
Study Group - “Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*”

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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18 July 2000

Just generate the proper motivation.

How Emptiness And Dependent Arising Are Complementary

We have finished the topic of how to see things as being like a magician's illusions in the period after meditating on emptiness. The commentary text then goes on to discuss how the understanding of the truth of emptiness and the understanding of the truth of dependent arising complement each other. This means that just as one's understanding of emptiness is based on the reasoning of dependent arising, so too understanding dependent arising is based on the reasoning of how things are being empty of inherent existence.

Creating a formal logical structure to show the relationship that exists between emptiness and dependent arising is a most effective way of understanding how emptiness and dependent arising are complementary to one another. This logic involves the application of dependent arising as the reason which proves that a sprout is empty of true or inherent existence.

If we put this into a logical syllogism then the sprout (the subject) is empty of this true or inherent existence (the predicate) because of dependent arising (the reason). Here, the thesis is that the sprout is empty of true or inherent existence. You establish this thesis that it does not exist from its own side by applying this reason of dependent arising, and through using dependent arising as a reason, you come to fully understand the emptiness of true existence. By using that reason you understand how these two truths of emptiness and dependent arising complement each other, and can be used to explain the meaning of what is referred to as conventional truth.

In the commentary it is said that through understanding the interdependence of emptiness and dependent arising, one is able to refute or negate the extreme views of existence. When we use a sprout as a subject to establish the emptiness of true existence, we need to have the knowledge which refutes the mode of apprehension of the innate conception which grasps at the true, or self existence of the sprout.

Here the reason used is to say that the sprout is a dependent arising in the sense that it depends upon causes and conditions. In a way it is a reasoning similar to that which is directly used by a farmer, and which most people automatically understood in past eras. In order for the sprout to grow it is dependent upon the coming together of various causes and conditions which include the seed, water, manure, heat, moisture and

many other phenomena. The collection of the various phenomena results in a sprout. By applying these reasons one is able to refute the view of the innate conception of the self, or the self-grasping of the sprout.

Although the fact, that the sprout is an outcome of the meeting of the various causes and conditions, is very obvious when we think about it, to the mind which perceives the sprout it appears to have inherent independent existence of its own. Therefore in order to realise emptiness we have to actually negate the mode of apprehension of that innate conception of grasping at the sprout as having true existence. We have to actually refute that view of the innate conception of that sprout.

That negation of the innate conception of the grasping of self is not something we can develop just theoretically, using some formula of words which mean 'by applying this reasoning of dependent arising'. Rather, we should gain our understanding of the lack of inherent existence of the sprout, for instance, through our meditations, by using this reasoning of dependent arising. As it says in the text, as a benefit of that reasoning of dependent arising, due to an understanding of the truth of the appearance of things, one is able to overcome the extreme views of existence.

In order to understand the lack of true inherent existence of the sprout, one also needs to consider what kind of existence the sprout would have if it existed inherently. If it existed inherently then of course it would not be dependent on any causes and conditions. So it would not have different stages of development. This means that if the sprout existed inherently, it would always remain as a sprout, and not have any other stage of development.

The fact is, however, that the sprout does undergo various stages of development. From a sprout it grows into a plant bearing a fruit, which is then utilised by humans and animals and so forth. All these facts show that the sprout is empty of inherent existence. This understanding of how the sprout is a causal or conditioned phenomena, helps our understanding of emptiness. At the same time our understanding of emptiness, the fact that the sprout is empty of inherent or true existence, supports our understanding of the sprout as being a dependent arising. The truth of the causal links of the sprout thus become very feasible, and so in this way we can understand how emptiness and dependent arising are complementary to each other.

In fact if we understand the meaning of dependent arising properly, then through this reasoning we can automatically gain a knowledge of emptiness. The

various schools of tenets have different views on the meaning of dependent arising. In brief the Sanskrit terms for 'dependent arising' indicate the meaning of the word 'meeting' as well as the meaning of 'dependent' and 'arising'. The various schools of tenets place a different interpretation on the meaning of 'meeting'.

The Svatantrika and Cittamatin schools of tenet interpret 'meeting' as 'meeting with causes and conditions'. This means that something which is a dependent arising is dependent upon causes and conditions. According to these two schools the truth of this dependent arising only covers conditional phenomena, not all phenomena.

However the Madhyamika Middle Way school says that 'meeting' means something which depends upon its parts. In general this means that a dependant arising is anything which depends upon either causes and conditions, or its parts. From this point of view all things or phenomena are dependent arisings.

We have to understand that this is something which we have to affirm for ourselves. We know of course that that food does not arrive on our plate automatically, and that we have to create or meet all the causes and conditions for it to do so. Yet we are not always aware of the fact that these everyday events are dependent arisings. We are not familiar with the view that everything is a dependent arising, and we do not automatically view everything that we perceive in that way. In fact, the text says that if we gain a more complete understanding of things as being dependent arisings then this is a very effective means to understand the lack of inherent existence.

Geshe-la says that some of you may remember His Holiness the Dalai Lama's teachings in Bodhgaya earlier this year where he explained the meaning of dependent arising in a very detailed and clear-cut way. Geshe Doga says that he felt very strongly at the time that the explanation was so vivid and so clear in his mind, but now he is afraid to try to repeat it because he now probably cannot fully recall the explanation.

What does it mean when you have this very firm understanding of things being dependent arisings? It means that your personal view is that things exist because of meeting the causes and conditions or their parts.

Such a firm understanding and strong awareness almost automatically leads one to understand the lack of inherent existence of those things. This is what understanding depending arising through the meaning of emptiness means. Likewise the meaning of emptiness can also be understood by the meaning of dependent arising. This is because, as we just discussed, when we contemplate the meaning of emptiness by saying, for example, 'the sprout is empty of inherent existence', indirectly the implication is that the sprout is dependent upon other phenomena. With the understanding of the emptiness of inherent existence one is negating the fact that the sprout, for instance, exists inherently rather than existing by depending upon the force of the designating name and the mind. This negation of the sprout's lack of true, or inherent existence leads one to understand dependent arising. So emptiness and dependent arising

have mutually complementary meanings.

We have just discussed how if we apply dependent arising to establish the emptiness of inherent existence of a sprout for instance, then the benefit is gaining the middle view, free of the extremes of both existence or non-existence. Through understanding dependent arising one understands the meaning of emptiness. Thus by understanding the appearance, which refers to the conventional truth or the dependent arising, one avoids the extreme of existence.

At the same time by understanding emptiness one is able to avoid the extreme of non-existence. That is because one's understanding of emptiness itself is the proof of the conventional or relative truth. Therefore the unique qualities of the view of the Madhyamika Prasangika school is that one is able to gain the knowledge that the meanings of emptiness and dependent arising complement each other.

The lam rim text provides further scriptural sources from the sutras, from Nagarjuna's root text *The Fundamental Wisdom*, and also Lama Tsong Khapa's *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*. There are quotations from each of those sources on the way emptiness and dependent arising are complementary.

The lam rim text goes on to say that understanding emptiness according to the Prasangika point of view can be a great source of motivation to engage in all the spiritual practices, such as practising virtuous actions and abandoning non-virtuous actions, and particularly the practice of generating love and compassion. One sees an even greater importance of all these spiritual practices. This Prasangika point of view leads one to make a greater effort with one's spiritual practice in both wisdom and method, and not one without the other. The capacity to lead one to such a complete practice is said to be the unique, uncommon quality of following the view of the Prasangika school of tenet.

Next week we begin the teaching on the selflessness of other phenomena. If we follow the commentary, which is quite clear and self-explanatory, it should not take a long time to cover.

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

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Note on authentication

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