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Jay L. Garfield

The Fundamental Wisdom  
of the Middle Way

Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika

The  
Fundamental  
Wisdom  
of the  
Middle  
Way

Nāgārjuna's  
*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY  
JAY L. GARFIELD

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PART ONE

The Text of  
*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*



# Dedicatory Verses

I prostrate to the Perfect Buddha,  
The best of teachers, who taught that  
Whatever is dependently arisen is  
Unceasing, unborn,  
Unannihilated, not permanent,  
Not coming, not going,  
Without distinction, without identity,  
And free from conceptual construction.

# Chapter I

## Examination of Conditions

1. Neither from itself nor from another,  
Nor from both,  
Nor without a cause,  
Does anything whatever, anywhere arise.
2. There are four conditions: efficient condition;  
Percept-object condition; immediate condition;  
Dominant condition, just so.  
There is no fifth condition.
3. The essence of entities  
Is not present in the conditions, etc . . . .  
If there is no essence,  
There can be no otherness-essence.
4. Power to act does not have conditions.  
There is no power to act without conditions.  
There are no conditions without power to act.  
Nor do any have the power to act.
5. These give rise to those,  
So these are called conditions.  
As long as those do not come from these,  
Why are these not non-conditions?

6. For neither an existent nor a non-existent thing  
Is a condition appropriate.  
If a thing is non-existent, how could it have a  
condition?  
If a thing is already existent, what would a condition  
do?
7. When neither existents nor  
Non-existents nor existent non-existents are  
established,  
How could one propose a “productive cause?”  
If there were one, it would be pointless.
8. An existent entity (mental episode)  
Has no object.  
Since a mental episode is without an object,  
How could there be any percept-condition?
9. Since things are not arisen,  
Cessation is not acceptable.  
Therefore, an immediate condition is not reasonable.  
If something has ceased, how could it be a condition?
10. If things did not exist  
Without essence,  
The phrase, “When this exists so this will be,”  
Would not be acceptable.
11. In the several or united conditions  
The effect cannot be found.  
How could something not in the conditions  
Come from the conditions?
12. However, if a nonexistent effect  
Arises from these conditions,  
Why does it not arise  
From non-conditions?

13. If the effect's essence is the conditions,  
But the conditions don't have their own essence,  
How could an effect whose essence is the conditions  
Come from something that is essenceless?
  
14. Therefore, neither with conditions as their essence,  
Nor with non-conditions as their essence are there any  
effects.  
If there are no such effects,  
How could conditions or non-conditions be evident?

## Chapter II

### Examination of Motion

1. What has been moved is not moving.  
What has not been moved is not moving.  
Apart from what has been moved and what has not  
been moved,  
Movement cannot be conceived.
2. Where there is change, there is motion.  
Since there is change in the moving,  
And not in the moved or not-moved,  
Motion is in that which is moving.
3. How would it be acceptable  
For motion to be in the mover?  
When it is not moving, it is not acceptable  
To call it a mover.
4. For whomever there is motion in the mover,  
There could be non-motion  
Evident in the mover.  
But having motion follows from being a mover.
5. If motion is in the mover,  
There would have to be a twofold motion:

One in virtue of which it is a mover,  
And one in virtue of which it moves.

6. If there were a twofold motion,  
The subject of that motion would be twofold.  
For without a subject of motion,  
There cannot be motion.
7. If without a mover  
It would not be correct to say that there is motion,  
Then if there were no motion,  
How could there be a mover?
8. Inasmuch as a real mover does not move,  
And a non-mover does not move,  
Apart from a mover and a non-mover,  
What third thing could move?
9. When without motion,  
It is unacceptable to call something a mover,  
How will it be acceptable  
To say that a mover moves?
10. For him from whose perspective a mover moves,  
There would be the consequence that  
Without motion there could be a mover.  
Because a mover moves.
11. If a mover were to move,  
There would be a twofold motion:  
One in virtue of which he is a mover,  
And one in virtue of which the mover moves.
12. Motion does not begin in what has moved,  
Nor does it begin in what has not moved,  
Nor does it begin in what is moving.  
In what, then, does motion begin?

