

B2. The Buddha Is the Only Unimpeachable One for Those Who Seek Liberation

C1. Establish the Faultlessness of Buddhism

D1. Establish the Faultlessness of the Teaching of Dependent Origination and Emptiness

E1. Explain the Meaning of Dependent Origination and Emptiness

F1. Brief Explanation

G1. Emptiness Means Dependent Origination

Verse 5

*“Whatsoever depends on conditions,
That is devoid of intrinsic existence.”
What excellent instruction can there be
(That is) more amazing than this proclamation?*

“Whatever depends on conditions is devoid of a self-establishing nature.” What could be a more amazing, excellent manner of instructing than this statement?

- a. Things that arise from causes and conditions, possess the nature of emptiness

The Buddha taught us that dependent arising means that everything that arises and whose existence is dependent upon others is devoid of intrinsic existence and is therefore empty by nature, like an illusory phenomena. As is said in both the *Mah ratnak a Sutra*¹ (*The Sutra of the Heap of Jewels*) and *Sa yukta gama*²,

*Because this exists, that exists;
Because of the arising of this, that arises as well;
Because of this not existing, that also does not exist;
Because of the cessation of this, that ceases as well.*

This verse explains the true meaning of dependent arising. There are two types of dependent arising. The first type is that, since A arises as a result of B, A and B have a relationship of cause and effect; this is like the relationship between a seed and a seedling. The second type of dependent arising is that the existence of A is dependent on the existence of B, like the relationship between east and west, or right and left, all of which are established by conceptual thoughts and exist only in a relative manner. No matter which type of dependent arising we are observing, phenomena that is dependent on causes and conditions must possess the nature of emptiness. As it is said in the *Treatise on the Great Virtue of Wisdom of Nagarjuna (Maha Prajnaparamita Sastra)*³, “All things come from a complex of causes and conditions and as they have no self-nature, they are emptiness.” This means that everything arises depending upon causes and conditions, and as a result, lacks intrinsic nature; hence it is emptiness.

If one fully understands that the nature of all phenomena is emptiness due to dependent arising, then this person will break free from cyclic existence. We may ask ourselves, who

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mah%C4%81ratnak%C5%AB%E1%B9%ADa_S%C5%ABtra

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C4%80gama_%28Buddhism%29#Ekottara_.C4.80gama

³ It is a commentary on the *Perfection of Wisdom in Five Thousand Lines*, and only survives in Chinese.

then has the ability to give such excellent teachings? Only Buddha Shakyamuni, our fundamental teacher, who saw and taught this amazing and excellent knowledge to all living beings. Nobody else has ever had the wisdom to propose such an enlightened understanding. This is because worldly people either believe that everything is permanent, or affirm that nothing exists at all, and thus are confined by the wrong view of these extremes.

b. Only the Buddha teaches the genuine knowledge of liberation

The statement that the gathering of causes and conditions generates all phenomena and that the falling apart of causes and conditions leads to its corresponding cessation is uniquely compelling. Such excellent instruction can only be found in the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni and is not a part of any other religious tradition or philosophy. According to the *Compendium of Valid Cognition*⁴ (Pram nav rtikak rika), the Buddha is the only teacher who compassionately shared this genuine knowledge of liberation through his teachings on the four noble truths. In fact, the four noble truths share the exact same meaning as the instruction on dependent arising. The first truth relates the current situation of ordinary beings, which is suffering. The second truth outlines the cause of suffering, which is ignorance. How then does one go about eradicating ignorance and the suffering it produces? By following the fourth truth, the path of the cessation of suffering, which is the realization of emptiness that leads to the third truth, the truth of cessation.

I believe that many more intelligent people would develop an irreversible faith in Buddhism if they were to see the wisdom of this principle as a result of their own learning and observation, in conjunction with guidance from their teachers. However, if their understanding does not progress beyond a superficial level, some may lose their faith when confronted by competing philosophical views. Therefore, the wise should study the theory of emptiness and dependent arising deeply and meticulously, to see for themselves why the teaching is not only absolutely reasonable but also reveals the truth of all phenomena.

G2. The Seeing of Dependent Origination Is the Key to Liberation

Verse 6

*By grasping at it the childish,
Strengthen bondage to extreme views;
For the wise this very fact is the doorway,
To cut free from the net of elaborations.*

This real fact (of dependent arising) which, if grasped at (as establishing true existence), makes infantile beings' bondage to grasping for extremes more firm, is the gateway for the learned to cut all the webs of their mental fabrication, without any exception.

a. The different kinds of grasping at extreme views

This verse tells us that deluded beings assume all phenomena that arises from causes and conditions to be true existence. Even in Buddhism, regardless of whether we refer to the Vaibhashika School⁵, the Sautrantika School⁶ or the Chittamatra School⁷, they all believe that

⁴ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Compendium_of_Valid_Cognition

⁵ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Vaibhashika>

phenomena arising from causes and conditions possess the nature of true existence. The followers of the Chittamatra School believe that all phenomena arise from alaya consciousness⁸ (storehouse consciousness), and that alaya consciousness truly exists. The followers of the Vaibhashika and the Sautrantika Schools believe that all phenomena arise from indivisible particles of matter⁹ or indivisible moments of consciousness¹⁰, the self-nature of which is intrinsic existence rather than emptiness.

Here the Buddha says that those who cling to that which comes about as a result of dependent arising as true existence are the “childish people”. As it is said in the *Lankavatara Sutra*, “Not knowing the arising of causes and conditions, ignorant beings create all delusions.” Those who are not following any tradition and those who are following the Buddhist schools that don’t contain the ultimate teaching of the Buddha are all driven by their delusions and regard all phenomena as true existence. However, the wise people who follow the school of the Middle Way clearly understand that the nature of all phenomena is emptiness. This is because they are aware of the fact that they arise from causes and conditions.

b. The gateway that the wise should enter

For those learned people who truly understand dependent arising as emptiness, this very fact is the gateway to cut away the web of their conceptual fabrications. As we know, conceptual fabrication is like a web that fetters living beings within samsara. Therefore, the wise who completely understand the philosophy of the Middle Way, those Vajrayana practitioners who have achieved the Great Perfection or Mahamudra, and those great Zen masters who have recognized the nature of mind, would never believe that there is anything truly and permanently existing, because they see the true reality of dependent arising and have eradicated all kinds of grasping at extreme views.

The theory of dependent arising is the most wonderful and unsurpassable teaching within all of the reasoning that makes up the philosophy of the Middle Way. Briefly speaking, it tells us that no phenomenon possesses real existence, because all phenomena arise from causes and conditions. Or vice versa, because all phenomena arise from causes and conditions, their nature is emptiness, therefore they are beyond all conceptual elaborations.

It is well known, that in order to comprehend that the ego has no self-nature, one may use either Chandrakirti’s seven-fold reasoning¹¹ of the chariot or Nagarjuna’s five-fold reasoning, while as a means to establish the truth that no phenomenon has self-nature, one may rely on the argument of the Diamond Splinters¹². All of these different methods of reasoning essentially belong to the principle of dependent arising. In other words, as long as

⁶ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Sautrantika>

⁷ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Chittamatra>

⁸ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=All-ground_consciousness

⁹ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Partless_particle

¹⁰ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Indivisible_moment_of_consciousness

¹¹ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Sevenfold_reasoning_of_the_chariot

¹² http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Four_great_logical_arguments_of_the_Middle_Way

one understands the nature of dependent arising, one will be able to destroy all conceptual fabrications, without any exception, and thereby achieve ultimate freedom from samsara.

This statement is not based on any arbitrary opinion or personal preference. Through unbiased and meticulous observation, one will certainly come to find that no person or philosophical system can overthrow the principle of dependent arising. Observation or examination is actually indispensable in Buddhism, which is one of the aspects that make it a religion of wisdom. The Buddha never claimed that one should accept his teaching only because he was the Buddha. In Buddhism, faith is never regarded as a requirement before becoming a Buddhist; in fact, reasonable doubt is strongly encouraged. For this reason, Buddhist practitioners carefully examine the Buddha's teaching for themselves and thus develop real wisdom from within.

On the other hand, generally speaking, Buddhism does require that practitioners possess a certain amount of reasonable doubt and sentimental faith. In certain instances, faith can be regarded as essential, and sometimes doubt is necessary for a rational faith to be developed. Regardless of the method, the ultimate goal is to discover one's own innate wisdom; this is the ultimate meaning of the Three Jewels.

G3. Thus Concludes the Statement that the Buddhist Teachings Exceed Other Doctrines

Verse 7

*Since this teaching is not seen elsewhere,
You alone are the Teacher;
Like calling a fox a lion, for a Tirthika
It would be a word of flattery.*

As this teaching is not seen in others, then the title "Teacher" is really yours (alone); it's a sham word, however, if also (used) for those with heterodox (views), like "lion" for the species "fox".

a. The heterodox view

Dependent arising is the essence of the Buddha's teachings. Other than Buddhism, no other traditions or religions in this world see this truth, nor do they give these teachings. A worldly scholar is only familiar with the knowledge in his or her own field. For example, an astronomer or a physicist who wishes to learn about a particular area of interest, may have to rely on readings taken by highly technical instruments, even though these instruments measure only a tiny part of the relative dependent arising. It is only Buddha Shakyamuni who deserves the title of "fundamental teacher" as he is the only one who is able to guide living beings onto the path to enlightenment so that they may achieve ultimate freedom.

