

# Mulamadhyamakakarika\*

By Nagarjuna



\*Chapter 26, 18, 23, 24, 22, and 1



# **Mulamadhyamakakarika**

(When His Holiness the Dalai Lama teaches the Mulamadhyamakakarika he often teaches the following chapters: chapter 26, 18, 23, 24, 22, and 1)

## **Verse of Homage:**

That which is dependent arising is  
Without ceasing, without being generated,  
Without annihilation, without permanence,  
Without coming, without going,  
Without being different, without being one,  
It is peaceful, free from mental fabrication.  
To the complete Buddha who taught all that,  
To the unsurpassed one, I bow.

## **26. Chapter:**

### **Examination of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising**

1. (26)

Obscured by ignorance we perform three types  
Of compositional actions that lead to rebirth.  
Driven by compositional karmic actions  
We wander in migratory existence.

2. (26)

Having actions as its conditions,  
Consciousness enters migratory existence.  
Once consciousness has entered,  
Name and form will come to be.

3. (26)

Once name and form come to be,  
The six sense sources arise.  
In dependence on the six sense sources,  
Contact ensues.

4. (26)

It is solely generated depending  
On eye and form and retention.  
Thus, in dependence on name and form,  
Consciousness is generated.

5. (26)

That which is the coming together of the three—  
Eye and form and consciousness—  
Is contact. From contact  
Feeling comes to be.

6. (26)

Craving is conditioned by feeling.  
Craving arises for a feeling.  
When we crave, we grasp —  
We grasp at the four aspects.

7. (26)

When there is grasping,  
'Existence' of those who grasp comes to be.  
If we did not grasp, we would  
Be freed; 'existence' would not arise.

8. (26)

'Existence' is also the five aggregates.  
From 'existence' comes birth.  
Old age and death,  
Misery, lamentation,

9. (26)

Unhappiness and agitation:  
All these arise from birth.  
Thus, a mass of suffering  
Is all that arises.

10. (26)

The root of cyclic existence is compositional action.  
So the wise ones do not act.  
It is the unwise who act;  
The wise ones do not, for they see reality.

11. (26)

With the cessation of ignorance,  
Compositional action will not arise.  
The cessation of ignorance will occur  
When consciousness meditates on reality.

12. (26)

Through the cessation of this or that,  
This or that will not arise.  
That which is exclusively a mass of suffering  
Will thus completely cease.

## **18. Chapter:**

### **Examination of the Self and Phenomena**

1. (18)

If the aggregates were the self,  
It would have to arise and cease.  
If it were different from the aggregates,  
It would not have the characteristics of the aggregates.

2. (18)

If the self did not exist,  
How could there be “mine”?  
Owing to the pacification of the self and “mine”  
There will be no holding onto “I” and “mine.”

3. (18)

He who does not hold onto “I” and “mine,”  
Does not exist either.  
Whoever sees one who does not hold onto “I” and  
“mine,”  
Does not see.

4. (18)

When thoughts of self and “mine” are eliminated  
with regard to internal and external objects,  
Appropriation ceases.

By eliminating this, birth is eliminated.

5. (18)

Through eliminating karma and affliction there is  
liberation.

Karma and affliction come from conceptual thought.  
These come from mental fabrication.

Fabrication ceases through emptiness.

6. (18)

The Buddhas designated a self;

And taught there is no self;

They also taught that

There is neither self nor selflessness.

7. (18)

What is expressed is repudiated

The objects of mind are repudiated.

Not generated and unceased:

Suchness is like Nirvana.

8. (18)

Everything is real; and everything is not real;

Both real and unreal;

Neither unreal nor real.

That is the Lord Buddha's teaching.

9. (18)

Not dependent on another [person], at peace and  
Not fabricated by mental fabrications,  
Not conceptualized, without distinctions:  
That is the characteristic of suchness.

10. (18)

Whatever arises dependent on something else  
Is neither identical to that thing  
Nor different from it.  
Thus it is neither annihilated nor permanent.

11. (18)

It is nectar—the doctrine of the Buddhas,  
Who are the protectors of the world.  
Not identical, not different,  
Not annihilated, not permanent.

12. (18)

When fully enlightened Buddhas do not appear,  
And when the Shravakas have disappeared,  
The wisdom of the Pratyekabuddhas  
Will arise completely without a teacher.



## **23. Chapter:**

### **Examination of errors**

1. (23)

It is said that attachment, aversion and confusion  
Always arise from conceptualization.  
They arise invariably in dependence on  
The pleasant, the unpleasant, and error.

