

## **A Commentary on the Awakening Mind**

(Skt: Bodhichittavivarana)

(Tib: Jangchub Semdrel)

- *Arya Nagarjuna*

Homage to the Glorious Vajrasattva!

It has been stated:

Devoid of all (substantive) entities;  
Utterly discarding all objects and subjects,  
Such as the aggregates, elements and sense fields;  
Due to sameness of selflessness of all phenomena,  
One's mind is primordially unborn;  
It is in the nature of emptiness.

Just as the blessed Buddhas and the great Bodhisattvas have generated the mind of great awakening, I too shall, from now until I arrive at the heart of awakening, generate the awakening mind in order that I may save those who are not saved, free those who are not free, relieve those who are not relieved, and help thoroughly transcend sorrow those who have not thoroughly transcended sorrow. Those Bodhisattvas who practise by means of the secret mantra, after having generated the awakening mind in terms of its conventional aspect in the form of an aspiration, must (then) produce

the ultimate awakening mind through the force of meditative practice.  
I shall therefore explain its nature.

1. Bowing to the glorious Vajra Holder  
Who embodies the awakening mind,  
I shall explain here the meditative practice  
Of awakening mind that destroys cyclic existence.
2. The Buddhas maintain the awakening mind  
To be not obscured by such conceptions  
As consciousness of self, aggregates and so on;  
It is always characterized by emptiness.
3. It is with a mind moistened by compassion  
That you must cultivate (awakening mind) with effort.  
The Buddhas who embody great compassion  
Constantly develop this awakening mind.
4. The self postulated by the extremists,  
When you thoroughly analyse it with reasoning,  
Within all the aggregates (of body and mind),  
Nowhere can you find a locus for this.
5. Aggregates exist (but) are not permanent;  
They do not have the nature of selfhood.

A permanent and an impermanent cannot  
Exist as the support and the supported.

6. If the so-called self does not exist,  
How can the so-called agent be permanent?  
If there were things, then one could  
Investigate their attributes in the world.
7. Since a permanent cannot function (to cause)  
In gradual or instantaneous terms,  
So both without and within,  
No such permanent entity exists.
8. If it were potent, why would it be dependent?  
For it would bring forth (everything) at once.  
That which depends upon something else,  
Is neither eternal nor potent.
9. If it were an entity, it would not be permanent,  
For entities are always momentary;  
And with respect to impermanent entities,  
Agency has not been negated.

10. This world devoid of self and so on  
Is utterly vanquished by the notions  
Of aggregates, elements and the sense-fields,  
And that of object and subject.
  
11. (Thus the Buddhas) who seek to help others  
Have taught to the Disciples  
The five aggregates: form, feelings, perception,  
volitional forces and consciousness.
  
12. The excellent among the bipeds  
Always taught as well “Forms appear as a mass of foam,  
Feelings resemble bubbles in water,  
And perception is like a mirage,
  
13. Mental formations are like plantain trees,  
Consciousness is like a magical illusion”.  
Presenting the aggregates in this manner,  
(The Buddhas) taught thus to the Bodhisattvas.
  
14. That which is characterized by the four great elements  
Is clearly taught to be the aggregate of form.  
The rest are invariably established

Therefore as devoid of material form.

15. Among these, the eyes, visible forms and so forth,  
Which are described as the elements,  
These should be known also as (the twelve) sources,  
And as the objects and the subjects as well.
  
16. Neither atom of form exists nor is sense organ elsewhere;  
Even more, no sense organ as agent exists;  
So the producer and the produced  
Are utterly unsuited for production.
  
17. The atoms of form do not produce sense perceptions,  
For they transcend the realm of the senses.  
(If asserted) that they are produced through aggregation,  
(Production through) collection too is not accepted.
  
18. Through division in terms of spatial dimensions,  
Even the atom is seen as possessing parts;  
That which is analysed in terms of parts,  
How can it logically be (an indivisible) atom?
  
19. With respect to a single external object,

Divergent perceptions can arise.  
A form that is beautiful to someone,  
For someone else it is something else.

20. With respect to the same female body,  
Three different notions are entertained  
By the ascetic, the lustful and a (wild) dog,  
As a corpse, an object of lust, or food.
21. “It’s the sameness of the object that functions,” (if asserted),  
Is this not like being harmed in a dream?  
Between the dream and wakeful state, there is no difference  
In so far as the functioning of things is concerned.
22. In terms of objects and subjects,  
Whatever appears to the consciousness,  
Apart from the cognitions themselves,  
No external objects exist anywhere.
23. So there are no external objects at all  
Existing in the mode of entities.  
The very perceptions of the individual consciousnesses  
Arise as appearances of the forms.