In relation to the term "heterodox", in ancient India there were six tirthika¹³ schools who used to debate with Buddha Shakyamuni. Three of these were the Samkhya School¹⁴, the Vaisheshika School¹⁵ and the Lokayata School¹⁶. The followers of these schools regarded their

¹³ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Tirthika>

¹⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samkhya>

¹⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaisheshika>

founders as the most perfect teachers in this world. But by examining the teachings of each of these schools, one can only come to the conclusion that none of them were deserving of such a title, and that, in fact, to call them so would be like calling a fox a lion. Tirthika teachers such as these do not at all deserve to be called the fundamental teachers because none of them understand the principle of dependent arising. They either hold that all phenomena are permanent, or insist that all phenomena are nothingness; some of these so-called “teachers” even deny the existence of previous and future lives. In these lines, Lama Tsongkhapa says that to call a tirthika a teacher, makes a sham out of the word and would be the same as calling a fox a lion.

b. The lion’s roar

The teaching of the essential principle of dependent arising is like the roar of a lion. Nagarjuna says, “Since all phenomena arise from causes and conditions, the Buddha claims that their nature is emptiness. The teaching that nothing possesses intrinsic existence resembles the roaring of a lion.” Like the roaring of a lion that scares away all other beasts, the Buddha’s teaching negates all other heterodox views. For one who hears and understands the teaching of dependent arising, there can be no retort.

If, after listening to and studying the philosophy of the Middle Way, one truly believes that the teaching of dependent arising and emptiness is unexcelled, then one will never fall into one of the hell realms in this or future lives. This is also the result that arises from having complete and sincere faith in the Buddha’s teaching, although faith is not the only way to realize the teaching of dependent arising. When one truly understands the theory of dependent arising, then one is able to realize that all phenomena are merely illusory and without any solid entity.

For us ordinary beings, even though we see these manifested delusions, we fail to recognize their true reality. For instance, a pillar or a bottle that we see in our daily life, even when viewed from the perspective of modern physics, is in a state of high-speed motion all of the time, even though our eyes delude us into believing it to be static. If our sense faculties delude us to the point that we can’t even see this fact on the relative level, then on a more profound level, the ultimate truth is most certainly beyond our ordinary perception. In spite of this, it is our great fortune that we are able to hear and study such truth in the teachings of the Buddha, from whom we have already heard that appearance is emptiness and emptiness is none other than appearance.

The teaching of dependent arising does not need too many words to be expressed, and is actually very well presented in just this one verse,

*All dharmas originate from causes.
The Tathagata has taught these causes,
And also that which puts a stop to these causes—
This too has been taught by the Great Shramana.*

Although this verse seems simple, it contains the essence of all of the Buddha’s teachings. For those people with great merit, realizing or truly understanding the essence of

¹⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charvaka>

this Dharma teaching is not that difficult, but for those without an auspicious connection to the Buddha, understanding its profound meaning will not be easy.

Verse 8

*Wondrous teacher! Wondrous refuge!
Wondrous speaker! Wondrous savior!
I pay homage to that teacher
Who taught well dependent origination.*

How wondrous – a Teacher! How wondrous – a Safe Direction! How wondrous – a Supreme Speaker! How wondrous – a Guardian! I prostrate to (you) that Teacher, who spoke excellently about dependent arising.

c. The meaning of the four *Wondrous*

Here Lama Tsongkhapa uses “wondrous” four times to praise Buddha Shakyamuni. In the first instance, “wondrous teacher”, means that Buddha Shakyamuni is the authentic teacher of all living beings. Why? Because the Buddha through his own wisdom realized both the relative truth of appearance and the ultimate truth of emptiness. As Ju Mipham Rinpoche said in his *Beacon of Certainty*¹⁷,

*Emptiness and existence are contradictory
In the mind of an ordinary person.
But here, this manifest Coalescence is said to be wonderful;
The learned praise it with words of amazement.*

So the first “wondrous” indicates that the fundamental teacher Buddha Shakyamuni has the profound and unsurpassable wisdom that perceives the true nature of all phenomena. This is so wondrous!

The second usage, “wondrous refuge”, tells us that those who possess only wisdom or intelligence may not be endowed with the suitable qualities to be the refuge for living beings. However, with his unconditioned compassion, the Buddha treats all living beings in the three realms, as a loving mother would treat her only son. It is for this reason that the Buddha is the refuge for all living beings. Out of his great compassion, the Buddha takes responsibility for removing the suffering of all living beings. This is why the Buddha is the wondrous refuge!

The third usage, “wondrous speaker” refers to the Buddha’s perfect way of teaching. The Buddha applies the principle of dependent arising to point out the true reality of all phenomena, which relatively speaking, is the illusory appearance arising from causes and conditions, and ultimately speaking, is emptiness beyond all conceptual elaborations. This perfect and unexcelled teaching can never be taught by any other worldly scholar, therefore the Buddha is the wondrous speaker.

In the fourth usage, “wondrous savior” states that the Buddha is the savior of all living beings. Why? Because the Buddha not only takes care of living beings with great compassion, but also guides them on to the right path of liberation. There are some sages who are also regarded by their disciples as the refuge, because they have a broad scope of knowledge, however they cannot guide their disciples on the path of liberation. As a result,

¹⁷ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Beacon_of_Certainty

these people remain blind and have no way to break free from the suffering of cyclic existence. The Buddha, on the contrary, has taught the 84,000 Dharma paths, which can guide living beings of all different capacities towards liberation. That is why the Buddha is called the wondrous savior of this world.

In *the Introduction to the Middle Way*¹⁸, it is said,

*And so things are produced dependently;
The theories just mentioned cannot be believed.
The argument that all “arises in dependence”
Cuts in pieces all mistaken views.*

The Buddha has told us that all phenomena arise from causes and conditions. This truth is perceived only by the Buddha’s profound wisdom, and cannot be arrived at by conceptual thinking. This sophisticated principle surpasses all the other arguments¹⁹ of the Middle Way, such as the Diamond Splinters, or the argument of “neither one nor many”. Therefore, it is able to eliminate all of the attachments or delusions of this world. It is exactly because the Buddha taught this principle that he is the authentic teacher and guide of all living beings. Therefore, in front of the Buddha with such qualities, Lama Tsongkhapa again pays homage with great joy and sincere respect.

Upon having achieved enlightenment and grasping the essence of dependent arising, Lama Tsongkhapa was greatly moved and filled with gratitude when he thought of the Buddha’s incomparable kindness and of his profound teaching. In fact, anyone who achieves such enlightenment would, like the author, surely bow to the Buddha with sincere reverence.

F2. Extensive Elaboration

G1. The Union of Dependent Origination and Emptiness Is the Ultimate Teaching of the Buddha

H1. One Cannot Comprehend the Buddha’s Teachings if Misunderstanding Dependent Origination

Verse 9

*To help heal sentient beings,
O Benefactor, you have taught
The peerless reason to ascertain
Emptiness, the heart of the teaching.*

You, the Benefactor, prescribed it as a medicine for wandering beings, (since) it’s the peerless line of reasoning for ascertaining voidness, the heart of your teachings.

a. The Peerless Reason to Ascertain Emptiness

The Buddha, as the benefactor of all living beings, has taught the authentic Dharma of emptiness, which is like a medicine specifically prescribed for beings who are wandering in samsara. This compelling and irrefutable proof of the empty nature of all phenomena precisely reveals the principle of dependent arising. As Nagarjuna says in *The Root Stanzas*

¹⁸ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Introduction_to_the_Middle_Way

¹⁹ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Four_great_logical_arguments_of_the_Middle_Way

on the Middle Way,

*Because there is nothing that is not
Dependent arisen,
There is nothing
That is not empty.*

There are two meanings within this teaching. One is that there are no things that do not arise from causes and conditions; the other is that there are no things that do not possess the nature of emptiness. The principle of dependent arising reveals the heart of the Buddha's teaching, and it is the unsurpassed reason to ascertain emptiness, although it can only be understood by those who have earnestly studied the philosophy of the Middle Way. As followers of the Buddha Shakyamuni, particularly those of us who are Mahayana practitioners, we should, at the very least, strive to gain at minimum, a basic understanding of the principle of dependent arising. This is because, without at least this most basic level of understanding, there is no way to really understand the essential meaning of the Buddha's teaching and to develop sincere faith in it.

Verse 10

*This way of dependent origination,
Those who perceive it
As contradictory or as unestablished,
How can they comprehend your system?*

How can those who see this manner (of reason) of dependent arising as contradicting (functionality) or as unestablished ever be able to comprehend your system?

b. The views of other schools fail to comprehend the Buddha's ultimate teaching

For a Tirthika who does not believe that all phenomena arise from causes and conditions, the principle of dependent arising can be said to be un-established. Actually, the main difference between a Buddhist and a tirthika, in terms of their views, lies in the acceptance of the law of dependent arising which is a profound truth that no non-Buddhist tradition can really comprehend. For example, the Hindu schools of Shaivism²⁰ and Vaishesika both share the belief that phenomena does not arise from causes and conditions. They think it impossible that emptiness can take different forms of appearance.

The Buddhist philosophical schools of Vaibhashika, Sautrantika and Chittamatra believe that emptiness and dependent arising are contradictory. From their point of view, phenomena that arises from causes and conditions still possess some aspects that truly exist, rather than being completely empty of inherent nature. It is only through studying and contemplating the teachings of the philosophical schools that are aligned with the Middle Way that one can conclude that all phenomena exist only in an illusory way that lacks any intrinsic existence due to the fact that all phenomena are conditioned or caused by other phenomena.

Therefore, these two perspectives, that of the non-Buddhist schools, and that of the Vaibhashika, Sautrantika and Chittamatra schools, that perceive dependent arising as un-

²⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shivaism>

established or contradictory, fail to comprehend the real meaning of the Buddha's teaching. However, if we can reach a deeper understanding of the statement that dependent arising is the peerless reason to ascertain emptiness, we will have gained a completely new attitude towards external things and internal mental states. External phenomena such as mountains, rivers, etc., as well as mental states such as desire, hatred and ignorance, are all manifested as an illusory image without true existence. The principal of emptiness does not deny the many forms of appearance, rather it explains that these forms of appearance are devoid of any substantial existence. Even though ordinary beings are easily deluded by their sensual perceptions of appearance, the truth is that all physical appearance is in itself, empty by nature, just as a rainbow in the sky lacks any inherent existence.

That is why Chandrakirti says in his work, *Introduction to the Middle Way*,

*So too all things, though empty,
Strongly manifest within their very emptiness.*

In the *Heart Sutra*²¹, Avalokitesvara famously states that “form is emptiness, emptiness is form”, the true meaning of this is that the appearance of all phenomena is the result of causes and conditions, therefore its true nature is emptiness, which is in itself, beyond all conceptual elaboration.

