way of approaching this, we use our intelligence. We use our intelligence to analyze what is the ultimate truth. We ask the

Question: What is actually happening here? What is the mode of appearance, and what is the mode of true reality? And so what we find is that true reality is free from all of these different thoughts. None of these thoughts can express the true reality because all of these thoughts are just dependent on something else. So they can't be really true. What is true reality?

It just depends on how you look at it - the reality that your thoughts create depends on how you are looking at it. You can't describe true reality. And so in the middle way, what we do is we use our intelligence to understand that and to gain certainty about it, and then, once we have gained certainty about it, we remember it again and again.

And then, when we meditate, we rest the mind evenly without any thoughts at all.

One way to do this is to meditate right upon the very feeling of sickness. When we have a feeling of sickness, we use our intelligence, which tries to determine what is really the truth, to see that this sickness has no essence. And then we rest in that, in true reality which is free from thoughts about the sickness. If we have an especially strong, intense feeling of sickness, then, when the thought stops, there is an experience of great power. The stronger the feeling is, when the thought that takes it to be real stops, the stronger and more powerful the realization is.

One way we can analyze is to base our reasoning on the fact that there is no "I," that there is no truly existent self of the individual. When we are sick, and we have the thought of "Oh, I'm sick," we can say, "Well, who is sick?" Find this "I." The individual or the "I" is the name that we throw onto the five aggregates,* but try to find this truly existent "I" amongst these five aggregates - the one aggregate of the body and the four of the mind.

*Editor's note: The five aggregates, or the five skandhas in Sanskrit, are five aggregates of phenomena, which make up individuals and their experience. They are form (Sanskrit: rupa; Tibetan: gzugs), feeling (San: vedana; Tib: thsorwa), perception (S: samjña; T: 'du-shes), formation (S: samskara; T: 'du-byed), and consciousness (S: vijñana; T: rnam-parshes-pa.) All aspects of an individual's experience of her/his world or his/her mind can be subsumed under these five categories. In the confused state, we cling to one or another aspect, or to a collection of aspects, of these five categories of experience as being a concrete self. When the aggregates are actually seen accurately, no self is found in them, either singly or taken together. Moreover, one does not find an individual apart from them. Ultimately, the aggregates, or skandhas, which are merely analytical constructs for categorizing an individual's experience, are empty of inherent existence, as are all individuals, and as are all aspects of their experience.

Where is this "I"? Where is it? If you do that, you will realize you cannot find it. You

cannot find the "I" anywhere. And so, if there is no "I," if there is nobody to get sick, then sickness can't exist. There is nobody to get sick.

This is a method that again is based on reasoning, on using your intelligence.

You use your intelligence to figure out what is the truth, and once you've done that, then you just rest in that. In this instance, you look for the "I" until you realize you cannot find it, and then you rest in not being able to find it.

So, we have to think about how it is in a dream, and why, in a dream, we suffer as a result of illness. We suffer when we have a dream of being sick because we think in this dream that we are real. That is the mistake of clinging to an "I" where there is no "I." We think the sickness is something real. That is making the mistake of thinking that a phenomenon which doesn't have any substance, has substance, that it exists.

Because of these two mistakes - even though, because it is just a dream, there is no "I" and no sickness - we suffer. If we think about that, we can apply that in the daytime when we feel sickness. And that will help our view. It will be an aid to gaining the correct view.

It is just like the suffering we experience as a result of thinking about the future. We think about the future a lot, and as a result of that we suffer a lot. We have thoughts about the future like, "Oh, I'm going to get old, and when I'm old, who's going to take care of me?" We suffer as a result of thoughts like that. But really, there is no "I." We think that there is an "I" in the future, and as a result of that first mistake we suffer. And then we take the future to be something real. But where is the future? The future is nowhere. You can't find it anywhere. It is not really existent.

The future is nowhere to be found. That is called the mistake of taking phenomena which are not truly existent to be truly existent. Based on these two mistakes we suffer, whereas, if we realize that we are making these mistakes, then we won't suffer anymore as a result.

