

THE SEVENTY STANZAS ON VOIDNESS

by Arya Nagarjuna

Translation by

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1. Although the Buddhas, according to the world's convention, speak of permanence, birth and destruction, of existence and inexistence, of inferiority, sameness and superiority, according to the true reality, nothing (of that) exists. (FD)

Voidness of All (2-3)

2. Substance does not exist, non-substance does not exist; since substance and non-substance do not exist, nothing that is to be designated by words exists at all. All the things that are to be designated by words, similar to *nirvāṇa*, are void of an own being. (FD)

3. Since the own being of all things is nowhere, neither in the conglomerate of causes and conditions nor in each of them—because of this, (all things) are void (of an own being). (FD)

Impossibility of Birth, Permanence and Destruction

4. (Something) existent cannot be born, since it is (already) existent; (something) in-existent (can)not (be born), since it is in-existent; (something) existent and in-existent (at the same time) (can)not (be born), since (both concepts) are contradictory between themselves. Because birth does not exist, neither permanence nor destruction exists. (FD)

Impossibility of Being Produced

5. What has been (already) born cannot be produced; what has been (not yet) born cannot be produced either; what is being born cannot be produced either, since it is (at the same time, already) born and not (yet) born. (FD)

Impossibility of the Cause

6. If the effect existed, (there would be) a cause provided (already) with its effect; if that effect does not exist, the cause is similar to (something) inexistent; and it is contradictory that (the effect) be not existent and be not inexistent (at the same time as the cause). (Therefore) the cause is not logically possible in any of the three times. (FD)

One and Multiple are Relative Notions

7. Without the one, the multiple does not exist; without the multiple, the one does not exist; for this reason things arisen in dependence are devoid of essential characteristics. (FD)

Denial of Dependent Origination (8-14)

8. Those twelve members of Dependent Origination, which have suffering as their effect, are not born, since they are not logically possible in one (single) consciousness, nor are they possible in several (consciousnesses). (FD)

9. Impermanence, permanence do not exist; non-substance, substance do not exist; impurity, purity do not exist; suffering, happiness do not exist. Because of this, the (four) errors do not exist. (FD)

10. Since these⁵⁴ do not exist, ignorance, which arises out of the four errors, does not exist; since it does not exist, the *saṃskāras* do not arise, nor the remaining (members). (FD)

11. Since ignorance does not arise without *saṃskāras* and without it the *saṃskāras* do not arise, both, because they are (reciprocally) cause of each other, cannot be admitted as having an own being. (FD)

12. By a thing, which is not admitted with the nature of a substance, how could another thing be produced? Therefore conditions, which are not admitted (as having an own being), cannot produce other ones. (FD)

13. As the father is not the son, (and) the son is not the father (and) both cannot be the one the other (and) both do not exist simultaneously, so are the twelve members. (FD)

14. As happiness and suffering, which depend on an object (seen) in dreams, do not exist nor (does) that object (exist), so a thing which has arisen in dependence does not exist, nor does exist that, depending on which that thing has arisen. (FD)

Impossibility of the Existence of an Own Being (15-18)

15. If things did not exist with an own being, inferiority, sameness and superiority would not exist, diversity would not be admissible, origination out of causes would not exist. (FD)

16. (If things were) admitted with an own being, they could not become things in dependence. If they are not things in dependence, what happens? Since an own being cannot become inexistent, whatever happened to exist with an own being, could not perish (ever). (FD)

17. Since (an own being) does not exist, how could (things) be “a thing in itself”, or “another thing” or perish. Therefore, “another thing”, “non thing”, “thing”, “thing in itself” are errors. (FD)

18. If things are void (of an own being), they are not destroyed, they are not born. In relation to (something) devoid of an own being, where could destruction be produced? Where could birth be produced?

Existence and Inexistence (19-22)

19. A thing existing and not existing at the same time is not (possible); without the not existing thing, the existing thing is not (possible); the existing thing and the not existing thing would be eternal; the existing thing, the not existing thing does not arise. (FD)

20. Without the existing thing there is not the not existing thing; (a thing) does not exist out of itself; does not exist out of another one; so things do not exist; if these do not exist, (these same) things are not (possible) (as) not existing. (FD)

21. If there were existence in itself of things, there would be eternalism; if there were inexistence in itself, there would be nihilism; if things existed, both (would be), (and this) is not (possible); therefore things are not admitted. (FD)

22. Because of the series (of birth and destruction), they (eternalism and nihilism) are not produced; if there is a cause, things cease. As (we have said) before, this is not admissible; moreover the logical defect of the destruction of the series would be produced. (FD)

The Nirvāṇa (23-26)

23.

(Although Buddha), considering birth and destruction, has taught the path to *nirvāṇa*, (yet) owing to voidness they do not exist, since they are contradictory between themselves and are perceived (only) because of error. (FD)

24.