In the *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, it is also said,

*Furthermore, appearance eliminates the extreme of existence
And emptiness eliminates the extreme of non-existence.
If you realize how emptiness manifests in the manner of cause and effect
Then you are not captivated by wrong notions holding extreme views.*

The fact that appearance eliminates the extreme of inherent existence is because, for things to appear, they must be devoid of inherent existence; therefore they must be phenomena that arise dependently. The fact that they appear eliminates the possibility that they possess inherent or permanent existence.

Further, the fact that emptiness eliminates the extreme of nonexistence means that phenomena appears as a result of dependent arising and, as such, could not possibly be totally nonexistent. Therefore, emptiness eliminates the extreme of total nonexistence of phenomena.

Thus, the understanding that all phenomena are devoid of inherent existence because of dependent arising, and that all phenomena arises dependently because they are devoid of inherent existence, prevents us from falling into either of the two extremes, that of grasping at true, inherent existence or of grasping at total nonexistence.

c. The ultimate Guru or Buddha

Usually, in our guru yoga practice, we visualize the guru, the embodiment of all the Buddhas, completely dissolving into our mind; in this way we become inseparable from the guru. We often say that everything is the manifestation of the deity and all phenomena are the display of the guru. Actually, this does not mean that all that we see, such as a cup or a bottle,

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heart_Sutra

is the body of the guru, or that all that we hear, such as the clink of the cup, is the speech of the guru. If we truly recognize the nature of our own mind, we are able to perceive the perfect union of emptiness and appearance and see the true reality of all phenomena. This is precisely what we are speaking of when we speak of the ultimate guru or Buddha. In that moment, we are truly inseparable from the guru, as well as from Manjushri, Amitabha and all the other Buddhas, because we transcend all conceptual thoughts and abide in the ultimate truth of the perfect union of emptiness and appearance.

Before we achieve enlightenment, we need make efforts in our visualizations. What we visualize is the precise truth of all phenomena. After realization, we perceive this true reality in person. At that time, we clearly see that all phenomena in this world are illusory, like a rainbow in the vast sky, and that the appearance of deities, Dharma protectors, or buddhas is also the miraculous display of emptiness and possesses the ultimate nature of emptiness.

H2. The Union of Dependent Origination and Emptiness Is the Ultimate Teaching of the Buddha

I1. When Understanding Dependent Origination One Realizes that to Possess Valid Functions Does Not Contradict Emptiness

Verse 11

*For you, when one sees emptiness
In terms of the meaning of dependent origination,
Then being devoid of intrinsic existence and
Possessing valid functions do not contradict.*

When you saw voidness as meaning dependent arising, (you saw that) voidness of a self-establishing nature and the performing of functions are not contradictory, but in fact reasonable (in terms of one another).

As Buddha Shakyamuni states in his teachings, through constant study, reflection, and meditation, when one fully sees dependent arising as emptiness, and emptiness as dependent arising, one will also understand that to possess valid functions is not at all contradictory with emptiness, but is, in fact, a result of the nature of emptiness.

In the phenomenal world, due to the nature of emptiness, all things go through the process of birth, abiding and cessation, and perform specific functions. If their nature were to possess any substantial existence, there would be no way for them to manifest different functions, nor could there be any interaction or relation between different things. Because of this universal nature of emptiness, in *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, Nagarjuna says,

*Samsara does not differ
Even slightly from nirvana.
Nirvana does not differ
Even slightly from samsara.*

With a deep understanding of dependent arising, one sincerely appreciates the karmic law of causality, and possesses the knowledge that this is not contradictory with the nature of emptiness at all. It is because of the empty nature of causes and effects that the karmic law can be established; otherwise, the law could not be the governing function of all things.

12. Misunderstanding of Dependent Origination Will Lead One to Fall into a Dreadful Abyss

Verse 12

*Whereas, when one sees the opposite,
Since there can be no function in emptiness
Nor emptiness in what has functions,
One falls into a dreadful abyss, you maintain.*

But if one sees the reverse of that, then since function would be inadmissible in terms of voidness, and there could be no voidness in terms of function, one would be asserting a plunge into an abyss of despair.

a. The dreadful abyss of wrong view

On the contrary, if one were to believe that function would be inadmissible in terms of emptiness, and there could be no emptiness in terms of function, then such a person would fall into a dreadful abyss. Ju Mipham Rinpoche proclaimed in his commentary on the *Ornament of the Middle Way*, that among all that is knowable in this world, the most essential knowledge is the complementarity of dependent arising and emptiness. If, failing to understand this principle, one comes to see the law of causality and emptiness as contradictory, and as a result, believes that the karmic law of cause and effect cannot be established given the fact that the nature of all things is emptiness, then such a person would fall into a dreadful abyss of wrong view.

If one person were to believe that non-existence is the ultimate view, while another were to believe that Buddha nature, Tathagatagarbha²², is something other than emptiness, then both misunderstand the truth of emptiness. As an example, both Longchenpa²³ and Ju Mipham Rinpoche declared that the nature of mind is emptiness, and its manifestation follows the principle of dependent arising. If this is not true and the nature of mind truly and substantially exists, then this view is no different from the concept to which the tirthikas cling, which is that of a permanent and independent self.

b. The same truth realized by different Buddhist traditions

In the Nyingma tradition, many songs of realization on the Great Perfection speak of the view of the great union of dependent arising and emptiness. Ju Mipham Rinpoche has said that once a Dharma practitioner sees the truth of dependent arising, his or her realization is no different from the realization of the Great Perfection. This realization is identical to that of all other enlightened beings. If one fully grasps the philosophy of the Dharma teaching, even without having obtained enlightenment, one could still recognize the perfect harmony that exists among the different schools of Buddhism, continually remind themselves of this understanding and share it with others.

That is why at Larung Gar Institute, students are required to study the main texts of all the different schools. These texts include, Gelugpa's *Lamrim*²⁴, *The Three Principles of the Path*, and *In Praise of Dependent Origination*, Sakyapa's *The General Commentary on*

²² http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Buddha_nature

²³ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Longchenpa>

²⁴ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Lamrim>

*Abhidarmakosa*²⁵, and *The Treasure of Cognition and Logic*²⁶, Jonangpa's *Mountain Doctrine*²⁷ (*Ocean of Definitive Meaning*), as well as Kagyupa's *The 37 Practices of a Bodhisattva*²⁸. These teachings, although they stem from different schools, all share the same aim of guiding the practitioner towards the realization of the fundamental principle of dependent arising.

Similarly in Han Buddhism, for example in the Zen tradition, the principle of dependent arising can once again be seen to be the ultimate meaning of their teachings. It is for this reason that many stanzas or songs of enlightenment in the Zen tradition speak of the same things that are expressed in the songs of realization in the Great Perfection. Sometimes those who don't understand the profound truth of dependent arising discriminate between this or that school or tradition, and claim that the view of one or the other is not reasonable. Such an attitude and behavior shows that not only do they not comprehend the ultimate teaching of Buddha Shakyamuni, but will also cause them to accumulate heavily negative karma and fall into a dreadful abyss without any hope of liberation.

Therefore, as followers of the Buddha, we must keep in mind that the essential teaching of the Buddha is the fundamental principle of dependent arising. If one can, through their efforts, develop a conviction for this teaching, then regardless of whatever befalls them, whether it is birth, aging, sickness or death, they will not cling to those illusory phenomena. Furthermore, they will clearly understand that all appearances arise from dependent causes and conditions and that as a result, as regards their appearance, they each have their own functions, yet as regards their true nature, they are empty. When one has developed a strong conviction about this statement, one is getting closer to enlightenment.

13. Thus Dependent Origination Does Not Contradict Emptiness

Verse 13

*Therefore in your teaching
Seeing dependent origination is hailed;
That too not as an utter non-existence
Nor as an intrinsic existence.*

*Because of that, excellent praise to the vision of dependent arising in your teachings!
For that, in fact, nullifies (both) total nonexistence and existence by means of a self-establishing nature.*

- a. The real meaning of dependent arising

The principle of dependent arising does not claim that things do not truly exist, like the son of a barren woman or a flower that appears from empty space. Rather, it advocates that things do not exist with an intrinsic, permanent and substantial nature. So the true nature of all phenomena is neither intrinsic existence nor is it total non-existence. Ordinary people or beginners of the Middle Way may think this statement is contradictory because, it seems to

²⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abhidarmako%C5%9Bak%C4%81rik%C4%81>

²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treasure_of_Logic_on_Valid_Cognition

²⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ocean_of_Definitive_Meaning

²⁸ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Thirty-Seven_Practices_of_the_Bodhisattvas

them that emptiness is not compatible with appearance, and that appearance is not congruent with emptiness. Indeed, the principle of dependent arising tells us that since everything arises from causes and conditions, their nature is most certainly emptiness, as it is due to the nature of emptiness that all things appear in the phenomenal world. In other words, once one sees the union of emptiness and appearance, one sees the great truth of dependent arising.

Among all that is knowable, perceiving the relationship between emptiness and appearance is the most essential. In the *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*²⁹, it is said that,

*When dependent arising is seen
Confusion will not occur.
Thus every effort has been made here
To explain precisely this subject.*

The verse emphasizes that if people are able to see the truth of dependent arising, all ignorance will disappear forever. Therefore, the author makes every effort to fully explain this teaching. As followers, we should also study it diligently, in order to gain a deep understanding of its truth.

b. The benefits of understanding dependent arising

If we gain a deep understanding of dependent arising, we will be rid of all strong attachments to any person, place or thing. Some may think that Dharma practice is simply a preparation for our next life, but the fact is that Dharma teachings can also help us a lot within this present life. For example, if one clings strongly to family, relationships, possessions or fame, then the more of these feelings of attachment that we have, the more we will experience suffering. However, with a comprehension of the teachings on dependent arising, we come to understand that due to their empty nature, all things are like bubbles floating on the surface of the water. As we come to realize that they possess no permanent existence, our attachment to them naturally decreases. Attachment can be likened to holding onto a handful of sand. The tighter one grips it, the faster the sand slips away; eventually one ends up with an empty hand. Similarly, for such things as wealth or love, the more one clings to them, the less one is able to hold on to it.