So in short, this has been an explanation of how to take sickness to the path, and to sum it all up, first you remember the view. You think about the view. Once you have gained certainty in the view, you rest the mind in meditation. Just rest it evenly. And the more you get accustomed to this and the more you meditate on this, the easier and easier it will be to take sickness to the path.

In the Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, the bodhisattva Shantideva says that once you start to meditate, whatever happens, it is easy. It is like that.

So tonight we have explained in brief Nagarjuna's text called The Refutation of Criticism and the song of Götsangpa called Seven Delights. If we think about these again and again, if we meditate on these again and again in connection with each other, then that would be very good. So now we have studied Sixty Stanzas of Reasonings, Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness, and The Refutation of Criticism, all by Nagarjuna, and Gyalwa Götsangpa's songs, Eight Flashing Lances, Melody of the Eight Types of Nonduality, and Seven Delights. These are the words of the great scholar and of a great siddha, a great meditation master, and, if we think about these in connection with each other, then that is very good. Sometimes if you all, on a weekend, can get together and recite some verses and sing some songs together and meditate on them, then that would be very good. If you recite the words and meditate on the words, then the words have great power. So now let's recite the verses from The Refutation of Criticism, one by one, and meditate in between.

[Recitation of The Refutation of Criticism] In the madhyamika tradition there are two types of meditation. Once you have determined that all phenomena are empty, one tradition is to rest in that emptiness which is like space. And the second type is just to rest the mind completely free of any type of idea or concept at all. The meditation on emptiness which is like space, the complete absence of any phenomena, is the meditation that is taught by the Autonomy Middle Way school, the Svatantrika Madhyamika. And the meditation in which thoughts even of emptiness cease, and there is absolutely no thought of anything whatsoever, that is the meditation taught by the Consequence Middle Way school, the Prasangika Madhyamika.

[Comments]

(RÉSUMÉ :

- Everything is merely imputed by the mind, illusions, dependently arisen.
- But still one illusory path can help to remove the belief in the inherent existence of those illusions
- Dependent origination implies emptiness; and emptiness implies dependent origination. One cannot exist without the other. They are interdependent. They are not different / separate, not the same. They are the ground, the Two Truths: conventional truth (based on inherent existence causality space & time) and Ultimate Truth (emptiness).
- But, the true nature, the dharmadhatu, is not dependent origination (realism), not emptiness (idealism or nihilism), not both in opposition of each other forming a real duality (dualism), and not something else that would eliminate the duality completely (monism / oneness). That is the Tetralemma. The true nature is inconceivable, beyond any description, beyond any conceptualization, beyond any duality, beyond any view. So any description of it, any view would necessarily be flawed. Nagarjuna does not propose such a transcendental view.
- The Middle Way is not accepting any of the four extreme position as the absolute true nature of everything, nor rejecting any of those four positions because, even if they are illusions or empty of inherent existence, they can be used as skilful means to fight the extreme tendencies of another illusory position.
- Liberation is seeing the real nature of the mind, and of everything. And this is called The Union of The Two Truths. It is seeing the dependently arisen appearances, and their Ultimate nature / emptiness, at the same time. When one is constantly aware of the real nature of the mind, one has realized the Union of The Two Truths.)

- \ Dependently arisen entities
- \ Are called “emptiness,”
- \ [For] that which is dependently arisen
- \ Is that which has no inherent nature. (22)

(i.e. DEPENDENT ORIGINATION -- > EMPTINESS:

Commentary: All entities that are arisen from causes and conditions are called emptiness; they are of the nature of emptiness. That which is dependently arisen, that which arises due to causes and conditions, has no inherent nature of its own. It has no independent nature. This verse demonstrates that whatever dependently arises is necessarily

empty of true existence. Everything that is dependently arisen is pervaded by emptiness. There is nothing that is dependently arisen which is somehow outside of the scope of emptiness. Also, within the expanse of emptiness all different types of things arise due to the coming together of various causes and conditions.

... In the same way, all appearances—what happened in past lives and what may happen in future lives, all appearances of actions and the effects of actions—appear due to the coming together of various different causes and conditions. They are pervaded by emptiness, and within emptiness they all arise.)

