

## *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness - ( Sunyatasaptati )*

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Prostration is made to the Youthful Manjushri.

[1]

Though the Buddhas have spoken of duration, origination, destruction,  
being, non-being, low, moderate, and excellent  
by force of worldly convention,  
[they] have not done [so] in an absolute sense.

[2]

Designations are without significance,  
for self, non-self, and self-non-self do not exist.  
[For] like nirvana,  
all expressible things are empty of own-being.

[3]

Since all things altogether lack substance  
either in causes or conditions,  
[in their] totality, or separately  
they are empty.

[4]

Being does not arise, since it exists.  
Non-being does not arise, since it does not exist.  
Being and non-being [together] do not arise, due to [their] heterogeneity.  
Consequently they do not endure or vanish.

[5]

That which has been born cannot be born,  
nor can that which is unborn be born.  
What is being born now, being [partly] born, [partly] unborn,  
cannot be born either.

[6]

A cause has an effect when there is an effect,  
but when there is no [effect] the [cause] amounts to no cause.  
It is inconsistent that [the effect] neither exists nor does not exist.  
It is illogical that [the cause is active] in the three times.

[7]

Without one, there are not many.

Without many, one is not possible.

Whatever arises dependently

is indeterminable.

[8]

The twelve dependently arising members,

which result in suffering, are unborn.

They are possible neither in one mind

nor in many.

[9]

Permanent is not, impermanent is not,

not-self is not, self is not, impure is not, pure is not,

pleasure is not, and suffering is not.

Therefore the perverted views do not exist.

[10]

Without these, ignorance based on the four bad views is not possible.

Without this [ignorance], the formative forces do not arise.

The same [is true] for the [ten]

remaining [dependently arising members].

[11]

Ignorance does not occur without the formative forces

[and] without it the formative forces do not arise.

Caused by one another,

they are not established by own-being.

[12]

How can that which is not established

by own-being create others?

Conditions established by others

cannot create others.

[13]

A father is not a son, a son is not a father.

Neither exists except in correlation with the other.

Nor are they simultaneous.

Likewise for the twelve members.

[14]

Just as pleasure and pain depending on an object  
in a dream do not have [a real] object,  
so neither that which arises dependently  
nor that which it arises in dependence on exists.

[15]

Opponent: If things do not exist by own-being,  
then low, moderate, and excellent  
and the manifold world are not established  
and cannot be established, even through a cause.

[16]

Reply: If own-being were established,  
dependently arising things would not occur.  
If [they were] unconditioned, how could own-being be lacking?  
True being also does not vanish.

[17]

How can the non-existing have own-being,  
other-being, or non-being?  
Consequently, own-being, other-being, and non-being  
[result from] perverted views.

[18]

Opponent: If things were empty,  
origination and cessation would not occur.  
That which is empty of own-being:  
How does it arise and how does it cease?

[19]

Reply: Being and non-being are not simultaneous.  
Without non-being, no being.  
Being and non-being would always be.  
There is no being independent of non-being.

[20]

Without being there is no non-being.  
[Being] neither arises from itself nor from [something] else.  
This being so, this [being] does not exist:  
So there is no being, and [therefore] no non-being.

[21]

If there is being there is permanence;  
if there is non-being there is necessarily annihilation.

When there is being, these two [dogmas] occur.

Therefore [one should] not accept being.

[22]

Opponent: These [dogmas] do not occur due to continuity:

Things cease after having caused [an effect].

Reply: As before [see v. 19], this [continuity] is unestablished.

It also follows that the continuity would be interrupted.

[23]

Opponent: [No!] The Buddha's teaching of the path  
aims at showing origination and cessation, not sunyata!

Reply: To experience the two  
as mutually exclusive is a mistake.

[24]

Opponent: If there is no origination and cessation,  
then to the cessation of what is nirvana due?

Reply: Is not liberation this:  
that by nature nothing arises and ceases?