Generally speaking, most ordinary people feel very happy when they are in the company of someone that they are especially fond of. However, if they develop a strong feeling of clinging towards this person, any change in the other person's behavior can become a direct or indirect cause of suffering. Initially, one feels that by remaining near to the special person, they will attain happiness, but the real situation rarely turns out in this way. Given the three or ten years of a typical relationship, if we were to summarize the actual amount of happiness or suffering the relationship has brought us, then one would have to admit that strong attachment most often generates more suffering than happiness. If we truly understand that all things are generated by causes and conditions, and that certain causes are inevitably followed by certain results, then we can easily let go of our attachments.

In the Mahayana teachings, the knowledge of dependent arising comes through the

²⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aryadeva>

recognition of emptiness, while in the Vajrayana teachings it is arrived at through the embrace of the View, Meditation, Action and Fruit of the Great Perfection. Ju Mipham Rinpoche says in his *Beacon of Certainty* that perceiving the great union of emptiness and appearance is the essential realization of Dzogchen, Mahamudra, and the Great Middle Way. In the *Flower Adornment Sutra*³⁰ it is said that, “Upon seeing the truth of dependent arising, one sees the purity of all phenomena; upon seeing the purity of all phenomena, one sees the purity of the whole land.” It is for this reason that the Mahayana teachings state that, “with pure mind there is a pure land.” Such purity is neither truly existing, nor completely non-existing, but is rather, the manifestation of emptiness.

Some may wonder, if everything is empty by nature, then why is it that we cannot perceive such emptiness? It is because our strong and solid habitual tendencies blind the nature of our mind, and like a blind person, we cannot see the sun. Because of our deluded perception, we not only miss seeing the ultimate truth when we are looking at the subtle levels of human existence, we even fail to see reality on the most gross level; one example of this is the constant high speed molecular motion of physical matter. Ordinary people tend to believe that what they see is true reality, when in fact, their perceptions are so defiled by their strong habitual tendencies that they are not in accord with the truth at all.

H3. The Standard State of the Realization of the Union of Dependent Origination and Emptiness

Verse 14

*The non-contingent is like a sky flower,
Hence there is nothing that is not dependent.
If things exist through their essence, their dependence on
Causes and conditions for their existence is a contradiction.*

Non-reliance is like a flower from empty space; therefore non-dependence does not exist. If the existence (of things) were established by their essential natures, then the establishment of that would contradict their depending on causes and conditions.

a. The standard state of the realization

This verse discusses the standard state of the realization of the great union of dependent arising and emptiness. When one personally comes to the realization of this truth, through his or her own perception, they will clearly see that nothing exists independently, and that it is impossible for a flower to spontaneously arise from empty space. The metaphor of the sky flower is used to illustrate something that exists independently of any other causes or conditions, which is in itself an impossibility.

When a practitioner realizes this truth, they will not fall into the extreme view of nihilism, because they will recognize that, unlike the metaphoric flower that arises from empty space, all physical phenomena exist and dependently arise as a result of specific causes and conditions. If the existence of all things were to be established by their own

³⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avatamsaka_Sutra

nature, then they would be independent of any other cause or condition, and this is certainly not in accord with reality; to conclude that the establishment of the existence all things relies on their essential nature contradicts their dependence on specific causes and conditions.

So, once again, this verse primarily discusses the personal realization of dependent arising and emptiness. The *Heart Sutra* states that, “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form; emptiness is no other than form, form is no other than emptiness.” Once we fully realize this teaching, we will have a complete understanding that the appearance of all phenomena does not indicate their substantial existence. Chandrakirti once said in his commentary on the *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*, “Neither do I state that all things do not exist, because I accept the principle of dependent arising; nor do I state that all things do exist, because I accept the principle of dependent arising.” Then what exactly does the term “dependent arising” mean? All phenomena that arise, dependent on causes and conditions, are nothing more than dreams or illusions, no more real than the image of the moon reflected in a bowl of water, or any other seemingly magical manifestation that lacks a self-establishing nature and therefore, does not exist as a result of its own substance.

When we use the terms “dream-like” or “illusion-like”, we are not saying that the world that we experience is similar to, but different from another type of experience that we might categorize as a dream or an illusion. In fact, everything we see, hear or feel is an illusion, and is identical in every way to that which we experience in dreams. Those things that so vividly appear in dreams arise from certain causes and conditions, and disappear completely once those causes and conditions no longer exist. Similarly, the things that we see in daily life also arise from causes and conditions and they too disappear when their corresponding causes and conditions cease to exist. The *Flower Adornment Sutra* states that fully realizing the truth of dependent arising leads one to abide in dharmadhatu³¹ and to see all conditioned phenomena as if it were nothing more than reflections in a mirror. Everything that we see around us, even the mighty rivers and mountains, are nothing more than manifested images lacking any true intrinsic existence.

b. The pith instructions of Manjushri

Lama Tsongkapa said in his the *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*,

*If [these two realizations] are happening simultaneously without alternation,
And from merely seeing dependent relation as completely unbetraying
The definite ascertainment comes that completely destroys
The way all objects are apprehended [as truly existent],
At that time the analysis of the ultimate view is complete.*

As we have mentioned earlier, this verse discusses what can be described as the standard state of the realization of the perfect union of dependent arising and emptiness, which is, that the realization of emptiness happens simultaneously with the realization of dependent arising, and that there is no cognitive alternation between the perception of these two realizations. This simultaneous perception is precisely the state of realization of enlightened beings. However, to our unenlightened ordinary perception, emptiness is not

³¹ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Dharmadhatu>

appearance and appearance is not emptiness. This is because we are only able to conceive of this ultimate perspective with our conceptual thinking rather than by directly perceiving it ourselves.

Indeed, it is only when we recognize an object's true nature is empty that we can completely cut off our attachment to it. When Lama Tsongkhapa had a vision in which Manjushri appeared before him, Manjushri taught the venerable master a profound pith instruction on how to rid one's self of attachments. Manjushri said, "Do not tie yourself to appearance, and you will be free from all attachments." We ordinary people tend to cling to all kinds of appearances. When we see what we consider to be a pleasurable appearance, the clinging leads us to desire; and when we see what we consider to be an unpleasant appearance, the clinging leads us to aversion. With these kinds of mental afflictions we accumulate a variety of karma and end up wandering in samsara. If, however, we can completely come to the realization of the truth of dependent arising, all attachment can be eliminated and that is the end of samsara. As is said in the *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*,

*When selflessness is seen in objects,
The seed of existence is destroyed.*

Therefore, it is of great importance to gain a full understanding of the ultimate meaning of dependent arising.

G2. The Reason Taught by the Buddha that Emptiness Is the Nature of All Phenomena

H1. All Phenomena Are Devoid of Intrinsic Existence

Verse 15

*"Therefore since no phenomena exist
Other than origination through dependence,
No phenomena exist other than
Being devoid of intrinsic existence," you taught.*

(Thus) you said that because of that, since there are no phenomena other than what dependently arises, there are no phenomena other than what is devoid of a self-establishing nature.

The Buddha Shakyamuni explained that, in the entire world, there is no phenomena that is not dependently arising, and because of that, the nature of all things is emptiness; which is another way of saying that there are no phenomena existing with a self-establishing nature. In the *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness*, Nagarjuna reiterates that, "Because all things are empty of inherent existence, the Peerless Tathagata has shown the emptiness of dependent arising as the reality of all things."

For us ordinary beings, it is important that we reflect over and over again on this teaching, both in our Dharma practice and in our daily lives. In the course of our reflection, we might ask ourselves why does dependent arising indicate emptiness, or what is the meaning of emptiness and why does it transcend all conceptual thinking? We may also question why, of all the wonderful teachings that have been brought forth in this world, the

teaching on dependent arising is the most wonderful and unsurpassable? Although it is relatively easy to understand that the generation of all phenomena requires that certain causes and conditions exist, very few people are truly able to understand the nature of emptiness due to dependent arising.

In fact, there is no difference between dependent arising on a relative level of phenomena and the nature of emptiness on an ultimate level. According to Ju Mipham Rinpoche, dependent arising, emptiness and the middle way are all different names for the same truth. In Longchenpa's *Finding Comfort and Ease in the Nature of Mind*³², the metaphor of the reflection of the moon in a bowl of water is employed to describe emptiness and appearance. The moon in the sky projects its reflection onto the surface of the water. The image of the moon, which is visible on the water's surface, represents the relative truth of appearance, and the fact that it is just a projection of the real moon in the sky without any essential existence represents the ultimate truth of emptiness. The appearance of the moon on the water's surface perfectly expresses the nature of emptiness and appearance, and shows that emptiness and appearance are not different in any way. To see and recognize the perfect union of appearance and emptiness is to realize the truth of all phenomena.

In the *Beacon of Certainty*, Ju Mipham Rinpoche explains that appearance and emptiness are just two aspects of the same thing. The reflection of the moon in the bowl of water expresses its own appearance while also possessing the nature of emptiness. Emptiness and appearance are inseparable within the same phenomenon. Likewise, all that we see, hear or touch is also devoid of intrinsic existence. As is said in *Introduction to the Middle Way*, this empty nature is no different from the nature of a son born to a barren woman. Neither has any true existence, and accordingly, as a result of the emptiness of their nature, they, like all phenomena, are nothing more than dreams and illusions.

