Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way

NAGARJUNA

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मूलमध्यमककारिका

Translated from the Sanskrit with AI (Claude) and edited



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INTRODUCTION

The *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, the "Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way," is the founding text of the Madhyamaka, or "Middle Way," school of Buddhist philosophy. Its author, Nagarjuna, probably lived in south India in the second century AD; almost nothing certain is known about his life. The work is some 450 short verses in twenty-seven chapters, written as memorable summaries of arguments that teachers and commentators would unpack.

Nagarjuna takes up, one by one, the basic notions that Buddhist thinkers and their rivals used to describe the world—causation, motion, the senses, time, the self, action and its fruit, bondage and liberation, even the Buddha and nirvana—and shows that none of them can be made sense of if things have an intrinsic nature of their own. Everything that arises in dependence on other things is "empty" of such a nature. Emptiness is not a hidden essence or a kind of nothingness, but simply dependent origination rightly understood, and it too is empty.

The famous chapter 24 answers the charge that this destroys the Buddha's teaching, with the doctrine of the two truths, conventional and ultimate; chapter 25 concludes that there is not the slightest difference between nirvana and the round of rebirth.

Chapter 1: Conditions

प्रत्ययपरीक्षा *(Pratyayaparīkṣā)*

Things arise neither from themselves, nor from something else, nor from both, nor without a cause; the four kinds of condition examined.

Ded. Without ceasing, without arising, not cut off, not eternal,
not single, not manifold, not coming, not going—
the one who taught this dependent origination, the
auspicious stilling of conceptual proliferation,
the fully awakened one, best of speakers: him I salute.[1]

1.1 Not from itself, not from another, not from both, and not
without a cause:
nowhere and never is anything found that has arisen.

1.2 There are four conditions: the causal condition, the
supporting object, the immediately preceding condition,
and likewise the dominant condition; there is no fifth
condition.[2]

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1 Dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda): the teaching that things arise in dependence on conditions. Conceptual proliferation (prapañca): the mind's spinning out of concepts and distinctions.

2 The four conditions of Abhidharma analysis: the cause proper, the object that supports a cognition, the moment immediately preceding, and the decisive or dominant factor.

1.3 For the intrinsic nature of things is not found in the conditions and the rest.
Where intrinsic nature is not found, extrinsic nature is not found.[3]

1.4 Activity is not endowed with conditions, nor is activity without conditions.
There are no conditions without activity, and none endowed with activity either.

1.5 "These are conditions, because something arises in dependence on them," so it is said;
but as long as it does not arise, how are they not non-conditions?

1.6 Neither for an existent nor for a nonexistent object is a condition possible.
If it is nonexistent, whose condition is it? If it is existent, what use is a condition?

1.7 When a thing comes about neither as existent, nor as nonexistent, nor as both existent and nonexistent,
how, this being so, can a producing cause make sense?[4]

1.8 An existent thing is taught to be simply without a supporting object.
And if a thing is without a supporting object, how then can there be a supporting object?

1.9 Since things have not arisen, cessation is not possible.
So an immediately preceding condition is untenable; and when something has ceased, what condition is it?

1.10 Since things without intrinsic nature have no being,
the formula "when this exists, that comes to be" is not tenable.

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3 Intrinsic nature (svabhāva): a nature of its own, independent of anything else. Extrinsic nature (parabhāva): the nature of something else.
4 Things (dharma, plural): the basic elements into which Buddhists analyzed experience.

1.11 The effect is not in the conditions, taken separately or together.
And how could what is not in the conditions come from the conditions?

1.12 But if, though nonexistent, it comes forth from those conditions,
why does the effect not come forth from non-conditions as well?

1.13 The effect is made of the conditions, yet the conditions are not made of themselves.
How could an effect that comes from what is not made of itself be made of the conditions?

1.14 Therefore no effect is found, whether made of conditions or made of non-conditions.
Since there is no effect, how could there be conditions and non-conditions?

Chapter 2: Motion

गतागतपरीक्षा *(Gatāgataparīkṣā)*

Where does going take place—on the path already gone, the path not yet gone, or the path being gone? Mover and motion.

2.1 What has been gone over is not being gone over; nor is what has not yet been gone over.
Apart from what has and has not been gone over, what is being gone over is not being gone over.

2.2 Where there is movement, there is going; and since movement is in what is being gone over,
not in what has been gone over nor in what has not, going is in what is being gone over.

2.3 How could the going of what is being gone over be possible at all,
when two goings in what is being gone over are not possible?

2.4 Whoever holds that going belongs to what is being gone over is committed to this:
there is "being gone over" without going—for what is being gone over is being gone over.

2.5 If there is going in what is being gone over, two goings follow:
the one by which it is "being gone over," and the further going in it.

2.6 If two goings follow, two goers follow;
for apart from a goer, going is not possible.

2.7 If apart from a goer going is not possible,
then, when there is no going, where could the goer come from?

2.8 First, the goer does not go; nor does the non-goer go.
What third, other than goer and non-goer, could go?

2.9 How could "the goer goes" be possible at all,
when without going a goer is not possible?

2.10 Whoever holds the thesis "the goer goes" is committed
to a goer without going, since he wants the goer to have a going.

2.11 If the goer goes, two goings follow:
the one by which he is called a goer, and the one by which, being a goer, he goes.

2.12 Going is not begun in what has been gone over, nor in what has not been gone over;
it is not begun in what is being gone over. Where, then, is going begun?

2.13 Before going begins, there is nothing being gone over and nothing gone over
in which going could be begun. How could there be going in what has not been gone over?

2.14 What has been gone over, what is being gone over, what has not—why are these conceptually constructed,
when a beginning of going is nowhere seen at all?

2.15 First, the goer does not stand still; nor does the non-goer stand still.
What third, other than goer and non-goer, could stand still?

2.16 How could "the goer stands still" be possible at all,
when without going a goer is not possible?

2.17 One does not come to a stop from what is being gone over,
nor from what has been gone over, nor from what has not.
Going, setting out, and coming to a stop: the case is the same as with motion.

2.18 That going and goer are the very same is not tenable;
that the goer is something other than going is not tenable either.

2.19 For if going and goer were the very same,
it would follow that agent and action are one.

2.20 And if the goer is imagined to be other than going,
there would be going without a goer, and a goer without going.

2.21 If two things are established neither by being one nor by being different,
how can they be established at all?

2.22 The going by which a goer is called a goer—that going he does not go,
since no one exists before the going who goes anywhere.

2.23 The going by which a goer is called a goer—he does not go a different one,
since two goings are not possible in a single goer.

2.24 A goer who is existent does not go any of the three kinds of going;
nor does a goer who is nonexistent go any of the three kinds of going.

2.25 One both existent and nonexistent does not go any of the three kinds of going.
Therefore going, the goer, and what is to be gone over are not found.

Chapter 3: The Senses

चक्षुरादीन्द्रियपरीक्षा *(Cakṣurādīndriyaparīkṣā)*

Seeing cannot see itself; seer, seeing and the seen depend on one another.

3.1 Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and mind
are the six senses; their fields are the seen and the rest.

3.2 Seeing does not see itself.
And if it does not see itself, how will it see others?

3.3 The example of fire is not enough to establish seeing;
it, together with seeing, has been answered by what is
being gone over, gone over, and not gone over.[1]

3.4 When there is no seeing whatever that is not seeing,
how can it make sense to say that seeing sees?

3.5 Seeing does not see; non-seeing does not see either.
And the seer should be understood as explained in the
same way as seeing.

3.6 Without seeing, or not without it, there is no seer.
If there is no seer, how can there be the seen and seeing?

1 The opponent compares seeing to fire, which was held to burn or illuminate itself as well as other things.

3.7 Since the seen and seeing do not exist, the four beginning with consciousness
do not exist; how, then, will grasping and the rest come about?[2]

3.8 Hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and mind are explained
by seeing; so too should one understand the hearer, the heard, and the rest.

2 The four beginning with consciousness: consciousness, contact, feeling and craving—links in the twelvefold chain of dependent origination, which continues with grasping.

Chapter 4: The Aggregates

स्कन्धपरीक्षा *(Skandhaparīkṣā)*

Material form cannot be found apart from its cause, nor its cause apart from it; the same holds for the other aggregates.