[25]

If nirvana [resulted] from cessation,  
[then there would be] destruction.

If the contrary, [there would be] permanence.

Therefore it is not logical that nirvana is being or non-being.

[26]

If a definite cessation did abide,  
it would be independent of being.

It does not exist without being,  
nor does it exist without non-being.

[27]

The marked is established through a mark different from the marked;  
it is not established by itself.

Nor are the [two] established by each other,  
[since what is] not established cannot establish the not-established.

[28]

In this [way], cause, effect,  
feeling, feeler, and so forth,  
the seer, the visible, and so forth  
whatever may be all are explained, without exception.

[29]

The three times do not exist (substantially)  
since they are unfixed and are mutually established,  
since they change [and] are not self-established,  
[and] since there is no being. They are merely discriminations.

[30]

Since the three marks of the conditioned  
– origination, duration, and cessation – do not exist,  
there is not the slightest conditioned  
or unconditioned [phenomenon].

[31]

The non-destroyed does not cease,  
nor does the destroyed.  
The abiding does not abide, nor does the non-abiding.  
The born is not born, nor is the unborn.

[32]

Composite and non-composite are not many [and] not one;  
are not being [and] are not non-being;  
are not being-non-being.  
All [possibilities] are comprised within these limits.

[33]

Opponent: The Bhagavat, the Teacher, has spoken of karma's duration,  
of karma's nature, and of karma's result,  
and also of the personal karma of living beings  
and of the non-destruction of karma.

[34]

Reply: Karma is said to lack own-being.  
[Karma] that is not born is not destroyed.  
From that again I-making is born.  
But the belief that creates it is due to discrimination.

[35]

If karma had own-being  
the body created by it would be permanent.  
So karma would not result in suffering  
and would therefore be substantial.

[36]

Karma is not born from conditions  
and by no means from non-conditions,  
for karma-formations are like an illusion,  
a city of gandharvas, and a mirage.

[37]

Karma has klesas as its cause.  
[Being] klesas, the karma-formations are of impassioned nature (klesatmaka).  
A body has karma as its cause.  
So [all] three are empty of own-being.

[38]

Without karma, no agent.  
Without these two, no result.  
Without these, no enjoyer.  
Therefore things are void.

[39]

When because the truth is seen  
one correctly understands that karma is empty, karma does not arise.  
When [karma] is no more,  
what arises from karma arises no more.

[40]

Just as when the Lord Tathagata  
magically projects an apparition  
and this apparition again projects  
another apparition-

[41]

In that case the Tathagata's apparition is empty  
(not to mention the apparition [created] by the apparition!).  
Both of them are but names,  
merely insignificant discriminations.

[42]

Just so, the agent is like the apparition,

and karma is like the apparition [created] by the apparition.

By nature [they are] without significance:

mere discriminations.

[43]

If karma possessed own-being,

there would be no nirvana nor deeds [of an] agent.

If [karma] does not exist,

the pleasant or unpleasant result created by karma does not exist.

[44]

‘Is’ and ‘is not’

and also ‘is-is not’ have been stated

by the Buddhas for a purpose.

It is not easy to understand!

[45]

If form is material (bhautika) in itself,

it does not arise from the elements (bhuta).

It is not derived from itself – it does not exist, does it? – nor from anything else.

Therefore it does not exist [at all].

[46]

The four [great elements] are not [found] in one [element],

nor is one of them [found] in [any of] the four.

How can form be established

with the four great elements as [its] cause?

[47]

Since it is not conceived directly, [it seems form does] not exist.

But if [you maintain it to be conceived] through a mark,

that mark, born from causes and conditions, does not exist.

And it would be illogical [if form could exist] without a mark.

[48]

If mind could grasp form,

it would grasp its own-being.

How could a [mind] that does not exist (since it is born from conditions)

really conceive absence of form?

