

The Commentary

on

Lama Tsongkhapa's

In Praise of Dependent Origination

prepared from

Khenpo Sodargye's oral teaching

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The Importance of the Text

Lama Tsongkhapa's *In Praise of Dependent Origination* is an outstanding and profound poem that explains the deep meaning of dependent origination and emptiness. When His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche¹ was alive, he often spoke highly of the brilliance of this poem. His opinion was that, "As a follower of the Buddha, even if one is unable to extensively study all of Lama Tsongkhapa's supreme writings, one should at least study his short and pithy treatises, such as *In Praise of Dependent Origination* and *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*²."

Over the course of Buddhist history, there have been many other renowned Buddhist practitioners who have attached great importance to *In Praise of Dependent Origination* as well. An excellent example of these is the great Tibetan scholar Gendün Chöphel³, who it is said, just before passing into nirvana, asked his attendant to read two poems to him, Lama Tsongkhapa's *In Praise of Dependent Origination* and Ju Mipham⁴ Rinpoche's *Prayer to the Indivisible Basis, Path, and Fruit of the Great Perfection of Manjushri*. After having listened to the words of these two poems, he was to have said, "Now I have totally understood the illusory essence of the world's manifestation. Everything has been perfectly achieved." The next day when the attendant arrived, he found that the great master had already passed into nirvana during the night.

It is said that on one occasion, while engaged in ascetic practice, Lama Tsongkhapa received a spiritual vision during which Manjushri appeared before him. Manjushri prophesized that Lama Tsongkhapa would attain enlightenment through the blessings of Nagarjuna⁵ and Aryadeva⁶, and that in addition, he would also bring enormous benefit to all living beings through his Dharma activities, however before this came to fruition, he must be diligent in accumulating merit. Later after having received this prophecy, Lama Tsongkhapa had a dream in which he saw five important Madhyamika commentators, Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Buddhapalita⁷, Chandrakirti⁸ and Bhavaviveka⁹, and in which Buddhapalita blessed him by placing *The Shastra of Buddhapalita* on his head. After waking from this dream, Lama Tsongkhapa immediately found this text and while reading the verse:

¹ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Khenpo_Jikme_Phuntsok

² http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Three_Principal_Aspects_of_the_Path

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gend%C3%BCn_Ch%C3%B6phel

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

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

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

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

⁸ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Chandrakirti>

⁹ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Bhavaviveka>

*External objects exist conventionally,
While ultimately lacking intrinsic existence,*

he achieved enlightenment.

(In another version, Lama Tsongkhapa achieved enlightenment as he was reading the following verse in *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*¹⁰:

*If it were other than the aggregates,
It would not have the characteristics of the aggregates.)*

After his enlightenment, Lama Tsongkhapa developed an unsurpassable confidence in emptiness and an irreversible faith in Buddha Shakyamuni arose within him. As a result he composed the poem *In Praise of Dependent Origination*, which was his first writing after his enlightenment, and which, upon completion, became very popular.

Here is a story of how this poem, led Gyaltsab Je¹¹, who became one of Lama Tsongkhapa's two principle disciples, to rely on him as his root guru. One day, Gyaltsab Je overheard a monk reading a poem outside a temple. It was so beautifully written, and he became so joyful upon hearing its content, that he believed that a poem this wonderful must have been composed by either Chandrakirti or Nagarjuna, as it was his belief at that time, that no Tibetan was capable of composing a poem this beautiful. When he discovered that it had been composed by Lama Tsongkhapa, it caused him to develop such great faith in Lama Tsongkhapa's enlightenment, that he came to rely on him, with the three ways of pleasing¹², as his root guru.

Being aware of the poem's supreme value, many great masters from all over the world, have given it special attention and have taught it widely to their students. Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche first translated this poem from Tibetan into Chinese in 2004, adding some corrections to his translation in 2007, however it was not until 2010 that Khenpo Sodargye was able to give teachings on this poem. As he said, "All things are like this, including Dharma teaching; without the coming together of proper causes and conditions, things will not happen."

Khenpo has also said that by learning this great text, he is certain that followers of the Dharma will develop great faith in Buddha Shakyamuni and gain a deep understanding of the Dharma teachings. As long as one listens to the teachings properly, reflects on their meaning carefully, and meditates on them diligently, one will be able to attain a certain level of realization.

¹⁰ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Mulamadhyamaka-karika>

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

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

A1. Opening

B1. Title

The title, *In Praise of Dependent Origination*, does not mean that it is the intention of the author to solely praise the teaching of dependent origination. Actually, in this poem the author directly praises Buddha Shakyamuni, and indirectly praises the teaching on emptiness and appearance.

Why? It is well known that Buddha Shakyamuni, in the beginning, aroused bodhichitta, in the middle, accumulated incredible merit for three great eons, and in the end, achieved Buddhahood. After his awakening, the Buddha taught the 84,000 paths of Dharma practice to living beings. Among all of his teachings, the Buddha taught the most profound principles of dependent origination and emptiness, with the supreme wisdom of his own enlightenment. This is a unique teaching that cannot be taught by any other great scholar or person of wisdom from any of the other schools of philosophy. Therefore, Lama Tsongkhapa praises the Buddha in a way that acknowledges that apart from Buddha Shakyamuni, no one else in this world had attained the realization of dependent origination and given these enlightened teachings. It is for this reason that one should praise the Buddha with great gratitude.

As we know, every living being in this world wants to pursue happiness. However, in spite of this wish, most of the time, living beings end up experiencing the pain of suffering. How then, can we break away from the cycle of suffering? It is through learning and realizing the truth of dependent origination. Who discovered and first taught this truth? It was Buddha Shakyamuni. Therefore, as a follower of the Buddha, Lama Tsongkhapa praises the Buddha in this way.

B2. Homage

C1. Homage in General

Homage to (my) Guru, Manjughosha.

Right at the beginning of this poem, Lama Tsongkhapa pays homage to his guru and Manjushri. This is the homage in general, which indicates that this text belongs to Abhidharma within the category of the three pitakas (Vinaya, Sutras, Abhidharma)¹³.

C2. Homage in Particular

Verse 1

*He who speaks on the basis of seeing,
This makes him a knower and a teacher unexcelled,*

¹³ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Three_pitakas

*I bow to you, O Conqueror; you who saw
Dependent origination and taught it.¹⁴*

*I bow to (you) the Triumphant (Buddha), who has seen and taught dependent arising,
which to see (makes you) a knower, and to speak of (makes you) an unsurpassable
instructor.¹⁵*

a. The wisdom of the Buddha

This is the homage to Buddha Shakyamuni. The Buddha saw and realized the truth of dependent origination through his own enlightenment and furthermore taught this truth to his followers. Because of seeing, he is a great knower; and because of having taught it, he is an unsurpassable teacher. Therefore, the author, with all his reverence, bows to the Buddha. Essentially speaking, the unexcelled wisdom of the Buddha is exactly the full realization of emptiness and dependent origination. It is because of this that the Buddha is also called the Conqueror in this world.