4.1 Apart from the cause of form, form is not apprehended;
apart from form, the cause of form is not seen either.[1]

4.2 If form existed apart from the cause of form, form would turn out
to be without a cause; but nothing anywhere is without a cause.

4.3 But if there were a cause of form apart from form,
it would be a cause without an effect; and there is no cause without an effect.

4.4 If form already exists, a cause of form is not tenable;
if form does not exist, a cause of form is not tenable either.

4.5 And form without a cause is utterly untenable.
Therefore one should not engage in any conceptual construction about form.

4.6 That the effect resembles the cause is not tenable;
that the effect does not resemble the cause is not tenable either.

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1 Form (rūpa): matter, the first of the five aggregates; its cause was held to be the four great elements.

4.7 For feeling, mind, perception, and formations, in every respect,
and for all things, the procedure is the same as for form.

4.8 When a debate is conducted by way of emptiness, whoever replies with a rebuttal
has rebutted nothing: it all stands on a par with what is still to be proved.[2]

4.9 When an explanation is given by way of emptiness, whoever finds fault with it
has faulted nothing: it all stands on a par with what is still to be proved.

2 Emptiness (śūnyatā): the absence of intrinsic nature in things.

Chapter 5: The Elements

धातुपरीक्षा *(Dhātuparīkṣā)*

Space and the other elements are neither a thing defined nor a defining mark, neither existent nor nonexistent.

5.1 No space at all exists before the defining mark of space.
If it existed before its defining mark, it would follow that it is without a defining mark.[1]

5.2 And nowhere is there any thing without a defining mark.
If there is no thing without a defining mark, where does the defining mark come to apply?

5.3 A defining mark does not operate on what has no mark, nor on what has a mark,
nor does it operate anywhere other than what has a mark and what has none.

5.4 When the defining mark does not operate, the thing to be marked is not possible;
and when the thing to be marked is not possible, the defining mark is impossible too.

5.5 Therefore the thing to be marked does not exist, and the defining mark does not exist;
nor does any thing exist apart from the marked and the mark.

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1 Defining mark (lakṣaṇa): the characteristic by which a thing is identified; for space, in Abhidharma, it is unobstructedness.

5.6 And when no existent is found, of what will there be
nonexistence?
And who, being unlike both existent and nonexistent,
knows existent and nonexistent?

5.7 Therefore space is neither existent nor nonexistent, neither
the marked nor the mark;
and the other five elements are just like space.[2]

5.8 But those of little understanding who see existence and
nonexistence
in things do not see the auspicious stilling of what is to be
seen.

2 The six elements (dhātu): earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness.

Chapter 6: Desire and the Desirer

रागरक्तपरीक्षा *(Rāgaraktaparīkṣā)*

Desire and the one who desires can be established neither apart nor together.

6.1 If the desirous one existed before desire, apart from desire,
desire would arise in dependence on him: when there is a desirous one, there is desire.

6.2 But if there is no desirous one, where could desire come from?
Whether desire exists or not, the procedure is the same for the desirous one.

6.3 Nor is it tenable that desire and the desirous one arise together,
for then desire and the desirous one would be independent of each other.

6.4 In oneness there is no togetherness, for a thing is not together with itself;
but in separateness, how could there be togetherness?

6.5 If there is togetherness in oneness, it would occur even without a companion;
if there is togetherness in separateness, it would occur even without a companion.

6.6 And if there is togetherness in separateness, is the separateness of desire and the desirous one
already established, so that on its basis they are together?

6.7 Or if desire and the desirous one are established as
separate,
why do you imagine them to be together?

6.8 Since they are not established separately, you want them to
be together;
yet to establish their togetherness, you again want
separateness.

6.9 Since separateness is not established, togetherness is not
established.
In what kind of separateness do you want togetherness to
exist?

6.10 Thus desire is established neither together with the
desirous one nor apart from him.
Like desire, all things are established neither together nor
apart.

Chapter 7: The Conditioned

संस्कृतपरीक्षा *(Saṃskṛtaparīkṣā)*

Arising, abiding and ceasing, the marks of what is conditioned, examined; the lamp that lights itself; like a dream, a magic show, a city in the clouds.

7.1 If arising is conditioned, the three characteristics apply to it;
but if arising is unconditioned, how can it be a characteristic of the conditioned?[1]

7.2 Arising and the other two, taken separately, cannot do the work of characterizing
the conditioned; taken together, how could they be in one place at one time?

7.3 If arising, abiding, and ceasing have another characteristic of the conditioned,
there is an infinite regress; if they have none, they are not conditioned.

7.4 The arising of arising gives rise only to the primary arising;
the primary arising in turn gives rise to the arising of arising.[2]

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1 In Abhidharma (Sarvāstivāda) doctrine, every conditioned thing bears three characteristics: arising, abiding, and ceasing.

2 The Sarvāstivāda held that arising is itself produced by a secondary "arising of arising," each producing the other.

7.5 If, as you hold, the arising of arising gives rise to the primary arising,
how will it, not yet produced by the primary arising, produce that?

7.6 If, as you hold, the one produced by the primary gives rise to the primary,
how does that primary, not yet produced by it, produce it?

7.7 This one, while arising, might indeed give rise to that one, as you would like,
if this one, not yet born, were able to produce that one.

7.8 Just as a lamp illuminates both itself and others,
so arising would produce both itself and others.[3]

7.9 In the lamp there is no darkness, nor where the lamp is placed.
What then does the lamp illuminate? For illumination is the destroying of darkness.

7.10 How is darkness destroyed by the lamp while it is arising,
when the lamp, while arising, does not reach the darkness?

7.11 Or if darkness is destroyed by the lamp without reaching it,
then the lamp, standing here, will destroy the darkness that is in all the world.

7.12 If the lamp illuminates both itself and others,
then darkness too will without doubt conceal both itself and others.

7.13 How could this arising, if not yet arisen, produce itself?
And if, already arisen, it produces, what more is produced when it is already born?

3 The lamp was a standard example of something that illuminates itself as well as other things.

7.14 What is arising, what has arisen, what has not arisen—in no way
do these arise; this has been explained by what is being gone over, gone over, and not gone over.

7.15 When what is arising does not yet take part in arising,
how can what is arising be said to be so in dependence on arising?

7.16 Whatever comes to be in dependence, that is by intrinsic nature at peace.
Therefore what is arising is at peace, and so is arising itself.

7.17 If some unarisen thing existed anywhere,
it could arise; but if that thing does not exist, what arises?

7.18 And if this arising produces what is arising,
what further arising would produce that arising?

7.19 If another arising produces it, there is an infinite regress;
if it arises without an arising, then everything arises in that way.

7.20 The arising of the existent is not tenable, nor that of the nonexistent,
nor of what is both existent and nonexistent; this was shown earlier.

7.21 The arising of a thing that is ceasing is not possible;
and a thing that is not ceasing is not possible.

7.22 What is already abiding does not abide; what is not abiding does not abide;
what is in the course of abiding does not abide; and what unarisen thing abides?

7.23 The abiding of a thing that is ceasing is not possible;
and a thing that is not ceasing is not possible.

7.24 Since all things are always subject to old age and death,
what things are there that abide without old age and death?

7.25 Abiding cannot abide by another abiding, nor by that very abiding,
just as arising does not arise by itself or by another.

7.26 What has not ceased does not cease; what has ceased does not cease;
nor does what is ceasing. What unborn thing ceases?

7.27 The cessation of a thing that is abiding is not possible;
nor is the cessation of a thing that is not abiding possible.

7.28 A state does not cease through that very same state,
nor does a state cease through another state.

7.29 Just as the arising of all things is not possible,
so the cessation of all things is not possible.

7.30 The cessation of an existent thing is not possible,
for in one and the same, existence and nonexistence are not possible.

7.31 Nor is the cessation of a nonexistent thing possible,
just as there is no cutting off of a second head.

7.32 Cessation does not cease by itself, nor by another,
just as arising does not arise by itself or by another.

7.33 Since arising, abiding, and ceasing are not established, there is no conditioned;
and if the conditioned is not established, how will the unconditioned be established?

7.34 Like an illusion, like a dream, like a city of the gandharvas —
so arising, so abiding, so ceasing have been described.[4]

4 Illusion (māyā): a conjurer's magic show. A city of the gandharvas (celestial musicians) is a mirage-like city seen in the sky, a stock image of unreality.