24. Just as a person whose mind is deluded  
Sees magical illusions and mirages,  
And the cities of Gandharva spirits,  
So, too, forms and so on are perceived.
25. To overcome grasping at selfhood  
(The Buddha) taught aggregates, elements and so on.  
By abiding in the (state of) mind only,  
The beings of great fortune even renounce that (teaching).
26. For those who propound consciousness (only),  
This manifold world is established as mind (only).  
What might be the nature of that consciousness?  
I shall now explain this very point.
27. “All of this is but one’s mind,”  
That which was stated by the Able One  
Is to alleviate the fear of the childish;  
It is not (a statement) of (final) truth.
28. The imputed, the dependent,  
And the consummate – they have  
Only one nature of their own, emptiness;

Their identities are constructed upon the mind.

29. To those who delight in the great vehicle,  
The Buddha taught in brief,  
Selflessness in perfect equanimity,  
And that the mind is primordially unborn.
30. The proponents of yogic practices assert  
That a purified mind (effected) through  
Mastery of one's own mind  
And through utter transformation of its state  
Is the object of its own reflexive awareness.
31. That which is past is no more;  
That which is yet to be is not obtained;  
As it abides, its locus is utterly transformed,  
So how can there be (such awareness in) the present?
32. Whatever it is, it's not what it appears as;  
Whatever it appears as, it is not so;  
Consciousness is devoid of selfhood;  
(Yet) consciousness has no other basis.

33. By being close to a lodestone,  
An iron object swiftly moves forward;  
It possesses no mind (of its own),  
Yet it appears as if it does.
34. Likewise, the foundational consciousness too  
Appears to be real, though it is false;  
In this way, it moves to and fro  
And retains (the three realms of) existence.
35. Just as the ocean and the trees  
Move about though they possess no mind;  
Likewise, foundational consciousness too  
Moves about in dependence upon the body.
36. So, if it is considered that  
Without a body there is no consciousness,  
You must explain what this awareness is,  
That is the object of one's own specific knowledge.
37. By calling it specific awareness of itself,  
You are asserting it to be an entity;  
Yet by stating "it is this,"  
You are asserting it also to be powerless.

38. Having ascertained oneself  
And to help others ascertain,  
The learned proceeds excellently,  
Always without error.
39. The cognizant perceives the cognizable;  
Without the cognizable, there is no cognition;  
Therefore why do you not admit  
That neither object nor subject exists (at all)?
40. The mind is but a mere name;  
Apart from its name it exists as nothing.  
So, view consciousness as a mere name;  
Name too has no intrinsic nature.
41. Either within or likewise without,  
Or somewhere in between the two,  
The conquerors have never found the mind;  
So the mind has the nature of an illusion.
42. The distinctions of colours and shapes,  
Or that of object and subject,  
Of male, female and the neuter –  
The mind has no such fixed forms.

43. In brief, the Buddhas have never seen  
Nor will they ever see (such a mind);  
So how can they see it as having intrinsic nature,  
That which is devoid of intrinsic nature?
44. 'Entity' is a conceptualization;  
Absence of conceptualization is emptiness;  
Where conceptualization occurs,  
How can there be emptiness?
45. The mind, in terms of the perceived and perceiver,  
This the Tathagatas have never seen;  
Where there is the perceived and perceiver,  
There is no enlightenment.
46. Devoid of characteristics and origination,  
Devoid of substantive reality and transcending speech,  
Space, awakening mind and enlightenment  
Possess the characteristics of non-duality.
47. Those abiding in the heart of enlightenment,  
Such as the Buddhas, the great beings,  
And all the great compassionate ones

Always understand emptiness to be like space.

48. Therefore constantly meditate on this emptiness:

The basis of all phenomena,

Tranquil and illusion-like,

Groundless and destroyer of cyclic existence.

49. As 'non-origination' and as 'emptiness',

Or as 'no-self', (grasping at) emptiness (as such),

He who meditates on a lesser truth,

That is not (true) meditation.

50. The notions of virtue and non-virtue,

Characterized by being (momentary and) disintegrated;

The Buddha has spoken of their emptiness;

Other than this, no emptiness is held.

51. The abiding of a mind which has no object,

Is defined as the characteristic of space;

(So) they accept that meditation on emptiness

Is (in fact) a meditation on space.

52. With the lion's roar of emptiness,

All pronouncements are frightened;  
Wherever such speakers reside,  
There, emptiness lies in wait.

53. To whom consciousness is momentary,  
To them it cannot be permanent;  
So if the mind is impermanent,  
How could it be inconsistent with emptiness?

54. In brief, if the Buddhas uphold  
The mind to be impermanent,  
How would they not uphold  
That it is empty as well?

55. From the very beginning itself,  
The mind never had any (intrinsic) nature;  
It is not being stated here that an entity  
Which possesses intrinsic existence (somehow) lacks this.