Dependent origination has both a relative level and an ultimate level. The relative level of dependent origination means that the arising of all phenomena depends on proper causes and conditions; there are no phenomena that arise independently or that do not arise when the proper causes and conditions come together. The ultimate level of dependent origination means that the appearance of all phenomena by nature is beyond the four extremes¹⁶ or the eight kinds of elaborations¹⁷; this is the nature of all phenomena.

The Buddha perceived the ultimate truth of emptiness and the relative truth of appearance, and furthermore, he directly taught this truth to all living beings. As such, the Buddha, his wisdom and his teachings can be said to be unsurpassed in this world. Therefore, Lama Tsongkhapa pays homage to the Buddha with reverence and respect.

b. The way of paying homage

This is a wonderful method of paying homage that we should remember. As a matter of fact, in many great treatises, the authors pay homage in this manner. For example, at the beginning of *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, Nagarjuna says,

*To him who taught that things arise dependently,
Not ceasing, not arising,
Not annihilated nor yet permanent,
Not coming, not departing,
Not different, not the same,
The stilling of all thought, and perfect peace:
To him, the best of teachers, perfect Buddha,*

¹⁴ Translated by Geshe Thupten Jinpa

¹⁵ Translated by Dr. Alexander Berzin in studybuddhism.com

¹⁶ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Four_extremes

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

I bow down.

At the end of the text, again Nagarjuna says,

*To him who in compassionate wisdom
Taught the Sacred Dharma
For the shunning of all views,
To him, to Gautama, I bow.*

These stanzas explain how the Buddha taught the principle of dependent origination to all sentient beings to eradicate their wrong views, delusions and ignorance. Hence, Nagarjuna respectfully pays homage to him.

At the beginning of *The Commentary on the Ornament of the Middle Way*¹⁸, Ju Mipham Rinpoche also praises Buddha Shakyamuni for his unexcelled teachings of dependent origination:

*To you, O peerless one, who spoke supremely well
Discoursing on the wondrous path: dependent co-arising,
Which looses all the strings and fetters of samsara,
To you, Lord, Loin of the Shakyas, I bow down.*

As followers, we should praise and pay homage to the Buddha in this way because the Buddha is unique and differs from all other wise people of this world. Worldly intelligent people can only make contributions to society in a certain field, but the Buddha can solve the mental problems of all living beings by teaching dependent origination and emptiness. Accordingly, in the *Mulasarvastivada Vinaya*¹⁹, the Buddha is paid homage to in the following way:

*"I pay homage to the king of doctors,
As you are good at solving mental problems;
Although you are far away from us,
Your teachings can inspire us to be wise."*

A2. Main Text

B1. Praise the Buddha for Teaching the Theory of Dependent Origination

C1. The Seeing of Dependent Origination Can Eradicate the Root of Samsara

Verse 2

*Whatever degenerations there are in the world,
The root of all these is ignorance;
You taught that it is dependent origination,
The seeing of which will undo this ignorance.*

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

¹⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mulasarvastivada>

Unawareness is the root of as much torment as there is in the world. Thus, you spoke of dependent arising, which, if seen, turns that back.

a. The Root of Samsara

In this world, all afflictions, sufferings, degenerations, destructions and so on, are fundamentally caused by ignorance. The Buddha taught us that the root of all of these sufferings and degenerations in samsara can be eradicated by the recognition of dependent origination. Why is that? It is because all sufferings of living beings are directly caused by mental afflictions such as desire, hatred and jealousy, which are in turn caused by ignorance.

What are we ignorant of? Every living being is, in fact, the combination of five aggregates. In spite of this, people regard that theirs as an independent existence with an intrinsic nature. Starting from this misunderstanding, ordinary people have attachment to self and to the things that belong to self. This results in suffering from sickness, old age and death, or from the loss of, or failure in the seeking after of desirable things. Furthermore, the root cause of wars between countries and conflicts between families and individuals are also due to self-attachment. In other words, suffering and restlessness in this world are the result of the ignorance of ordinary people who strongly believe that this illusory world has a solid existence. As the Buddha said, if one can destroy ignorance, then all the other eleven links of dependent origination can be destroyed, and that is the end of samsara.

b. The Indication of Dependent Origination

It is said in *The Play in Full*²⁰, that the Bodhisattva perceives the truth of dependent origination and realizes the true nature of the world. In the *Vimalakirti Sutra*²¹ it also directs the reader to “profoundly enter into the teaching of dependent origination and eliminate all wrong views”. It suggests that all wrong views, ignorance, afflictions and sufferings are due to the lack of understanding of the law of dependent origination, which, if one were to truly understand it, he or she would no longer become attached to anything or experience any kind of suffering. For example, people always pursue high position, but in fact, social position is nothing more than a fabricated phenomenon that is dependent on related causes and conditions.

In the *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness*²², the last verse says that by seeing that internal and external phenomena arise from causes and conditions, one eliminates the whole network of wrong views. As a result, one abandons desire, hatred and ignorance, and thereby attains nirvana unstained by wrong views.

²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lalitavistara_S%C5%ABtra

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

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

It is also said in the *Lankavatara Sutra*²³, that ordinary and ignorant people regard phenomena that arises from causes and conditions as true existence. Due to this delusion, they fail to recognize the true nature of the three samsaric worlds. This is the current situation of ordinary beings. However, once they realize the truth of dependent origination, their ignorance will be eliminated and as a consequence, all corresponding suffering will vanish.

C2. The Path of Dependent Origination Is the Essence of the Dharma

Verse 3

*So how can an intelligent person
Not comprehend that this path
Of dependent origination is
The essential point of your teaching?*

At that time, how could those with intelligence not have comprehended the path of dependent arising as being the essential point of your teachings?

- a. The essential point of the Buddha's teaching

If we understand that realizing the principle of dependent origination can eliminate ignorance and cut through all kinds of suffering, then we can naturally understand that the path of dependent origination is the essence of the Buddha's teaching. In other words, the essential teaching of all 84,000 paths of liberation can be summed up as the path of dependent origination. Therefore, an intelligent person should comprehend that this path is the fundamental and essential point of the Buddha's teaching.

This is also the reason that Nagarjuna composed *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, in which he employed the principle of dependent origination to support the conclusion that the ultimate nature of all phenomena is beyond all extremes of conceptual thought. Nagarjuna's manifestation in this world, was prophesied by Buddha Shakyamuni himself and after the Buddha entered parinirvana. Nagarjuna was regarded as the second Buddha and his work, *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, brings temporary and ultimate benefit to countless living beings. Intelligent people must understand that the truth of dependent origination is the single most essential teaching in Buddhism, and is the one that all serious practitioners must come to understand and to fully realize.