Chapter 8: Action and Agent

कर्मकारकपरीक्षा *(Karmakārakaparīkṣā)*

Agent and action exist only in dependence on each other.

8.1 An agent that is existent does not perform an existent action;
nor does an agent that is nonexistent undertake a nonexistent action.

8.2 If the action is existent, there is no activity, and the action would lack an agent;
if the agent is existent, there is no activity, and the agent would lack an action.

8.3 If a nonexistent agent performed a nonexistent action,
the action would be without a cause, and the agent would be without a cause.

8.4 If there is no cause, neither effect nor cause is found;
without these, activity, agent, and instrument are not found.

8.5 When activity and the rest are impossible, right and wrong do not exist;
and when right and wrong do not exist, the fruit born of them does not exist.[1]

1 Right and wrong (dharma and adharma): good and bad conduct, merit and demerit.

8.6 Without the fruit, there is no path to liberation or to heaven,
and it follows that all activity would be pointless.

8.7 An agent both existent and nonexistent does not perform an action both existent and nonexistent,
for existent and nonexistent contradict each other: how could they be in one?

8.8 The nonexistent is not done by an existent agent, nor the existent by a nonexistent one;
for all those same faults would follow there.

8.9 Neither a nonexistent action nor one both existent and nonexistent
does an existent agent perform, for the reasons already given.

8.10 Nor does a nonexistent agent perform an existent action, or one both existent and nonexistent,
for the reasons already given.

8.11 An agent both existent and nonexistent does not perform an existent or a nonexistent
action; this should be understood from the reasons already given.

8.12 The agent comes about in dependence on the action, and in dependence on that agent
the action comes about; we see no other ground for their being established.

8.13 In the same way one should understand grasping, from the refutation of action
and agent; by means of action and agent one should examine the remaining things.

Chapter 9: What Comes Before

पूर्वपरीक्षा *(Pūrvaparīkṣā)*
Is there someone prior to seeing, hearing and feeling, to whom they belong?

9.1 Seeing, hearing and the rest, and feeling and the rest too—
the one to whom they belong exists before them, some say.

9.2 For how could seeing and the rest belong to a thing that does not exist?
Therefore, before them, there is that thing, firmly established.

9.3 But that thing established before seeing, hearing and the rest, and before feeling and the rest—
by what is it designated?

9.4 And if it is established even without seeing and the rest,
then these too will exist without it, no doubt.

9.5 Someone is made known by something; something is made known by someone.
Without something, how could there be someone? Without someone, how could there be something?

9.6 Someone prior to all of seeing and the rest does not exist;
he is made known by one of seeing and the rest at one time, by another at another.

9.7 If there is no one prior to all of seeing and the rest,
how is there someone prior to each one of seeing and the rest?

9.8 If the seer is the same as the hearer and the same as the feeler,
he would exist prior to each one; but this is not tenable.

9.9 If the seer is one, the hearer another, and the feeler yet another,
then when there is a seer there would also be a hearer, and there would be many selves.

9.10 Seeing, hearing and the rest, and feeling and the rest—
in the elements from which they arise, he is not found either.

9.11 Seeing, hearing and the rest, and feeling and the rest—
if the one to whom they belong does not exist, they too do not exist.

9.12 Before seeing and the rest, at the same time, and afterward,
he is not found; for him, the imaginings "exists" and "does not exist" have ceased.

Chapter 10: Fire and Fuel

अग्नीन्धनपरीक्षा *(Agnīndhanaparīkṣā)*

Fire is neither the same as its fuel nor other than it; so too the self and what it appropriates.

10.1 If fire were fuel, agent and action would be one.
If fire were other than fuel, it would exist even without fuel.[1]

10.2 It would be forever burning, without any cause for its kindling;
starting it again would be pointless, and so it would be without action.

10.3 Because it would not depend on anything else, it would be without any cause for its kindling;
starting it again would be pointless, and it would follow that it burns forever.

10.4 If you say that fuel is simply what is being burned,
by what is that fuel burned, if fuel is only that?

10.5 Being other, it will not reach the fuel; not reaching it, it will not burn it; not burning it,
it will not go out; not going out, it will remain with its own marks.[2]

1 Fire and fuel: a standard image for the relation between the person and the aggregates it takes up (see 10.15).
2 To go out (nirvā-): the verb from which nirvāṇa, "blowing out," is formed.

10.6 If fire were other than fuel, it could reach the fuel,
as a woman reaches a man and a man a woman.

10.7 Fire, though other than fuel, might indeed reach the fuel,
if fire and fuel existed separated from each other.

10.8 If fire depends on fuel, and fuel depends on fire,
which is produced first, in dependence on which there is
fire or fuel?

10.9 If fire depends on fuel, a fire already established is
established again;
and that being so, there will also be fuel without fire.

10.10 If a thing is established in dependence on another, and that
other, on which it is to depend,
is established in dependence on it, then which is
established in dependence on which?

10.11 How can a thing that is established in dependence depend
on anything while not yet established?
But if it depends when already established, its dependence
makes no sense.

10.12 There is no fire in dependence on fuel, and no fire
independent of fuel.
There is no fuel in dependence on fire, and no fuel
independent of fire.

10.13 Fire does not come from something else, nor is fire in the
fuel.
The rest concerning fuel has been stated by what is being
gone over, gone over, and not gone over.

10.14 Fuel is not fire, nor is fire anywhere other than fuel.
Fire does not possess fuel; fuel is not in fire, nor fire in fuel.

10.15 Fire and fuel explain the whole case of the self and what it
grasps,
without remainder, together with pots, cloths, and the rest.

10.16 Those who describe the self and things as each having its own reality, separately,
I do not consider to understand the meaning of the teaching.

Chapter 11: The Beginning and the End

पूर्वापरकोटिपरीक्षा *(Pūrvāparakoṭiparīkṣā)*

The round of rebirth has no first point and no last; birth and death cannot be ordered in time.

11.1 The Great Sage said that no first point is known.
The round of rebirth is without beginning or end: it has no start and no last point.[1]

11.2 Where there is neither beginning nor end, how could there be a middle?
So here the orders of before, after, and at the same time are not possible.

11.3 If birth came first and old age and death afterward,
birth would be without old age and death, and one who had not died would be born.

11.4 If birth came later and old age and death first,
how could there be causeless old age and death of one not born?

11.5 Nor is it tenable that birth occurs together with old age and death;
one would die while being born, and both would be without a cause.

1 The Great Sage: the Buddha. The round of rebirth (saṃsāra): the beginningless cycle of birth, death, and birth again.

11.6 Where these orders of before, after, and at the same time do not come about,
why engage in conceptual proliferation about birth, and about old age and death?

11.7 Effect and cause, the marked and the mark,
feeling and the one who feels, whatever objects there are—

11.8 it is not only the round of rebirth whose first point is not found;
of all things whatever, no first point is found.

Chapter 12: Suffering

दुःखपरीक्षा *(Duḥkhaparīkṣā)*

Suffering is made neither by oneself, nor by another, nor by both, nor without a cause.

12.1 Made by oneself, made by another, made by both, or without a cause—
so some hold suffering to be; but that it is something made is not tenable.

12.2 If it were made by oneself, it would not arise in dependence;
for these aggregates arise in dependence on those aggregates.[1]

12.3 If these were other than those, or those different from these,
suffering would be made by another: those would be made by these others.

12.4 If suffering is made by one's own person, then, apart from suffering,
who is that person of one's own by whom suffering is made by oneself?[2]

1 Aggregates (skandha): the five groups into which a person is analyzed—form, feeling, perception, formations, consciousness.
2 Person (pudgala): the Pudgalavāda schools held that there is a person neither identical with nor different from the aggregates.

12.5 If suffering is born of another person, the one to whom it is handed over,
the other having made it—where is that one, apart from suffering?

12.6 If suffering is born of another person, who is that other person
who, apart from suffering, makes it and sends it to the other?

12.7 Since suffering made by oneself is not established, how could suffering be made by another?
For whatever suffering the other made would be, for him, made by himself.

12.8 First, suffering is not made by oneself, for it is not made by that very one.
If the other is not self-made, how could suffering be made by another?

12.9 Suffering could be made by both, if it could be made by each.
Made neither by another nor by oneself, how could suffering be without a cause?