56. If one asserts this, one abandons  
The locus of selfhood in the mind;  
It's not the nature of things  
To transcend one's own intrinsic nature.

57. Just as sweetness is the nature of molasses  
And heat the nature of fire,  
Likewise we maintain that  
The nature of all phenomena is emptiness.
58. When one speaks of emptiness as the nature (of  
phenomena),  
One in no sense propounds nihilism;  
By the same token, one does not  
Propound eternalism either.
59. Starting with ignorance and ending with ageing,  
All processes that arise from  
The twelve links of dependent origination,  
We accept them to be like a dream and an illusion.
60. This wheel with twelve links  
Rolls along the road of cyclic existence;  
Outside this, there cannot be sentient beings  
Experiencing the fruits of their deeds.
61. Just as in dependence upon a mirror,  
A full image of one's face appears,  
The face did not move onto the mirror;

Yet, without it, there is no image (of the face).

62. Likewise, aggregates recombine in a new existence;

Yet the wise always understand

That no one is born in another existence,

Nor does someone transfer to such existence.

63. In brief, from empty phenomena,

Empty phenomena arise;

Agent, karma, fruits and their enjoyer –

The conqueror taught these to be (only) conventional.

64. Just as the sound of a drum and a shout

Are produced from a collection (of factors),

We accept the external world of dependent origination

To be like a dream and an illusion.

65. That phenomena are born from causes

Can never be inconsistent (with facts);

Since the cause is empty of cause,

We understand it to be empty of origination.

66. The non-origination of all phenomena

Is clearly taught to be emptiness;  
In brief, the five aggregates are denoted  
By (the expression) 'all phenomena'.

67. When the (ultimate) truth is explained as it is,  
The conventional is not obstructed;  
Independent of the conventional,  
No (ultimate) truth can be found.
68. The conventional is taught to be emptiness;  
Emptiness itself is the conventional;  
One does not occur without the other,  
Just as (being) produced and impermanent.
69. The conventional arises from afflictions and karma;  
And karma arises from the mind;  
The mind is accumulated by the propensities;  
When free from propensities, it's happiness.
70. A happy mind is tranquil indeed;  
A tranquil mind is not confused;  
To have no confusion is to understand the truth;  
By understanding the truth one attains freedom.

71. It's described as suchness and as the reality-limit,  
As signlessness and as the ultimate truth,  
As the supreme awakening mind;  
It's described also as emptiness.
72. Those who do not understand emptiness  
Are not receptive vehicles for liberation;  
Such ignorant beings will revolve  
In the prison of existence of six classes of beings.
73. When this emptiness (as explained)  
Is thus meditated upon by yogis,  
No doubt there will arise in them  
A sentiment attached to other's welfare.
74. "Towards those beings who have  
Bestowed benefits upon me in the past,  
Such as through being my parents or friends,  
I shall strive to repay their kindness."
75. "To those beings who are being scorched  
By the fire of afflictions in existence's prison,  
Just as I have given them sufferings (in the past),

It's befitting (today) that I give them happiness.”

76. The fruits that are desirable or undesirable  
In the form of fortunate or unfortunate births in the world,  
They come about from helping sentient beings  
Or harming them.

77-78. If, by relying upon the sentient beings,  
The unexcelled state (of Buddhahood) is brought about,  
So what is so astonishing about the fact  
That whatever prosperities there are in gods and humans,  
Such as those enjoyed by Brahma, Indra and Rudra,  
And the (worldly) guardians of the world,  
There is nothing in this triple world system  
That is not brought forth by helping others?

79. As hell beings, as animals and as hungry ghosts,  
The different kinds of sufferings  
That sentient beings experience,  
These come about from harming others.

80. Hunger, thirst and attacking each other,  
And the agony of being tormented,

Which are difficult to avert and unending –  
These are the fruits of harming others.

81. (Just as) there is Buddhahood and awakening mind  
And the fortunate birth (on the one hand)  
And the unfortunate birth (on the other),  
Know that the (karmic) fruition of beings too is twofold.
82. Support others with all possible factors;  
Protect them as you would your own body.  
Detachment towards other sentient beings  
Must be shunned as you would a poison.
83. Because of their detachment,  
Did the Disciples not attain lesser awakening?  
By never abandoning the sentient beings,  
The fully awakened Buddhas attained awakening.
84. Thus, when one considers the occurrence of  
The fruits of beneficial and non-beneficial deeds,  
How can anyone remain even for an instant  
Attached (only) to one's own welfare?
85. Rooted firmly because of compassion,

And arising from the shoot of awakening mind,  
The (true) Awakening that is the sole fruit of altruism –  
This, the Conqueror's children cultivate.