There is a story of Sariputra²⁴ and Maudgalyayana²⁵ and how they became disciples of the Buddha. Once, Sariputra saw a Bhikkhu named Assaji²⁶ who was begging for alms in Rajagaha. Being impressed by Assaji's demeanor, Sariputra followed him until he had

²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La%E1%B9%85k%C4%81vat%C4%81ra_S%C5%ABtra

²⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sariputta>

²⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maudgalyayana>

²⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assaji>

finished his alms round. When Assaji sat down, Sariputra asked him about his teacher and the teachings he followed. Assaji said that his teacher was Buddha Shakyamuni and he had been taught the unexcelled Dharma, but could not offer more explanation due to his lack of experience. Upon the further urging of Sariputra, Assaji spoke this short 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.*

Sariputra was able to comprehend this teaching and thus gained sotapanna²⁷, the first stage of arhathood. Sariputra immediately went off to share what he had learned with Maudgalyayana. Maudgalyayana, on hearing it, also attained the state of sotapanna. Thereafter, Sariputra and Maudgalyayana and their 250 disciples took refuge in the Buddha.

b. Visualization is a way of dependent origination

Thus, intelligent people must know and understand that the teaching of dependent origination is the supreme and ultimate nectar in all the teachings of the Buddha Shakyamuni. In the *Buddhabhumi Sutra Shastra* it is said that, if one sees the truth of dependent origination, one sees the nature of all phenomena; and if one sees the nature of all phenomena, one sees all the Buddhas. People usually think that seeing the Buddha means seeing his marvelous appearance. In fact, the real Buddha is the truth of dependent origination and the nature of all phenomena.

In both the Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings, it is said that at that moment that one visualizes Amitabha, one becomes Amitabha; alternately, when one visualizes Padmasambhava, one becomes Padmasambhava and no other Padmasambhava exists anywhere else in the world. The appearance of Padmasambhava in the mind as a visualization is the relative Padmasambhava, and the ultimate Padmasambhava is the nature of mind that is beyond all extremes and elaborations. This is the perfect union of emptiness and appearance. Other than this, there is nothing else that can be called dependent origination.

In other words, with the coming together of causes and conditions, there is both emptiness and appearance. For ordinary living beings, what they see is the appearance of all phenomena arising from causes and conditions, however for enlightened beings, what they perceive is emptiness, which is the real nature of all phenomena. This is exactly why the Buddha says that everything comes from dependent origination.

C3. To Praise the Buddha for Having Taught Dependent Origination Is the Best Way of

²⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sot%C4%81panna>

Praising

Verse 4

*This being so, who will find, O Savior,
A more wonderful way to praise you
Than [to praise you] for having taught
This origination through dependence.*

*As that is so, how could anyone find as a gateway for praising you, O Guardian,
anything more wondrous than your statements about dependent arising?*

a. The Way of Praising

The Buddha has been praised by numerous beings in a variety of ways. Yet, of all the various ways of giving praise, the most supreme and wondrous is to offer praise for his teaching on dependent origination.

As we know, followers of different traditions also praise their teachers for certain aspects of their qualities or their teachings; however, the aspects or features of these teachers are not unique or special. For example, some may praise their teacher for their ability to enter Samadhi or manifest miraculous powers, or it may be for aspects of their personality, such as their compassion to other human beings. All of these are actually fairly common within the context of different spiritual traditions. The teaching on dependent origination, however, makes Buddha Shakyamuni the most supreme and unsurpassable teacher, because in all of the world, it is only the Buddha who has taught living beings the truth of all phenomena and guided his followers on the path of liberation. Therefore, to praise his unique teaching is the most wonderful way that there is of praising the Buddha.

b. The Best Way of Praising

As we can see, to praise someone also requires wisdom. Without wisdom, one may not truly recognize the qualities of the person being praised. Even worse, praise without wisdom may be taken as slander. In this poem, we can see that Lama Tsongkhapa had realized the supreme teaching on dependent origination and created this composition from the perspective of his enlightened wisdom. It is because he himself perceived the true nature of all phenomena, that Lama Tsongkhapa highly praised Buddha Shakyamuni for this unexcelled teaching. As followers of the Buddha, it is our great fortune to be able to study and practice the path of dependent origination. Therefore, we should each make the aspiration to follow in the footsteps of all enlightened masters and attain personal realization of the truth of dependent origination.

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 *Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra*²⁸ (*The Sūtra of the Heap of Jewels*) and *Saṃyukta Āgama*²⁹,

*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)*³⁰, “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 then has the ability to give such excellent teachings? Only Buddha

²⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mah%C4%81ratnak%C5%AB%E1%B9%ADa_S%C5%ABtra

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

³⁰ It is a commentary on the *Perfection of Wisdom in Five Thousand Lines*, and only survives in Chinese.

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*³¹ (Pramānavārttikakārika), 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.

³¹ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Compendium_of_Valid_Cognition

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 School³², the Sautrantika School³³ or the Chittamatra School³⁴, they all believe that 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 consciousness³⁵ (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 matter³⁶ or indivisible moments of consciousness³⁷, 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

³² <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Vaibhashika>

³³ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Sautrantika>

³⁴ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Chittamatra>

³⁵ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=All-ground_consciousness

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

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

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 reasoning³⁸ 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 Splinters³⁹. All of these different methods of reasoning essentially belong to the principle of dependent arising. In other words, as long as 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

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

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

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 tirthika⁴⁰ schools who used to debate with Buddha Shakyamuni. Three of these were the Samkhya School⁴¹, the Vaishesika School⁴² and the Lokayata School⁴³. The followers of these schools regarded their 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

⁴⁰ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Tirthika>

⁴¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samkhya>

⁴² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaisheshika>

⁴³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charvaka>

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 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*⁴⁴,

*Emptiness and existence are contradictory
In the mind of an ordinary person.*

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

*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, 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*⁴⁵, 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 arguments⁴⁶ of the Middle Way, such as the Diamond Splinters, or the argument of “neither one nor many”.