13. Prior to the beginning of motion,  
There is no beginning of motion in  
The going or in the gone.  
How could there be motion in the not-gone?
14. Since the beginning of motion  
Cannot be conceived in any way,  
What gone thing, what going thing,  
And what non-going thing can be posited?
15. Just as a moving thing is not stationary,  
A non-moving thing is not stationary.  
Apart from the moving and the non-moving,  
What third thing is stationary?
16. If without motion  
It is not appropriate to posit a mover,  
How could it be appropriate to say  
That a moving thing is stationary?
17. One does not halt from moving,  
Nor from having moved or not having moved.  
Motion and coming to rest  
And starting to move are similar.
18. That motion just is the mover itself  
Is not correct.  
Nor is it correct that  
They are completely different.
19. It would follow from  
The identity of mover and motion  
That agent and action  
Are identical.
20. It would follow from  
A real distinction between motion and mover  
That there could be a mover without motion  
And motion without a mover.

21. When neither in identity  
Nor in difference  
Can they be established,  
How can these two be established at all?
22. The motion by means of which a mover is manifest  
Cannot be the motion by means of which he moves.  
He does not exist before that motion,  
So what and where is the thing that moves?
23. A mover does not carry out a different motion  
From that by means of which he is manifest as a mover.  
Moreover, in one mover  
A twofold motion is unacceptable.
24. A really existent mover  
Doesn't move in any of the three ways.  
A non-existent mover  
Doesn't move in any of the three ways.
25. Neither an entity nor a non-entity  
Moves in any of the three ways.  
So motion, mover and  
And route are non-existent.



## Chapter III

# Examination of the Senses

1. Seeing, hearing, smelling,  
Tasting, touching, and mind  
Are the six sense faculties.  
Their spheres are the visible objects, etc. . . .
2. That very seeing does not see  
Itself at all.  
How can something that cannot see itself  
See another?
3. The example of fire  
Cannot elucidate seeing.  
Along with the moved and not-moved and motion  
That has been answered.
4. When there is not even the slightest  
Nonseeing seer,  
How could it makes sense to say  
That seeing sees?
5. Seeing itself does not see.  
Nonseeing itself does not see.  
Through seeing itself  
The clear analysis of the seer is understood.

6. Without detachment from vision there is no seer.  
Nor is there a seer detached from it.  
If there is no seer  
How can there be seeing or the seen?
7. Just as the birth of a son is said to occur  
In dependence on the mother and father,  
So consciousness is said to arise  
In dependence on the eye and material form.
8. From the nonexistence of seeing and the seen it follows  
that  
The other four faculties of knowledge do not exist.  
And all the aggregates, etc.,  
Are the same way.
9. Like the seen, the heard, the smelled,  
The tasted, and the touched,  
The hearer, sound, etc.,  
And consciousness should be understood.

## Chapter IV

# Examination of the Aggregates

1.     Apart from the cause of form,  
       Form cannot be conceived.  
       Apart from form,  
       The cause of form is not seen.
2.     If apart from the cause of form, there were form,  
       Form would be without cause.  
       But nowhere is there an effect  
       Without a cause.
3.     If apart from form  
       There were a cause of form,  
       It would be a cause without an effect.  
       But there are no causes without effects.
4.     When form exists,  
       A cause of the arising of form is not tenable.  
       When form is non-existent,  
       A cause of the arising of form is not tenable.
5.     Form itself without a cause  
       Is not possible or tenable.  
       Therefore, think about form, but  
       Do not construct theories about form.

