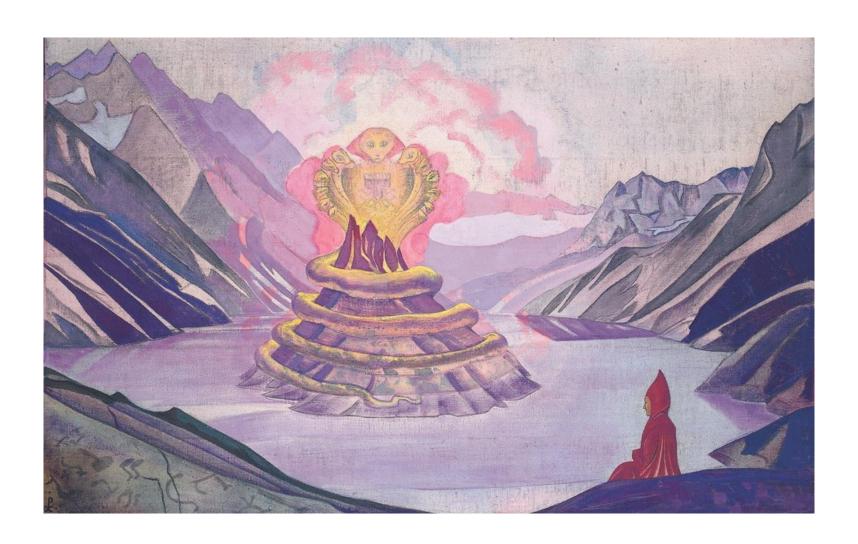# Nāgārjuna (c. 150 – 250 CE)
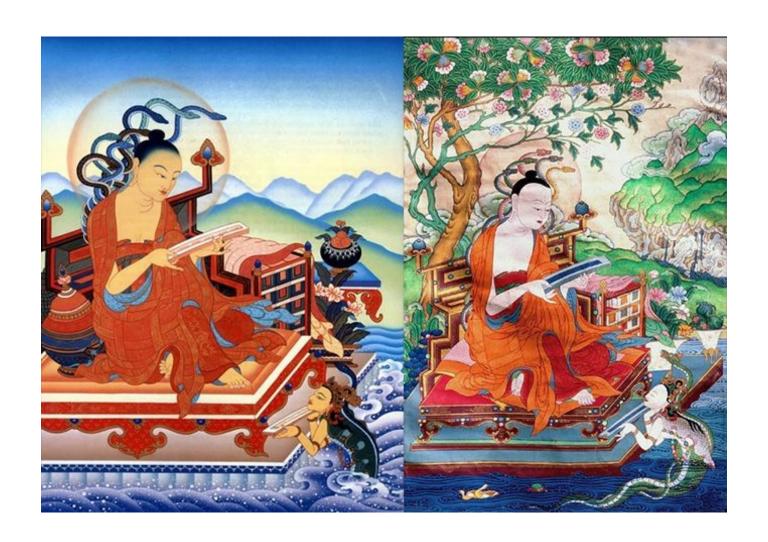
Nagarjuna's core text is the *Mulamadhyamakakarika*, or "Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way."
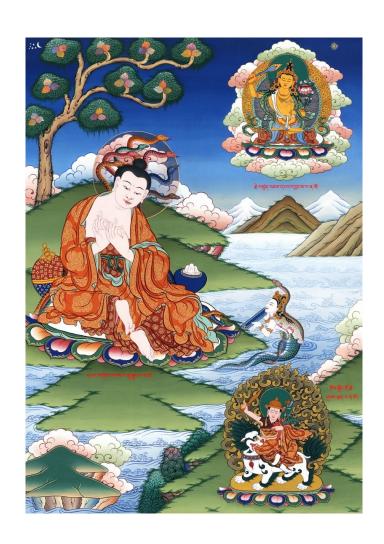
Nagarjuna means "Noble Serpent." The legend is that his teachings were given to him by snake-like beings called "nagas" that came out of the bottom of the sea. The story is that the Buddha, during his life, had given the teachings to these beings for safekeeping until the world was ready.

# From the "Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way," (Stephen Batchelor tr.)

## Self

Were mind and matter me,
I would come and go like them.
If I were something else,
They would say nothing about me.

What is mine
When there is no me?
Were self-centeredness eased,
I would not think of me and mine—
There would be no one there
To think them.

What is inside is me,
What is outside is mine—
When these thoughts end,
Compulsion stops,
Repetition ceases,
Freedom dawns.

Fixations spawn thoughts
That provoke compulsive acts—
Emptiness stops fixations.

Buddhas speak of "self"
And also teach "no self"
And also say "there's nothing
Which is either self or not."

When things dissolve,
There's nothing left to say.
The unborn and unceasing
Are already free.

Buddha said: "it is real,"
And "it is unreal,"
And "it is both real and unreal,"
And "it is neither one nor the other."

It is all at ease,
Unfixatable by fixations,
Incommunicable,
Inconceivable,
Indivisible.

You are not the same as or different from
Conditions on which you depend;
You are neither severed from
Nor forever fused with them—

This is the deathless teaching
Of buddhas who care for the world.

When buddhas don't appear
And their followers are gone,
The wisdom of awakening
Bursts forth by itself.

## Time

If I had a past,
What is now and yet to come
Would have already happened.
Were there no now and future then,
How could now and future
Ever have a past?

Without a past
There is no now and future;
What is now and still to come
Would never happen.

Past, present, future
Are like bottom, middle, top
And one, two, three.

You can't grasp time
And times you can
Are never time itself.
Why configure time you cannot grasp?

If time depends on things,
How could I ever have
Time apart from things?
Without things how can time persist?