12.10 It is not only for suffering that none of the four options holds;
for external things too, none of the four options holds.

Chapter 13: Conditioned Things

संस्कारपरीक्षा *(Saṃskāraparīkṣā)*

All conditioned things are deceptive; emptiness is the relinquishing of all views.

13.1 The Lord said that whatever is of a deceptive nature is false.
All formations are of a deceptive nature; therefore they are false.[1]

13.2 If whatever is of a deceptive nature is false, what is there that deceives?
What the Lord said sheds light on emptiness.

13.3 Things are without intrinsic nature, since they are seen to become otherwise.
There is no thing without intrinsic nature, since things have emptiness.

13.4 Of what could there be becoming otherwise, if intrinsic nature is not found?
Of what could there be becoming otherwise, if intrinsic nature is found?

13.5 Becoming otherwise is not tenable for the thing itself, nor for something else;
for the young do not grow old, and the old do not grow old.

1 The Lord (bhagavān): the Buddha. Formations (saṃskāra): here, all conditioned things.

13.6 If the thing itself became otherwise, milk itself would be curds,
and the state of being curds will belong to something other than milk.

13.7 If something that is not empty existed, something empty might exist.
Nothing exists that is not empty; so how will the empty exist?

13.8 The Victors have taught emptiness as the relinquishing of all views.
But those for whom emptiness is a view, they have called incurable.[2]

2 The Victors (jina): the buddhas.

Chapter 14: Contact

संसर्गपरीक्षा *(Saṃsargaparīkṣā)*

Seer, seen and seeing never meet, for things that are different cannot come into contact.

14.1 The seen, seeing, and the seer: these three, whether in pairs or all together, do not enter into connection with one another.

14.2 So too desire, the desirous one, and what is desired should be seen;
and likewise, in threes, the remaining afflictions and the remaining sense bases.[1]

14.3 Connection is of one different thing with another, and that difference is not found
among the seen and the rest; therefore they do not enter into connection.

14.4 Not only is the difference of the seen and the rest not found; no difference of anything from anything else is possible.

14.5 The different is different in dependence on something different; nothing is different without the different.
What depends on something is not tenably different from it.

1 Afflictions (kleśa): desire, hatred, delusion and the like. Sense bases (āyatana): the six senses and their six kinds of object.

14.6 If the different were different from the different, it would be so even without the different;
but without the different the different is not different; therefore it does not exist.

14.7 Difference is not found in what is different, nor in what is not different.
And when difference is not found, there is neither the different nor the same.

14.8 Connection of a thing with itself is not tenable, nor of one different thing with another.
What is connecting, what is connected, and the one who connects are not found.

Chapter 15: Intrinsic Nature

स्वभावपरीक्षा *(Svabhāvaparīkṣā)*

What arises from causes and conditions cannot have an intrinsic nature; neither "it is" nor "it is not."

15.1 It is not tenable that intrinsic nature should come about through conditions and causes;
intrinsic nature produced from causes and conditions would be something made.

15.2 But how could intrinsic nature be something made?
For intrinsic nature is not made, and does not depend on anything else.

15.3 Where intrinsic nature does not exist, how will extrinsic nature exist?
For the intrinsic nature of an extrinsic nature is what is called extrinsic nature.

15.4 Apart from intrinsic and extrinsic nature, where is there an existent?
For an existent is established when there is intrinsic or extrinsic nature.

15.5 If the existent is not established, the nonexistent is not established either;
for people call the existent's becoming otherwise "the nonexistent."

15.6 Those who see intrinsic nature and extrinsic nature, the existent and the nonexistent,
do not see the truth in the Buddha's teaching.

15.7 In the Instruction to Katyayana, both "it exists" and "it does not exist"
were rejected by the Lord, who understands the existent and the nonexistent.[1]

15.8 If something existed by its very nature, it would not become nonexistent;
for a nature's becoming otherwise is never possible.

15.9 If a nature does not exist, of what will there be becoming otherwise?
If a nature does exist, of what will there be becoming otherwise?

15.10 "It exists" is the grasping of eternalism; "it does not exist" is the view of annihilation.
Therefore the wise should not rely on existence or nonexistence.

15.11 "What exists by intrinsic nature does not not exist"—that is eternalism.
"It does not exist now, but existed before"—that entails annihilation.

1 Instruction to Kātyāyana: the Kaccānagotta Sutta (Saṃyutta Nikāya 12.15), where the Buddha teaches a middle way between "everything exists" and "nothing exists."

Chapter 16: Bondage and Liberation

बन्धमोक्षपरीक्षा *(Bandhamokṣaparīkṣā)*

Who is it that transmigrates, is bound, and is freed?

16.1 If formations transmigrate, they do not transmigrate as permanent,
nor do they transmigrate as impermanent; the same procedure holds for a living being.

16.2 If a person transmigrates—among the aggregates, sense bases, and elements,
sought in five ways, he is not there; who will transmigrate?[1]

16.3 Transmigrating from grasping to grasping, he would be without existence;
and without existence and without grasping, who is he, and what would transmigrate?

16.4 The *nirvāṇa* of formations is not possible in any way;
nor is the *nirvāṇa* of a living being possible in any way.[2]

16.5 Formations, subject to arising and passing away, are neither bound nor freed;
as before, a living being is neither bound nor freed.

16.6 If bondage is grasping, one with grasping is not bound,
and one without grasping is not bound; then in what state is one bound?

1 Sought in five ways: the person is neither the aggregates, nor other than them, nor in them, nor are they in him, nor does he possess them.
2 *Nirvāṇa*: the final extinction of the afflictions and release from the round of rebirth.

16.7 Bondage might indeed bind, if it existed before the one to be bound;
but it does not. The rest has been stated by what is being gone over, gone over, and not gone over.

16.8 First, one who is bound is not freed, nor is one who is not bound freed.
If one who is bound were being freed, bondage and freeing would be simultaneous.

16.9 "Free of grasping, I shall attain *nirvāṇa*; *nirvāṇa* will be mine"—
those who seize on this are gripped by a great grasping.

16.10 Where *nirvāṇa* is not superimposed and the round of rebirth is not removed,
what round of rebirth is there, and what *nirvāṇa* is conceptually constructed?

Chapter 17: Action and Its Fruit

कर्मफलपरीक्षा *(Karmaphalaparīkṣā)*

How can an action that has ceased bear fruit later? Rival theories examined; action, afflictions and agent are like a mirage or a dream.

17.1 The mind that restrains oneself and benefits others,
and is kindly—that is *dharma*, the seed of fruit after death and here.[1]

17.2 Intention, and what is done having intended: the Supreme Sage called these action.
Many kinds of distinctions in that action have been proclaimed.[2]

17.3 Of these, the action called intention is said to be mental;
and what is called "having intended" is bodily and verbal.

17.4 Speech, movement, and the non-abstentions known as unmanifest,
and the other unmanifest ones, the abstentions, are likewise taught.[3]

17.5 Merit that comes from use, and demerit of the same kind,
and intention: these seven things are held to make action manifest.[4]

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1 *Dharma*: here right conduct as the Buddha taught it; both senses, conduct and teaching, are live.
2 Action (karman): the deed that bears fruit in this life or a later one.
3 Unmanifest (avijñapti): in Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma, a subtle action generated by a deed or vow that persists without showing itself.
4 Merit from use: merit that accrues to a donor as the gift is used by the recipient.

17.6 If action remained until the time of its ripening, it would be permanent.
If it has ceased, how, having ceased, will it produce a fruit?

17.7 The continuum that begins with the sprout proceeds from the seed;
from it comes the fruit; and without the seed it does not proceed.

17.8 Since the continuum comes from the seed and the fruit arises from the continuum,
the fruit has the seed before it; therefore it is neither cut off nor eternal.

17.9 Likewise the mental continuum that proceeds from a mental act—
from it comes the fruit; and without the mind it does not proceed.

17.10 Since the continuum comes from the mind and the fruit arises from the continuum,
the fruit has action before it; therefore it is neither cut off nor eternal.

17.11 The means of accomplishing *dharma* are the ten pure paths of action;
the fruit of *dharma*, here and after death, is the five strands of sense pleasure.[5]

17.12 If this were how it is imagined, the faults would be many and great;
therefore this way of imagining it is not tenable here.