⁴⁵ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Introduction_to_the_Middle_Way

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

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 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 Shaivism⁴⁷ and Vaisesika 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-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

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

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*⁴⁸, 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, 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

⁴⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heart_Sutra

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, Tathagatagarbha⁴⁹, is something other than emptiness, then both misunderstand the truth of emptiness. As an example, both Longchenpa⁵⁰ 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

⁴⁹ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Buddha_nature

⁵⁰ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Longchenpa>

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*⁵¹, *The Three Principles of the Path*, and *In Praise of Dependent Origination*, Sakyapa's *The General Commentary on Abhidarmakosa*⁵², and *The Treasure of Cognition and Logic*⁵³, Jonangpa's *Mountain Doctrine*⁵⁴ (*Ocean of Definitive Meaning*), as well as Kagyupa's *The 37 Practices of a Bodhisattva*⁵⁵. 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

⁵¹ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Lamrim>

⁵² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abhidharmako%27s%20Commentary>

⁵³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treasure_of_Logic_on_Valid_Cognition

⁵⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ocean_of_Definitive_Meaning

⁵⁵ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Thirty-Seven_Practices_of_the_Bodhisattvas

*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 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*⁵⁶, 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

⁵⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aryadeva>

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 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*⁵⁷ 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

⁵⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avatamsaka_Sutra

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 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 dharmadhatu⁵⁸ 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 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*,

⁵⁸ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Dharmadhatu>

*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*⁵⁹, 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

⁵⁹ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Finding_Comfort_and_Ease_in_the_Nature_of_Mind

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

As is said in *The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*⁶⁰, 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 cognitions⁶¹, and consequently no one could ever achieve nirvana.

⁶⁰ [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)

⁶¹ [http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Two obscurations](http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Two_obscurations)

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

*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 fearlessness⁶² 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 ones⁶³, 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

⁶² http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Four_fearlessnesses

⁶³ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Six_Ornaments_and_Two_Supreme_Ones

emptiness and luminosity. As a result, Mahayana practitioners have a sincere respect for every living being 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*⁶⁴, 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

⁶⁴ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Clear_Words

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-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 arising⁶⁵

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 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 reasoning⁶⁶, 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

⁶⁵ [http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Essence of Dependent Origination dharani](http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Essence_of_Dependent_Origination_dharani)

⁶⁶ [http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Four great logical arguments of the Middle Way](http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Four_great_logical_arguments_of_the_Middle_Way)

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 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 Sthiramati⁶⁷, 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

⁶⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sthiramati>

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 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 Asvaghosa⁶⁸ 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.

⁶⁸ <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*⁶⁹ 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-cognition⁷⁰ 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

⁶⁹ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Vajra_Cutter_Sutra

⁷⁰ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Six_supercognitions

phenomena and obtained their Dharma eyes⁷¹.

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

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

⁷¹ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Five_eyes

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 Dignaga⁷² contemplated what would later become one of his best-known works, *The Compendium of Valid Cognition*⁷³, 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

⁷² <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Dignaga>

⁷³ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Compendium_of_Valid_Cognition

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 obscurations, 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 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*⁷⁴. 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

⁷⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prajnaparamita>

*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.

C2. Establish the Authenticity of the Buddha's Guidance for Those Who Seek Liberation

D1. Point out the Difference between the Buddha and Teachers of Other Doctrines

Verse 31

*You who speak excellently by seeing as it is,
For those who train in your footsteps,
All degenerations will become remote;
For the root of all faults will be undone.*

In training, in your footsteps, in what you have said so well, after you saw in accord with fact, one puts all one's troubles far away, because one turns back the root of all one's faults.

Verse 32

*But those who turn away from your teaching,
Though they may struggle with hardship for a long time,
Faults increase ever more as if being called forth;
For they make firm the view of self.*

(On the other hand,) those who face away from your teachings, even should they devote themselves wearily for a long time, are like inviting one mistake after the next, because of their firm view of identity natures.

a. The difference in results between Buddhist and non-Buddhist practice

The first verse explains why the Buddha is so extraordinary. It is because the Buddha alone, without any hindrance, has clearly seen the un-obscured truth of the reality of all phenomena. Furthermore, because of his unconditioned compassion, the Buddha most excellently speaks of this truth to all living beings.

The term “speak excellently” indicates that it is from his great compassion and wisdom that the Buddha offers these excellent teachings, which are, without exception, of great benefit to all living beings. As a result, people who sincerely follow and train in the Buddha’s teachings will surely avoid degenerations of all kinds.

Here “degenerations” means both the degeneration of an Arhat’s one-sided nirvana and the degeneration of an ordinary being’s samsara. Why is it that Mahayana practitioners are able to avoid these types of degenerations? It is because they are able to turn back the root of all faults, which is the attachment to self and phenomena that is driven by ignorance of the nature of emptiness.

As stated in *The Great Jewel-Heap Sutra*, “The intrinsic nature of all phenomena is emptiness; which can be said to be without either characteristics or essence. In all of the various phenomena in the world, there is no essential essence that can be found.” Hence, when viewing the true nature of reality, nothing exists, no I or mine, no afflictions or ignorance. When one is aware of this true reality and uproots the attachments of self and phenomena, all degenerations become remote. It is only the Buddha, who has had the wisdom and compassion to convey this excellent and authentic teaching to us.

However, for those who practice religions other than Buddhism, as well as for those who have outright refused to accept the Buddha’s teachings, their firm view of self may cause mental afflictions, such as desire and anger, to become even stronger. Even if they have diligently undergone many years of ascetic practices, these methods, in the end, will bring them no benefit. In the sutra of *The Play in Full*, the Buddha clearly explains that, “Those adherents to other traditions practice asceticism diligently, but end up with nothing. They firmly cling to delusive phenomena instead of letting them go. They hold wrong views throughout their lives, and will fall into the lower realms after they die.” Therefore, if one’s spiritual practice does not reduce or eradicate the firm attachment to self or to a belief in intrinsic existence, it is of no benefit at all.

b. The Buddhist practice of asceticism

It is important to differentiate beneficial practice from un-beneficial practice. Some people may think that like other religions, Buddhism encourages ascetic practices. In

support of this, the Buddha is known to have engaged in asceticism in his early life, and past and present Buddhist practice suggests that serious practitioners should have only one meal a day, and that that meal should be eaten before noon. These same practitioners are urged to pay homage to the Buddha by performing full-body prostrations. As all of these practices are guided by the correct view of emptiness and karmic law, they are considered to be beneficial to one's current and future lives.

Lama Tsongkhapa is a great example of a dedicated practitioner who carried out ascetic practices. He walked round and around stupas and temples until his bare feet were a mass of festering wounds. He made daily mandala offerings until his palms were red and raw. During the time when Lama Tsongkhapa was studying *The Shastra of Buddhapalitrutti*, he performed extraordinary ascetic practices for the benefit of all living beings and for the flourishing of dharma activities. Through his ascetic practices, Lama Tsongkhapa not only achieved personal enlightenment, but also composed great works, and left a body of great teachings to his many followers.

During the time that Gendün Chöphel spent in India, his many interactions with non-Buddhist practitioners caused him to feel that the more one searches for the truth, the more one comes to appreciate how extraordinary the Buddha was. In his plain way of speaking, he once said, "Some religions gain dominance through bloody wars; Buddhism is spread all over the world by monks who wouldn't even kill an insect." Indeed, the spirit of not killing any living being is so profound that most other traditions find it too difficult to put into practice. For this reason, even when judged solely on the basis of compassion alone, it is clear that Buddhism can be seen to surpass most other traditions. In Lama Tsongkhapa's poetic verses, his primary focus is on the way that Buddhism's unique education offers people a way to see the world through the perspective of wisdom.