[49]

Since one moment of mind cannot within [the very same] moment  
grasp a form born (as explained),  
how could it understand  
a past and a future form?

[50]

Since color and shape  
never exist apart,  
they cannot be conceived apart.  
Is form not acknowledged to be one?

[51]

The sense of sight is not inside the eye,  
not inside form, and not in between.  
[Therefore] an image depending upon  
form and eye is false.

[52]

If the eye does not see itself,  
how can it see form?  
Therefore eye and form are without self.  
The same [is true for the] remaining sense-fields.

[53]

Eye is empty of its own self  
[and] of another's self.  
Form is also empty.  
Likewise [for the] remaining sense-fields.

[54]

When one [sense-field] occurs simultaneously with contact,  
the others are empty.  
Empty does not depend upon nonempty,  
nor does non-empty depend upon empty.

[55]

Having no [independent] fixed nature,  
the three [namely, indriya, visaya, and vijnana] cannot come into contact.  
Since there is no contact having this nature,  
feeling does not exist.



[56]

Consciousness occurs in dependence on  
the internal and external sense-fields.

Therefore consciousness is empty,  
like mirages and illusions.

[57]

Since consciousness arises in dependence on a discernible object,  
the discernible does not exist [in itself].

Since [the conscious subject] does not exist without the discernible and consciousness,  
the conscious subject does not exist [by itself].

[58]

[In a relative sense] everything is impermanent,  
but [in the absolute sense] nothing is permanent or impermanent.

[If there] were things, they would be either permanent or impermanent.

But how is that [possible]?

[59]

Since the entities 'desire', 'hatred', and 'delusion' arise  
through perverted views about pleasant and unpleasant,  
desire, hatred, and delusion  
do not exist by own-being.

[60]

Since one [may] desire, hate, and be deluded  
regarding the very same [thing],

[the passions] are created by discrimination.

And that discrimination is nothing real.

[61]

That which is imagined does not exist.

Without an imagined object, how can there be imagination?

Since the imagined and the imagination are born from conditions,  
[they are] sunyata.

[62]

Through understanding the truth, ignorance,  
which arises from the four perverted views, does not exist.

When this is no more, the karma-formations do not arise.

The remaining [ten members vanish] likewise.

[63]

The thing that arises in dependence upon

this or that does not arise when that is absent.

Being and non-being, composite and non-composite are at peace.

This is nirvana.

[64]

To imagine that things born

through causes and conditions are real

the teacher calls ignorance.

From that the twelve members arise.

[65]

But when one has understood

by seeing fully that things are empty,

one is no longer deluded. Ignorance ceases,

and the twelve spokes [of the wheel] come to a halt.

[66]

Karma-formations are like the city of gandharvas,

illusions, mirages, nets of hair,

foam, bubbles, phantoms, dreams,

and wheels made with a firebrand.

[67]

Nothing exists by virtue of own-being,

nor is there any non-being here.

Being and non-being,

born through causes and conditions, are empty.

[68]

Since all things are empty of own-being,

the incomparable Tathagata

teaches dependent co-origination

regarding things.

[69]

The ultimate meaning consists in that!

The perfect Buddhas, the Bhagavats,

have [only] conceived the entire multiplicity

in reliance upon worldly convention.

[70]

The worldly norms [dharmas] are not violated.

In reality [the Tathagata] has not taught the Dharma.

Not understanding the Tathagata's words,

[fools] fear this spotless discourse.

[71]

The worldly principle, "This arises depending on that,"

is not violated.

But since what is dependent lacks own-being,

how can it exist? That is certain!

[72]

One with faith who tries to seek the truth,

one who considers this principle logically

[and] relies [upon] the Dharma that is lacking all supports

leaves behind existence and non-existence [and abides in] peace.

[73]

When one understands that "This is a result of that,"

the nets of bad views all vanish.

Undeiled, one abandons desire, delusion, and hatred

and gains nirvana.

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*Translation by Christian Lindtner*