

Barry Kerzin

*Nagarjuna's Wisdom: The Middle Way*

Week Four: "Ground, Path, and Result"

May 27, 2019



Welcome back. We're now on session four of this four part series on *Nagarjuna's Wisdom: A Practitioner's Guide to the Middle Way*. In this book, we're not following or commenting on all 27 chapters, but rather we're extracting five important chapters that are often taught by His Holiness the Dalai Lama when he teaches *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, Nagarjuna's most important and seminal text.

In the third session we talked about Chapters 26 and 18, and now we move on to Chapter 24. In Chapter 18, which is titled Analysis of the Self, Nagarjuna really refutes the idea of an intrinsically existent self from many angles. If we don't fully understand the difference between a lack of intrinsic existence and lack of existence, we may think that Chapter 18 refutes the self completely, saying "there's no me." In order to counter that, His Holiness the Dalai Lama then teaches Chapter 24, which is titled "Analysis of the Four Noble Truths."

In the commentary given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 24th chapter, the four noble truths are looked at from the point of view of their characteristics, functions, and outcome. We can expand the four noble truths into 16 based on characteristics, functions, and outcome. In order to expand into the 16, we try to go deeper into the meaning of the four noble truths.

This approach of at looking at characteristics, function, and outcome dovetails very nicely with the main structure of the Buddhist path, which is the ground, the path, and the result. The ground is often seen as nature reality itself, and the path is cultivating or understanding that ground. The result is then cultivating that path and having the actual experience of the ground within us—experiencing that ground, the nature of reality, and emptiness.

Ground, path, and result can also be looked at from the perspective of the ground being the two truths. Every time the Buddha would teach wisdom, and subsequently when Nagarjuna would teach wisdom, he would usually begin with a discussion of the two truths.

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What are the two truths? There's the ultimate truth and the conventional truth. Ultimate truth is the wisdom of emptiness, and conventional truth is that things do exist on a conventional, linguistic, or conceptual level but not on a ultimate level.

The path that we follow is the two accumulations of merit and wisdom, or method and wisdom. The method comes from the conventional truth, and the wisdom comes from the ultimate truth.

The two results are the two resultant bodies of a Buddha. From the accumulation of method we get the rupakaya or the form body of the Buddha, and from the accumulation of wisdom we get the dharmakaya or the wisdom-truth body of a Buddha.

This is the elaborate explanation of the four noble truths that's presented in Chapter 24. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama does, and as explained in the commentary, the intention behind having Chapter 24 follow Chapter 18 is to counter that tendency that we may have developed in Chapter 18 to take the self as nonexistent. That is, where we're not clearly understanding a distinction between no intrinsic self or reality, and no reality or self at all.

After Nagarjuna establishes conventional reality quite well in Chapter 24, the commentary by His Holiness the Dalai Lama that we follow in my book *Nagarjuna's Wisdom: A Practitioner's Guide to the Middle Way*, directs us to Chapter 22, which is entitled "Analysis of the Tathagata," the Buddha. In this chapter, Nagarjuna discusses how even the Buddha, the Buddha's mind, and the main quality of the Buddha, which is emptiness, is itself empty of any intrinsic existence. So emptiness is also empty. That's what's being discussed in Chapter 22.

We can extend that analysis from the Tathagata, the Buddha, to our self, and apply that emptiness to our self in a similar fashion to Chapter 18.

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In Chapter 24, the establishment of conventional reality through the discussion of the four noble truths might lead us to take emptiness as something special, because it is done in the context of understanding conventional reality within the understanding of emptiness. We might get the false notion that emptiness has some special ontologic or existential sort of quality but in fact it doesn't. That's what is being refuted in Chapter 22, "The Analysis of the Tathagata." Finally, when we and His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, have enough time, we then present Chapter one.

Chapter one is titled "The Analysis of Conditions," and here conditions means the same as causes or production. This is all about *pratitya-samutpada* [dependant origination], which is production in dependence on causes and conditions.

Chapter one is divided into three sections. The first section is the salutation and verse one. Verse one uses the tetralemma, the type of logic that looks at options of A, B, A plus B, and neither A nor B, with respect to production.

What's implied here when he refutes all those four possibilities is not that there's no production at all, but there's no inherent, intrinsic, or objective production. That's what's being refuted in chapter one, particularly in the first section—the salutation and verse one.

Then section two is verses two through ten, where Nagarjuna is refuting the four conditions. The *Cittamatra* [mind only] school uses the four conditions to claim, "The mind really does exist intrinsically. Why? Because the Buddha taught these four conditions and these four conditions are establishing themselves as intrinsically existent and therefore, they establish the intrinsic existence of the mind." That theory is used by the third of the four philosophical schools.

The school considered highest and most sophisticated, at least from the perspective of the Mahayana schools, is the *Madhyamaka* school. The Madhyamaka or Middle Way school

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believes that there is no inherently existent mind and there is no inherently existent anything, both self or phenomena in general.

So the second section is refuting these four conditions which the Cittamatra or Mind Only school used to establish the intrinsic existence of the mind. Then in the third section of Chapter one: The Analysis of Conditions, Nagarjuna refutes intrinsically existent effects.

That completes my book which uses the five chapters in the order taught by His Holiness the Dalai Lama when he comments on Nagarjuna's text, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*. This completes the discussion of the five major chapters in the order of Chapter 26, looking at the 12 links of interdependent origination, and then going to Chapter 18, The Analysis of the Self, and then going to Chapter 24, Analysis of the Four Noble Truths, and then to Chapter 22, Analysis of the Tathagata or the Buddha. We finish with Chapter one, which is The Analysis of Conditions.

Thank you very much for joining us in these four sessions. I hope you've enjoyed it as much as I have.