

# **Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way**

(Skt: Mûlamadhyamakakârikâ)  
(Tib: Tsawa sherab)

- Arya Nagarjuna

*These are the chapters selected by His Holiness the Dalai Lama as the more important chapters. His Holiness has often given public teachings on these chapters, except Chapter 25. Chapter 25 has been added to this book as it is part of the syllabus of some Indian Universities.*

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **EXAMINATION OF THE CONDITION**

1. Neither from itself nor from another,  
Nor from both,  
Nor without a cause,  
Does anything whatsoever, anywhere ever arise.
2. There are four conditions: causal condition,  
Perceptive condition, immediate condition,  
Dominant condition, just so.  
There is no fifth condition.
3. The self-nature of functional things  
Is not present in the conditions, etc.  
If there are no self-functional things,  
There can be no functional things at all.

4. There is no action which possesses conditions.  
There is no action without possessing conditions.  
It is not a condition (if) it does not possess an action.  
For dependent upon this, production occurs.
  
5. These give rise to those,  
So these are called conditions.  
In as much as there is no (process of) production,  
Why are these not non-conditions?
  
6. For neither a non-existent nor an existent thing  
Is a condition appropriate.  
If a thing is non-existent, whose condition would it be?  
If a thing is (already) existent, what (purpose)  
would a condition serve?
  
7. When neither existents  
Nor non-existents nor existent non-existents are established,  
How could one propose the producer as a causal  
(condition)?  
It would be pointless (to define a causal condition) as such.  
Cessation is not acceptable.  
Therefore, an immediate (condition) is not tenable.
  
8. An existent entity (*mental event*)  
Has no object, (yet you) insist upon speaking (of it).  
If this entity (*a mental event*) is without an object,

How is it possible that there is an object of perception?

9. Since things are not produced,  
Cessation is not acceptable.  
Therefore, an immediate (condition) is not tenable.  
If something ceases, how could it act as a condition?
10. In the things that lack self-nature,  
How does (the cause) exist if (its result) does not exist?  
The phrase, "Because this exists, that will arise"  
Would not be acceptable.
11. Neither in the individual (conditions) nor in the collection (of conditions)  
Can the result be found.  
How could (the result), which the conditions (are deprived of),  
Arise from the conditions?
12. However, despite the result being non-existent,  
If it arises from these conditions,  
Why does the result not arise  
From non-conditions?
13. (If you say) the result is of the nature of the conditions,  
But the conditions do not have their own self-nature,  
(Then) how could a result (be derived) through a non-self

thing (conditions),

Which is the self-nature of conditions?

14. Therefore, there is no result

Which is of the nature of the conditions or non-conditions.

And since the result is non-existent,

How can something be (its) condition or non-condition?

## CHAPTER 18

### EXAMINATION OF SELF AND PHENOMENON

1. If the self were the aggregates,  
It would have arising and ceasing (as properties).  
If it were different from the aggregates,  
It would not have the characteristics of the aggregates.
2. If there were no self,  
Where would the self's (possessions) be?  
From the pacification of the self and what belongs to it,  
One is freed from grasping onto 'I' and 'mine'.
3. One who does not grasp onto 'I' and 'mine',  
That one does not exist.  
One who views non-grasping onto 'I' and 'mine'  
He does not perceive (the reality).
4. When views of 'I' and 'mine' are extinguished,  
Whether with respect to the internal or external,  
The appropriator ceases.  
This having ceased, birth ceases.
5. Ceasing of action and affliction leads to Nirvana.  
Action and affliction come from conceptual thought.  
This comes from (mental) elaboration.