\ One magical creation halts another,
\ One illusory being puts an end to
\ The wrong views of his illusory opponent.
\ When I refute the arguments of others, that is exactly what is happening. (23)

(i.e. ONE ILLUSORY ANTIDOTE CAN FIGHT ANOTHER ILLUSION :

Commentary: Those who believed that things really exist said to people who espoused the middle way, like Nagarjuna, “You say that all phenomena are empty. And if that is true, then your words are also empty. And all your reasonings are empty. How can your reasonings do anything? If your words and your reasonings are empty of any substance, then how do they have the power to refute the ideas of others? How do they have the power to describe what is the correct view?” The answer that Nagarjuna gave to them is in this verse.

In the same way, all of the appearances in the cycle of existence, all of the appearances in the three realms of existence, are just like an illusion and like a dream. They are mere appearances that are empty of any substantial existence or any inherent nature. Because we take these appearances to be true, we suffer. That is the problem. But there is an antidote for that problem, and that antidote is the practice of the dharma. The dharma reverses our attachment to these appearances as being real. The crux of our problem is that we take these appearances to be real. That does not mean that the dharma itself, in order to serve as an effective antidote, has to be something real, either. The reasonings of the dharma do not have to be something real, because they are all equally illusory, equally mere appearance.)

\ Another example: suppose a man falls in love with an illusory woman,
\ Then another illusion comes along
\ And shows the man what a fool he has been—
\ That’s my work. (27)

(i.e. ONE ILLUSORY ANTIDOTE CAN FIGHT ANOTHER ILLUSION :

Commentary: They are just as illusory as the woman. But they still have the ability to reverse this person’s thought that this illusory woman is something real.

According to the prajnaparamita sutras, which are the sutras of the transcendent perfection of wisdom, samsara, the cycle of existence, is empty of any inherent or substantial existence. Nirvana, the transcendence of suffering, is also empty of any inherent existence. Samsara, the cycle of existence, is just appearance and emptiness inseparable. Nirvana is just appearance and emptiness inseparable. None of the sentient beings, none of us have any substance. We are just appearance and emptiness inseparable. The buddhas are just appearance and emptiness inseparable. Everything is just appearance and

emptiness inseparable. And yet, when a suitable person hears the words of the dharma, then they can reverse their clinging to all of these things, ourselves included, as being real. They can understand that it is all just like illusions—that it is all just appearance and emptiness inseparable.)

\ If I took a position,
\ Then I would have a flaw.
\ Since I take no position,
\ I have no flaw at all. (29)

(i.e. THE TRUE NATURE IS INCONCEIVABLE - ONE CAN ONLY SAY THAT IS IT BEYOND THE FOUR EXTREME

POSITIONS - THE TETRALEMMA - THAT IS ALL: a negation without affirming anything.

Commentary: Then the opponents of Nagarjuna said to him, “Nagarjuna, you go around refuting everyone else’s view. What about your view? You have a view. You talk about emptiness as being the ultimate truth. That view also has a flaw, because, as it is a view, it can also be refuted.” Nagarjuna responded with a verse which states that if he had a position, then he would have a flaw.

Nagarjuna refutes all propositions. He refutes all ideas, and he cuts through all objects of focus. These three things. If Nagarjuna had some view or some proposition, then he would have a flaw. But he doesn’t. If he had some idea, then he would have a flaw, but he doesn’t. If he had any object of focus—in terms of the ultimate truth being this or that—then he would have a flaw. But he doesn’t. Therefore, he has no flaw.

In the tradition of Nagarjuna, all views, all propositions are refuted, but nothing is proposed in their place. All ideas are refuted, but nothing is thought of in their place. All objects that could be focused on are cut through, but nothing is focused on in their place. Nagarjuna refutes the idea that things truly exist, but he does not say anything else. That is the end of the discussion. The reason Nagarjuna does things in this way is that the ultimate truth is something in which there are no names at all. So there is nothing that can be said about it. The ultimate truth transcends all convention, all concepts, all terms. And so no term can be applied to it. That is why Nagarjuna, once he refutes the views of others, does not propose anything himself.)

