



# Nāgārjuna's

## *Mūlamādhyaṃkā-kārikā*

### *Stanzas on the Middle Path*

#### Chapter XXIV

##### *Examination of the Four Noble Truths*

1. If all of this is empty,  
Neither arising nor ceasing,  
Then for you, it follows that  
The Four Noble Truths do not exist.

2. If the Four Noble Truths do not exist,  
Then Knowledge, abandonment,  
Meditation and manifestation  
Will be completely impossible.

3. If these things do not exist,  
The four fruits will not arise.  
Without the four fruits, there will be no attainers of  
the fruits.  
Nor will there be the faithful.

4. If so, the spiritual community will not exist.

Nor will the eight kinds of person.

If the Four Noble truths do not exist,

There will be no true Dharma.

5. If there is no doctrine and spiritual community,

How can there be a Buddha?

If emptiness is conceived in this way,

The three jewels are contradicted.

6. Hence you assert that there are no real fruits.

And no Dharma. The Dharma itself

And the conventional truth

Will be contradicted.

7. We say that this understanding of yours  
Of emptiness and the purpose of emptiness  
And of the significance of emptiness is incorrect.  
As a consequence you are harmed by it.

8. The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma  
Is based on two truths:  
A truth of worldly convention (*saṃvṛti*)  
And an ultimate truth (*paramārtha*).

9. Those who do not understand  
The distinction drawn between these two truths  
Do not understand  
The Buddha's profound truth.

10. Without a foundation in the conventional truth,  
The significance of the ultimate cannot be taught.  
Without understanding the significance of the  
ultimate,  
Liberation is not achieved.

11. By a misperception of emptiness  
A person of little intelligence is destroyed.  
Like a snake incorrectly seized  
Or like a spell incorrectly cast.

12. For that reason—that the Dharma is  
Deep and difficult to understand and to learn—  
The Buddha's mind despaired of  
Being able to teach it.

13. You have presented fallacious refutations  
That are not relevant to emptiness.  
Your confusion about emptiness  
Does not belong to me.

14. For him to whom emptiness is clear,  
Everything becomes clear.  
For him to whom emptiness is not clear,  
Nothing becomes clear.

15. When you foist on us  
All of your errors  
You are like a man who has mounted his horse  
And has forgotten that very horse.

16. If you perceive the existence of all things  
In terms of their essence,  
Then this perception of all things  
Will be without the perception of causes and  
conditions.

17. Effects and causes

And agent and action

And conditions and arising and ceasing

And effects will be rendered impossible.

18. Whatever is dependently arisen  
(*pratītyasamutpāda*).

That is explained to be emptiness (*śūnyatā*).

That, being a dependent designation,

Is itself the middle way.

19. Something that is not dependently arisen,

Such a thing does not exist.

Therefore a nonempty thing

Does not exist.

20. If all this were nonempty, as in your view,

There would be no arising and ceasing.

Then the Four Noble Truths

Would become nonexistent.

21. If it is not dependently arisen,

How could suffering come to be?

Suffering has been taught to be impermanent,

And so cannot come from its own essence.

22. If something comes from its own essence,

How could it ever be arisen?

It follows that if one denies emptiness

There can be no arising (of suffering).

23. If suffering had an essence,

Its cessation would not exist.

So if an essence is posited,

One denies cessation.

24. If the path had an essence,

Cultivation would not be appropriate.

If this path is indeed cultivated,

It cannot have an essence.

25. If suffering, arising, and

Ceasing are nonexistent,

By what path could one seek

To obtain the cessation of suffering?

26. If non understanding comes to be

Through its essence,

How will understanding arise?

Isn't essence stable?

27. In the same way, the activities of  
Relinquishing, realizing, and meditating  
And the four fruits  
Would not be possible.

28. For an essentialist,  
Since the fruits through their essence  
Are already unrealized,  
In what way could one attain them?

29. Without the fruits,  
there are no attainers of the fruits, or enterers.  
From this it follows that  
The eight kinds of persons do not exist.  
If these don't exist, there is no spiritual community.

30. From the nonexistence of the Noble Truths  
Would follow the nonexistence of the true  
doctrine.  
If there is no doctrine and no spiritual community,  
How could a Buddha arise?

31. For you, it would follow that a Buddha  
Arises independent of enlightenment.  
And for you, enlightenment would arise  
Independent of a Buddha.

32. For you, one who through his essence  
Was unenlightened,  
Even by practicing the path to enlightenment  
Could not achieve enlightenment.