H2. Nirvana Would Become Impossible if Phenomena Possessed Intrinsic Nature

Verse 16

*“Because intrinsic nature cannot be negated,
If phenomena possess some intrinsic nature,
Nirvana would become impossible
And elaborations could not be ceased,” you taught.*

You (further) said that because, if phenomena (actually) had a certain self-establishing nature, (the appearance of) self-establishing natures could not be turned back; nirvana would (then) become inadmissible, and all mental fabrication could not be turned back.

a. The indication of intrinsic nature

If a particular phenomenon were to possess a self-establishing nature, and was in truth, independent of any cause and condition, then it could never be changed or negated. If intrinsic existence existed in this world, then no human being would have the power to change it. For example, if the nature of mind was a truly existent entity, or if mental afflictions had intrinsic existence, then no matter how much effort we gave to the practice of

³² http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Finding_Comfort_and_Ease_in_the_Nature_of_Mind

our spiritual path, we could never cut through our mental afflictions.

As is said in *The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*³³, liberation means the elimination of delusion. If mental afflictions had their own intrinsic existence, then we could never separate ourselves from the obscurations of emotional afflictions and mental cognitions³⁴, and consequently no one could ever achieve nirvana.

Some spiritual traditions believe that everything exists, while others believe that nothing exists; both of these are wrong views that can be classified as the extremes of permanence or nihilism. In truth, one cannot deny the reality of the manifestation that appears to ordinary beings nor can one declare that the phenomena that surrounds us exists truly and permanently. However, it can be said with certainty that anything that has the power to change lacks intrinsic existence; it can change or be changed because its nature is the product of causes and conditions. Buddha Shakyamuni discovered the Middle Way that transcends both the belief in the permanence of existence and nihilism, which is the belief that nothing truly exists. The Middle Way or the Middle Path, precisely describes the truth of all phenomena.

b. The meaning of nirvana

In Buddhism, nirvana does not mean death. Actually, we can say that there are two types of nirvana, the nirvana of the Hinayana school and the nirvana of the Mahayana school. The first refers to the elimination of afflictive obscurations and the achievement of Arhathood; the second refers to the elimination of both afflictive and cognitive obscurations and the achievement of Buddhahood, which in its nature is emptiness, for it is through emptiness that the Buddha manifests in numerous forms to benefit all living beings.

Therefore, the fact that an ordinary being can become fully enlightened and attain Buddhahood is clear evidence that all phenomena lack intrinsic existence. If this were not true, it would be impossible to cease all conceptual thoughts or their elaborations and achieve nirvana, for the reason mentioned above, which is that intrinsic nature cannot be negated. We find in *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way* these words,

*If all these are not empty,
There is no arising, there is no cessation.
What has been relinquished and what ceases
Whereby nirvana, as you claim, occurs?*

This means that if a thing were to truly exist due to its intrinsic nature, then it would experience no arising and no cessation, therefore, there could be no achievement of nirvana that resulted from the elimination of all mental afflictions and suffering. It is only because all phenomena, including all afflictions and all sufferings, are devoid of true existence, that the appearance of both samsara and nirvana is reasonable.

H3. No Reasonable Refutation Exists for Such Teaching

Verse 17

³³ [http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras](http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=The_Ornament_of_the_Mahayana_Sutras)

³⁴ [http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Two obscurations](http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Two_obscurations)

*Therefore who could challenge you?
You who proclaim with a lion's roar
In the assembly of learned ones repeatedly
That everything is utterly free of intrinsic nature?*

Because of that, in the crowd of learned ones, you spoke excellently, again and again, with a lion's roar, that everything is parted from self-establishing natures. Who could get the better of this?

Because emptiness is the true reality of all phenomena, Buddha Shakyamuni, in the assembly of learned ones, proclaimed repeatedly with a lion's roar that expressed the four types of fearlessness³⁵ that everything is devoid of intrinsic nature. No one in this world can refute this wondrous teaching. Throughout history, numerous great people, including the six ornaments and the two supreme ones³⁶, have achieved full enlightenment by following this teaching.

In the *Summary Verses of Prajna*, the Buddha, like a lion that scares away all wild animals by its roaring, defeated the views of all tirthikas, making it impossible for anybody to challenge his wisdom. In the Middle Way, the statement of emptiness is declared in this way: all phenomena are like shadows or projections, and are therefore devoid of a self-established nature due to their dependent arising. Nobody can refute this statement, or find any evidence to dispute its validity.

Again, in *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, it is stated,

*When emptiness is set forth and explained,
All statements made to show its faults,
Reveal no faults at all,
For they exemplify the thesis to be proved.*

Even though non-Buddhist schools, as well as some Buddhist schools including the Vaibhashika, Sautrantika and Chittamatra, do not believe that everything is emptiness, they cannot point out any valid argument to refute this teaching, or to establish their differing view. Their reasoning fails because every example they employ to refute it actually possesses the nature of that which they refute. In other words, for all their protestations, they cannot find any valid reasons or examples to undermine the truth of emptiness. They may, for instance, claim that a bubble of water is solid, and by way of evidence, they may point to another water bubble, ignoring the obvious reality that both are fragile and can be easily dispersed.

In this regard, it can be said that Mahayana practitioners can be distinguished from ordinary people of the world by their wisdom and compassion. Their wisdom is profound as it includes the understanding of the truth of dependent arising and emptiness. As a result, they recognize that nothing is solid and for this reason any attachment to worldly phenomena is not warranted. The compassion of the Mahayana practitioner is unbiased because of the understanding that all living beings equally possess the ultimate nature of emptiness and luminosity. As a result, Mahayana practitioners have a sincere respect for every living being

³⁵ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Four_fearlessnesses

³⁶ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Six_Ornaments_and_Two_Supreme_Ones

and wholeheartedly, aspire to benefit all beings by guiding them onto the path of enlightenment.

G3. Things without Intrinsic Existence Function in Accordance with Dependent Arising

H1. Dependent Origination and Emptiness Converge without Conflict

Verse 18

*That there is no intrinsic existence at all
And that all functions as “this arising
In dependence on that,” what need is there to say
That these two converge without conflict?*

There is no such thing as a self-establishing nature; also, the entire presentation is reasonable of “this” arising from depending on “this.” As these two (points) are non-contradictory, is there need to mention that they fit together?

On an ultimate level, the essential nature of everything is emptiness, and in spite of its appearance, is without substantial existence; on a relative level, all things arise as a result of their dependence on other things. For example, positive conduct leads to positive rewards and negative conduct leads to negative rewards, a seedling comes forth from a seed, and many kinds of conceptual thoughts can be generated through the use of language. All of these examples are reasonable and are generated within the realm of emptiness. This shows that all things can materialize and manifest appearance from emptiness.

Ju Mipham Rinpoche emphasized repeatedly in his *Beacon of Certainty*, that emptiness is the true nature of all phenomena and that form and appearance as it materializes to ordinary deluded living beings, is the manifestation of that emptiness. He further expressed these seemingly divergent points of view are reasonable and fit together seamlessly. As an example, in a mirror, there may appear reflections of the external world. Even though we know that these reflections are by nature empty, to our eyes they nevertheless appear to be real. This example should make it clear that emptiness and appearance are not contradictory, but in fact, coexist in a state of perfect union.

For beginning practitioners, this statement is hard to understand because we are in the habit of believing that emptiness and appearance are two separate entities. However, through systematic study of Nagarjuna’s *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, or Chandrakirti’s *Clear Words*³⁷, along with other great texts of the Middle Way, one can eventually come to understand this teaching.

It is interesting to note that current scientific research has caused some scientists to rethink the true nature of physical matter. In fact, there are even some Quantum physicists who now openly question whether the external world can be said to have any true existence at all! This is based on theoretical research that has led them to the conclusion that physical reality consists of nothing more than a superposition of quantum field. As Buddhist practitioners, we are better off to make use of the philosophy of the Middle Way as a framework through which to carefully observe the nature of phenomena and to gain an in-

³⁷ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Clear_Words

depth understanding of dependent arising. It is essential, over the course of this study, that you develop a strong conviction regarding the empty nature of all phenomena, and that you develop a clear awareness that all things are devoid of a self-established nature.

H2. The Union of Dependent Origination and Emptiness Is the Most Supreme Teaching

Verse 19

*“It is through the reason of dependent origination
That one does not lean towards an extreme;”
That you’ve declared this excellently is the reason
O Savior, of your being an unexcelled speaker.*

“Because of the line of reasoning, dependent arising, one does not become founded in an extreme view.” This excellent statement (of yours) is the cause for your speech, O Guardian, being peerless.

a. The reason for being called an unexcelled speaker

Here, the Buddha has said that by following the reasoning of dependent arising, one will not fall into such wrong views as the extreme belief in permanence or nihilism. Indeed, wrong views of this type can be completely eradicated on both the gross and the subtle levels. Before studying any of the Dharma teachings of the Middle Way, most people know very little about this subject. However, once they develop a deeper understanding of its irrefutable reasoning, they come to sincerely appreciate it as the most essential of the Buddha’s teachings. Furthermore, these people come to respectfully praise the Buddha for his excellent and peerless speech.

The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way, states:

*Whatever is dependently arisen
This has been explained as empty.
In dependence upon something else it is imputed [as existent].
This is the Middle Way indeed.*

This means that in this phenomenal world, everything arises from causes and conditions; therefore the nature of all things is emptiness. On a relative level, while everything has its name imputed or attributed by people’s conceptual thoughts, on an ultimate level, things are neither existent nor non-existent; this is the precise meaning of the Middle Way. It is because of the precision and excellence of this teaching that the Buddha is heralded as an unexcelled speaker.

b. The mantra of dependent arising³⁸

Once we fully understand the teaching of dependent arising, then all other profound Dharma teachings will become straightforward for us. Because dependent arising is a universal principle that applies to all phenomena, its mantra, the mantra of the Essence of Interdependent Origination, is considered as amongst the most powerful and is traditionally chanted in the ritual of consecration. If one truly sees the truth of dependent arising, they are

³⁸ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Essence_of_Dependent_Origination_dharani

able to put the ultimate meaning of the Dharma into practice at any time and in any place. On the other hand, if one fails to understand it, no Dharma practice of any kind will lead them to liberation.

