

A COMMENTARY ON THE AWAKENING MIND

Nagarjuna

Sanskrit title: *Bodhicittavivarana*

Tibetan title: *byang chub sems kyi 'grel pa*

Homage to glorious Vajrasattva!

It has been stated:

*Devoid of all real entities;
Utterly discarding all objects and subjects,
Such as 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 practice by means of the secret mantra, after having generated 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
Bowling 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 analyze 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 bi-peds
Always taught as well “Forms appear as mass of foams;
Feelings resemble bubbles in water;
And perception is like a mirage;

13
Mental formations are like the 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
Through this the eyes, visible forms and so forth,
Which are described as the elements,
These should be known also as [the twelve] sense-fields,
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 produce 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 analyzed 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
Insofar 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 revolution of its state
Is the sphere 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 loadstone
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
Move about in dependence upon the body.

36
So if it is considered that
Without a body there is no consciousness,
You must explain what it is this awareness
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 that "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 cognizer 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 colors 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 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 aging,
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 as well as a shoot
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;
The 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 the emptiness.

72
Those who do not understand emptiness
Are not receptive vehicle for liberation;
Such ignorant beings will revolve
In the existence prison 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 others' welfare.

74

“Towards those beings that 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 that 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 which are desirable or undesirable
In the form of fortunate or unfortunate births in the world,
They come about from helping the 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 the 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,
Which 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 not the Disciples 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
So long not exhorted by the Buddhas,
So long the Disciples will remain
In a bodily state of wisdom
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 saviors of the world,
Which 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 fulfill other's 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

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 conqueror's children.

104

Bow to them with your entire being;
They are always worthy of honor 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 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,
May through this all sentient beings submerged in the waves of
existence ocean
Travel on the path trodden by the leader of the bipeds.

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.

© English translation. Geshe Thupten Jinpa, 2006; revised 2007. This translation was prepared on the basis of reading the Tibetan root text against Smriti Jnanakirti's commentary (*Tengyur*, Derge, rgyud 'grel *Ci*, p.117a-142b) and Gomchen Ngawang Drakpa's commentary entitled *Jewel Garland (The Collected Works of Gomchen Ngawang Drakpa, vol.ka)*.