33. Moreover, one could never perform  
Right or wrong actions.  
If this were all nonempty what could one do?  
That with an essence cannot be produced.

34. For you, from neither right nor wrong actions  
Would the fruit arise.  
If the fruit arose from right or wrong actions,  
According to you, it wouldn't exist.

35. If, for you, a fruit arose  
From right or wrong actions,  
Then, having arisen from right or wrong actions,  
How could that fruit be nonempty?

36. If dependent arising is denied,  
Emptiness itself is rejected.  
This would contradict  
All of the worldly conventions.

37. If emptiness itself is rejected,

No action will be appropriate.

There would be action which did not begin,

And there would be agent without action.

38. If there is essence, the whole world

Will be unarising, unceasing,

And static. The entire phenomenal world

Would be immutable.

39. If it (the world) were not empty,

Then action would be without profit.

The act of ending suffering and

Abandoning misery and defilement would not exist.

40. Whoever sees dependent arising

Also sees suffering

And its arising

And its cessation as well as the path.

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Chapter XXV

*Examination of Nirvāṇa*

1. If all this is empty,

Then there is no arising or passing away.

By the relinquishing of ceasing of what

Does one wish *nirvāṇa* to arise?

2. If all this is nonempty,

Then there is no arising or passing away.

By the relinquishing or ceasing of what

Does one wish *nirvāṇa* to arise?

3. Unrelinquished, unattained,

Unannihilated, not permanent,

Unarisen, unceased:

This is how *nirvāṇa* is described.

4. *Nirvāṇa* is not existent.

It would then have the characteristics of age and death.

There is no existent entity

Without age and death.

5. If *nirvāṇa* were existent,

*nirvāṇa* would be compounded.

A noncompounded existent

Does not exist anywhere.

6. If *nirvāṇa* were existent,

How could *nirvāṇa* be nondependent?

A nondependent existent

Does not exist anywhere.

7. If *nirvāṇa* were not existent,

How could it be appropriate for it to be non-existent?

Where *nirvāṇa* is not existent,

It cannot be a nonexistent.

8. If *nirvāṇa* were not existent,

How could *nirvāṇa* be nondependent?

Whatever is nondependent

Is not nonexistent.

9. That which comes and goes

Is dependent and changing.

That, when it is not dependent and changing,

Is taught to be *nirvāṇa*.

10. The teacher has spoken of relinquishing

Becoming and dissolution.

Therefore, it makes sense that

*Nirvāṇa* is neither existent nor nonexistent.

11. If *nirvāṇa* were both

Existent and nonexistent,

passing beyond would, impossibly,

Be both existent and nonexistent.

12. If *nirvāṇa* were both

Existent and nonexistent,

*Nirvāṇa* would not be nondependent.

Since it would depend on both of these.

13. How could *nirvāṇa*

Be both existent and nonexistent?

*Nirvāṇa* is uncompounded.

Both existents and nonexistents are compounded.

14. How could *nirvāṇa*

Be both existent and nonexistent?

These two cannot be in the same place.

Like light and darkness.

15. *Nirvāṇa* is said to be

Neither existent nor nonexistent.

If the existent and the nonexistent were established,

This would be established.

16. If *nirvāṇa* is

Neither existent nor nonexistent,

Then by whom is it expounded'

"Neither existent nor nonexistent"?

17. Having passed into *nirvāṇa*, the Victorious Conqueror (*Tathāgata*)

Is neither said to be existent

Nor said to be nonexistent.

Neither both nor neither are said.

18. So, when the victorious one abides, he

Is neither said to be existent

Nor said to be nonexistent.

Neither both nor neither are said.

19. There is not the slightest difference

Between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

There is not the slightest difference

Between *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*.

20. Whatever is the limit of *nirvāṇa*,

That is the limit of *saṃsāra*.

There is not even the slightest difference between them,

Or even the subtlest thing.

21. Views that after cessation there is a limit, etc.,

And that it is permanent, etc.,

Depend upon *nirvāṇa*, the final limit,

And the prior limit.

22. Since all existents are empty,

What is finite or infinite?

What is finite and infinite?

What is neither finite nor infinite?

23. What is identical and what is different?

What is permanent and what is permanent?

What is both permanent and impermanent?

What is neither?

24. The pacification of all objectification

And the pacification of illusion:

No Dharma was taught by the Buddha

At any time, in any place, to any person.

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Garfield, Jay L. 1995. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamādhyaṃaka-kārikā*.  
Oxford: Oxford University Press.