D2. Cultivate Reverence for the Buddha by Being Aware of the Difference

Verse 33

*Aha! When the wise comprehend
The differences between these two,
Why would they not at that point
Revere you from the depths of their being?*

How wondrous! How could any learned person, when he has comprehended the difference between these two, not develop, at that time, respect for you from the depth of his heart?

- a. How wondrous is the Buddha

Here "Aha" means how wondrous, and expresses Lama Tsongkhapa's strong feeling of reverence. For those people of wisdom who have fully comprehended the principle of dependent arising and emptiness, and have recognized the value of the Four

Immeasurables, as well as for those who have a complete understanding of the difference between Buddhist and non-Buddhist teaching, how could they not develop sincere respect for the Buddha from the depths of their hearts? Indeed, one who truly understands the Buddha's unparalleled wisdom or his unconditioned compassion will surely develop an unshakable faith in Buddha Shakyamuni, the fundamental teacher.

In Han Buddhism, there is a text known as *The One Hundred and Fifty Praises of the Buddha*, in which one can find this verse: "The light of the Buddha's wisdom can dispel the darkness of all living beings' ignorance. It is so wondrous and peerless that it is stronger than the light of one thousand suns and has the power to destroy all wrong views." Since the Buddha sees and teaches the true reality of all phenomena, the light of such truth can never be blocked by anybody in any way. When one understands the Buddhist philosophy of compassion and wisdom, a deep and sincere faith toward the Buddha will certainly arise in one's heart.

Verse 34

*Let alone your numerous teachings,
Even in the meaning of a small part,
Those who find ascertainment in a cursory way,
This brings supreme bliss to them as well.*

What need to mention many of your statements, when finding merely a rough certainty about even only the meaning of a single portion bestows supreme bliss.

b. The vastness of the Buddha's teaching

The Buddha has given numerous teachings to his followers; taken together they are as vast as the ocean. Even today, we have threefold canons (Tripitaka), twelve categories of scriptures, four principal tantras, and eighty-four thousand Dharma approaches; taken all together they are too numerous to count. The following story can be found in Chapter 15 of the *Connected Discourses*⁷⁵.

One day in the Bamboo Grove Monastery⁷⁶, the Buddha grabbed a handful of leaves from the ground beneath a tree. He then turned to his disciples and asked, "Are there more leaves in this entire grove than these that I hold in my hand?" All of the monks answered in a unified voice, "Of course, the amount of leaves in your hand is much less than that can be found in the entire grove." Then Buddha then said, "The number of Dharma teachings you have heard from me is like the amount of leaves in my hand, however, the knowledge that I possess is like that of all of the leaves in the entire grove." The Buddha continued, "Why is this? The reason is that, to achieve liberation from samsara, living beings need only the amount of teachings that equal the number of leaves that I hold in my hand."

⁷⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C4%80gama_%28Buddhism%29

⁷⁶ Bamboo Grove: Pali: Veluvana; Sanskrit: Venuvana, the first monastery (Bodhi-Mandala) in Buddhism located in Rajagaha. It was donated by the elder Kalanda and built by King Bimbisara of Magadha.

Even so, the Buddha has given countless number of teachings; these include not only his teachings to human beings, but also his teachings in the God Realm and in the Dragon's Palace. Even in different places of the human world, different teachings have been recorded. For example, the Tibetan version of the Tripitaka is different from its Chinese version, etc. Given how numerous teachings these teachings are, it is impossible to gain a thorough understanding of each and every one of them. However, if we have a true understanding of even a few words, or if we gain a general understanding of just a few verses, it is sufficient for us to achieve extraordinary peace and bliss.

Khenpo Sodargye has mentioned in the past that he knows some people who, in spite of not being very learned about the Dharma, have been greatly benefited by having heard just a couple of teachings, such as "abstain from unvirtuous deeds, and conduct all the virtuous ones". That's why here Lama Tsongkhapa says,

*Even in the meaning of a small part,
Those who find ascertainment in a cursory way,
This brings supreme bliss to them as well.*

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

*Those with little merit
Do not even doubt this teaching.
Entertaining just a doubt
Tears to tatters worldly existence.*

Therefore, if in our minds, we hold a reasonable doubt about emptiness, and wonder whether the true nature of all phenomena is really empty or not, we will be able to destroy samsara. Just as a seed that has rotted due to high temperatures will never give birth to a seedling, a reasonable doubt about the true nature of all phenomena will eventually destroy the three existences. In some sutras it is said that, the merit of understanding only one verse of emptiness, surpasses that of offering numerous buddhas seven types of jewels.

D3. Understanding the Difference Evokes the Author's Reverent Faith in the Buddha

Verse 35

*Alas! My mind was defeated by ignorance;
Though I've sought refuge for a long time,
In such an embodiment of excellence,
I possess not a fraction of his qualities.*

Alas! My mind is so overwhelmed with being muddled that although I've long taken safe direction from (you, who are) a mass of excellent qualities like this, I cannot show even a tiny speck of good qualities (in myself).

Verse 36

Nonetheless, before the stream of this life

*Flowing towards death has come to cease
That I have found slight faith in you --
Even this I think is fortunate.*

But until the flow of my life-force toward the direction of the mouth of the Lord of Death comes to an end, I shall consider myself fortunate even in just this: the slight amount of confident belief (I've developed) in you.

a. Lama Tsongkhapa's manifestation

In this portion of the poem, Lama Tsongkhapa, explains in a humble manner how he developed faith in the Buddha through understanding the principle of dependent arising. The verse begins with the word, "Alas", which the lama uses to express his feeling of great sadness. But why does this great man feel so sad? It is because since beginningless time, due to karmic obscurations, his mind has been overwhelmed by ignorance. He bemoans the fact that, even though he has been seeking refuge for a long time, he does not possess even a tiny fraction of the Buddha's qualities. But the great news is that within this lifetime, before he enters into the mouth of the Lord of Death, as a result of his understanding of the teaching on dependent arising, he has developed a small but meaningful amount of faith in the Buddha, for which, he considers himself fortunate.

This is a perfect manifestation of how Lama Tsongkhapa manifests himself to ordinary beings. As Buddhist followers, this should also be our true feeling: Although we took refuge in Buddhism long ago, and in spite of the fact that we also know that the Buddha and his teachings have incredible qualities, our negative karma still prevents us from achieving any enlightenment in our spiritual practice. What makes us joyful, however, is our great good fortune to be able to receive these wonderful teachings before we go to our death. When viewed from either the perspective of theoretical philosophy, or from the perspective of actual realization, Buddha Shakyamuni is the best teacher in this world.

b. Develop a conviction on the Buddha

The Great Collection Sutra states, "It is only the Buddha who can eradicate all mental afflictions; it is only the Buddha who can guide all living beings toward liberation; it is only the Buddha who can light the lamp of the noble Dharma for all living beings; and it is only the Buddha that I take refuge in, as my savior in the three realms." Therefore, as followers of the Buddha, we should feel extremely fortunate.

