



The Wisdom of Arya Nagarjuna
Course One: The Eight Invisibles
Class 4—The Four Kinds of Conditions
Homework Master

1) An important concept in the Perfection of Wisdom literature is that of an “innovator.” Name the two great innovators of India and what they innovated, including the 6 parts of the classical definition of an innovator, and a comparison to modern times.

[The two great innovators of India are recognized as Arya Nagarjuna (c. 200AD) and Arya Asanga (350AD). Nagarjuna is the innovator of the Middle Way School, and Asanga is the innovator of the Mind Only School. Je Tsongkapa is recognized as the “Innovator of the Land of Snows,” or Tibet, due to the fact that he fulfills all six parts of the classical definition.

These six are that (1) the sage must be acting here in this world, and not for example in their own Buddha paradise. They (2) present the meaning of the word of the Buddha in a unique way of their own, (3) without following the way of another innovator. (4) It must have been predicted within the scriptures of that word, by the Buddha himself, that they specifically will be doing so. (All three innovators mentioned here were thus predicted). (5) They must be an arya (someone who has seen emptiness directly), and (6) they must be a bodhisattva: they must have undergone the direct experience of the Wish to achieve enlightenment.

In essence, they are creators of excellent RealApps!]

*2) What are the two general types of negative things recognized in Buddhism? What is the general description of each, and an example of each? Which of these two categories does emptiness itself belong to? Why is it useful to know which of the two it is?

[The two types of negatives recognized in Buddhism are (1) a simple absence of something; and (2) saying that something is not something, which leads our mind to a different place than where it was.

As an example of the first, Choney Lama gives both the fact that things have no nature of their own, and the absence of any existing thing (the first is emptiness).

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As an example of the second, he gives both “the opposite of all which is not a coffee cup” and the fact that “things which are not coffee cups do exist.”

Another famous example of the second is the statement: “This monk is very fat, but he does not eat during the day”—a negative statement which leads our mind to think he eats a lot at night.

Emptiness belongs to the first category, because it is the simple absence of something which is not coming from our seeds: the husband in the kitchen who is *not* coming from me, which is an impossible and non-existent husband.

When we make it clear that emptiness is the simple absence of something which cannot exist, it keeps us from making big mistakes about what emptiness is. For example, it could never be a kind of shining light, since that is not even any kind of negative thing: it is positive. Nor could it be thinking to stop our thoughts, which is also a positive thing. And so on: It can only be “seen” by the mental sense, at first indirectly through reasoning, and then directly by deep meditation—it could never be seen directly by a non-Buddha for example while they are chopping wood, etc.]

3) In this famous second verse, Arya Nagarjuna is examining all the possibilities for ways that things could ever start. What are the four choices he mentions? Why are three of them not very difficult choices to eliminate? How do we eliminate the fourth?

[Arya Nagarjuna says that things must either come from themselves; from something outside of themselves; from both of these choices; or without any cause at all. We’ve already seen how the first choice is impossible: if things came from themselves, then they would already be there before they came. Because they can’t come from themselves, they can’t come both from themselves and from something else together. And everyone can see that a thing that grows cannot come from no cause at all. This only leaves the possibility that things come from something other than themselves.

It would appear that this possibility is correct: trees come from seeds, which are things that are other than themselves; a car engine runs, because it is caused to run by the gasoline.

When we think about it carefully though, we can see that not every seed produces a tree. And not every car with gasoline will get you someplace. Apparently, a cause which is other than its result cannot *work*, unless something else is present. And that is the mental seeds which come from how we treat others.]

*4) Why is there an ancient argument over saying, “Things don’t come from themselves, or from both themselves and others; or from no cause at all—nor do they come from other things, at least from their own side.”

[The argument against adding “at least from their own side” here is that a person who misinterprets the very idea of a cause (thinking it works in and of itself) is also going to misinterpret, on a deep level, the very words “at least from their own side.” That is, the desire to add these words reflects the belief, deep down, that *they* have some power of their own to give understanding to the person who hears them. In time, this very disagreement led to the division between the upper and lower branches of the Middle Way School; and is why the lower branch is given the name it is.]

5) Why does Arya Nagarjuna bring up, in his third verse, all the four different types of factors which create things? Please list the four, and describe them very briefly—while commenting on the possibility of a fifth type of cause.

[Nagarjuna’s imaginary opponent in the first chapter of *Wisdom* is not unintelligent. He or she knows that three possibilities for how causes work are not possible.

They strongly believe, though, that causes which are a separate thing from their result (like a seed and a tree) *do* work, and from their own side. In support of this, they give a list of four different types of factors or causes which create things; this list was spoken by the Buddha himself, and because they all involve causation by “other” things, it must be the case (they say) that Buddha himself supported the idea that things cause things that are other than themselves.

The four types of factors here are:

(1) Causal factors: such as a seed for a tree. All working entities in the universe (equal to “all caused things” in the universe) have both “causal” factors and “self-sufficient” factors.

(2) Objects of perception (such as the color blue), which trigger an awareness of them in people who perceive them (the thought, “I see blue”).

(3) Factors that produce a result immediately after they themselves end. Classically, these are states of mind that lead directly into other states of mind—a subject which is traditionally considered important so that we can anticipate moods etc which might cause a negative thought; or even the direct perception of emptiness.

(4) The main, self-sufficient cause which produces any particular result. This is the same thing as anything which acts to cause anything else.

Nagarjuna says specifically in this verse that “there is no fifth type of cause.” He is referring specifically to a being or force (“big bang”) which could create the entire universe, without being created itself by something earlier.]

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*6) What is the basic problem—which Nagarjuna brings up in his fourth verse—with thinking that a seed could cause a tree, in the way that we normally think it does?

[If a seed caused a tree in the way that we normally think it does, then at some point the tree would have to depend on the seed; which means that the tree would have to touch the seed; which means the seed would have to still be there after it opened up and created the tree. If we think carefully about it, this is simply not possible. Trees must be coming from somewhere else!]

Meditation assignment:

Twice a day, do rounds 1 through 4 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:

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?		
Total		