- Elaboration ceases through emptiness.
6. That there is a self has been taught,  
And the doctrine of no-self,  
By the Buddhas, as well as the  
Doctrine of neither self nor non-self.
  7. What language expresses is non-existent.  
The apprehension of mind is non-existent.  
(Because of being) unarisen and unceased, like Nirvana  
Is the nature of things.
  8. Everything is real and is not real,  
Both real and not real,  
Neither real nor not real.  
This, the Lord Buddha taught accordingly.  
Neither nihilism nor eternalism.
  9. Not dependent upon another, peaceful and  
Not elaborated by elaboration,  
Not thought, without distinctions,  
These are the characteristics of thatness.
  10. Whatever comes into being, dependent upon another,  
Is not identical to that thing.  
Nor is it different from it.  
Therefore it is neither nihilistic nor eternalistic.

11. This nectar of the teachings  
Of the Buddhas, patrons of the world,  
Is (understood as) without identity, without distinction,  
Neither nihilism nor eternalism.
  
12. When the fully enlightened ones do not appear,  
And when the Hearers have disappeared,  
The wisdom of self-enlightenment  
Will arise completely without dependence.

## CHAPTER 22

### EXAMINATION OF THE TATHAGATA

1. Neither the aggregates, nor different from the aggregates  
(is the Tathagata).

The aggregates are not in him, nor is he in the aggregates.

The Tathagata does not possess the aggregates.

What is the Tathagata?

2. If the Buddha depended on the aggregates,

He could not exist through his self-nature.

That which does not exist through its self-nature,

How could it exist through (the power of) other things?

3. Whatever is dependent upon another entity,

Its selfhood is not feasible.

How could it be a Tathagata

Which lacks a self?

4. If there is no self-nature,

How could there be an other-thing?

What is the Tathagata

Other than the self-nature or other (than that)?

5. If, without depending upon the aggregates,  
There were a Tathagata,  
Then now (it should be feasible that) he would be depending  
upon them.  
Therefore, he would exist through dependence.
  
6. In as much as there is no Tathagata  
Not dependent upon the aggregates,  
Since there is not anything which is not dependent,  
How can it be appropriating (others)?
  
7. Where there is no appropriation,  
How is it not the (case) with the appropriated (then, of its  
absence)?  
Without the appropriated,  
How can there be a Tathagata?
  
8. Having searched through the fivefold means,  
And finding it neither identical nor different (from the  
appropriated),  
(Then) how can the Tathagata  
Be designated through (the power of) the appropriated?
  
9. All those appropriated

Do not exist through self-nature.

When something does not exist through itself,

It cannot possibly exist through other things.

10. Thus (both) the appropriated and the appropriator  
Are empty in every respect.  
How can an empty Tathagata's (arising) be feasible  
Through (the power of something which is) not existent?
11. 'Emptiness' (of Tathagata) is not asserted,  
Nor is 'non-emptiness' asserted.  
Neither both nor neither are asserted.  
They are (merely) asserted on the basis of labelling.
12. How can the tetralemma of permanent, impermanent,  
etc.,  
Be true in this peacefulness (of inherent existence)?  
How can the tetralemma of finite, infinite, etc.,  
Be true in this peacefulness (of inherent existence)?
13. The one who is caught up in strong grasping  
At the existence of the Tathagata,  
Will conceptualize, in his thought,  
The non-existence of (Tathagata) at Nirvana.

14. In that which is empty of self-nature,  
The thought that the Buddha  
Exists or does not exist  
After Nirvana is inappropriate.
  
15. Those (beings) who develop (mental) fabrications towards  
the Buddha,  
Who is free of fabrications, and devoid of exhaustion  
Those who are undermined by (obsession to) fabrication,  
Will fail to see the Tathagata.
  
16. Whatever is the nature of the Tathagata,  
Is (also) the nature of migrators.  
The Tathagata has no self-nature.  
Migrators (also) have no self-nature.

## CHAPTER 24

### EXAMINATION OF THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

1. If all of this is empty,  
Neither would arising nor ceasing exist.  
Then for you, it follows that  
The Four Noble Truths would not exist.
2. If the Four Noble Truths do not exist,  
Then knowledge, abandonment,  
Meditation and actualization  
Would not be feasible.
3. If these things do not exist,  
The four fruits as well will not arise.  
Without the four fruits, there will be no abiders in the fruits.  
Nor will there be the enterers.
4. If the eight persons do not exist,  
The Sangha will be non-existent.  
If the Noble Truths do not exist,  
There will be no True Dharma.
5. If there is no True Dharma and Sangha,  
How can there be a Buddha?