Even if one does not take refuge in the Buddha, a Vajra seed of liberation becomes rooted deep in one's mind just upon hearing the great teaching of dependent arising. As the Buddha said in *The Great Jewel-Heap Sutra*, "In the degenerated times of the future, if someone has the opportunity to hear this sublime Dharma, it indicates that this person must have accumulated a huge amount of merit over a long period of time."

If by learning the teaching on dependent arising and emptiness, we can develop a

conviction that the Buddha is the only one in this world who can teach valid cognition and who can guide us across the ocean of samsara toward liberation, then we will not turn away from him regardless of what kind of adversities we encounter in our lives. This irreversible faith is indeed, in itself, a kind of precious enlightenment. Without enlightenment such as this, we may spend lifetimes wandering aimlessly here and there, all the while deviating further and further from the right path of liberation. Therefore, an irreversible faith is so essential for each of us that we should really spend every effort to work on it. The verses of this poem reminds us of how important it is that we all try our best to gain a clear understanding of dependent arising and emptiness.

D4. Conclusively Establish the Buddha as the Only Holder of Truth and the Dharma as the Only Valid Knowledge

Verse 37

*Among teachers, the teacher of dependent origination,
Amongst wisdoms, the knowledge of dependent origination –
You, who are most excellent like the kings of the world,
Know this perfectly well, not others.*

Like a commander of the triumphant in the worldly realms, your omniscient mind has no other (match) in its magnificence and excellence. Among teachers, you are the one who shares the knowledge of dependent arising, and among those with the most discriminating awareness, you alone have an awareness of dependent arising.

a. The most wonderful teacher and the most excellent wisdom

In this world, of the numerous teachers who have each proclaimed their own philosophies, the most excellent is the one who taught dependent arising, this in part, is because of all of the different types of knowledge, the most wonderful is the knowledge of dependent arising. The one who possesses the two supreme qualities, that of gaining the knowledge of dependent arising and that of teaching the knowledge of dependent arising, is like a worldly king who is revered and honored by all of his people. It is the Buddha alone who fully possesses these two qualities, and in this way is distinguished from ordinary people who could not, on their own, understand the value and significance of the principle of dependent arising.

In the beginning of *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, Nagarjuna says,

*To he who taught that things arise dependently,
Not ceasing, not arising,
Not annihilated nor yet permanent,
Not coming, not departing,
Not different, not the same,
The stilling of all thought, and perfect peace:
To him, the best of teachers, perfect Buddha,*

I bow down.

On an ultimate level, all things transcend the eight extremes: not ceasing, not arising, not annihilated, not permanent, not coming, not departing, not different, and not the same. On a relative level, all things arise dependently due to causes and conditions. This sublime teaching can only be taught by the Buddha, and so, for this reason, Nagarjuna sincerely pays homage to him.

Similarly, in Bhavaviveka's *Wisdom Lamp*⁷⁷, there is a verse that praises the principle of dependent arising. It states,

*Not different, not the same,
Not annihilated, not permanent,
This is the essential nectar of the Dharma
Taught by all Conquerors.*

The Buddha proclaimed the teaching of emptiness that is beyond distinction and identity, annihilation and permanence. In this world, only the Buddha possesses the wisdom to bestow such unexcelled teaching, which is the sole nectar that is capable of pacifying all mental afflictions. If we comprehend the meaning of dependent origination and emptiness, we will be able to cut through all mental fabrications and afflictions, and let go of any kind of attachment. In this way, we can eventually lead happy and easygoing lives, and enjoy the ultimate freedom possessed by the great enlightened masters of history.

As the Buddha is the best teacher in the history of the world, and his teaching on dependent arising the most sublime, as his followers, we should appreciate his unique qualities. Without a clear awareness of the Buddha's extraordinary qualities, our confidence and devotion in him may too easily crumble over time. As Nagarjuna wrote in *Letter to a Friend*⁷⁸,

*Within the treasury of Buddha's words
There's none so precious, so profound as this.
And those who see that things dependently arise
Do see the Buddha, perfect knower of the truth.*

Therefore, as we aspire to realize the utmost truth, we must diligently strive to comprehend and practice the teaching of dependent arising, for in this world there is no greater or more important teaching.

- b. Spread the teaching of dependent arising and emptiness

Although there are many specific teachings and practices in both the Vajrayana and Mahayana traditions, the true reality of all phenomena is the only one that represents the inseparable union of dependent arising and emptiness. Whether as a speaker or as a listener,

⁷⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bh%C4%81viveka>

⁷⁸ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Letter_to_a_Friend

one must understand how significant the meaning of dependent arising is. As some of the time, the mind of renunciation is emphasized, and at other times the mind of bodhicitta is emphasized, one may wonder, which of these is the most essential? Although differing in their points of view, each of these teachings is crucial. Nevertheless, in order to achieve liberation from samsara, one must realize the ultimate truth of dependent arising and emptiness. That is why in his *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, Lama Tsongkhapa said,

*Without the wisdom realizing ultimate reality,
Even though you have generated renunciation and the mind of enlightenment,
You cannot cut the root cause of circling.
Therefore, attempt the method to realize dependent arising.*

Through the principle of dependent arising and emptiness, we'll come to appreciate the unparalleled quality of the Buddha's compassion and wisdom. Without having gained a definite conviction in this valuable knowledge, we may not be able to develop a genuine faith in the Buddha and believe that he is the only incomparable one in the world, who has unfailingly taught the valid knowledge of everything. It is precisely because he has declared the principle of dependent arising and emptiness that we should arouse within ourselves sincere faith in the Buddha and his teachings.

Nowadays, many people are mired in confusion and mistaken concepts. While on the surface, these people may appear to be intelligent and have a basis in theoretical knowledge, in fact, they are caught up in their own thoughts and ideas. Those who are educated in worldly philosophies are especially inflexible to change, as they never doubt their own deeply ingrained concepts and ideas. If it is our aspiration to seek to understand the most profound principle in the world, we must turn our attention to the teaching on dependent arising, and if it is our desire to convey to others the most meaningful and beneficial knowledge, then this must be the subject of our choosing.

It is quite natural that some will be receptive to this teaching, and that others will not. This has something to do with one's previous lives. Those who, in past lifetimes had deep karmic links to the teaching of emptiness or the related Mahayana teachings, will, upon hearing the teaching on dependent arising in this life, feel joyful and embrace it completely. On the other hand, those who had been in the lower realms for a long time or who have defamed the Three Jewels in their previous lifetimes, instead of having their faith aroused by it, will resent or turn away from this teaching, upon first hearing of it.