6. The assertion that the effect and cause are similar  
Is not acceptable.  
The assertion that they are not similar  
Is also not acceptable.
7. Feelings, discriminations, and dispositions  
And consciousness and all such things  
Should be thought of  
In the same way as material form.
8. When an analysis is made through emptiness,  
If someone were to offer a reply,  
That reply will fail, since it will presuppose  
Exactly what is to be proven.
9. When an explanation is made through emptiness,  
Whoever would find fault with it  
Will find no fault, since the criticism will presuppose  
Exactly what is to be proven.

## Chapter V

# Examination of Elements

1. Prior to a characteristic of space  
There is not the slightest space.  
If it arose prior to the characteristic  
Then it would, absurdly, arise without a characteristic.
2. A thing without a characteristic  
Has never existed.  
If nothing lacks a characteristic,  
Where do characteristics come to be?
3. Neither in the uncharacterized nor in the characterized  
Does a characteristic arise.  
Nor does it arise  
In something different from these two.
4. If characteristics do not appear,  
Then it is not tenable to posit the characterized object.  
If the characterized object is not posited,  
There will be no characteristic either.
5. From this it follows that there is no characterized  
And no existing characteristic.  
Nor is there any entity  
Other than the characterized and the characteristic.

6. If there is no existent thing,  
Of what will there be nonexistence?  
Apart from existent and non-existent things  
Who knows existence and nonexistence?
7. Therefore, space is not an entity.  
It is not a nonentity.  
Not characterized, not without character.  
The same is true of the other five elements.
8. Fools and reificationists who perceive  
The existence and nonexistence  
Of objects  
Do not see the pacification of objectification.

## Chapter VI

# Examination of Desire and the Desirous

1. If prior to desire  
And without desire there were a desirous one,  
Desire would depend on him.  
Desire would exist when there is a desirous one.
2. Were there no desirous one, moreover,  
Where would desire occur?  
Whether or not desire or the desirous one exist,  
The analysis would be the same.
3. Desire and the desirous one  
Cannot arise together.  
In that case, desire and the desirous one  
Would not be mutually contingent.
4. In identity there is no simultaneity.  
A thing is not simultaneous with itself.  
But if there is difference,  
Then how would there be simultaneity?

5. If in identity there were simultaneity,  
Then it could occur without association.  
If in difference there were simultaneity,  
It could occur without association.
6. If in difference there were simultaneity,  
How could desire and the desirous one,  
Being different, be established?  
If they were, they would be simultaneous.
7. If desire and the desirous one  
Are established as different,  
Then why would you think  
That they are simultaneous?
8. Since difference is not established,  
If you assert that they are simultaneous,  
Since they are established as simultaneous,  
Do you also assert that they are different?
9. Since nothing different has been established,  
If one is asserting simultaneity,  
Which different thing  
Do you want to say is simultaneous?
10. Thus desire and the desirous one  
Cannot be established as simultaneous or not  
simultaneous.  
So, like desire, nothing whatever  
Can be established either as simultaneous or as  
nonsimultaneous.



## Chapter VII

# Examination of the Conditioned

1. If arising were produced,  
Then it would also have the three characteristics.  
If arising is not produced,  
How could the characteristics of the produced exist?
2. If the three, arising, etc., are separate,  
They cannot function as the characteristics of the  
produced.  
But how could they be joined  
In one thing simultaneously?
3. If arising, abiding, and ceasing  
Have characteristics other than those of the produced,  
There would be an infinite regress.  
If they don't, they would not be produced.
4. The arising of arising only gives rise  
To the basic arising.  
The arising of the basic arising  
Gives rise to arising.
5. If, as you say, the arising of arising  
Gives rise to the basic arising,

How, according to you, does this,  
Not arisen from the basic arising, give rise to that?