\ If the son is produced by the father,
\ But the father is also produced by that very son,
\ Then will you please tell me,
\ Which one is the true “cause” and which the true “result?” (49)

(i.e. TRANSCENDING CAUSALITY / DEPENDENT ORIGINATION:

Commentary: There were those who believed that things truly exist because they thought there were really causes and there were really results; there were things that did the producing, and that there were things that were produced. The verse is a response to that type of view.

If we look at this question in terms of a gross view, in terms of a continuum, then we say that the father produces the son. But if we analyze that continuum in terms of the individual moments, which are completely distinct, and then try to find the exact point at which the producer produces and what is produced is produced, then we will see that there is

no way that one can come before the other. They exist only in dependence upon each other. Therefore, one cannot exist before the other one does. Therefore, it is nonsensical to speak of one of them being the producer. If the producer does not exist before the produced, then how can it be the producer of the produced?)

- \ If emptiness is possible,
- \ Then all objects are possible, all levels attainable.
- \ If emptiness is impossible,
- \ Then everything else is [impossible] as well. (70)

(i.e. EMPTINESS ==> DEPENDENT ORIGINATION:

Commentary: Another criticism that was brought against the followers of the middle way, and against Nagarjuna in particular, by other Buddhist and by non-Buddhists alike, was that, if phenomena were really empty, if there were nothing that was truly existent, then that would mean that there would be no such thing as cause and effect, there would be no such things as past and future lives, there would be no such thing as the three jewels, there would be no such thing as attaining buddhahood. In response to that, Nagarjuna composed this verse.

Here Nagarjuna argues that the actual situation is just the reverse of what these people claimed. Only because phenomena are empty of true existence can all of these different kinds of appearances manifest. If phenomena were truly existent, solid, and unchanging, then there could not be a cause and a result with respect to these phenomena, because nothing would ever change. You could not possibly attain buddhahood or any other level of realization, as nothing would ever change. Everything would be independently existent—not affected by causes and conditions. And therefore no change would be possible.)

- \ I prostrate to the Awakened One, the Buddha,
- \ Who taught that dependent arising and emptiness have the same meaning,
- \ And that this is the middle way path.

(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 / have the same meaning, not the same. The Middle Way is not accepting any of those as the real nature, and not rejecting any of those because they are the antidote of each other. But they do not form a real duality, a real opposition either. The true reality is not dependent origination (based on some realism), not emptiness (which can lead to nihilism if taken too seriously), not both in opposition / dualism, not something else that eliminates the duality completely / monism. The real nature of everything is inconceivable, but we call it the Union of The Two Truths, the inseparability of appearances and emptiness.

Commentary: This is a prostration to the Buddha, because the Buddha taught dependent arising. That is the reason why Nagarjuna prostrates to the Buddha. Also, Nagarjuna points out to us that dependent arising, emptiness, and the middle way path, which is free from all extremes, have the exact same meaning. They are the same teaching. The teaching of the middle way, the teaching on emptiness, and the teaching on dependent arising, all have the same import and the same meaning. Because the Buddha taught this, the Buddha's words are supreme, and the meaning of the Buddha's words is unsurpassed. For this reason, Nagarjuna

prostrates to the Buddha.

The Buddha taught that dependent arising and emptiness have the same meaning and are inseparable. This is not something that can be harmed or refuted by reasoning. Because the Buddha's teachings about dependent arising and emptiness cannot be defeated by reasoning, Nagarjuna prostrates to the Buddha. This is the manner in which homage is paid in a tradition grounded in reasoning. The one to whom we prostrate is the one who speaks words which cannot be refuted. We test these words and find them to be completely valid and irrefutable by any type of argument. For that reason we prostrate to that person—not for any other reason.)

\ Your words are supreme, their meaning unsurpassed. (Concluding homage)

\ Under the guidance of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, translated by Ari Goldfield, May 21, 1997.

[End]

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