86. When, through practice, it becomes firm,  
Then, alarmed by other's suffering,  
The (Bodhisattvas) renounce the bliss of concentration  
And plunge even to the depths of relentless hells.

87. This is indeed amazing, praiseworthy it is;  
This is the excellent way of the sublime;  
That they give away their own flesh  
And wealth, is not surprising at all.

88. Those who understand this emptiness of phenomena  
Yet (also) conform to the law of karma and its results,  
That is more amazing than amazing!  
That is more wondrous than wondrous!

89. Those who wish to save sentient beings,  
Even if they are reborn in the mires of existence,  
They are not sullied by the stains of its events;  
Just like the petals of a lotus born in a lake.

90. Though Bodhisattvas such as Samantabhadra  
Have burned the wood of afflictions  
With the wisdom fire of emptiness,  
They still remain moistened by compassion.
91. Those under the power of compassion  
Display acts of departing, birth and merriment,  
Renouncing kingdom, engaging in ascetic penance,  
Great awakening and defeating the Maras;
92. Turning the Wheel of Dharma,  
Entering the realm of all gods,  
And likewise display the act of going  
Beyond the bounds of sorrow.
93. In guises of Brahma, Indra and Vishnu,  
And that of fierce Rudra forms,  
They perform the compassionate dance  
With acts bringing peace to the beings.
94. For those disheartened on existence's road,  
For their respite, the two wisdoms that lead  
To the great vehicle had been taught;  
They are (however) not ultimate.

95. As long as not exhorted by the Buddhas,  
So long the Disciples will remain  
In a bodily state of wisdom,  
In a swoon and intoxicated by absorption.
96. When exhorted, then, in diverse forms,  
They will become attached to others' welfare;  
And if they gather stores of merit and wisdom,  
They will attain the Buddha's (full) awakening.
97. Because the propensities for two (obscurations) exist,  
These propensities are referred to as seeds (of existence);  
From the meeting of the seeds with conditions,  
The shoot of cyclic existence is produced.
98. (The paths) revealed by the saviours of the world,  
That follow the pattern of beings' mentalities,  
Differ variously among the diverse people  
Due to the diverse methods (employed by the Buddhas).
99. (The instructions) differ as the profound and as the vast;  
On some occasions (an instruction) is characterized by both;  
Though such diverse approaches are taught,  
They are (all) equal in being empty and non-dual.

100. The retention powers and the (Bodhisattva) levels,  
As well as the perfection of the Buddhas,  
The omniscient ones taught these to be  
Aspects of the awakening mind.

101. Those who fulfil others' welfare in this way  
Constantly through their body, speech and mind,  
Who advocate the dialectic of emptiness,  
There is no dispute at all of being nihilistic.

102. Neither in cyclic existence nor in Nirvana  
Do the great beings reside;  
Therefore the Buddhas taught here  
The non-abiding Nirvana.

103. The single taste of compassion is merit;  
The taste of emptiness is most excellent;  
Those who drink (the elixir of emptiness) to realize  
Self and other's welfare are Conquerors' children.

104. Bow to them with your entire being;  
They are always worthy of honour in the three worlds;  
These guides of the world reside  
As representatives of the Buddhas.

105. This awakening mind is stated  
To be the highest (ideal) in the great vehicle;  
So, with an absorbed (determined) effort,  
Generate this awakening mind.
106. To accomplish self and others' welfare,  
No other means exist in the world;  
Apart from the awakening mind,  
To date the Buddhas saw no other means.
107. The merit that is obtained  
From mere generation of the awakening mind,  
If it were to assume a form,  
It will fill more than the expanse of space.
108. A person, who, for an instant,  
Meditates on the awakening mind,  
The heap of merit (obtained from this),  
Not even the Conquerors can measure.
109. A precious mind that is free of afflictions,  
This is the most unique and excellent jewel;  
It can be neither harmed nor stolen by

Such robbers as the Mara of afflictions.

110. Just as aspirations of the Buddhas

And the Bodhisattvas are unswerving,

Likewise, those who immerse themselves in

Awakening mind, must hold firm their thought.

111. Even with wonder you should strive

As explained here (in the preceding lines);

Thereafter, you will yourself realize

Samantabhadra's (great enlightened) deeds.

112. By praising the awakening mind hailed by the excellent

conquerors,

The incomparable merits I have obtained today from this act,

Through this, may all sentient beings submerged in the

waves of the ocean of existence,

Travel on the path trodden by the leader of the bipeds.

*Colophon: This concludes 'A Commentary on the Awakening Mind' composed by the great master Arya Nagarjuna. It was translated and edited by the Indian abbot Gunakara and the translator Rapshi Shenyen, and was later revised by the Indian abbot Kanakavarma and the Tibetan translator Patsap Nyima Drak.*

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