If birth and cessation do not exist, through the cessation of what would *nirvāṇa* be produced? Not being born and not ceasing *in se et per se*, is that not liberation? (FD)

25. If *nirvāṇa* is cessation, there is nihilism; if it is the other (alternative), there is eternalism; therefore it is neither an existing thing nor a non existing thing; it is without birth and cessation. (FD)

26. If a cessation did subsist, then it would have to be without the existence of the thing; (but) it cannot be without the existence of the thing; nor can it be without the inexistence of the thing. (FD)

The Characteristic and the Characterized (thing)

27. It is admitted that the characteristic is on account of the characterized (thing); and it is admitted that the characterized (thing) is on account of the characteristic; therefore it is not admitted that they exist *in se et per se*; nor can it be admitted that both (exist) one on account of the other, since what is not admitted cannot make another thing –that itself is not admitted– to be admitted. (FD)

Application of What Precedes to Other Cases

28. With this has been completely explained all that can exist: cause and effect, sensation together with the object of sensation etc., who sees and the visible (thing) etc. (FD)

Inexistence of the Three Times

29. Because they do not remain, because they are admitted one in relation to the other one, because they are inferred, because they cannot be admitted as a substance, because things do not exist, the three times do not exist, they are only an idea. (FD)

Inexistence of All

30. Since birth, permanence and destruction, these three characteristics of the conditioned (things) do not exist, because of this, what is conditioned and what is not-conditioned—nothing exists. (FD)

Inexistence of Destruction, Permanence and Birth

31. Destruction does not exist for what has not (yet) been destroyed; nor does it exist for what has (already) been destroyed; does not exist for what has (already) endured; permanence does not exist either for what does not yet endure; birth does what has (already) been born, nor does it exist for what has not (yet) been born. (FD)

Conditioned and Non-conditioned Things

32. What is conditioned and what is non-conditioned are not nor unity; they are not being, they are not non-being; they are not being and non-being; inside these extremes are completely comprehended these (two) aspects. (FD)

Action (33-43)

33. The *Bhagavant* has said that the action subsists; the Master has said that the actions have their own fruit, that the actions belong to each living being and that the actions do not perish. (FD)

34. Since it has been taught that (action) has not an own being, therefore, because it does not arise, it does not perish; it arises out the conception of an ego, and also that conception, which makes it to arise, arises (at its own turn) out of a (mere) idea. (FD)

35. If action were an own being, the body, which arises out of it, would be eternal; it could not be provided with the ripening that is suffering; because of this, action would be also a substance. (FD)

36. No action, arisen out of conditions, does exist; nor does exist (any action) arisen out of non- conditions; *saṃskāras* are similar to a magical illusion, to the *gandharvas'* city, to a mirage. (FD)

37. Action has as its cause the impurities; the *saṃskāras* are constituted by impurities and action; the body has action as its cause; the three are void of an own being. (FD)

38. Since action does not exist, the doer of the action does not exist; since both do not exist, the fruit of the action does not exist; since the experiencer (of the fruit) does not exist, owing to the non-existence of that (fruit), all is devoid (of an own being). (FD)

39. If, because of having seen reality, one understands well that action is empty of an own being, action does not (really) arise; since action does not exist, that, which (apparently) has arisen out of action, does not (really) arise. (FD)

40. In the same way as the *Bhagavant*, the *Tathāgata*, through his extraordinary powers creates (for himself) apparently (a body), and after having produced this apparent creation, through this same apparent creation creates apparently (other) apparent creations, (FD)

41.—there the apparent creation of the *Tathāgata* is void; still more (are void) the apparent creations (apparently created) by the apparent creation; both are only ideas— (FD)

42. in the same way, who acts, similar to the apparent creation, and the action (which he performs), similar to the apparent creation (apparently created) by the apparent creation, are void of an own being, they exist as something which is only an idea. (FD)

43. If action existed with an own being, *nirvāṇa* would not exist nor the doer of the action; if (action) does not exist (with an own being), the fruit produced by action — suffering and non-suffering— does not exist. (FD)

Intentional Formulations of the Buddhas

44. It is not easy to understand what has been intentionally said by the Buddhas: “The existent exists, “the non-existent” exists, “the existent and non-existent” also exists. (FD)

The Object of Visual Knowledge (45-46)

45. If the visible (thing) arose from the material elements, the visible (thing) would arise from something unreal; so it would not exist out of (something with) an own being; (and), since this one does not exist, it does not exist out of another. (FD)

46. In one, the four do not exist; in the four, the one does not exist; therefore, depending on the inexistent four great elements, how would the visible (thing) exist? (FD)

Perception or Visual Knowledge (47-52)

47. If it is said that, as (the visible thing) is not perceived in itself, it (can be perceived) through its attributes, (we answer that) these attributes do not exist, since they are produced by causes and conditions; if the visible (thing) existed, it would be illogical (that it exist) without attributes. (FD)

48. If the visible (thing) were perceived, an own being would be perceived; how would the inexistent visible thing be perceived through a consciousness (also) inexistent since it arises out of conditions? (FD)

