

## 2. Dependent Arising and Emptiness

The passage up to the fifth line of the third paragraph, "the five aggregates are empty of any inherent nature of their own," is the brief answer about how to meditate on emptiness. Following that is the extensive explanation.

First is an extensive explanation of the meaning of emptiness in relation to form, **Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form and form is not other than emptiness.**

This detailed explanation of emptiness in relation to form is followed by an explanation of how to apply it to the remaining aggregates and other phenomena such as the twelve links of dependent arising. What you understand from the discussion of emptiness in relation to form, should be applied to other phenomena such as the eighteen elements, the twelve sources, the twelve links of dependent arising and the Four Noble Truths.

Evidently, it is important to understand how this works in relation to form because then you can apply it to anything else.

In brief, it says that all phenomena (everything which exists) are empty of existing by their very nature (by their own nature). There are various ways to express this. One can say either that everything is empty of true existence or of self-existence.

With cause and effect, for example mother and child, the mother is the cause, and the child is the effect. As an effect the child depends upon the mother as a cause. It is straightforward to understand how results depend upon causes - the child depends upon the mother because the mother gave birth to the child. However, somebody cannot be called a mother without there being a child to be mother of, so also the mother exists depending upon the child.

One can easily see that the child's existence depends upon the mother. However, one might have doubts about the idea of the mother's existence depending on the child. This illustrates cause depending on effect, not simply effect depending on cause.

According to the highest system of Buddhist philosophy, the Prasangika (Consequentialist)<sup>1</sup> system, not only do effects depend on causes, but causes also depend on effects. They say the mother depends on the child. This is obvious when one considers how a woman does not become a mother merely by reaching a certain age, such as by becoming an adult. She becomes a mother by having a child. Without a child there would

be no mother.

Likewise a series of moments culminates in the formation of a particular object. The later moments depend upon the earlier moments, but also the earlier moments of the series exist in dependence on the later moments.

In terms of time, a year, being composed of twelve months, depends on twelve months. Regardless of the different lengths of months - thirty or thirty-one days and so on - a month exists depending on its days, a day depends on twenty-four hours, an hour depends on sixty minutes and so on. Parts and whole are mutually interdependent.

Likewise with respect to short and long, something is only long in comparison to something shorter and something can only be short in comparison with something longer. There are many other instances of this principle. For example, inside and outside: outside only exists in relation to inside and inside only exists in relation to outside. Likewise, big and small. Moreover, with cloth - fine cloth or coarse weave cloth - or thick and thin. We can understand this if we apply our minds to it.

One can see how a large object like a house exists depending upon its various parts and can see an interdependent relationship in so many other things too. The more one reflects the more one sees that everything exists and comes into being through depending on something else. One simply cannot find anything that cannot be analysed or described in this way.

According to the Consequentialist system of Buddhist philosophy which is the system of this commentary, there is nothing which does not exist depending upon something else. For example a watch for telling the time can only exist through the convergence and fitting together of its various parts. Since nothing is completely independent, not depending upon something or other, there is nothing self-existent. This is because to be self-existent would be to exist in and of itself without depending on anything else, whereas everything exists through depending on something else.

"Emptiness" implies the non-existence of something. When we use the term "emptiness", something is denied or negated. What is negated or denied is a thing's being self-existent, where self-existence implies the capacity to come into being and exist without depending on anything else. Nothing exists completely independently of anything else; everything depends upon something. For that reason everything is empty, meaning "empty of self-

existence".

The great master Nagarjuna says in *The Fundamental Stanzas on Wisdom* that there is nothing at all which is not dependent and therefore, there is nothing at all which is not empty. If one could find something not dependent, in other words completely independent of anything, one would have found something self-existent, because self-existent means existing in and of itself without having to depend upon anything else. Thus it would not be empty. If something were independent it would not be empty, because empty means "empty of self-existence". Emptiness negates the self-existence of everything.

It is said that "empty" and "dependent arising" are synonyms - possessing the same import. This means that saying something is dependent means it depends on this and that, and so is not independent. If it is dependent, of course it is not independent and the fact that you know it to be dependent means you know it not to be independent. If it is not independent, it is empty of being independent, or empty of being self-existent, because "independent" means 'self-existent', these being the same thing. "Empty of being self-existent" is exactly what is meant by saying things are empty.

Recognising something as empty enables recognition of it as dependent; it comes to the same thing. Being empty means "empty of self-existence", or empty of existing in and of itself, independent of anything else. Therefore if it is empty it is not independent. Not being independent must mean that it depends, because these are opposites. Therefore thinking about something's being dependent brings one to the same conclusion, that it must be empty. Thinking about how something is empty brings one to the conclusion that it is dependent, so in this sense "empty" and "dependent" have the same import and may be regarded as synonyms.

Thus, saying something is either empty or dependent comes to the same thing, because something's being empty means it is empty of self-existence or not self-existent. It is not self-existent because self-existent would mean independent of anything else. Being empty of being self-existent means to depend. Whether you describe something as empty or dependent it means the same thing.

Source: <http://www.lamayashe.com/article/chapter/2-dependent-arising-and-emptiness>