5 The ten pure (literally "white") paths of action: refraining from three bodily, four verbal, and three mental wrongs. The five strands of sense pleasure: pleasant sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches.

THE PROMISSORY NOTE

A rival view is set out: action leaves an imperishable entity that holds its fruit like a note of debt.

17.13 But I will now explain the way of imagining that fits here,
praised by the buddhas, the solitary buddhas, and the disciples.[6]

17.14 Non-perishing is like a promissory note, and action is like a debt.
By realm it is fourfold, and by nature it is morally indeterminate.[7]

17.15 It is not abandoned by abandonment, but only by cultivation.
Therefore it is through non-perishing that the fruit of actions arises.[8]

17.16 If it could be abandoned by abandonment, or through the transfer of action,
faults would follow, such as the destruction of action.

17.17 Of all actions, whether of different kind or of like kind,
at the linking to a new birth a single one arises for those of the same realm.

17.18 In this present life it arises from each and every action,
of every action of the two kinds, and it remains even when the action has ripened.

6 Solitary buddhas (pratyekabuddha): those who reach awakening on their own and do not teach. Disciples (śrāvaka): literally "hearers" of the Buddha's teaching.
7 Non-perishing (avipraṇāśa): a doctrine of the Sāṃmitīya school—an entity that holds an action's result in store, like a note of debt, until it ripens.
8 Abhidharma distinguishes what is abandoned by the insight of seeing the truths from what is abandoned only by repeated meditative cultivation.

17.19 It ceases either when the fruit has been passed through, or at death.
Here one should mark the distinction between the uncontaminated and the contaminated.[9]

17.20 Emptiness, yet not annihilation; the round of rebirth, yet not eternal;
and the non-perishing of action: this is the Dharma taught by the Buddha.[10]

ACTION WITHOUT INTRINSIC NATURE

Action does not arise, since it lacks intrinsic nature, so it neither persists eternally nor perishes.

17.21 Why does action not arise? Because it is without intrinsic nature.
And because it has not arisen, it does not perish.

17.22 If action existed by intrinsic nature, it would without doubt be eternal,
and action would be unmade, for what is eternal is not made.

17.23 If action were unmade, there would be the danger of meeting with what one has not done,
and the fault of not living the holy life would follow.[11]

17.24 All everyday conventions would be contradicted, no doubt;
and the distinction between those who do good and those who do evil would not hold.

17.25 An action whose ripening has already ripened would ripen yet again,
if action were fixed, and so had intrinsic nature.

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9 Contaminated (sāsrava): bound up with the "outflows" of desire, becoming, views, and ignorance; uncontaminated (anāsrava): free of them.
10 The Dharma: the Buddha's teaching.
11 The holy life (brahmacarya): the celibate life of religious practice.

17.26 This action has the afflictions as its nature, and the afflictions are not real.
If the afflictions are not real, how could action be real?

17.27 Action and the afflictions are declared to be the conditions of bodies.
If action and the afflictions are empty, what is there to say of bodies?

17.28 The being obscured by ignorance and fettered by craving—
he is the one who experiences the fruit; he is neither other than the agent nor the same.

17.29 Since this action exists neither as arisen from conditions
nor as arisen without conditions, there is no agent either.

17.30 If there is neither action nor agent, where could a fruit born of action come from?
And if there is no fruit, where will the one who experiences it come from?

17.31 Just as the Teacher, by the perfection of his supernatural power, conjures up a conjured being,
and that conjured being in turn conjures up another—[12]

17.32 so the agent has the form of a conjured being, and so does the action it does:
it is just like a conjured being conjured up by another conjured being.

17.33 Afflictions, actions, bodies, agents, and fruits
are like a city of the gandharvas, like a mirage, like a dream.

12 Conjured being (nirmitaka): a phantom produced by supernatural power, a stock image of what appears real but is empty.

Chapter 18: The Self

आत्मपरीक्षा *(Ātmaparīkṣā)*

The self is neither the aggregates nor other than them; the Buddhas taught self, no self, and neither.

18.1 If the self were the aggregates, it would partake of arising and passing away.
If it were other than the aggregates, it would lack the characteristics of the aggregates.

18.2 And if there is no self, how could there be what belongs to the self?
When self and what belongs to self are stilled, one is free of "mine" and free of "I."

18.3 And the one who is free of "mine" and free of "I"—that one too does not exist.
Whoever sees someone free of "mine" and free of "I" does not see.

18.4 When "mine" and "I" have wasted away, in outer things and inner alike,
grasping ceases; and with its ending, birth comes to an end.

18.5 Liberation comes from the ending of action and afflictions; action and afflictions come from conceptual construction;
these come from conceptual proliferation; but proliferation ceases in emptiness.

WHAT THE BUDDHAS TAUGHT

The buddhas taught self, no self, and neither; reality is beyond naming and conceptual construction.

18.6 It has been made known that there is a self, and it has been taught that there is no self;
the buddhas have also taught that there is neither any self nor any no-self.

18.7 What can be named has ceased, since the sphere of the mind has ceased;
for, unarisen and unceasing, like *nirvāṇa*, is the nature of things.

18.8 Everything is real, or not real, or both real and not real,
or neither not real nor real: this is the teaching of the buddhas.

18.9 Not dependent on another, at peace, not spun out by conceptual proliferation,
free of conceptual construction, without multiplicity: this is the mark of reality.

18.10 Whatever comes to be in dependence on something is not, to begin with, that very thing,
nor is it something other than it; therefore it is neither cut off nor eternal.

18.11 Neither one in meaning nor many, neither cut off nor eternal:
this is the deathless nectar of the teaching of the buddhas, protectors of the world.

18.12 When fully awakened buddhas do not appear, and the disciples have passed away,
the knowledge of the solitary buddhas arises without contact with others.

Chapter 19: Time

कालपरीक्षा *(Kālaparīkṣā)*

Present and future depend on the past, yet cannot be found in it; time without things does not exist.

19.1 If the present and the future depend on the past,
then the present and the future will exist in past time.

19.2 And if the present and the future do not exist there,
how could the present and the future depend on it?

19.3 Yet without depending on the past, the two cannot be established.
Therefore present and future time do not exist.

19.4 By this same method the remaining two, taken in turn,
and highest, lowest, middle and the rest, and oneness and the rest, should be understood.

19.5 Time that does not stay cannot be grasped; time that stays does not exist.
How can time that would have to be grasped, but is not grasped, be designated?

19.6 If time depends on things, how could there be time apart from things?
And no thing at all exists; how then will there be time?

Chapter 20: The Assembly of Causes

सामग्रीपरीक्षा *(Sāmagrīparīkṣā)*

Does an effect come from a collection of causes and conditions? Cause and effect are neither the same nor different.

20.1 If the effect is born from the combination of cause and conditions,
and the effect exists in the combination, how is it born from the combination?

20.2 If the effect is born from the combination of cause and conditions,
and the effect does not exist in the combination, how is it born from the combination?

20.3 If you say the effect exists in the combination of cause and conditions,
surely it should be perceived in the combination—yet it is not perceived there.

20.4 If you say the effect does not exist in the combination of cause and conditions,
then causes and conditions would be the same as what are not causes and conditions.

20.5 If the cause ceases after passing its causal power to the effect,
the cause would have a double nature: the part that was given and the part that ceased.

20.6 And if the cause ceases without passing its causal power to the effect,
then the effect born after the cause has ceased would be without a cause.

20.7 And if the effect were to appear together with the combination,
it would follow that producer and produced exist at one time.

20.8 And if the effect were to appear before the combination,
the effect, free of cause and conditions, would be without a cause.

20.9 If you say the effect exists once the cause has ceased, that would be a transfer of the cause,
and it would follow that a cause already born is born again.

20.10 How could a cause that has ceased, that has gone to its end, produce an effect that has arisen?
And even while it lasts, how could a cause produce an effect it is already joined with?

20.11 Or, if it is not joined with the effect, what effect could it produce?
For no cause produces an effect either without having met it or having met it.

20.12 For a past effect never has contact with a past cause,
nor with one not yet born, nor with one already born.

20.13 Nor does an effect that is born ever have contact with a cause not yet born,
nor with one that is past, nor with one already born.

20.14 Nor does an effect not yet born ever have contact with a cause that is born,
nor with one not yet born, nor with one that has perished.