6. If, as you say, that which is arisen from basic arising  
Gives rise to the basis,  
How does that nonarisen basis  
Give rise to it?
7. If this nonarisen  
Could give rise to that,  
Then, as you wish,  
It will give rise to that which is arising.
8. Just as a butterlamp  
Illuminates itself as well as others,  
So arising gives rise to itself  
And to other arisen things.
9. In the butterlamp and its place,  
There is no darkness.  
What then does the butterlamp illuminate?  
For illumination is the clearing of darkness.
10. If the arising butterlamp  
Does not reach darkness,  
How could that arising butterlamp  
Have cleared the darkness?
11. If the illumination of darkness occurs  
Without the butterlamp reaching darkness,  
All of the darkness in the world  
Should be illuminated.
12. If, when it is illuminated,  
The butterlamp illuminates itself and others,  
Darkness should, without a doubt,  
Conceal itself and others.

13. How could this arising, being nonarisen,  
Give rise to itself?  
And if it is arisen from another,  
Having arisen, what is the need for another arising?
14. The arisen, the nonarisen, and that which is arising  
Do not arise in any way at all.  
Thus they should be understood  
Just like the gone, the not-gone, and the going.
15. When there is arising but not yet  
That which is arising,  
How can we say that that which is arising  
Depends on this arising?
16. Whatever is dependently arisen,  
Such a thing is essentially peaceful.  
Therefore that which is arising and arising itself  
Are themselves peaceful.
17. If a nonarisen entity  
Anywhere exists,  
That entity would have to arise.  
But if it were nonexistent, what could arise?
18. If this arising  
Gave rise to that which is arising,  
By means of what arising  
Does that arising arise?
19. If another arising gives rise to this one,  
There would be an infinite regress.  
If something nonarisen is arisen,  
Then all things could arise in this way.
20. Neither an existent nor a nonexistent  
Can be properly said to arise.

As it is taught before with  
"For neither an existent nor a nonexistent."

21. The arising of a ceasing thing  
Is not tenable.  
But to say that it is not ceasing  
Is not tenable for anything.
22. A static existent does not endure.  
A nonstatic existent does not endure.  
Stasis does not endure.  
What nonarisen can endure?
23. The endurance of a ceasing entity  
Is not tenable.  
But to say that it is not ceasing  
Is not tenable for anything.
24. Inasmuch as the nature of all things  
Is aging and death,  
Without aging and death,  
What existents can endure?
25. Stasis cannot endure through itself  
Or through another stasis.  
Just as arising cannot arise from itself  
Or from another arising.
26. The ceasing of what has ceased does not happen.  
What has not yet ceased does not cease.  
Nor does that which is ceasing.  
What nonarisen can cease?
27. The cessation of what is static  
Is not tenable.  
Nor is the cessation of  
Something not static tenable.

28. Being static does not cease  
Through being static itself.  
Nor does being static cease  
Through another instance of being static.
29. When the arising of any entity  
Is not tenable,  
Then the cessation of any entity  
Is not tenable.
30. For an existent thing  
Cessation is not tenable.  
A single thing being an entity and  
A nonentity is not tenable.
31. Moreover, for a nonentity,  
Cessation would be untenable.  
Just as a second beheading  
Cannot be performed.
32. Cessation does not cease by means of itself.  
Nor does it cease by means of another.  
Just as arising cannot arise from itself  
Or from another arising.
33. Since arising, ceasing, and abiding  
Are not established, there are no compounded things.  
If all compounded things are unestablished,  
How could the uncompounded be established?
34. Like a dream, like an illusion,  
Like a city of Gandharvas,  
So have arising, abiding,  
And ceasing been explained.

## Chapter VIII

# Examination of the Agent and Action

1. This existent agent  
Does not perform an existent action.  
Nor does some nonexistent agent  
Perform some nonexistent action.
2. An existent entity has no activity.  
There would also be action without an agent.  
An existent entity has no activity.  
There would also be agent without action.
3. If a nonexistent agent  
Were to perform a nonexistent action,  
Then the action would be without a cause  
And the agent would be without a cause.
4. Without a cause, the effect and  
Its cause will not occur.  
Without this, activity and  
Agent and action are not possible.