2. (23)

That which arises in dependence  
on the pleasant, the unpleasant, or error  
Does not exist inherently.  
Thus the afflictions are not real.

3. (23)

The self's existence or nonexistence  
Has not been established in any way.  
Without that, how could the afflictions'  
Existence or nonexistence be established?

4. (23)

The one to whom the afflictions belong  
Has not been established either.  
Without anyone to whom to belong,  
There can be no afflictions of anyone.

5. (23)

Just as one views one's own body, the afflictions are  
Not afflicted in the fivefold way.

Just as one views one's own body, the afflicted is  
Not in the afflictions in the fivefold way.

6. (23)

If the pleasant, unpleasant, and error

Do not exist inherently,

What afflictions are dependent

On the pleasant, unpleasant, or error?

7. (23)

Form, sound, taste, and tangible objects,

Smell and phenomena: these six factors

Are considered to be the basis of attachment,

Aversion and confusion.

8. (23)

Form, sound, taste, and tangible objects,

Smell and phenomena: they are merely

A city of Gandharvas;

Like a mirage or like a dream.

9. (23)

How could the pleasant

And unpleasant arise

In ones who are like an illusory person

And like a reflection?

10. (23)

The unpleasant, depending on which  
The pleasant is imputed,  
Cannot exist without depending on the pleasant,  
Therefore, the pleasant is not tenable.

11. (23)

The pleasant, depending on which  
The unpleasant is imputed,  
Cannot exist without depending on the unpleasant,  
Thus, the unpleasant is not tenable.

12. (23)

If there is no pleasant,  
How can there be desire?  
If there is no unpleasant,  
How can there be aversion?

13. (23)

If to grasp at the view of  
“The impermanent is permanent” is mistaken,  
Since what is empty is not impermanent,  
How could grasping [at permanence] be mistaken?

14. (23)

If to grasp at the view of  
“The impermanent is permanent” is mistaken,  
Why is grasping at the view that  
“What is empty is impermanent” not mistaken?

15. (23)

That which grasps and the grasping,  
The one who grasps, and what is grasped:  
All are being pacified.  
Hence there is no grasping.

16. (23)

Since there is no grasping,  
Whether mistaken or correct,  
Who is in error?  
Who is not in error?

17. (23)

One who was in error  
Cannot commit error.  
One who was not in error  
Cannot commit error.

18. (23)

One who is committing error  
Cannot commit error.  
Who can commit error?  
Examine this on your own!

19. (23)

If error has not arisen,  
How could it come to exist?  
If error is not arisen,  
How could one be in error?

20. (23)

Since an entity does not arise from itself,  
Nor from another,  
Nor from another and itself,  
How could one be in error?

21. (23)

If the self and the pure,  
The permanent and happiness existed,  
The [the view of the] self, the pure, the permanent,  
And happiness would not be erroneous.

22. (23)

If the self and the pure,  
The permanent and happiness are non-existent,  
The non-self, the impure, the impermanent,  
And suffering do not exist.

23. (23)

Thus through the ceasing of error  
Ignorance ceases.  
When ignorance ceases,  
Formative actions, and so forth cease.

24. (23)

If anyone's afflictions  
Existed inherently,  
How could they be eliminated?  
Who could eliminate the existent?

25. (23)

If anyone's afflictions  
Did not exist inherently,  
How can they be eliminated?  
Who can eliminate the non-existent?

## **24. Chapter:**

### **Examination of the four noble truths**

1. (24)

If all this were empty,  
There would be neither arising nor ceasing,  
For you, it would follow  
That the Four Noble Truths do not exist.

2. (24)

Since the Four Noble Truths would not exist,  
Complete understanding, eliminating,  
Meditation, and actualizing  
Would not be feasible.

3. (24)

As these would not exist,  
The four results would not exist.  
Without the results, there would be no one abiding in  
the result,  
Nor would there be path-enterers.

4. (24)

If the eight kinds of person did not exist,  
There would be no sangha;  
There would be no Noble Truths,  
And thus no exalted Dharma.

5. (24)

If there were no Dharma nor Sangha,  
How could there be a Buddha?  
If emptiness were construed in this way,  
The existence of the Three Jewels would be  
undermined.

6. (24)

The existence of activities and results,  
The profane, Dharma itself,  
And worldly conventions:  
All those would be undermined.

7. (24)

Here we say that you do not realize  
Emptiness, the purpose of emptiness,  
Or the meaning of emptiness.  
Hence, you are harmed by it.

8. (24)

The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma  
Is based on the two truths:  
The truth of worldly convention,  
And the ultimate truth.