20.15 If there is no contact, how does the cause produce the effect?
Or if there is contact, how does the cause produce the effect?

20.16 If the cause is empty of the effect, how does it produce the effect?
If the cause is not empty of the effect, how does it produce the effect?

20.17 An effect that is not empty will not arise; what is not empty will not cease.
What is not empty will be unceasing and unarisen.

20.18 How will what is empty arise? How will what is empty cease?
It follows that what is empty, too, is unceasing and unarisen.

20.19 The identity of cause and effect is never tenable;
the difference of cause and effect is never tenable.

20.20 If effect and cause were one, producer and produced would be the same.
If effect and cause were separate, a cause would be like what is not a cause.

20.21 If the effect exists by intrinsic nature, what will the cause produce?
If the effect does not exist by intrinsic nature, what will the cause produce?

20.22 And what does not produce cannot be a cause;
and if there can be no being a cause, of what will the effect be the effect?

20.23 And if the combination of conditions and causes
does not produce itself by itself, how could it produce an effect?

20.24 The effect is not made by the combination, nor is it made
by what is not the combination.
Without an effect, how can there be a combination of
conditions?

Chapter 21: Arising and Passing Away

संभवविभवपरीक्षा *(Saṃbhavavibhavaparīkṣā)*
Coming into being and ceasing to be; the stream of existence is neither eternal nor cut off.

21.1 There is no passing away, either without coming to be or together with it;
there is no coming to be, either without passing away or together with it.

21.2 How could there be passing away without coming to be?
There would be death without birth; there is no passing away without coming to be.

21.3 How could passing away exist together with coming to be?
For birth and death do not occur at the same time.

21.4 How could there be coming to be without passing away?
For impermanence is never absent from things.

21.5 How could coming to be exist together with passing away?
For birth and death do not occur at the same time.

21.6 Two things whose establishment is found neither together with each other nor apart from each other—
how could their establishment be found at all?

21.7 There is no coming to be of what is decaying, nor coming to be of what is not decaying;
there is no passing away of what is decaying, nor passing away of what is not decaying.

21.8 Coming to be and passing away do not exist without an existent;
an existent does not exist without coming to be and passing away.

21.9 Coming to be and passing away are not tenable for what is empty;
coming to be and passing away are not tenable for what is not empty.

21.10 It is not tenable that coming to be and passing away are one;
it is not tenable that coming to be and passing away are different.

21.11 You may think that coming to be and passing away are seen;
but coming to be and passing away are seen only through delusion.

21.12 An existent is not born from an existent; an existent is not born from a nonexistent;
a nonexistent is not born from a nonexistent; a nonexistent is not born from an existent.

21.13 An existent is not born from itself, nor is it born from another,
nor from both itself and another; from what, then, is it born?

21.14 For one who accepts an existent, the view of eternalism or annihilation
follows, for that existent would have to be either permanent or impermanent.

21.15 For one who accepts an existent, there is neither annihilation nor eternalism,
for existence is the continuous series of the arising and passing away of cause and effect.

21.16 If existence is the continuous series of the arising and passing away of cause and effect,
then, since what has passed away does not arise again, the cutting off of the cause follows.

21.17 For what truly exists by intrinsic nature, becoming nonexistent is not possible;
yet at the time of *nirvāṇa* there would be annihilation, since the series of existence is stilled.

21.18 If the last existence has ceased, a first existence is not possible;
if the last existence has not ceased, a first existence is not possible.

21.19 If the first were born while the last is ceasing,
the one ceasing would be one existence, and the one being born another.

21.20 Nor is it tenable that the ceasing and the being born are together:
would one then be born in the very aggregates in which, at the same time, one dies?

21.21 Thus in none of the three times is a series of existence possible.
What does not exist in the three times—how could it be a series of existence?

Chapter 22: The Tathāgata

तथागतपरीक्षा *(Tathāgataparīkṣā)*

The Buddha sought in the aggregates, apart from them and in five ways, and not found; his nature is the nature of the world.

22.1 He is not the aggregates, nor other than the aggregates; the aggregates are not in him, nor is he in them;
the Tathāgata does not possess the aggregates. What, then, is the Tathāgata?[1]

22.2 If the Buddha, taking up the aggregates, does not exist by intrinsic nature,
how could what does not exist by intrinsic nature exist by extrinsic nature?

22.3 What exists in dependence on an extrinsic nature is rightly held to be no self;
and how could what is no self be the Tathāgata?

22.4 And if there is no intrinsic nature, how could there be an extrinsic nature?
Apart from intrinsic and extrinsic nature, what is this Tathāgata?

22.5 If there were some Tathāgata who had not taken up the aggregates,
he would now take them up, and taking them up, he would then exist.

1 The Tathāgata: a title of the Buddha, "one who has thus gone."

22.6 But without taking up the aggregates, there is no Tathāgata at all;
and how will what does not exist without taking them up take them up?

22.7 Nothing is "what is appropriated" unless it has been taken up,
and in no way is there a Tathāgata without what he appropriates.

22.8 He who, sought in five ways, exists neither as identical with them nor as different—
how can that Tathāgata be designated through what he appropriates?[2]

22.9 And this, too, which is appropriated does not exist by intrinsic nature;
and how could what does not exist by intrinsic nature exist by extrinsic nature?

22.10 Thus what is appropriated and the one who appropriates are empty in every way.
And how could an empty Tathāgata be designated by what is empty?

22.11 One should not say "empty," nor should one say "not empty,"
nor "both," nor "neither"; but they are spoken for the sake of designation.

22.12 How could the four—eternal, not eternal and the rest—apply to this, which is at peace?
How could the four—finite, infinite and the rest—apply to this, which is at peace?

2 The five ways: the Tathāgata as identical with the aggregates, different from them, containing them, contained in them, or possessing them (as in 22.1).

22.13 But one who has taken hold of the solid conviction that the Tathāgata exists
will, constructing the idea that he does not exist, imagine this even of one who has passed into *nirvāṇa*.

22.14 And of this, which is empty by intrinsic nature, the thought is not tenable
that after cessation the Buddha exists, or does not exist.

22.15 Those who proliferate concepts about the Buddha, who is beyond proliferation and imperishable,
are all struck down by proliferation and do not see the Tathāgata.

22.16 Whatever is the intrinsic nature of the Tathāgata, that is the intrinsic nature of this world.
The Tathāgata is without intrinsic nature; this world is without intrinsic nature.

Chapter 23: Errors

विपर्यासपरीक्षा *(Viparyāsaparīkṣā)*

Desire, hatred and delusion arise from conceptual thinking;
the four inverted views and how they cease.

23.1 Desire, hatred and delusion are said to arise from conceptual thought,
for they arise in dependence on errors about the attractive and the unattractive.

23.2 What arises in dependence on errors about the attractive and the unattractive
does not exist by intrinsic nature; therefore the afflictions are not real.

23.3 The existence or nonexistence of the self is in no way established;
without it, how could the existence or nonexistence of the afflictions be established?

23.4 For these afflictions belong to someone, and that one is not established.
Or could there be afflictions without anyone, belonging to no one?

23.5 Like the view of one's own body, the afflictions are not in the afflicted in any of the five ways;
like the view of one's own body, the afflicted is not in the afflictions in any of the five ways.[1]

1 The "view of one's own body" (svakāyadṛṣṭi) is the belief in a real self, which Buddhist texts refute by the same fivefold analysis applied to the Tathāgata in 22.1.

23.6 The errors about the attractive and the unattractive do not exist by intrinsic nature;
in dependence on which errors about the attractive and the unattractive, then, could the afflictions arise?

23.7 Form, sound, taste, touch, smell and mental objects: this sixfold
basis of desire, hatred and delusion is conceptually constructed.

23.8 Form, sound, taste, touch, smell and mental objects are, in themselves,
like a city of the gandharvas, like a mirage or a dream.

23.9 How could the unattractive or the attractive come to be in these,
which are like a person conjured up by magic, or like a reflection?

23.10 Without depending on the attractive, there is no unattractive
in dependence on which we might designate the attractive; therefore the attractive is not tenable.

23.11 Without depending on the unattractive, there is no attractive
in dependence on which we might designate the unattractive; therefore the unattractive does not exist.

23.12 And when the attractive does not exist, how will there be desire?
And when the unattractive does not exist, how will there be hatred?