Therefore, we can see that it is essential for each of us to deeply study this text and to develop a sincere faith in the Buddha. There are many reasons that one may have faith in the Buddha. It may be because of his marvelous appearance or because his extraordinary kindness, but the truest and most sincere faith in the Buddha can be only based on a deep understanding and a full agreement with his teachings. This is particularly true of his peerless teaching on dependent arising.

G4. Emptiness Implies the Rationality of the Law of Causality and Leads One to Go Beyond Any Extreme

Verse 20

*“All of this is devoid of essence,”
And “From this arises that effect” –
These two certainties complement
Each other with no contradiction at all.*

All these (things) are devoid (of being established) by an essential nature, while from “this,” “this” arises as a result. These two certainties, without hindering one another, serve as (mutual) helps.

- a. The two certainties complement each other

This verse tells us that it is only because all phenomena are devoid of a self-established nature, that the relative truth of all phenomena, including the laws of causality and of reincarnation involving past and future lives, are established. Otherwise, the relative truth of the existence of phenomena would make no sense at all.

When one observes an object from the philosophical perspective of the Middle Way, such as the four great arguments of reasoning³⁹, etc., one can conclude that in this world, there is nothing that can be established as possessing an intrinsic nature. Modern scientists, through theoretical research and measurements made with highly refined scientific instrumentation, have come to a similar conclusion. Although everything possesses the nature of emptiness, within this emptiness all phenomena are manifested. For example, when given the proper conditions, a black seed can give rise to a green seedling. As the verse says, from this cause, arises that effect, which is an easy to understand, and perfectly reasonable mechanism.

Although it may appear to ordinary living beings that these two certainties are as different, as a white cord is from a black one, to those enlightened beings that have perceived the true reality of all phenomena, there is nothing at all contradictory in these two points of view. The language that is used to describe these two views may convey the impression that these two aspects of the nature of phenomena are in opposition to one another, but in truth, emptiness and appearance exist as a perfect union, and are as inseparable as fire and heat. As

³⁹ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Four_great_logical_arguments_of_the_Middle_Way

Ju Mipham Rinpoche said in *The Beacon of Certainty*,

*Therefore, appearance and emptiness
Can each be conceived of separately,
But in fact, they are never different.
Therefore, they are called “coalescent”,
Since the confidence of seeing the nature of things
Does not fall to any extreme.*

Verse 21

*What is more amazing than this?
What is more marvelous than this?
If one praises you in this manner,
This is real praise, otherwise not.*

*What could be more amazing than this? What could be more marvelous than this?
There is no other way of praising than to praise you in this way.*

b. The real praising of the Buddha

Over the course of history, only Buddha Shakyamuni discovered and fully explained the perfect union of emptiness and appearance as the true reality of all things. In this world, there is no teaching that is more amazing, more profound or more marvelous than the teaching of dependent arising. This teaching evokes real praise for the Buddha, and there's is no action or offering that is better than to praise the Buddha in this way.

Indeed, because of its profundity, just hearing the teaching of dependent arising, can bring one incredible benefits. The Indian master Sthiramati⁴⁰, in order to dispel doubts toward the Mahayana teaching, composed a text known as *The Treatise on Entering the Mahayana Path*. In the text there is a verse that explains that it is rare to take birth where the Dharma exists, and even rarer to hear the teaching. It goes on to say that while one may wander in samsara endlessly, receiving the Dharma teaching puts an end to it. The Dharma teaching referred to, specifically directs the practitioner to the teaching of dependent arising, or the perfect union of emptiness and appearance.

In *The Sutra of the Heap of Jewels*, the Buddha proclaims that there is nothing that is either intrinsically existent or totally non-existent. This teaching is intended to prevent his followers from falling into extreme views and it is therefore called the lion's roar. In this way, the Buddha taught the ultimate truth of all phenomena. Ordinary beings fail to see it because their perceptions are contaminated by their afflictive and cognitive obscurations; before these obscurations have been completely purified, one is unable to perceive true reality.

In this text, Lama Tsongkapa primarily praises the Buddha for his ultimate view, rather than for the Buddha's behavior in the causal stage or the qualities that he displayed during the fruition stage. Of course, the Buddha possesses many incredible qualities, such as his profound concentration, his marvelous appearance, and his miraculous abilities. However, it is only by relying on this teaching and putting it into practice, that numerous living beings

⁴⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sthiramati>

can break free from samsara and achieve ultimate happiness. From this perspective, the most marvelous way of praising Buddha Shakyamuni is by praising his unique teaching. As his followers, we should be proud and feel fortunate to be able to rely on this authentic teacher and his unimpeachable guidance.

c. Develop a strong conviction on dependent arising

It is essential for each of us to develop a strong conviction in emptiness and dependent arising, understanding that the appearance of all things is manifested within emptiness. It is this emptiness that makes the appearance of every phenomenon possible, albeit in an illusory and dream-like manner.

It is not necessary to deny any appearance in the phenomenal world. As the Buddha has said, ordinary beings may argue with him, but he has no argument with them, rather, he fully accepts what they acknowledge to be true in the phenomenal world. By accepting what ordinary beings perceive, rather than denying their personal perceptions of the phenomenal world, the Buddha is able to communicate with them accordingly.

It is important for us to be aware of the vast and ultimate meaning of the Buddha's teaching. For different people with different capacities, the Buddha gave different teachings. Sometimes, he would say that all phenomena is permanent, while on other occasions, he would say all phenomena is impermanent. Ultimately speaking, all phenomena are empty, and yet, on a relative level phenomena appear through a variety of forms. Therefore, we say that emptiness and appearance are not contradictory at all. This is the ultimate teaching of the Buddha.

From this perspective, we can clearly declare that Buddhism is not just a religious belief, but rather is an education in wisdom. Through pursuit of Buddhist philosophy, one can eventually understand the empty nature of all things and consequently release one's self from clinging to them. This is the most efficient way of decreasing and eventually eliminating one's suffering. If one realizes that one's body, relationship, or wealth does not substantially exist, that it is like a dream, an illusion or a water bubble, then one will not have a strong attachment to these things and as a result, one's mind will be completely relaxed, instead of being tied up in all kinds of clinging.

If we ask why modern people live such busy lives at such an increasingly rapid pace, we find that the reason is rooted in their strong and solid attachments to the people and things around them and thus to their great pursuit of their own interests. With a lack of understanding about the true nature of this world, people are enslaved by their endless desires. As the saying goes, "People die for money, birds die for food." People occupy themselves with making money and in the end, leave the world with their desires still unsatisfied.

We should therefore deeply reflect on the teaching of emptiness and develop a strong conviction in it. Otherwise, if we only learn to repeat this teaching but do not internalize it, we will remain the victim of our own ignorance and will miss the precious opportunity of achieving enlightenment. That is why in Tibetan Buddhism, debates are traditionally emphasized as a way to dispel the followers' doubts and wrong views.

For modern people, debates and discussions are even more essential because these days, people are being constantly exposed to many kinds of thoughts and information, which make it more difficult for most of us to fully accept a truly profound view such as this, that transcends all worldly views. Therefore, within the communities of monastics or lay practitioners, it is important to create more opportunities to debate and discuss the Dharma teachings. It is necessary to regularly hold seminars or symposiums within all monasteries and dharma centers, so that people can express their own thoughts and listen to the views of others. In this way, one's own doubts and wrong views are gradually dispelled and eventually one develops a sincere and irreversible faith in the Buddha and becomes a truly wise person.

E2. Refute the Counter Assertion

F1. The Assertion that Dependent Origination Means Intrinsic Existence is Unreasonable

Verse 22

*Being enslaved by ignorance
Those who fiercely oppose you,
What is so astonishing about their being
Unable to bear the sound of no intrinsic existence?*

Enslaved by their muddle-headedness, some are hostile toward you. Is it any wonder they cannot bear the sound of “no self-establishing nature?”

Verse 23

*But having accepted dependent origination,
The precious treasure of your speech,
Then not tolerating the roar of emptiness –
This I find amazing indeed!*

But those who accept dependent arising, the cherished treasure from among your statements, and then cannot bear the roar of voidness – it is they who amaze me.

- a. The two types of people who fiercely oppose the Buddha

These two verses refute the assertion that a thing that arises dependently possesses an intrinsic existence, and also describe the two types of people who most fiercely oppose the teachings of the Buddha. First are those who since beginningless time have been enslaved by strong ignorance. People like this, have always been hostile toward the Buddha and continue to do so by refusing to accept the teaching of emptiness. Consequently, it is not at all surprising that people such as this would feel this way. Second are those who have accepted the Buddha's teachings, but due to their strong clinging to intrinsic existence, cannot bear the roar of emptiness, and feel terrified at the most precious, profound and essential teaching of emptiness. It is this second group that Lama Tsongkhapa is most amazed by.

For non-Buddhists or tirthikas, due to the influence of their negative surroundings, it is understandable that they would refuse or oppose the Buddha's profound teaching, because their teachers have never taught them anything about dependent arising or emptiness, nor have any of their families and friends. As their spiritual studies have nothing to do with these teachings, and it is rarely possible for them to abruptly turn to Buddhism, accept the

teachings of the Buddha or to generate faith in him. As Maitreya said in *The Adornment of Mahayana Sutras*, it's justifiable for those with inferior capacity and those who have never received the relevant profound teachings, to reject, misunderstand, and even feel terrified at the teaching of emptiness.

However, for people who claim to be Buddhists, as, for example, the followers of the Vaibhashika, Sautrantika or Cittamatra schools do, how could they fail to accept the essential nature of emptiness, since they are taught in every sutra that phenomena arise and vanish as a result of causes and conditions? For this reason, Lama Tsongkhapa feels quite astonished by these people.

b. The dangerous situation of people with wrong views

Such people neither understand emptiness on the plane of ultimate truth, nor do they accumulate merit on the plane of conventional truth; therefore, they place themselves in a dangerous situation. Nagarjuna states in his *Sixty Stanzas on Reasoning* that,

*With no understanding of the meaning of absence,
But engaging only in mere studies
And failing to engage in meritorious acts –
Such base people are lost.*

This means that people are bound to do harm to themselves if they only listen to the teachings on emptiness, and because they are unaware of its connotations, they don't engage in any virtuous acts. After hearing the words of the teachings on emptiness, they believe that it is worthless to do anything good since everything is empty. This is terrible since, in the long run, this wrong view destroys them. These people are also referred to as "ones with inferior capacity".