9. (24)

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

10. (24)

Without depending on conventions,  
The meaning of the ultimate cannot be taught.  
Without realizing the meaning of the ultimate,  
Nirvana cannot be achieved.

11. (24)

Misperception of emptiness  
Destroys those of little intelligence:  
Like a snake seized incorrectly,  
Or a spell incorrectly cast.

12. (24)

Therefore, aware that  
For the weak-minded, this deep Dharma  
Is difficult to realize,  
Buddha's awareness [initially] turned away from  
teaching the Dharma.

13. (24)

Since the absurd consequences you adduce  
Are not plausible with regard to emptiness,  
Your rejection of emptiness  
Is not plausible to me.



14. (24)

For one to whom emptiness makes sense,  
Everything makes sense.  
For one to whom emptiness does not make sense,  
Nothing makes sense.

15. (24)

When you foist on us  
All of your errors,  
You are like someone who has mounted his horse  
And forgotten the horse itself.

16. (24)

If you regard all things  
As existing inherently,  
Then you should regard all things  
As being without causes and conditions.

17. (24)

Results and causes;  
Agents, instruments and actions;  
Arising and ceasing;  
As well as the results would be undermined.

18. (24)

That which is dependently arisen  
Is explained to be emptiness.  
That, being dependently imputed,  
Is the middle way.

19. (24)

There is no phenomenon  
That is not dependently arisen.  
Therefore, there is no phenomenon  
That is not empty.

20. (24)

If all this were not empty  
There would be no arising and ceasing.  
It would follow that according to you,  
The Four Noble Truths would not exist.

21. (24)

If it were not dependently arisen,  
How could suffering come to be?  
[Only] the impermanent is taught to be suffering,  
And so [suffering] cannot exist inherently.

22. (24)

If it existed inherently,  
How could it have an origin?  
Thus for one who undermines emptiness  
There can be no origin.

23. (24)

If suffering existed inherently,  
Its cessation would not exist.  
So if one takes it to exist inherently,  
One undermines cessation.

24. (24)

If the path existed inherently,  
Meditation would not be feasible.  
If the path is to be meditated,  
Your [path] cannot exist inherently.

25. (24)

If suffering, its origin, and  
Its cessation did not exist,  
What path could be asserted  
To bring about the cessation of suffering?

26. (24)

If a lack of completely understanding  
Existed inherently  
How could it become complete understanding?  
Does inherence not endure?

27. (24)

For you, just like complete understanding,  
Eliminating, actualizing,  
Meditating, and the four results  
Would not make sense either.

28. (24)

For one who grasps at inherence,  
How would it be possible  
To attain the four results  
That are inherently unattained?

29. (24)

Without the results, there would be no dwelling in the  
result,

Nor would there be anyone entering it.

If the eight kinds of beings or persons did not exist,  
There would be no sangha.

30. (24)

Since the Noble Truths would not exist

The noble Dharma would not exist either.

If there were neither Dharma nor Sangha,

How could there be a Buddha?

31. (24)

Also, for you it would follow that a Buddha

Would not depend on enlightenment;

And likewise enlightenment

Would not depend on a Buddha.

32. (24)

For you, someone who is

Inherently not a Buddha

Could not attain enlightenment, even if he exerted  
himself

In the Bodhisattva practices to become enlightened.

33. (24)

No one could ever perform

Virtuous or non-virtuous actions.

If all this were not empty, what could one do?

There are no inherent actions!

34. (24)

According to you, there would be a result  
Even without virtuous or non-virtuous causes.  
According to you, there would be no result  
That has arisen from virtuous or non-virtuous causes.

35. (24)

If according to you, a result arose  
From virtuous or non-virtuous causes,  
Then, having arisen from virtuous or non-virtuous  
causes,  
How could that result not be empty?

36. (24)

Those who undermine emptiness,  
Which is dependent arising,  
Undermine all  
Worldly conventions.

37. (24)

To undermine emptiness means  
That there is no action;  
That there can be action without effort;  
And that there can be an agent who performs no  
action.

38. (24)

If there were inherence, migratory beings  
Would not be born, nor cease,  
Nor eternally endure.  
They would be without a variety of states.

39. (24)

If they were not empty,  
Then there would be no attainment of the unattained;  
Nor the act of ending suffering;  
Nor the elimination of karma and all the afflictions.

40. (24)

Whoever sees dependent arising  
Sees suffering,  
And its origin,  
And its cessation, as well as the path.