If one conceives (the idea) of emptiness,  
The Three Jewels are contradicted.

6. Hence it contradicts everything,  
the (tenability of) fruits,  
Dharma and non-Dharma,  
And the conventional norms of the world.
7. We say that this understanding of yours  
Of emptiness and the purpose of emptiness,  
And of the meaning of emptiness is incorrect  
Thus you (misconceive) contradictions (in us).
8. The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma  
Is based on two truths:  
A truth of worldly convention  
And an ultimate truth.
9. Those who do not understand  
The distinction drawn between these two truths  
Do not understand  
The Buddha's teaching of the profound suchness.
10. Without dependence upon the convention,  
The meaning of the ultimate cannot be expressed.  
Without understanding the meaning of the ultimate,  
Liberation is not achieved.

11. Through misperception of emptiness,  
A person of little intelligence is ruined.  
Like a snake incorrectly seized  
Or like a spell incorrectly cast.
12. For the reason that he knows this teaching to be  
Difficult to fathom to the depths by the less intelligent,  
The Buddha's mind turned away  
From giving teachings.
13. These refutations are not relevant  
To (the advocates of) emptiness.  
Your (faults of) denigration of emptiness  
Do not hold true for me.
14. For him to whom emptiness is tenable,  
Everything becomes tenable.  
For him to whom emptiness is not tenable,  
Nothing becomes tenable.
15. When you foist upon 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 self-nature,  
This existence of things,

You will have to view as absent 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,  
That is explained to be emptiness.  
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 non-empty thing  
does not exist.
  
20. If all these were non-empty,  
There would be no arising and no ceasing.  
Then the Four Noble Truths  
For you would be non-existent.
  
21. If it is not dependently arisen,  
How could suffering come to be?  
Impermanent, which suffering is taught to be,  
Does not exist in its self-nature.

22. When something doesn't exist from its own nature,  
How could it ever arise?  
It follows that if one denies emptiness,  
There can be no origin (of suffering).
23. If suffering exists as self-nature,  
Its cessation could not exist.  
So if self-nature is posited,  
One denies cessation.
24. If the path had self-nature,  
Meditation would not be tenable.  
If this path is indeed meditated upon,  
Your (position of) self-nature would not hold true.
25. If suffering, origin and  
cessation are non-existent,  
By meditation upon which path could one seek  
To obtain the cessation of suffering?
26. If non-understanding comes to be  
Through its self-nature,  
How will understanding arise?  
Doesn't it (non-understanding) exist by virtue of self-nature?
27. Just as the understanding (of suffering) is said to be

- (unfeasible),  
Abandoning, actualizing and meditating  
And the Four Truths  
Also would not be possible for you.
28. For a propounder of self-nature,  
Since the fruits, that, through their self-nature,  
Are not attained,  
In what way could one attain them?
29. Without the fruits, there are no attainers of the fruits,  
Nor the enterers.  
If the eight kinds of persons did not exist,  
There would be no Sangha.
30. From the non-existence of the Noble Truths  
Would follow the non-existence of the true doctrine.  
If there is no doctrine and no Sangha,  
How could a Buddha exist?
31. For you it would follow that a Buddha  
Arises not in dependence upon enlightenment.  
For you, enlightenment would arise  
Not in dependence upon a Buddha.
32. For you, in all those who are not Buddhas  
Due to his self-nature,

Enlightenment could not be achieved  
Even through enlightened practices to obtain enlightenment.

