



The Wisdom of Arya Nagarjuna  
Course One: The Eight Invisibles  
Class 2—Learning the Eight Invisibles  
Homework Master

\*1) Describe briefly the three visions which Choney Lama had which are particularly relevant to our own study of Arya Nagarjuna's *Wisdom*, and explain the importance of them.

**[Each of the three important visions described in Choney Lama's inner biography relate, it would appear, to his very clear and cogent descriptions of Buddhist philosophy in general—and more specifically the concept of emptiness—reaching the West, presumably by being translated into modern western languages (as our own team is accomplishing at this very moment). The third vision specifically mentions Choney Lama transmitting the teachings of Arya Nagarjuna himself.]**

**The first vision was repeated several times in dreams as a boy; Choney Lama sees Buddhas flying through the sky from the East. They pause overhead, and then fly straight off to the West. Choney Lama claims, "I still don't know what this dream means."**

**In the second vision, Manjushri—the embodiment of all the emptiness wisdom of each and every Buddha—is again racing through the sky from East to West. But he pauses when Choney Lama calls up; turns; and sinks into his chest. Choney Lama thinks to himself, "Oh yes; now I have received his blessing."**

**In the third vision, Choney Lama dreams of Nagarjuna himself, "body of purest gold, shining like the sun," also flying towards the West. He describes Nagarjuna as "the realized one—the one who saw emptiness directly and wrote the greatest words on how to accomplish this feat." Nagarjuna too pauses and melts into Choney Lama's chest; and the lama "awakens with pure joy."]**

2) Arya Nagarjuna, in the very first verse of his most important work—*Wisdom*—achieves two major goals of the traditional opening to a scripture. He further sets up a major work to come, by Je Tsongkapa. Explain the goals and the set-up. Clue: One of these should have four parts of its own.

**[In his famed opening verse of *Wisdom*, Nagarjuna first makes the traditional obeisance to the teachers of the lineage, by bowing to Lord Buddha. He bows to the Buddha in specific respect of his teaching upon the fine points of how all things exist in dependence, and are**

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therefore unreal. This sets the scene for Je Tsongkapa, 12 centuries later, to compose his own incredible poem of dependence & emptiness, “A Praise of Lord Buddha, for His Teaching Dependence.”

Masterfully, Arya Nagarjuna in the very same verse indicates that his text is worthy of our serious consideration, since it contains what are traditionally referred to as “the four qualities of a purpose, and the rest,” which mark a work as significant. Here is how Choney Lama describes these four, for the present work—

(a) **This book has important subject matter: The topic of dependence, specifically as it is devoid of eight different extremes.**

(b) **The book has an immediate goal: For its readers to understand this profound form of dependence.**

(c) **It has an ultimate goal: For us readers to attain the ultimate form of nirvana, where all forms of seeing things as existing from their own side are put to a final rest.**

(d) **It has a connection: We can achieve the immediate goal by studying the book’s subject matter; and its ultimate goal by reaching the immediate goal.]**

3) In our text, Lord Buddha is praised, straight away, for teaching dependence. How does Nagarjuna himself, later on in his *Wisdom*, describe what dependence is?

[Arya Nagarjuna says, in the eighth chapter, that “The agents—those who do things—depend on the action they take; while the action they take depends, in turn, upon the agents.” It’s easy to see how an action depends upon the one who does it. How the reverse is true is that an agent cannot be called an “agent” until they have done something; and so in a sense they also depend on the action which comes after them, as their result. This chapter is the one in *Wisdom* which is named, “An Examination of Agents and Actions.”]

\*4) In *Wisdom*, we are examining many different proofs that things are empty. How do the attitudes of a person who is a bodhisattva, and a person who is not a bodhisattva, differ about these proofs? Why do they differ?

[Choney Lama admits that, in his teachings on the lower way (the hinayana), Lord Buddha did indeed give some proofs of emptiness. But he repeats a famous sentiment that those who have the bodhisattva motivation to become an enlightened being so that they can be of service to all living creatures have a hunger to learn “an infinite number of proofs”; and that for them, Lord Buddha offered nearly countless proofs of this ultimate reality. First of all, bodhisattvas want to confirm—in as many ways as possible—that their understanding of emptiness is indeed correct. But they also want to fill up their bodhisattva “toolkit” with more proofs, so that they can be of service to people with a wide variety of propensities and

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wishes. That is, different students that we meet over the course of our life will respond to, and remember, different proofs of emptiness.]

5) How many chapters are there in *Wisdom*? What are the names, for example, of the first three chapters? What theme is repeated in their name, and why?

[There are 27 brief chapters in *Wisdom*. Each one is called “an examination”; for example, the first three chapters are “An Examination of Conditions”; “An Examination of Coming & Going”; and “An Examination of the Powers of Sense.” The word “examination” is repeated because—in each of these chapters—we are investigating whether things around us can come from themselves, or not; that is, whether they are empty or not.]

6) Please name the Eight Invisibles, and explain why they are called “invisibles.” Explain also why you think that Arya Nagarjuna chose these eight, specifically.