## **22. Chapter:**

### **Examination of the Tathagata**

1. (22)

He is not the aggregates, nor different from the  
aggregates;  
The aggregates are not in him, nor is he in the  
aggregates.  
The Tathagata does not possess the aggregates.  
What is the Tathagata?

2. (22)

If the Buddha, who depends on the aggregates,  
Does not exist inherently,  
How can he who does not exist inherently  
Exist [inherently] through the entity of something else?

3. (22)

Something dependent on the entity of something else,  
Its self is not tenable.

How could one who does not have a self  
Be a Tathagata?

4. (22)

If something does not exist inherently,  
How can it have the entity of something else?  
Apart from existing inherently or having the entity of  
another,  
What could the Tathagata be?

5. (22)

If, without depending on the aggregates  
There could be a Tathagata at all,  
He would presently depend on his face.  
By depending on it he would be dependent.

6. (22)

There is no Tathagata at all  
Who does not depend upon the aggregates,  
If he could not exist without depending on them,  
How could he appropriate them?

7. (22)

Without the appropriated,  
There is no appropriation.  
Without appropriation,  
There is no Tathagata whatsoever.

8. (22)

Having been sought in the fivefold way,  
How can that which is neither identical nor different  
Be designated as the Tathagata  
By virtue of appropriating?

9. (22)

Whatever is appropriated  
Does not exist inherently.  
And when something does not exist through its own  
entity,  
It can never exist through the entity of another.

10. (22)

Thus the appropriated and appropriator  
Are empty in every respect.  
As he is empty how can  
the Tathagata be designated [as existing inherently]?

11. (22)

We do not state "Empty."  
Nor do we state "Not empty."  
We state neither both nor neither.  
They are stated only for the purpose of designation.

12. (22)

How can the four — permanent, impermanent, etc., —  
Exist for the pacified?  
How can the four — finite, infinite, etc., —  
Exist for the pacified?



13. (22)

One who holds firmly  
That the Tathagata exists  
Will have to fabricate his non-existence  
After having achieved nirvana.

14. (22)

Since he is empty of inherence,  
Neither the thought that the Buddha exists  
Nor that he does not exist — after  
He has achieved nirvana — is tenable.

15. (22)

Beings who are encumbered by engaging  
In mental fabrications about the Buddha —  
He who is not extinguished and has gone beyond all  
fabrications —  
Fail to see the Tathagata.

16. (22)

Whatever is the nature of the Tathagata,  
That is the nature of migrating beings.  
The Tathagata has no inherence;  
Migrating beings have no inherence.

## **1. Chapter:**

### **Examination of conditions**

1. (1)

Neither from itself nor from another  
Nor from both,  
Nor without a cause  
Is anything ever generated anywhere.

2. (1)

There are four conditions: causal [condition],  
Observed object [condition], immediately preceding  
[condition],  
And empowering [condition].  
There is no fifth condition.

3. (1)

The inherence of entities  
Does not exist in such things as the conditions.  
If the entity that is self does not exist,  
The entity that is other does not exist.

4. (1)

Actions do not have conditions.  
Without conditions there can be no actions.  
There are no conditions without actions.  
Nor do any [conditions] have actions.

5. (1)

Since something is generated in dependence on them  
They are called conditions.

As long as it is not generated

Why are they not non-conditions?

6. (1)

For an existent or a non-existent object

A condition is not possible:

If something were non-existent, of what would [its  
condition] be a condition?

If something existed, what would a condition do?

7. (1)

When phenomena are not established

As existent, non-existent, or both existent and non-  
existent

How can one propose a cause establishing [a  
phenomenon]?

If one did so, it would not be reasonable.

8. (1)

You taught emphatically that an existent phenomenon

Has no observed object at all.

So if phenomena do not have objects,

How could there be an observed object?

9. (1)

Since phenomena are not generated,

Cessation is not feasible.

Therefore, an immediately preceding [condition]  
makes no sense.

If something has ceased, how could it be a condition?

10. (1)

Since there is no existence of  
Entities that do not exist,  
The statement "If this exists, that will arise"  
Is not tenable.

11. (1)

A result is neither in the individual  
Nor the united conditions.  
How could something not in the conditions  
Be generated from the conditions?

12. (1)

If it were not in the condition  
but generated by them.  
Why would it not be generated  
By non-conditions?

13. (1)

If a result had the nature of a condition,  
A condition would not have its own nature.  
How could a result without its own entity  
Have the nature of a condition?

14. (1)

Therefore, results have neither the nature of  
conditions,  
Nor the nature of non-conditions.  
If there are no such results,  
How could there be conditions or non-conditions?