Generally speaking, there are two reasons why teaching dependent arising is advantageous. First, it can lead people to arouse an irreversible confidence in the teaching of emptiness and the law of causality. Second, it can lead people to develop an unwavering devotion towards the Buddha. Because they have generated the right faith and the right view people are naturally guided towards the path of liberation, which will certainly be followed by right practice and right conduction, and it is certain that they will progress on the path to liberation to achieve the ultimate happiness. For these reasons, it is of great

benefit to spread the teaching of dependent arising and emptiness.

B3. Only Buddhism Can Show the Path to Liberation

C1. All the Buddha's Teachings Are Skillful Means of Attaining Nirvana

Verse 38

*All that you have taught
Proceeds by way of dependent origination;
That too is done for the sake of nirvana;
You have no deeds that do not bring peace.*

However much has been proclaimed by you has originated and proceeded from dependent arising itself. And, moreover, it's been for the purpose of nirvana (a release from suffering). You do not do anything that doesn't bring about (such) pacification.

- a. All Buddhist teaching has originated and proceeded from dependent arising

This verse tells us that, all the eighty-four thousand Dharma paths taught by Buddha Shakyamuni have originated and proceeded from dependent arising itself.

We should recognize the fact that all eighty-four thousand Dharma paths can be categorized into teachings of relative truth and teachings of absolute truth. From the perspective of relative truth, all phenomena arise dependently from causes and conditions; if there is no cause, there is no effect. All phenomena can be further classified as to whether it is subject to outer or inner dependent arising. Inner dependent arising is illustrated by the twelve links of dependent origination, while outer dependent arising exists in relation to the natural laws of the external world, in which trees, plants and so on are produced by corresponding causes and conditions. In all, none of these dreamlike and illusory appearances arises, independent of causes and conditions. So, ultimately speaking, the nature of all phenomena is emptiness, which means that it exists on a plane beyond the four extremes and the eight elaborations.

The Buddha shared all of these teachings in order to guide living beings to eliminate suffering, to attain liberation, and to reach nirvana. All of the Buddha's teachings are able to pacify mental afflictions and sufferings, as their intent is for the realization of dependent arising and emptiness.

- b. All of the Buddha's teaching can bring peace

The teaching of the two truths is necessary because it can help ordinary beings to eliminate their suffering and purify their mind. In *The Meeting of the Father and Son Sutra*, it is said, "Buddhas appeared in the world and proclaimed the way leading to peace and liberation. Those who are wise, clearly realize that by choosing this path, they will cross the ocean of samsara, once and for all."

Even if we have not yet reached this state, we can still appreciate that none of the

teachings of the Buddha is contrary to achieving a state of peace. Everything that the Buddha did was about peace. For example, the Buddha has taught that one should not harm any living being. So learning to do no harm is exactly the teaching that brings peace.

For average people, entering nirvana and attaining Buddhahood are lofty goals, but coming to understand the Buddhist view of emptiness and altruism shouldn't be too difficult for them to accept. Many well-educated people have the feeling that before they learned about Buddhism, their thoughts and behaviors were kind of crazy due to the fact that they were confined by their limited perception and driven by their ego. Without knowing about the karmic law or emptiness, many people strongly and blindly cling to fame, wealth, relationship, social status and so on. Therefore, it is of great benefit to spread the philosophy of emptiness and compassion to everyone in every corner of this world.

Indeed, the Buddha's teachings can also greatly help national leaders to efficiently govern their countries. In *The Golden Light Sutra*⁷⁹ and other sutras, the Buddha taught many skillful means that are well suited to just this purpose. It is fair to say that both the relative view of compassion and the ultimate view of emptiness are beneficial not only to individuals, but also to any nation and to the whole of humanity.

C2. Thus One Should Accept All the Buddha's Teachings

Verse 39

*Alas! Your teaching is such,
In whosoever's ears it falls,
They all attain peace; so who would not be
Honoured to uphold your teaching?*

How wondrous! Because your teachings bring about a pacification (of suffering) to all those in whose ears it passes, who could not respect upholding your teachings?

a. The benefits of the Buddha's teaching

How wondrous are the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni! No matter which topic the teaching may concern, as long as it is heard by a living being, a virtuous seed is planted which enables one to destroy wrong views and to set oneself on the path towards nirvana. Knowing this, who is not willing to respectfully uphold such teachings?

In this world, all living beings want happiness, yet happiness that lasts for more than just a moment, remains elusive for most. From birth to death, living beings are bustling about trying to catch happiness. If one were to learn of a method to achieve true happiness, who wouldn't rush to follow it? This method is the Buddha's teaching; if living beings are able to grasp it and put it into practice, it is certain that they will attain not only short-term, but ultimate happiness. Knowing that the Buddha's teaching can offer such great benefit,

⁷⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Light_Sutra

who would not be joyful to receive it?

In *The One Hundred and Fifty Praises of the Buddha* it says: “Upon hearing the wondrous Dharma taught by the Buddha, one becomes filled with joy and the mind becomes clear. With subsequent careful contemplation, one is then freed from all mental afflictions.” When one first encounters the precious and supreme Dharma, they feel joyful; then through continuously studying and contemplating it, one can eradicate afflictions and experience even more unusual levels of happiness and joy. This enlightenment that is accompanied by unspeakable joy, is referred to, in the many realization songs of enlightened beings, as the great bliss.

The main reason that one experiences this great happiness, is that the Dharma is able to lead a person to recognize his own afflictions and reduce his clinging to things of this world; as a result, their mind will naturally relax and become peaceful and calm. Just like a prisoner that has been released from prison, if one understands the meaning of emptiness and compassion, the mind becomes free from the bondage of one's own afflictions and attachment, and consequently, one will achieve peace and happiness.

b. The merit of listening to the Dharma teaching

For this reason, Lama Tsongkhapa says that upon hearing the Buddha's teaching, people will be able to achieve liberation. The sutra of *Remaining Mindful of the True Dharma* says: “For sentient beings to rise above birth and death, their foremost recourse is to listen to the Dharma.” Listening to Dharma teachings is the best way to free oneself from samsara. Merely hearing one Dharma teaching every day, makes the day meaningful and valuable.

Before studying the Mahayana teachings, one may have the perception that they are surrounded by enemies and that whatever happens in daily life presents itself as a constant struggle with adversity. After being educated by the Mahayana teachings, even when one is actually insulted or mistreated, this type of situation can still become a favorable condition in the progression of one's spiritual practice. This is because, through study and practice, the Mahayana teachings are able to open one's heart, and make it more flexible and soft. With a rigid mind, everything has the potential to become a cause of suffering, however with an open mind, everything becomes acceptable.

