

## Je Tsongkapa On the first chapter from *Wisdom*

*In his brilliant commentary to Wisdom called The Ocean of Emptiness, Je Tsongkapa discusses the connection between Arya Nagarjuna's work and the original teachings of Lord Buddha.*

RIGS PA MI SHES SHING LUNG TZAM SKYABS SU GYUR PA RNAMS KYIS RTOG  
GE SKAM PO'I BSTAN BCOS TZAM GYIS BSGRUBS PA YIN NO ZHES SMRA BA  
DGAG PA'I PHYIR DANG,

Now some people might say:

All these books are just the product of some dry logicians who know nothing about clear reasoning—who hide in quotations from scripture, and use them to try to prove something.

One of the purposes of this chapter is to address these objections.

CHOS RNAMS SKYE BA MED PAR STON PA'I GSUNG RAB THAMS CAD RAB TU  
BYED PA 'DIS BSHAD PAR BYA BA YIN PAR BSTAN PA'I PHYIR NGES PA'I DON  
GYI LUNG DANG SBYOR BA'I PHYOGS TZAM STON PA NI,

At the same time, we can present just a sampling of scripture which is literal—and not figurative—in order to show that the chapter manages to explain the entire body of Buddhist scripture which treats the fact that nothing ever starts.

'PHAGS PA DKON MCHO G 'BYUNG GNAS KYI MDO LAS,

And so here we go, from the *Sutra on the Source of The Jewel*:

(1a)  
,GANG NA'ANG STONG PA RIG PA MED PA NI,

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[,GANG NA'ANG STONG PAR RIG PA MA MCHIS PAR,]  
,NAM MKHA' BAR SNANG BYA YI RJES DANG MTSUNGS,

The mind that understands emptiness  
In anything at all  
Is simply an impossibility;

It's just the same as the track  
That a bird leaves behind  
As it crosses the empty sky.<sup>1</sup>

,ZHES DE KHO NA NYID DANG RO GCIG TU GYUR PA SPROS PA MED PA'I YE  
SHES DPE DE DANG 'DRA BAR BSTAN NO,,

These lines are using a metaphor to refer to the wisdom which is free of all imagined things, and which becomes a single song with suchness.

DE KHO NA NYID NI,

The suchness itself is then presented in the lines that come next:

(1b)

,GANG NA'ANG NGO BO NYID 'GA' YOD MIN PA,  
,DE NI NAM YANG GZHAN GYI RGYUR MI 'GYUR,

(2a)

,GANG GI NGO BO NYID NI MI RNYED PA,  
,RANG BZHIN MED DE JI LTAR GZHAN GYI RKYEN,

Nothing that never had  
Any essence of its own  
Could ever act as a cause

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<sup>1</sup> *The mind that understands emptiness*: Note that the version of this sutra available to us, in the Lhasa edition of the Kangyur, has a slightly different spelling of this first line than the one found in both Je Tsongkapa and Master Chandrakirti. It seems more clear, and we have utilized that version here (in braces).

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For something other than it.

How could something  
That had no essence—  
Something without a nature  
Of its own—  
Ever act as a cause,  
For something else?

,ZHES RGYU DANG RKYEN LA SKYED BYED KYI RANG BZHIN MED PA DANG,

What these lines are saying is that neither causes nor condition have any nature of their own, where they make things start.

(2b)

,RANG BZHIN MED PA GZHAN GYIS CI ZHIG SKYED,  
,RGYU DE BDE BAR GSHEGS PAS BSTAN PA'O,

And how could something  
Without a nature  
Ever be started  
By something else?

These are the reasons  
That the One Gone to Bliss  
Taught for us.

,ZHES 'BRAS BU LA BSKYED BYA'I RANG BZHIN MED PA'I STONG NYID RGYAL  
BAS RGYU MTSAN DANG BCAS TE BSTAN PA DE NYID DO ZHES GSUNGS SO,,

These lines are expressing that results have no nature of their own either—of being started by something. This then is exactly the kind of place in scripture where the victorious Buddha says that things have no nature at all of these two kinds—of causing something else or being caused by something else. They are empty of any such nature.

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(3)

,THAMS CAD CHOS KYANG MI GA-YO BRTAN PAR GNAS,  
,[f. 51b] MI 'GYUR 'TSE BA MED CING ZHI BA STE,  
,JI LTAR NAMKHA' {%NAM MKHA'} SHES PA MED PA BZHIN,  
,DE LA MI SHES 'GRO BA RMONGS PAR 'GYUR,

Of everything in the world,  
It is the one thing that never wavers;  
It stays steadfast, and never changes;  
The one thing that can never hurt us,  
The one thing that is peace.

You should not understand it  
In the way you understand empty space;  
And those who never understand it  
Continue to live in darkness.

,ZHES PAS NI CHOS RNAMS KYI DE KHO NA NYID DE MI GA-YO BA SOGS SU  
BSTAN ZHING DE YANG NAM MKHA' RI BO LA SOGS PA'I THOGS BCAS BKAG  
TZAM LA 'JOG PA MIN PA

In these lines the Buddha is saying, first of all, that the suchness of things is something that never wavers—and so on. And he is saying secondly that this suchness is not something that we arrive at through a process such as where we deny some kind of concreteness: where we say for example that empty space consists of the simple elimination of physicality, in the form of mountains or the like.

GZHAN DU SHES PAR BYAR MED PAR BZHIN DU GA-YO BA DANG BRTAN PA  
SOGS KYI SPROS PA BCAD TZAM DU SHES PAR BYA BA DANG, DON DE MA  
RTOGS PAS 'KHOR BAR GSUNGS SO,,

Suchness is not something that we can understand in these other ways; rather, we must understand it through the simple elimination of the ways we imagine things to be: that they are wavering, or that they are steadfast. And because we fail to understand this point—the Buddha is saying—then we continue to wander, in the cycle of pain.