49. Since consciousness, which arises instantaneously, does not grasp the visible (thing) that is born (also) instantaneously, how could it perceive something visible, (already) past or not (yet) arrived? (FD)

50. Since colour and form are never separated, (it is) not (possible to say that), being separated, they are perceived together, since it is considered that both are the visible (thing). (FD)

51. The consciousness of the eye does not exist in the eye, does not exist in the visible (thing) nor in the middle (of both); it (as really arising), depending on the eye and on the visible (thing), is an error. (FD)

52. If the eye does not see itself, how could it see the visible (thing)? Therefore the eye and the visible do not exist *in se et per se*. The remaining *āyatana*s are similar to these. (FD)

***Voidness of the Āyatana*s (53-54)**

53. The eye is void of an own essence; it is void of the essence of another; the visible (thing) is equally void, and equally void are the remaining *āyatana*s. (FD)

54. If one exists together with the contact, the other ones are void. What is void does not lean upon what is not void, nor does what is not void lean upon what is void. (FD)

Inexistence of Sensory Knowledge

55. The three do not exist; since there is not conjunction of natures that do not endure, there is not a real contact among them, therefore perception does not exist. (FD)

Unreality of Consciousness

56. Depending on an internal *āyatana* and on an external one, consciousness arises; for this reason consciousness does not exist. it is void as a mirage; a magical illusion. (FD)

Inexistence of Consciousness, of the Object and Subject of Knowledge

57. Consciousness does not exist, since it arises depending on the knowable (thing); as consciousness does not exist nor the knowable (thing), therefore the knower does not really exist. (FD)

All is Impermanent; Nothing Exists

58. All is impermanent –impermanent or permanent, nothing exists. If things existed, they would be permanent or impermanent; then can they (really) exist? (FD)

Unreality of the Kleśas and of the Imagination that Produces Them (59-61)

59. Attraction, hatred and error arise, born out of conditions: (something) agreeable, (something) disagreeable, (something) erroneous; therefore attraction, hatred and error do not exist *in se et per se*. (FD)

60. Since attraction, hatred and error exist in relation to the same thing, they are produced by imagination, and imagination also does not exist really. (FD)

61. The imaginable (thing) does not exist; since the imaginable (thing) does not exist, how would imagination exist? Because of this, as they arise out of conditions, the imaginable (thing) and the imagination are void. (FD)

Ignorance Does Not Exist Nor the Other Members of Dependent Origination

62. When reality is perceived, ignorance born out of the four errors does not exist; since it does not exist, the *saṃskāras* do not arise; in the same way the remaining (members) also (do not arise). (FD)

All is Calm; All is Nirvānized

63. If a thing is born depending on another, that (thing) is born out of this one; since this one does not exist, the other one does not arise; existing things and non-existing things, the *saṃskṛta* and the *asaṃskṛta* are (all) calm, nirvānized. (FD)

Ignorance and the Twelve Members (64-65)

64. To consider that things born out of causes and conditions are real –the Master has said that that is ignorance. Because of that the twelve members arise. (FD)

65. When, by seeing reality, it is well known that things are void, (then) ignorance does not arise; that is the cessation of ignorance; for this reason the twelve members also cease. (FD)

Unreality of the Saṃskāras

66. The *saṃskāras* are similar to the *gandharvas'* city, to a magical illusion, to a mirage, to a bubble, to water's foam; they are similar to a dream, to the circle of light produced by a torch. (FD)

Inexistence of Things and No-things

67. Things with an own being do not exist at all; here non-things also do not exist; things and non-things, born out of causes and conditions, are void. (FD)

Dependent Origination = Voidness

68. Since all things are void of an own being, in an incomparable way the *Tathāgata* has taught the Dependent Origination of all things. (FD)

Supreme Truth = Dependent Origination. Validity of the Relative Truth (69-71)

69. The supreme truth is only that. Buddha, the *Bhagavant*, holding to the relative truth, considered all the diverse things in a correct way. (FD)

70. The teaching proper of the world has not been abolished; in reality, a teaching of the Doctrine never existed at all; by not understanding what the *Tathāgata* has said, (ignorant persons) become afraid of this principle free from (all) mental creation. (FD)

71. Depending on this, that does arise—this principle relative to the world is not denied. What arises in dependence lacks an own being, how could it exist? (All that precedes) is perfectly evident. (FD)

Means to Obtain Nirvāṇa

72. The man who has faith consecrates himself to the search for truth, does not cling to the teaching of any doctrine, adheres, according to logic, to that principle, having abandoned being and non-being, becomes calm. (FD)

73. Knowing the conditionality of (all) this, with the cessation of the mental creations, which constitute the net of the false doctrines, and the abandonment of attraction, error and hatred, on proceeds, pure, towards nirvāṇa. (FD)

These Seventy Stanzas Explaining How Phenomena Are Empty of Inherent Existence have been written by the Teacher Arya Nagarjuna