23.13 If grasping the impermanent as "permanent" is an error—
since in what is empty there is nothing impermanent, how is that grasping an error?

23.14 If grasping the impermanent as "permanent" is an error,
why is it not also an error to grasp what is empty as "impermanent"?

23.15 That by which one grasps, the grasping, the one who grasps and what is grasped—
all are stilled; therefore grasping does not exist.

23.16 And when grasping, whether false or true, does not exist,
who would be in error, and who would be free of error?

23.17 Errors do not arise for one who is already in error;
nor do errors arise for one who is not in error.

23.18 Errors do not arise for one who is falling into error.
Consider for yourself: for whom do errors arise?

23.19 How could errors that have not arisen exist at all?
When errors are unborn, how could there be one who is in error?

23.20 An existent is not born from itself, nor is it born from another,
nor from both itself and another; how, then, could there be one who is in error?

23.21 If the self, the pure, the permanent and happiness exist,
then the self, the pure, the permanent and happiness are not errors.[2]

23.22 If the self, the pure, the permanent and happiness do not exist,
then no-self, the impure, the impermanent and suffering do not exist either.

2 The four errors are taking what is without self, impure, impermanent and suffering to be self, pure, permanent and happiness.

23.23 Thus, through the cessation of error, ignorance ceases;
when ignorance has ceased, the formations and the rest cease.[3]

23.24 If someone had afflictions that were real by intrinsic nature,
how could they be abandoned? Who could abandon an intrinsic nature?

23.25 If someone had afflictions that were unreal by intrinsic nature,
how could they be abandoned? Who could abandon what does not exist?

3 Ignorance and the formations are the first two of the twelve links of dependent origination, set out in chapter 26.

Chapter 24: The Noble Truths

आर्यसत्यपरीक्षा *(Āryasatyaparīkṣā)*

An opponent charges that emptiness destroys the Buddha's teaching; the reply: the two truths, and dependent origination as emptiness.

24.1 If all this is empty, there is no arising and no passing away;
it follows for you that the four noble truths do not exist.[1]

24.2 Full understanding, abandonment, cultivation and realization
are not tenable, since the four noble truths do not exist.

24.3 Since these do not exist, the four noble fruits do not exist either;
without the fruits, there are neither those established in the fruits nor those on the way to them.[2]

24.4 If those eight kinds of persons do not exist, there is no Sangha;
and since the noble truths do not exist, the true Dharma does not exist either.[3]

1 The four noble truths: suffering, its origin, its cessation and the path to its cessation.
2 The four noble fruits are the stages of stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning and arhatship (full awakening).
3 The eight persons are those on the way to and those established in each of the four fruits; they make up the noble Sangha (community).

24.5 And if there is no Dharma and no Sangha, how will there be a Buddha?
Speaking in this way, you undermine all three jewels.[4]

24.6 In asserting emptiness, you undermine the reality of the fruit, wrong and right,
and all the conventions of the world.

THE REPLY: TWO TRUTHS

Nagarjuna answers that the objector misunderstands emptiness and sets out conventional and ultimate truth.

24.7 To this we reply: you do not understand the purpose of emptiness,
nor emptiness, nor the meaning of emptiness; that is why you are thus confounded.

24.8 The Dharma taught by the buddhas rests on two truths:
the conventional truth of the world and the truth in the ultimate sense.[5]

24.9 Those who do not understand the distinction between these two truths
do not understand the profound reality in the Buddha's teaching.

24.10 Without relying on convention, the ultimate is not taught;
without arriving at the ultimate, *nirvāṇa* is not attained.

24.11 Emptiness wrongly seen destroys the slow-witted,
like a snake wrongly grasped or a spell wrongly performed.

24.12 And so the Sage's mind turned back from teaching the Dharma,
knowing how hard this Dharma is for the dull to fathom.[6]

4 The three jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.
5 Conventional truth (saṃvṛti, literally "covering") is the truth of worldly usage; ultimate truth (paramārtha) is truth in the highest sense.
6 After his awakening, the Buddha (the Sage) at first hesitated to teach, until the god Brahmā urged him to do so.

24.13 The objection you keep raising against emptiness
is no fault that follows for us; it does not apply to what is empty.

24.14 Everything is possible for one for whom emptiness is possible;
nothing is possible for one for whom the empty is not possible.

24.15 You, turning your own faults upon us,
are like someone who, while riding a horse, has forgotten the very horse.

24.16 If you regard things as really existing by intrinsic nature,
then you regard things as without causes and conditions.

24.17 You undermine effect and cause, agent, means and act,
arising and cessation, and the fruit.

24.18 Whatever is dependent origination, that we call emptiness.
It is a dependent designation; it is itself the middle way.

24.19 Since there is no thing at all that has not arisen dependently,
there is therefore no thing at all that is not empty.

EMPTINESS MAKES THINGS POSSIBLE

Only if things are empty can suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path exist at all.

24.20 If all this were not empty, there would be no arising and no passing away;
it would follow for you that the four noble truths do not exist.

24.21 How could there be suffering that has not arisen dependently?
For suffering is said to be impermanent; it does not exist if there is intrinsic nature.

24.22 What exists by intrinsic nature—how could it originate?
Therefore, for one who undermines emptiness, there is no origin of suffering.

24.23 There is no cessation of suffering that exists by intrinsic nature;
by holding fast to intrinsic nature, you undermine cessation.

24.24 If the path had intrinsic nature, its cultivation would not be possible;
and if the path is cultivated, then for you it has no intrinsic nature.

24.25 When suffering, its origin and its cessation do not exist,
to which cessation of suffering will the path lead?

24.26 If suffering is by intrinsic nature not fully understood, how could it later
be fully understood? Is intrinsic nature not said to be fixed?

24.27 For you, abandonment, realization and cultivation,
like full understanding, are not possible, nor are the four fruits.

24.28 A fruit that by intrinsic nature is not attained—how then
could it be attained, for one who holds to intrinsic nature?

24.29 Without the fruits, there are neither those established in the fruits nor those on the way to them;
if those eight kinds of persons do not exist, there is no Sangha.

24.30 And since the noble truths do not exist, the true Dharma does not exist either;
and if there is no Dharma and no Sangha, how will there be a Buddha?

24.31 For you, it follows that a Buddha would exist even without depending on awakening;
and for you, it follows that awakening would exist even without depending on a Buddha.

24.32 And for you, one who is by intrinsic nature not awakened, even striving for awakening
in the practice of a bodhisattva, will not attain awakening.[7]

24.33 And no one would ever do right or wrong;
for what could be done by what is not empty? Intrinsic nature is not something done.

24.34 For you, the fruit exists without right and wrong;
for you, the fruit caused by right and wrong does not exist.

24.35 Or if, for you, a fruit caused by right and wrong does exist,
how can a fruit arising from right and wrong be, for you, not empty?

24.36 You undermine all the conventions of the world,
since you undermine the emptiness that is dependent origination.

24.37 There would be nothing to be done; action would never have begun;
there would be an agent who does nothing—for one who undermines emptiness.

24.38 The world would be unborn, unceasing and changelessly fixed;
if there were intrinsic nature, it would be devoid of its many different states.

24.39 The attaining of what has not been attained, the action that ends suffering,
and the abandoning of all afflictions—none of this exists if things are not empty.

7 A bodhisattva is one on the path to becoming a buddha.

24.40 Whoever sees dependent origination sees this:
suffering, its origin, its cessation and the path.

Chapter 25: Nirvana

निर्वाणपरीक्षा *(Nirvāṇaparīkṣā)*

Nirvana is neither existence nor nonexistence; there is not the slightest difference between nirvana and the round of rebirth.

25.1 If all this is empty, there is no arising and no passing away.
By the abandoning or cessation of what is *nirvāṇa* supposed to come about?

25.2 If all this is not empty, there is no arising and no passing away.
By the abandoning or cessation of what is *nirvāṇa* supposed to come about?

25.3 Not abandoned, not attained, not cut off, not eternal,
not ceased, not arisen: this is called *nirvāṇa*.

25.4 *Nirvāṇa*, to begin with, is not an existent; it would then follow that it has the marks of old age and death;
for there is no existent without old age and death.