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(4)

,JI LTAR RI BO DAG NI MI SGUL PA,  
,DE BZHIN CHOS RNAMS RTAG TU BSKYED MI NUS,  
, 'CHI 'PHO MED CING SKYE BA MED PA YI,  
,CHOS RNAMS DE LTAR RGYAL BAS RAB TU BSTAN,

Mountains never get up  
And move some other place;  
Neither can anything ever start  
Anything at all.

Thus did the Victor  
Teach us of things  
Where there is no death,  
And no moving on;  
And where there is no birth.

,ZHES PAS NI CHOS RNAMS RANG BZHIN GYIS STONG PA RNAM PA GZHAN DU  
DRANG DU MI NUS PA DANG 'CHI 'PHO SOGS MED PAR BSTAN NO,,

What this is saying is that the fact that things are empty of any nature of their own is not something you could ever try to understand in some other way. It is also saying that there is no death, and no moving on after death, nor anything of the like.

(5)

,CHOS GANG SKYE BA MED CING 'BYUNG BA MED,  
, 'CHI 'PHO MED CING RGA BAR MI 'GYUR BA,  
,MI YI SENG+GE YIS NI DER STON ZHING,  
,SEMS CAN BRGYA PHRAG DAG NI DE LA BKOD,

That lion among all human kind  
Taught us in these verses  
That there is nothing at all that ever  
Starts, or happens at all;

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That there is no death, no moving on,  
And that we will never get old.  
This is the place that we are leading  
Billions of beings to go.<sup>2</sup>

,CES PAS NI RANG BZHIN GYIS SKYE 'CHI MED PA'I DON DE GDUL BYA GZHAN  
DU MA ZHIG KYANG 'DZIN DU BCUG CES DNGOS SU BSTAN PA'I SHUGS KYIS  
GZHAN DAG GIS KYANG DE LA SEMS CAN RNAMS DGOD PAR BYA'O ZHES  
BSTAN NO,,

What this is saying is that we should encourage as many other disciples as we can to grasp this idea that there is no birth, and no death, that happens through any nature of its own. By implication the verse is saying that we should lead living beings to that same place, by using the other ideas presented here as well.

(6)

,GANG LA NGO BO NYID NI GANG YANG MED,  
,GZHAN YANG MA YIN SUS KYANG MI RNYED PA,  
,NANG NA MA YIN PHYI ROL DAG NA YANG,  
,MI RNYED DE DAG LA NI MGON POS BKOD,

Our Savior leads them to the place  
Where there is no essence, to anything—  
But which is nothing else either:  
The place that no one could find,  
The place that is neither inside us,  
Nor found outside of us either.

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<sup>2</sup> *That lion among human kind*: The three verses from here on, found in both Master Chandrakirti and Je Tsongkapa, don't appear as such in the *Sutra of the Source of the Jewel* available to us. The language they use is often used in the sutra though, so perhaps they used to be in it. Or it could be that Master Chandrakirti is giving a poetic summary of the ones that have come already.

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,CES PAS NI CHOS GANG LA TSOL BA PO SUS GNAS SKABS GANG DU BTZAL  
YANG RANG DANG GZHAN GYI NGO BO NYID MI RNYED PA'I DON DE LA SEMS  
CAN RNAMS BKOD CES BSTAN TE GDUL BYA LA NGES DON GYI [f. 52a] GO BA  
BSKYED LUGS BSTAN NO,,

What this is saying is that the Buddha leads living beings to a place where—no matter how hard anyone at all worked to find it—they would never find any nature, of things being themselves, or things being something else. These lines are meant to indicate how we help disciples to grasp what the Buddha really meant.

(7)

,BDE BAR GSHEGS PAS ZHI BA'I 'GRO GSUNGS KYANG,  
, 'GRO BA GANG YANG RNYED PAR MI 'GYUR TE,  
,DE DAG 'GRO LAS GROL BAR RNAM PAR GSUNGS,  
,GROL NAS SEMS CAN MANG PO GROL BAR MDZAD,

It's true that the Ones Gone to Bliss  
Have taught about how to go to peace;  
But it's not as if you can find any going at all—  
Which is why they said that these beings  
Who go through births can be liberated.  
And once they are freed, they free as well  
Many other suffering beings.

CES PAS NI ZHI BAR 'GRO MKHAN DE YANG BTZAL NA MI RNYED PA DANG, DE  
LTA NA'ANG DE DAG 'GRO BA LNGA'I 'KHOR BA LAS GROL BA DANG RANG  
GROL NAS GZHAN MANG PO SGROL BAR GSUNGS TE RIGS PAS DPYAD NA MI  
RNYED PAS THAR PA DANG DE THOB MKHAN DANG DES DE THOB PA SOGS  
THAMS CAD MI 'GOG PA'I DON NO,,

This verse is talking about those people who go to peace; because if you look for them, you won't find anyone. Nonetheless, it has been stated by the Buddha that these same beings *can* be liberated from the five forms of suffering life; and that once they are liberated, they can lead many others to liberation. The point is that—once you analyze them—you cannot find these things; but that in turn means that we are *not* denying them:

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neither freedom itself, nor the person that attains it, nor the act of attaining freedom or anything of the kind.

DE LTAR NA RAB BYED DANG PO'I RIGS PA 'DI RNAMS NI 'DI DANG 'DI 'DRA BA'I  
SKYE MED STON PA'I GSUNG RAB THAMS CAD LTA BA'I MIG TU SHES PAR GYIS  
SHIG,

As such, you should understand that studying all the proofs found in the first chapter of *Wisdom* is giving yourself the eyes to see into these words of the Buddha—and any others like them—which teach us what it means to say that “things never start.”