Indeed, these who hold wrong views such as this, harm both themselves and others. Some commentaries make use of the metaphor of one blind person guiding another until both of them fall off the cliff. It is even more of a shame when it is a person with good eyesight who guides a blind person off the cliff. Nowadays, some dharma masters claim that they are Mahayana practitioners, but do not acknowledge the teaching of dependent arising. Behavior such as this, really make no sense at all. It is unreasonable for them to identify themselves as followers of the Buddha, but all the while turn against him by spreading wrong views.

c. The difference between Buddhism and Science

Some people may know very little about Buddhism, but are avid supporters of modern science. They eagerly accept new ideas and very easily turn away from tradition. They claim that science is the only truth and that the philosophy of Buddhism would be better if it adapted to modern scientific findings. It is true that scientific research and technology have improved modern life in a variety of ways, including convenience in transportation, communication and so on, and Buddhists certainly acknowledge the benefits that science brings us. Nevertheless, the fact remains that there is still a big gap between science and Buddhism. The primary difference is that the Buddha revealed the relative and ultimate truth of all things, including both physical and mental phenomena, and science has only discovered

certain mechanical laws and how they relate to some specific areas of physical existence, and even these have to be continuously examined and re-examined by rigorous hypothesis testing.

Buddhism has existed in this world for more than 2,500 years, and in all of that time, it cannot be said that Buddhist thought has hindered the development of humanity or that it has been in opposition to natural law. By contrast, the same cannot be said of such inventions as explosives and the atomic bomb, which have led many scientists throughout history to be left with feelings of sadness and regret that their scientific research has resulted in such severe consequences and inflicted great damage to all of humanity. This may lead one to wonder whether, taken as a whole, scientific technology can be said to be beneficial or harmful to human life.

In fact, it is like the double-bladed vajra sword of ancient times: if one uses it well, it can serve to defeat one's enemies, however, if used unwisely, it can also harm whomever wields it, so it must be treated as a very dangerous and powerful weapon. The same can be said for science, with the motivation of the scientist, being perhaps the key to determining whether the result of his or her findings will be of benefit to humankind. Any effort that springs from a preoccupation with the self and lacks the guidance of an altruistic mind can only bring damage to others, and in the end, will become the cause of one's own suffering.

As Buddhist practitioners we should feel fortunate to have Buddhism in our life. A Buddhist education is beneficial not only to humans but also to every living being in the world. Buddhism does not aim to convert people to its faith, nor does it suppress any other teachings from which it may differ, as the Buddhist spirit teaches people to devote themselves to serving all beings regardless of their religion or beliefs. If the Buddhist spirit is passed onto just one person, this person can bathe his or her family and those around them in a glow of kindness and bliss. Therefore, we should know in our hearts, that Buddhist thought is of value to all beings and in all times.

F2. Those Who Hold Such Assertion Cannot Be Led to the Path that Pleases the Tathagata

Verse 24~25

*The door that leads to no intrinsic existence,
This unexcelled [door of] dependent origination,
Through its name alone, if one grasps
At intrinsic existence, now this person*

*Who lacks the unrivalled entrance,
Well travelled by the Noble Ones,
By what means should one guide him
To the excellent path that pleases you?*

It is just these people who grasp at self-establishing natures in the very name of dependent arising, but which, (in fact,) is the unsurpassable gateway leading to there being no self-establishing natures.

By what method could they be led to this excellent pathway pleasing to you, which is a peerless fording passage well traveled by the Supreme Noble Aryas?

a. The excellent path that pleases the Buddha

The teaching of dependent arising is the unsurpassable gateway leading to no intrinsic existence. Indeed, dependent arising and emptiness are inseparable. But if someone grasps at the idea of intrinsic nature in the name of dependent arising, or if someone believes dependent arising and emptiness are two different things, then there are no means to guide these people to the excellent path that is well traveled by the supreme Noble Ones and that pleases the Buddha.

Actually, the so called “arising” is just an imputed elaboration. In the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, it is said,

*Real or not real,
False or not false,
Worldly or beyond the worldly,
All are imputed elaborations.*

This means that all conceptual elaborations, real or not real, false or not false, worldly or beyond worldly, only exist as language descriptions. On the relative level, one can acknowledge their existence; while recognizing that on the ultimate level, none of these truly exist. Unfortunately, those who believe in the intrinsic existence of dependent arising, fail to recognize the emptiness of all phenomena.

Indeed, those who grasp at the intrinsic existence of dependent arising have no means to achieve liberation and cannot be guided onto the path that leads to the realization of the emptiness of both self and phenomena. In truth, the path of realizing emptiness and benefiting living beings is the only path that pleases all buddhas and bodhisattvas. As Mahayana practitioners, we should certainly follow this path and please all of the lineage masters.

Similarly, as is said in the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, “Noble one, among all the offerings, Dharma offering is the most supreme; this includes: following-the-teaching-and-practicing offering, benefiting-the-beings offering, accepting-the-beings offering, enduring-the-sufferings-of-beings offering, dedicating-to-good-deeds offering, not-abandoning-the-cause-of-Bodhisattva offering, and not-leaving-Bodhicitta offering.” So each of us should set out on the unrivalled path of emptiness with great compassion and filled with Bodhicitta.

b. Develop certainty in the excellent path

Certainty is hard to generate at first but such conviction is gradually developed through the systematic learning of the great treatises on the Middle way, such as *The Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*, *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, and *Introduction to the Middle Way*. After careful study of these treatises, one will truly understand the words of Chandrakirti, who said,

*Apart from this very path of the venerable Acharya Nagarjuna,
Other paths will not serve as means to attain Peace.*

Therefore, if we have certainty in the path of emptiness, we will naturally follow it towards liberation and abandon all worldly pursuits as being meaningless. As a result,

following the teaching of emptiness and dependent arising becomes the greatest source of enjoyment for us.

F3. Point Out the Self-contradiction of the Assertion

Verse 26

*Intrinsic nature, uncreated and non-contingent,
Dependent origination, contingent and created –
How can these two converge
Upon a single basis without contradiction?*

How can having a self-establishing nature, being un-fashioned, and non-reliant, as well as being dependently arising, reliant, and fashioned, both be gathered together with no contradiction on a single basis?

Intrinsic nature is not created or contingent; phenomenon which arises dependently is contingent and created. How can these two things, both the dependent and the independent, the changeable and the unchangeable, be gathered together on a single basis, with no contradiction? Such a thing is impossible!

Followers who acknowledge intrinsic existence, believe that the appearance of all phenomena is not emptiness, and that emptiness exists somewhere beyond appearance. Actually, given the fact that all phenomena arise dependently from causes and conditions and are conditioned and changeable, their nature is absolute emptiness. If one fails to accept this principle, one cannot fully appreciate the teachings of the Middle Way, nor are they able to study and practice these teachings. As Asvaghosa⁴¹ said about these kinds of people, “Although they have encountered the profound text, due to their extreme ignorance, they do not regard it as a precious treasure that transcends samsara, thus they have no intention to study it.”

Due to not accepting this profound teaching, people such as this stubbornly believe that appearance is definitely not emptiness, and that emptiness can never be appearance. Indeed, as Maitreya has said, “Everything arises from causes and conditions, and so does not possess an intrinsic nature.” *The Flower Adornment Sutra* states that the nature of all phenomena is unproduced, but manifests coming into being. This means that ultimately speaking, no phenomena are being produced, even though on the relative level they are manifested as being born. This explains the manner in which arising and not being produced do not contradict one another. It is only to ordinary beings that, due to their deluded perception, these two aspects appear to be in conflict.

As we ordinary human beings are easily confused by illusions and fail to perceive true reality, we would do better not be overly confident in ourselves. What we take as clean is in fact unclean, and that which we think to be existent are, in fact, non-existent. We think the river we saw last year is the same river that we see this year. Even worse, some of us believe that there are no previous and future lives, and the law of causality is invalid. All of these are the wrong and unreliable views of deluded beings.

⁴¹ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Ashvaghosha>

E3. Establish the View of Emptiness through Dependent Origination and Dispel All Interpolations and Repudiations

F1. The Reasoning Taught by the Buddha that All Phenomena of Dependent Origination are Illusion-like

Verse 27

*Therefore whatever originates dependently,
Though primordially free of intrinsic existence,
Appears as if it does [possess intrinsic existence];
So you taught all this to be illusion-like.*

Because of that, whatever dependently arises is, from the beginning, completely removed from having a self-establishing nature. Yet, since (things) appear to be there, you said that all of them are like illusions.

Everything that living beings perceive as appearing before them, is dependently arisen and is completely devoid of intrinsic existence. Therefore all appearances, regardless of their seeming reality, are nothing more than illusions. As is said in *The Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*, all phenomena are like fire-wheels, illusions, dreams, the reflection of the moon in water, echoes, mirages and clouds, all of which are empty of intrinsic existence. The *Diamond Sutra*⁴² also states that,

*All conditioned phenomena,
Are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, or shadows,
Like dew or a flash of lightning;
Thus we shall perceive them.*

There is a story that is described in *The Buddha Speaks of Illusion-like Samadhi Sutra* that tells of five hundred practitioners who had attained super-cognition⁴³ of their own and others' past lives. Thus, they were able to see that they had accumulated severe negative karma in their previous lives through such evil actions as killing their parents, etc. They were terrified by what might befall them because of those evil deeds and as a result, they failed to perceive the true nature of emptiness. Just then they saw that Manjushri had grabbed a sword and was about to kill the Buddha. This caused them to feel even more terrified and confused as to why Manjushri would commit such an enormously evil action towards the Buddha himself!