33. Moreover, one could never perform  
Dharma and non-Dharma (actions).  
If this were all non-empty, what could one do?  
That with self-nature, action does not exist.
34. For you the fruit arises,  
Even in absence of Dharma and non-Dharma (actions).  
You will be deprived of the fruits  
Which arose from Dharma and non-Dharma (actions).
35. If, for you, a fruit arose  
From Dharma or non-Dharma (actions)  
Then how could that fruit of Dharma or non-Dharma  
Be non-empty?
36. If emptiness (by virtue of)  
Dependent arising were denigrated,  
This would contradict  
All worldly conventions.
37. If emptiness itself is rejected,  
No action will be tenable.  
There would be action that did not begin,  
And there would be an agent without action.

38. If there were self-nature, migrators  
Would not arise nor uncease, (and hence)  
Would assume a static state.  
There would be absence of all varieties.
39. If it (the world) were not empty,  
Then the unachieved would not be achieved.  
The act of ending suffering and  
Abandoning afflictions would not exist.
40. Whoever sees dependent arising  
Also sees suffering,  
Its origin,  
Its cessation and the path.

**CHAPTER 25**  
**EXAMINATION OF NIRVANA**

1. If all this is empty,  
Then there is neither arising nor passing away.  
Through the abandonment or cessation of what  
Does one aspire to Nirvana?
  
2. If all this is non-empty,  
Then there is neither arising nor passing away,  
Through the abandonment or cessation of what  
Does one aspire to Nirvana?
  
3. Unrelinquished, unattained,  
Unannihilated, impermanent,  
Unarisen, unceased:  
This is how Nirvana is described.
  
4. Nirvana is not a thing.  
It would then have the characteristics of ageing and death.  
No thing exists  
Without ageing and death.
  
5. If Nirvana were a thing,

Nirvana would be compounded.

A non-compounded thing

Does not exist anywhere.

6. If Nirvana were a thing,

How could Nirvana be non-dependent?

A non-dependent thing

Does not exist anywhere.

7. If Nirvana were a non-thing,

How could it make sense for it not to be a thing?

Where Nirvana is not a thing,

It cannot be a non-thing.

8. If Nirvana were a non-thing,

How could Nirvana be non-dependent?

Whatever is non-dependent

Is not a non-thing.

**CHAPTER 26**  
**EXAMINATION OF THE TWELVE LINKS OF**  
**(SAMSARIC) EXISTENCE**

1. The obscuring *ignorance* propels (one) into (Samsaric) *birth*.  
The three compositional factors  
Enhance the formation (of births).  
These *actions* impel (one) into the state of migrators.
  
2. Having composition as its condition,  
*Consciousness* enters transmigration.  
Once *consciousness* has entered transmigration,  
*Name and form* come into being.
  
3. Once *name and form* come to be,  
The *six sense sources* come into being.  
Depending on the *six sense sources*,  
*Contact*, unwaveringly, comes into being.
  
4. Arising is only dependent  
Upon eye, form and attention.  
Thus, depending on *name and form*,

*Consciousness* is produced.

5. That which is assembled from the three -  
Eye, form and *consciousness* -  
Is *contact*.  
From *contact* arises *feeling*.
6. Conditioned by *feeling*, arises *craving*.  
*Craving* arises because of *feeling*.  
When it arises, there is *grasping*,  
Which comprises the four.
7. When there is *grasping*,  
The *existence* of the one who craves comes into being.  
If there is no *grasping*,  
Then being freed, he would not take (Samsaric) *birth*.
8. This birth is comprised of five aggregates.  
From *existence* arises *birth*,  
*Old age and death* and misery,  
Moaning and suffering
9. Grief and confusion.  
All these arise entirely because of *birth*.

In this way this very mass of suffering  
Comes into being.

10. The root of cyclic existence is compositional (factor).  
Therefore, the wise do not engage in compositional (factor).  
Thus, the unwise are the agents.  
The wise see reality.
11. With the cessation of *ignorance*,  
Compositional (factor) will not arise.  
The cessation of *ignorance* occurs through  
Insight and meditation.
12. Through the cessation of these,  
Those will not be manifest.  
The entire mass of suffering  
Indeed, thereby, completely ceases.

*Colophon:*