



EMPTINESS, WEEK 12

MEDITATION ON THE KING OF REASONS

FIRST FEW MINUTES

Touch in with your motivation for this meditation. Begin by connecting with your actual motivation. Then, see if you can expand from that motivation to include a longer view, and expand the scope.

PART ONE

“By understanding that phenomena are dependently arisen, we will be able to dispel the exaggerated notion that they exist from their own side, that the objects of our internal and external universe have a concrete, objective reality... By having a good understanding of the dependent nature of phenomena, we can see that things exist, that they function, that they arise in dependency on other factors. And so that frees us from nihilism, the wrong notion that all phenomena are non-existent.”

Geshe Tashi Tsering, *Emptiness*, p.110

A Review of Causal Dependency

This level of dependent arising means that each and every result is completely dependent on causes.

Geshe Tashi writes, “Every Buddhist master has emphasised that the main focus of our investigation should be on what is most important to us, how to overcome pain and difficulties and experience happiness and joy.”

What is most important to you?

A Review of Mutual Dependency

There are several important examples that we can use to illustrate this level of dependent arising.

i. Nagarjuna famously mentions here and there, near and far, self and other. Other abstract things, like short and tall, good and bad, are also mutually dependent. Why might it be useful to have an awareness of these kinds of dependencies in your day to day life?

ii. We know results depend on causes. But if we think causal dependency only goes one way, then Prasangika masters say we are only looking from a material level. For mutual dependency, both material and conceptual aspects need to be considered.

An apple seed is dependent for its existence on the apple, for example. Without taking into consideration the apple as a result, how can we posit an apple seed?

Take a moment to consider how the conceptual mind is involved in the following examples of mutual dependency as well:

Fire depends on fuel; and fuel depends on fire.

A commuter depends on the commute; and the commute depends on the commuter.

An action depends on an agent; but the agent depends on the action.

A Review of Merely Labelled Dependency

This is the most subtle level of dependent arising. Any object's label depends on the basis, but the basis also depends on the label. They are mutually dependent on each other for their existence.



EMPTINESS, WEEK 12

MEDITATION ON THE KING OF REASONS

“Without the mere designation there can be no basis of designation and vice versa. If there is no collection of legs, seat, and back, how can I put the label ‘chair’ on it? And if there is no label, how can it be more than a collection of the parts?”

Geshe Tashi Tsering, *Emptiness*, p.116

We can now move to something more central to our spiritual path. According to Madhyamika Prasangika, neither the “I” nor the aggregates intrinsically exist because they are mutually dependent on each other for their existence.

Geshe Tashi writes, “The only way the ‘I’ exists is as a mere label. It is just a designation to describe the relationship of the five aggregates. And our five aggregates function as the person we are because there is this merely labelled ‘I’.”

Does this mean that anything could be labelled as anything, and it will then function as such?

According to Prasankigas, the label must be appropriate to the basis, and the basis must be appropriate to the label. There is, Geshe la says, “an intimate relationship between the parts that form the base of designation, the function, and the designation itself.”

Due to this level of dependent arising, Geshe Tashi quotes His Holiness as saying, A pretty flower or a wonderful house never has and never will exist from its own side. It exists through the power of the mind, through the power of convention.

PART TWO

Daily Investigations into Dependent Arising

We suggest you take a different object each day and investigate its three dependencies.

1. First take a straightforward, familiar object from your life, a personal or domestic item for example.

Without examination, how does this object appear to you?

Now examine to see, what are its causal dependencies?

What are its mutual dependencies?

What are its dependencies that are merely labelled, or merely posited by the mind?

What makes up the basis and what makes up the label?

If this is the way the object exists, no more, no less, what are the implications for your experience of this object?

For us to say this object exists or doesn’t exist, how much is it dependent on your mind?

What else is involved?

2. Then move to a more complex object, such as an unpleasant event, a disagreement, or a difficult situation from your life.

How did this appear to you at the time?

Now examine, what were the causal dependencies involved?

What were the mutual dependencies?

What were the dependencies that are merely posited by the mind?



EMPTINESS, WEEK 12

MEDITATION ON THE KING OF REASONS

What makes up the basis and what makes up the label?
How much of what happened is dependent on your mind?
What are the implications of the analysis you are doing?

3. Now turn to yourself, the you that exists.

In what ways are you caused?

“I am, I feel, I’m happy, I’m tired, I’m upset.” What are the causes and conditions for your sense of “I” to arise?

What causes, circumstances and dependencies have shaped you, influenced you, changed you?

How much of you is dependent on your mind?

What makes up the basis of you and what makes up the label?

Is there any part of you that isn’t dependently arisen in any of these three ways?

Spend a few moments with the implications of your analysis.

As the week progresses, allow some stillness and space for understandings and insights to arise.

PART THREE

Contemplating Dependent Arising & Emptiness

In our previous meditations, we looked at emptiness as proof of the absence of independence. Here we have looked at dependent arising as proof of dependence. Both of these approaches are, as Geshe Tashi says, two sides of the same coin or a dual perspective on one and the same world.

“Whatever is dependently co-arisen,
That is explained to be emptiness.
That, being a dependent designation,
Is itself the middle way.”

Arya Nagarjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*

We can go further:

“Appearance clears away the extreme of existence;
Voidness clears away the extreme of non-existence.
When you understand the arising of cause and effect from the viewpoint of voidness,
You are not captivated by either extreme view.”

Lama Tsongkhapa, *The Three Principle Aspects of the Path*
(p.124 of the course book)

DEDICATION

In conclusion generate a determination to gain a greater experiential understanding into the nature of reality, and to experience the longer term benefits from this. As much as possible try expanding these benefits to others around you, widening the circle of your care and concern.