At that moment, the Buddha stopped Manjushri and turning to the five hundred said, "Manjushri does not exist, and neither do I. Each of you is also non-existent. All phenomena is without intrinsic nature. The same goes for negative karma, which is nothing more than an illusion, or a dream, and consequently, is as insubstantial as a mirage." Upon hearing this, the five hundred practitioners immediately realized the empty nature of all phenomena and obtained their Dharma eyes⁴⁴.

F2. Nobody Can Find Fault in the Buddha's Teaching of Dependent Origination

⁴² http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Vajra_Cutter_Sutra

⁴³ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Six_supercognitions

⁴⁴ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Five_eyes

Verse 28

*Through this very fact I understand well
The statement that, to what you have taught,
Those opponents who challenge you
Cannot find faults that accord with reason.*

Verse 29

*Why is this so? Because by declaring these
Chances for reification and denigration
Towards things seen and unseen
Are made most remote.*

It is by this very (reasoning) that one can well understand the statement that even if opponents try to pick apart how you have taught, they can never find an occurrence (of fault) in the Dharma's consistency.

"Why is this so?" It's because, by this explanation, you've distanced afar any chances for interpolation or repudiation regarding any phenomenon, seen or unseen.

- a. Stay away from any chance for interpolation or repudiation

If one fully understands the reasoning of dependent arising and emptiness, one will develop the conviction that it is impossible for even a tirthika or non-Buddhist to find any fault, that accords with reason, within any of the Buddha's teaching. If an opponent were to try to debate with the Buddha on the basis of proper reasoning, they would be quickly defeated by the Buddha's arguments.

Why? Because the Buddha has explained the true reality of all phenomena, and in doing so, has shown that causes give rise to results that can be perceived by ordinary beings, and that the profound meaning of emptiness transcends the perception of ordinary beings. Such explanations avoid any chance for interpolation or repudiation to be made towards any phenomenon, seen or unseen. Any intelligent, well-educated person who is capable of logical reasoning will therefore find it impossible to refute or discredit the Buddha's claims.

Interpolation means to impute a non-existent quality to any phenomenon, while repudiation means to discard an existent quality that any or all phenomena may inherently possess. For example, there is no evidence of a creator responsible for the existence of the entire world, so if someone were to believe in the existence of such a creator, this would be an interpolation imposed upon the world. On a relative level, all living beings have previous and future lives and all phenomena are governed by the law of causality, so if someone were to deny that reincarnation and karmic law exist, then this would be considered as a repudiation of true reality.

If one truly understands the principle of dependent arising and emptiness, they will work to completely eliminate all wrong views and any chance for interpolation or repudiation, and will avoid the extremes of existence and non-existence. By aligning ourselves with the teaching on dependent arising, we can develop the certainty that Buddha Shakyamuni is the only authentic teacher who, with his infallible wisdom, has taught us to recognize the true nature of all phenomena.

b. Dignaga's homage to the Buddha

As Dignaga⁴⁵ contemplated what would later become one of his best-known works, *The Compendium of Valid Cognition*⁴⁶, he first wrote a verse on the walls of his cave in chalk,

*To the One who has evolved into the Supreme Reliable Guide,
Motivated by altruism to benefit sentient beings,
The Teacher, Sughata, and Protector
To You, I make prostrations.*

A Brahman tirthika snuck into Dignaga's cave and twice erased the verse, after which, Dignaga left him a message, which read, "As these words are meaningful to me, please do not continue to erase them if you are just doing so for fun. If you don't agree with what the verse says, let us meet and debate its meaning." After a series of very rigorous debates, during which each of the Brahmin's arguments were completely defeated, the Brahman in his anger, used his supernatural power to set fire to all of Dignaga's belongings, very nearly setting Dignaga ablaze as well.

Dignaga felt discouraged at the thought that if he had been so unsuccessful at benefitting even one person, how could he hope to bring benefit to all living beings. Just as the thought of renunciation arose in his heart, Manjushri appeared before him and said, "You must not develop such negative thoughts because of one bad person. I am your deity, upon whom you can rely from life to life and I will protect you forever. You must accomplish the writing of this text, as it is destined to become an eye of wisdom for all people of the world." Encouraged by Manjushri, Dignaga eventually finished his great work, which later became famous throughout the Buddhist world.

The verse that was written on the cave walls does not seem complicated, but it does indeed contain all of the Buddha's virtuous qualities, which are unique amongst all of the world's scholars and teachers. It is for this reason that Lama Tsongkhapa says that those who would set themselves up as opponents of the Dharma, will be unable to find any fault in any of the Buddha's teachings.

c. A proper reason to take refuge in Buddhism

In some commentaries, it is said that the teaching on the perfect union of dependent arising and emptiness, reveals the Buddha's four categories of fearlessness. The first, which is the fearlessness of obscuration, means that the Buddha has shown no fear in declaring that it is afflictive and cognitive obscurations that prevent living beings from seeing the truth of dependent arising and emptiness. The second is the fearlessness of liberation, which means that any being can achieve liberation by cutting through all obscurations and realizing the true nature of emptiness. The third, which is the fearlessness of abandonment, means that when one has achieved the fruit of Dharmakaya, this person has abandoned every kind of affliction and obscuration, and finally, the fourth, which is the fearlessness of achievement, means that after realizing the true nature of emptiness, one can manifest themselves in different forms to different beings in order to better guide them towards liberation. Given that

⁴⁵ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Dignaga>

⁴⁶ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Compendium_of_Valid_Cognition

the Buddha has taught a truth that possesses qualities of the four types of fearlessness, no one in this world can find any fault in his teachings, nor can they challenge the Buddha with fair and just reasoning.

Hence, in this lifetime, our approach towards Buddhist teaching should rely on logic and sound reasoning. We might inquire, for instance, what are the logical reasons that we should take refuge in the Three Jewels? While some may consider Buddhism to be a tradition that is somehow unique or mysterious and others may see it as a peaceful and compassionate practice, these are not compelling reasons that should lead one to become a Buddhist.

Gendün Chöphel once told a story of an experience of his that took place in India. He had gone into a non-Buddhist temple and started to pray before the holy statue of this particular religion's primary deity. As a result of the sincerity of his prayer tears began to pour forth from his eyes, and it was through this experience, that he reached the understanding that people's emotional reactions were not reliable, and may sometimes come for no reason.

Some Buddhists, on meeting a guru, may suddenly find themselves getting teary-eyed. This may be due to their special karmic connections to this guru from previous lives or it could be nothing more than a natural physical reaction without too much meaning. Of course, if one were to shed tears of joy when in the presence of a Buddha statue, or tears of compassion when confronted with the plight of certain poor beings, many sutras state that even one drop of these type of tears is the cause for the accumulation of great merit. However, what matters more is to be aware of the Buddha's greatness, both in the achievement of his realization and in his compassionate teaching of the truth to all beings. In this world, the Buddha stands alone as the only one whose wisdom is unsurpassable and whose teaching is infallible. It is for this reason that those who are seeking after the truth, choose to follow him. Deluded as we ordinary people are, we should certainly follow his teaching and take refuge in the truth that he has so compassionately shared with us. That is the most important reason that we Buddhists take refuge in the Three Jewels.

D2. Establish the Faultlessness of the Buddha's Other Teachings

Verse 30

*Through this very path of dependent origination,
The rationale for your speech being peerless,
Convictions arise in me [also]
That your other words are valid too.*

By this very path of dependent arising, which is the reason your speech is seen as peerless, one can develop certainty that your other statements are valid as well.

- a. Develop convictions through the path of dependent arising

By studying this path of dependent arising and the peerless teaching on emptiness, confidence is aroused that there is absolutely no deception in any of the Buddha's statements, along with the certainty that they are all valid and irrefutable. One can then infer that the Buddha's teachings on other topics, such as generosity, discipline, the ten virtuous actions

and so on, are also all correct and without fault. From this one is born a deep and unshakable confidence in the Buddha's teachings.

The teachings on dependent arising and emptiness are clearly illustrated in the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*⁴⁷. If we have learned the extensive, the medium and the short version of the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*, such as the *Heart Sutra*, etc., we will understand that everything is empty in nature, and that from this emptiness, all things can arise.

If one understands this philosophical perspective, regardless of whether one is a Buddhist or not, one will realize that in this world, the only one who has seen and taught the true reality of emptiness and dependent arising is Buddha Shakyamuni. Through accepting the profundity of this one teaching, one can infer that all of his other teachings are also truthful and without fault. The Buddha has taught that generosity brings about wealth; pure discipline results in rebirth into higher realms; virtuous deeds are the cause of happiness and un-virtuous deeds lead to the lower realms, all of these are authentic teachings that are in accord with the underlying principles of the true nature of reality.

b. Resolve doubt through debate

In the *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*, it is said that,

*Whoever doubts what the Buddha said
About that which is hidden
Should rely on emptiness
And gain conviction in him alone.*

This means that, if those profound teachings given by the Buddha, on reincarnation, on the karmic law of causes and effects, and on the Six Paramitas and so on, are hard to accept, one can first study the teaching on emptiness, and as a consequence, one will develop a certainty on all of the Buddha's teachings.

Learned commentators have similarly inferred that all of the Buddha's teachings, including the teaching of dependent arising and emptiness, are flawless because they have proven themselves able to stand up to rigorous and thorough examination. From this it can be said that if one comes to an understanding of the philosophy of emptiness, they will have no doubt about the Buddha's other teachings.

In the world, some may develop confidence simply by seeing the dignified manner in which certain practitioners comport themselves, while others may have many discriminative thoughts and remain filled with suspicion and uncertainty. In either case, to become fully convinced, one would do well to engage in rigorous debate until any and all avenues of inquiry have been exhausted. As Gendün Chöphel has said, "The closer a wise person gets to the truth, the fewer doubts he will have." This is particularly true in this modern age, when scholars and other well-educated people, many of whose minds are filled with discriminatory thinking and doubts, really need to study Buddhist logic and the Middle Way. If they will take the time to closely follow the arguments provided in the sutras and their commentaries, they will be able to dispel all of their doubts and wrong views.

⁴⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prajnaparamita>