[The Eight Invisibles are:

- (1) Things that could *stop*, moment by moment, on their own.
- (2) Things that could *start*, after not having been there, on their own.
- (3) Things that could continue for some time, and then get *cut off*, on their own.
- (4) Things that could never end, and are therefore *unchanging*, on their own.
- (5) Things that could *come* towards us, on their own.
- (6) Things that could *go* away from us, on their own.
- (7) Things that are *separate*, on their own.
- (8) Things that are *one and the same*, on their own.

These things are called “invisible,” in a general way, because they do not exist—and so could never be observed. In particular, they are not something that an arya can even think of, during the direct perception of emptiness.

Why did Arya Nagarjuna choose these eight, specifically? Because they relate to our real life; and the goals and challenges of a real life. How can I *start* a new relationship? Why did he or she *stop* loving me? How can I get success to *come* to me? Why can't I lose more than *one* pound at a time?]

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\*7) What has the idea of “peace” got to do with these Eight Invisibles? Your answer should be two, and refer to a popular emptiness example!

**[For one thing, an arya who is in the direct perception of emptiness no longer has any wrong idea in their mind that any of these things could really exist, on their own—and this is a deep and ultimate kind of “peace,” during the length of their meditation. And when they come out of this perception, they use their knowledge that things don’t exist on their own to reach the higher forms of peace: nirvana, and total enlightenment.]**

**Both these kinds of peace are found in the “Two Husbands in the Kitchen” example. A husband who STARTED yelling on his own (the second of the eight), and not because the wife had the seeds in her mind from yelling at her children last week, is actually “invisible”: he cannot exist. When the wife understands this, she gains some peace of mind in the moment, in the kitchen. In the long term, she stops making the negative seeds to see her husband yelling, and attains a permanent peace from angry husbands.]**

8) In the verse about the Eight Invisibles—which is one of the most famous verses in Buddhism—Arya Nagarjuna strangely mentions “stopping” before “starting,” and “coming” (back) before “going.” How are we to understand this?

**[Arya Nagarjuna is hoping we’ll ask ourselves, as we read the verse, why he wrote it this way. The reason is that he wants to point out that—in a world where things come from their own side, and not from us—anything can happen before anything else: there would be no sequence to cause and effect, and it would literally be impossible for us to accomplish anything good in life.]**

9) Describe the difference between the emptiness of the person; the emptiness of things; and the tendency to believe in these two. And then connect the idea of “destruction view” to these, describing why it is so destructive. Finally, discuss when it is that we understand these two kinds of emptiness.

**[The emptiness of the person is the fact that ourselves, and anyone else we ever meet (like a yelling husband), is *not* coming from their own side—but rather from our side: from our seeds, planted when we did something to someone else before that. It is the fact that there never was and could not ever be a person who comes from their own side. This kind of emptiness almost always has a name: the “Mike” who is not there, or the “Elizabeth” who is not there.]**

**The emptiness of things is the emptiness of anything which is not a living being—which could even include the hands or legs of the living being, or their mind; but also obviously includes things like tables and chairs.**

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The “destruction view” is a specific Buddhist technical name for the belief that I myself (referring again to you by your name, such as “John” if your name is John)—or anything which is “mine” (“John’s”)—is coming from my own side. This is a kind of belief in the self-nature of a person, but not just any person: specifically, me or mine. It is focused on someone who is, for now, *destructible*: we will die. But in time the view itself can be *destroyed*.

It is said in the teachings on the Wheel of Life that this particular belief is the cause of all actions which plant impure mental seeds; producing either pain, or pleasure which becomes pain.

When we see emptiness directly for the first time, it is always the emptiness of ourselves *personally*: the first emptiness that John ever sees directly is the emptiness of John. And yet before that, when we are just learning about emptiness, it is most useful to start with a simple outer *thing*, such as a pen.]

10) Arya Nagarjuna is famous for giving us new and cool proofs of emptiness. Choney Lama describes four different ways in which these proofs work on us, saying that each one is different from the other, in some significant way. Name the four, and theorize about how they might be different from each other.

[Choney Lama says that proofs of emptiness work these four ways:

- (1) They get us thinking about whether something we think we see can stand up under correct reasoning, or not.
- (2) They show us ideas which correct reasoning can destroy.
- (3) They teach us how to look for certain things with an awareness based in correct reasoning, and discover that they cannot then be found.
- (4) They show us how the existence of certain things is denied completely by this type of logical awareness.

Students are free to give any well-thought-out examples of the above that they feel help differentiate between them.]

*Meditation assignment:*

Twice a day, do rounds 1 & 2 of the Lion’s Dance in a careful, enjoyable way spending as long as you have time to at each level—but still staying comfortable and inspired.

*Meditation dates and times:*

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*Please note that homeworks submitted without dates & times will not be accepted.*

## RealApp Assignment

Create a RealApp to accompany the material taught in this class. This is a principle derived from the material that relates to people's *real life* and is easily *applicable* to that life—a concept they might usefully meditate on, or utilize at work or in their family life.

1) Catchy title for your RealApp:

2) Description of the RealApp, in one or two sentences:

3) Description of the IDIM for your RealApp which you will look for on the internet, after the silent retreat period:

*For grader's use only*

Quality	Grade	Comments
Important?		
Creative?		
Authoritative?		
Use in real life?		
<b>Total</b>		