



From Geshe Legtsok, A Method for Depicting the Sacred Biography of the Great Jetsun Tsongkhapa on Painted Cloth in One Hundred and Fifty-Three Parts

[P 2] Having worked for the welfare of the Buddha Dharma like this in the area of Nyal, Tsongkhapa then made his way to the area at the foot of Mt. Oday Gungyal where he stayed at Dagpo Lhading and gave many Dharma teachings. One evening an auspicious portent arose. Having made intense requesting prayers to the inseparable lama and deity, Tsongkhapa had a dream in which the holy father and four sons (Nagarjuna accompanied by Aryadeva, Buddhapalita, Bhavaviveka, and Chandrakirti) appeared discussing whether there is inherent existence or not. From their midst one tall pandit with a clear bluish complexion arose. Saying that he was Buddhapalita, he came toward Tsongkhapa's pillow carrying an

Indian scripture in his hand and placed it on his head bestowing a blessing.

The next morning, while reading this pandit's text, entitled Buddhapalita, Tsongkhapa gained definitive ascertainment of the distinction between the objects of negation according to the Consequentialist and Autonomist Schools. All of his mental elaborations grasping at signs were destroyed. By the power of gaining faith through understanding the Teacher, he composed the prayer, In Praise of Dependent Origination. Since that time, an auspicious dependent relationship is also created whenever his followers read this prayer



Thubten Jinpa,
Tsongkhapa - A
Buddha in the
Land of Snows,

Tsongkhapa's Breakthrough

Content with what he had been able to achieve in Nyal, Tsongkhapa and his group, by now over thirty in number, returned once again to the retreat in the Wölkha Valley known as Lhading ("gods floating in the air").

He would remain there for a full year, continuing with his intensive meditative practice and conducting teachings for his small band of wandering

contemplative monks.

Throughout all this, taking to heart what his meditation deity Mañjuśrī had advised during their last encounter—that he should critically reflect on the great treatises and compare them against Mañjuśrī's own oral instructions—

Tsongkhapa redoubled his efforts in the ongoing quest for deeper insight into emptiness. One night, he had a prophetic dream, in which he saw Nāgārjuna surrounded by four of his principal interpreters—Āryadeva (second century), Buddhapālita (fifth century), Bhāviveka (sixth century), and Candrakīrti (seventh century)—engaged in deep conversation.

Then, one of the figures, said to be Buddhapālita, came over to Tsongkhapa bearing a wrapped text and touched the top of his head with it.

Following the symbolism of his dream, the next morning Tsongkhapa plunged into Buddhapālita's exposition of Nāgārjuna's Treatise on the Middle Way. Tsongkhapa read and read, reflecting every now and then, and meditating on crucial points of Buddhapālita's presentation of the philosophy of emptiness. As Tsongkhapa was reading and meditating on the eighteenth chapter, "Analysis of Self and Phenomena," all of a sudden everything became crystal clear. All of Tsongkhapa's long-standing doubts—especially regarding how to find the extremely fine line demarcating what is negated in emptiness and what is left untouched—vanished without a trace.

He felt that nothing whatsoever was left for possible objectification—no object, no basis, no ground. Yet there was no danger, not even the slightest hint, of collapsing into nihilism or some kind of ineffable absolutism. Paradoxically, instead of being demolished, the world of cause and effect, right and wrong, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa seemed even more clear and regulated. Tsongkhapa knew exactly what Nāgārjuna meant when he wrote, centuries earlier:

To whom emptiness is possible, For him all is possible;
To whom emptiness is impossible, For him nothing is possible.

Later, speaking of the impact of this experience, Tsongkhapa would tell his attendants the following:

These days, with greater familiarity [with insight into emptiness], even in the postmeditation periods, I would have the perception of this entire world of diversity as being empty yet, in an illusion-like manner, maintaining its specific forms. And the perception of things as not "sealed" or marked by awareness of their emptiness—as objective facts with intrinsic reality—rarely arises in me now.