25.5 And if *nirvāṇa* were an existent, *nirvāṇa* would be conditioned;
for no existent anywhere is unconditioned.

25.6 And if *nirvāṇa* were an existent, how could it be without dependence?
For no existent exists without dependence.

25.7 If *nirvāṇa* is not an existent, will it be a nonexistent?
Where there is no existent, there is no nonexistent either.

25.8 And if *nirvāṇa* were a nonexistent, how could it be without dependence?
For there is no nonexistent that exists without dependence.

25.9 What comes and goes, taking up or in dependence,
is, when not in dependence and not taking up, taught to be *nirvāṇa*.

25.10 And the Teacher spoke of abandoning both becoming and non-becoming;
therefore it is right that *nirvāṇa* is neither an existent nor a nonexistent.

25.11 If *nirvāṇa* were both a nonexistent and an existent,
liberation would be both a nonexistent and an existent—and that is not right.

25.12 If *nirvāṇa* were both a nonexistent and an existent,
nirvāṇa would not be without dependence, for both of these are dependent.

25.13 How could *nirvāṇa* be both a nonexistent and an existent?
Nirvāṇa is unconditioned, while existent and nonexistent are conditioned.

25.14 How could both a nonexistent and an existent be in *nirvāṇa*?
The two cannot be in one place, just as light and darkness cannot.

25.15 The claim that *nirvāṇa* is neither a nonexistent nor an existent
is established only if the nonexistent and the existent are established.

25.16 If *nirvāṇa* exists as neither a nonexistent nor an existent,
by what is it made known that it is "neither nonexistent nor existent"?

25.17 It is not conceived that the Lord exists after cessation;
nor is it conceived that he does not exist, or both, or neither.

25.18 Even while he remains alive, it is not conceived that the Lord exists;
nor is it conceived that he does not exist, or both, or neither.

NIRVANA AND THE ROUND OF REBIRTH

There is no difference at all between nirvana and the round of rebirth, and no view about them holds.

25.19 The round of rebirth has nothing at all to distinguish it from *nirvāṇa*;
nirvāṇa has nothing at all to distinguish it from the round of rebirth.

25.20 The limit of *nirvāṇa* and the limit of the round of rebirth—
between these two there is not even the subtlest difference.

25.21 The views about existence after cessation, about the finite and the like, and about the eternal and the like,
depend on *nirvāṇa*, on the future and on the past.

25.22 Since all things are empty, what is infinite, what finite?
What is both infinite and finite, what neither infinite nor finite?

25.23 What is the same, what is other? What is eternal, what not eternal?
What is both not eternal and eternal, or what is neither?

25.24 Auspicious is the stilling of all apprehending, the stilling of conceptual proliferation;
no Dharma at all was taught by the Buddha to anyone, anywhere.

Chapter 26: The Twelve Links

द्वादशाङ्गपरीक्षा *(Dvādaśāṅgaparīkṣā)*

The twelve links of dependent origination, from ignorance to old age and death, and how they come to an end.

26.1 Veiled by ignorance, one creates in three ways the formations for renewed existence;
through those actions one goes to a destiny.[1]

26.2 With the formations as its condition, consciousness enters that destiny;
and once consciousness has entered, name-and-form is infused.[2]

26.3 Once name-and-form is infused, the six sense bases come to be;
in dependence on the six sense bases, contact arises.

26.4 In dependence on the eye, on visible form and on attention —
thus in dependence on name-and-form—consciousness arises.

26.5 The coming together of the three—visible form, consciousness and the eye—
is contact; and from that contact feeling arises.

1 The three ways are body, speech and mind; a destiny (gati) is one of the realms of rebirth.

2 Name-and-form (nāmarūpa): the mental and physical constituents of a living being.

26.6 Conditioned by feeling is craving, for one craves for the sake of feeling;
craving, one takes up grasping of four kinds.[3]

26.7 When there is grasping, existence arises for the one who grasps;
for if he were without grasping, he would be freed, and there would be no existence.

26.8 And that existence is the five aggregates; from existence birth arises;
old age, death, suffering and the rest, sorrows with lamentation,

26.9 dejection and despair—all this arises from birth.
In this way this entire mass of suffering comes to be.

26.10 Therefore the one who does not know forms the formations that are the root of the round of rebirth;
hence the one who does not know is the agent, not the one who knows, since he sees reality.

26.11 When ignorance has ceased, the formations do not arise;
and the cessation of ignorance comes through knowledge, from the cultivation of just this.

26.12 Through the cessation of this and that, this and that no longer arises;
in this way this entire mass of suffering completely ceases.

3 The four kinds of grasping: at sensual pleasures, at views, at rules and rituals, and at doctrines of a self.

Chapter 27: Views

दृष्टिपरीक्षा *(Dṛṣṭiparīkṣā)*

Views about the past and the future—whether the self and the world are eternal or finite—examined and let go.

27.1 The views “I existed in the past” and “I did not exist,”
and those such as “the world is eternal,” depend on the past.

27.2 The views “In the future I will not exist” or “I will be someone else”
and “I will exist,” and those such as “the world has an end,” depend on the future.

27.3 “I existed in the past”—this is not tenable.
For the one who was in former births is not this very one.

27.4 It might be said, “It is the same self”; but what is appropriated is different.
And what, for you, is the self apart from what is appropriated?

27.5 When it has been granted that there is no self apart from what is appropriated,
then what is appropriated would itself be the self—and yet, for you, there is no self.

27.6 But what is appropriated is not the self: it passes away and it arises.
How indeed can what is appropriated be the one who appropriates?

27.7 Nor is it tenable that the self is other than what is appropriated;
for if it were other, it would be perceived without what is appropriated—and it is not perceived.

27.8 Thus it is not other than what is appropriated, nor is it identical with what is appropriated;
the self does not exist without what is appropriated, nor does it not exist: this is certain.

27.9 "I did not exist in the past"—this is not tenable.
For this one is not other than the one who was in former births.

27.10 For if this one were other, it would exist even without that one;
and that one would remain just as he was, or would be born there without having died.

27.11 There would follow annihilation, the destruction of actions,
and actions done by one would be reaped by another, and so forth.

27.12 Nor has it come into being after not having existed, for then a fault follows:
the self would be something made, or would have arisen without a cause.

27.13 Thus the view concerning the past—"I did not exist," "I existed,"
both, or neither—is not tenable.

27.14 The view "Will I exist in the future?"
and "I will not exist"—these are the same as with the past.

27.15 If the god is the same as the human, then it is eternal;
and the god would be unborn, for what is eternal is not born.

27.16 If the human is other than the god, it would then be not eternal;
if the human is other than the god, continuity is not tenable.

27.17 If one part were divine and one part human,
it would be both not eternal and eternal—and that is not right.

27.18 If both not eternal and eternal were established,
then, admittedly, "neither eternal nor not eternal" would be established as well.

27.19 If someone had come from somewhere and were to go again somewhere,
then the round of rebirth would be without beginning; but there is no such one.

27.20 If no one is eternal, who will be not eternal?
Who will be both eternal and not eternal, or set apart from both?

IS THE WORLD FINITE?

Views that the world is finite, infinite, both, or neither are examined and found untenable.

27.21 If the world were finite, how could there be another world?
And if the world were infinite, how could there be another world?

27.22 Since this series of aggregates, like the flames of a lamp,
goes on, neither finiteness nor infiniteness is tenable.[1]

27.23 If the earlier ones were to break up, and these were not to arise—
aggregates in dependence on those aggregates—then the world would be finite.

1 A lamp's flame is a series of momentary flames, each arising in dependence on the one before.

27.24 If the earlier ones were not to break up, and these were not to arise—
aggregates in dependence on those aggregates—then the world would be infinite.

27.25 If one part were finite and one part infinite,
the world would be both finite and infinite—and that is not right.

27.26 How, to begin with, could one part of the one who appropriates perish
and one part not perish? This is not right.

27.27 And how could one part of what is appropriated perish
and one part not perish? This too is not tenable.

27.28 If both finite and infinite were established,
then, admittedly, "neither finite nor infinite" would be established as well.

27.29 Or rather, since all existents are empty, views such as "eternal"—
where, for whom, which ones, and from what would they arise?

27.30 To him who taught the true Dharma for the abandoning of all views,
moved by compassion—to Gautama I bow.[2]

2 Gautama: the clan name of the Buddha.