The Flower Adornment Sutra states that, “The Tathagatas and bodhisattvas appear in this world, and their purpose is to open sentient being's wisdom eyes to enable them enjoy true happiness.” In fact, happiness that lasts a day or two is not real happiness nor is the enjoyment that we get from those things that please only our senses. So what then is this true happiness that we are speaking of? It is the realization of wisdom, and the end of ignorance. It is the perception of reality as it truly is. When we have recognized the essential truth of all phenomena, we are no longer troubled by emotional upheavals or suffering. Once we recognize this, we should make every effort to understand and uphold the

Buddha's supreme teaching, because it is only the Dharma that can lead us to lasting peace and great joy.

C3. The Author Feel Joyful by Realizing the Three Distinctive Characters of Buddhism

Verse 40

*It overcomes all opposing challenges;
It's free from contradictions between earlier and latter parts;
It grants fulfilment of beings' two aims –
For this system my joy increases ever more.*

My delight ever increases in this system (of yours), which defeats every kind of challenging opponent, is devoid of contradictions from top to bottom, and bestows the two aims of the nine kinds of beings.

a. The three distinctive characteristics of Buddhism

This verse tells the three primary reasons that the Buddha's teaching arouses such immense joy and respect in Lama Tsongkhapa.

First, the Buddha's teaching defeats all philosophies or doctrines held by the tirthikas of this world. This includes such schools as Vaisesika, Shaivism and Charvaka⁸⁰, none of which have been able to prevail against the rational arguments of Buddhist philosophy. The Buddha's proclamation, like the lion's roar that scares away all other wild animals, simply cannot be refuted; this applies to arguments made against it, in the past, the present, as well as in the future. Thus, Lama Tsongkhapa developed great joy in the Buddha's teaching.

Second, the Buddha's teachings have no contradictions within themselves, nor are there inconsistencies between its earlier and later parts, in spite of the fact that he gave his teachings over a period of forty-nine years to living beings of many different capacities. Because of the diversity of these provisional teachings, they are collectively known as the 84,000 Dharma paths or gates. In his first turning of the Dharma wheel, the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths; in the second turning, the Buddha taught the reality of emptiness, and in the third turning, the Buddha taught the true meaning of buddha-nature. Additionally, the Buddha also spoke of the unsurpassable tantras. In spite of the fact that there are all of these numerous teachings, including both the ultimate teachings and the provisional teachings, none of them will ever become outdated, useless or need to be eliminated.

Thirdly, the Buddha's teaching clearly has great benefits to all living beings. In this world, a certain philosophy may appear to be intellectually stimulating, but if it does not benefit sentient beings, it's unworthy of our endorsement. Only the Buddha's teaching, has

⁸⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charvaka>

the capacity to help all beings to achieve both their temporary and ultimate aims, as well as their worldly and other-worldly pursuits. As long as a person embraces it with devotion and feels an affinity for it, it is certain that they will gain both temporary and ultimate benefits.

For these three reasons, Lama Tsongkhapa generated tremendous joy in receiving the Buddha's teaching.

b. Arouse conviction by following in the footsteps of Lama Tsongkhapa

Even though we currently do not have the wisdom to fully appreciate the Buddha's incredible qualities, through learning this great text, composed and written by Lama Tsongkhapa, we should strive to develop such conviction.

On the one hand, the Buddha's wisdom is absolutely matchless. In Chapter 23 of *Connected Discourses* it says that, "Just as the water of an ocean cannot fit into the hoofprint of a cow, the wisdom of the Buddha cannot be held by ordinary people." The Buddha's compassion toward living beings is boundless and unconditioned; there is no one in this world that has the same compassion as the Buddha. *The Flower Adornment Sutra* says, "Delivering limitless sentient beings, teaching in accordance with their capacities, and pronouncing numerous doctrines unhindered, these are feats accomplished only by the Buddha." The Buddha is able to bring countless living beings to enlightenment by teaching the correct approach that is appropriate for each individual's need and potential. It is only the Buddha who has perfected this extraordinary ability.

That is why in another text praising the Buddha, *Praise to the Exalted Buddha Shakyamuni*, it says, "The more I analyzed the non-Buddhist doctrines, the stronger my faith in you grew, Peerless Teacher!" And further on in the same text, "I have no desire to follow any other teacher but you, Honorable Buddha, because you are unstained by fault and are replete with perfect qualities." This verse was a favorite of His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and was frequently quoted by him.

B4. Recollect the Buddha's Great Kindness with Gratitude

C1. The Author's Recollection of the Buddha's Great Kindness

D1. Recollect the Buddha's Sacrifice for Seeking the Dharma in his Causal Stage

Verse 41

*For its sake you have given away,
Again and again over countless eons,
Sometimes your body, at others your life,
As well as your loving kin and resources of wealth.*

It is for this purpose that you offered over and over again, through countless eons, at some times your body, at other times your life, as well as your dear relations and your stores of

wealth.

This verse tells us that over countless eons, over and again, the Buddha offered everything to achieve the realization of dependent arising. In his causal stage, over many lifetimes, the Buddha gave away his precious body, his life, his beloved families, and his wealth, not just once, but countless times. As is stated in *The Flower Adornment Sutra*, “Because he valued the dharma, he did not cherish even his own body or life, how much the less did he crave a king’s throne, the cities, settlements, palaces, forests, and all the possessions that go with it. Furthermore, he exerted himself to the extreme in various ascetic and difficult practices.”

There was once a great enlightened master of the Kagyu lineage. While performing prostrations to the Jowo Shakyamuni in Lhasa, he offered his respect for Buddha Shakyamuni in this way, “In the beginning we were the same, in the middle you gathered the two accumulations of merit and wisdom, and at the end you attained Buddhahood; now I shall pay homage to you.” We should remember that for the sake of living beings, the Buddha, over countless eons gave away his life and everything that he owned, so it is right that we followers should now pay homage and make offerings to him. Why? Because the Buddha has accumulated immense merits and bestowed on us the sublime teaching of dependent arising; furthermore, the Buddha has exhausted all defects and perfected all qualities. Now that he has attained such an exalted state, it is only reasonable that we take refuge in the Buddha and pay homage to him.

The One Hundred and Fifty Praises of the Buddha says: “Undaunted over countless eons, you persevered on the Bodhisattva path; to seek the dharma nectar, you offered your body over many lifetimes.” On the causal stage, over countless eons, the Buddha exerted diligence unremittingly and surrendered his most precious body and gave up his life, in numerous situations and over numberless lifetimes. To follow his example, it is necessary for us to take upon hardships and austerity in our pursuit of the noble Dharma; even to hear only one single dharma lecture, whatever difficulty we may have to bear, it is worth many times more than whatever we have to overcome to do so.

We must be aware that a spiritual path will always involve some kind of hardship, and that it is worth it. Remembering this, we shall not shrink from minor sufferings or frustrations when travelling on the Dharma path. The truth of dependent arising and emptiness is unequalled by any worldly knowledge, thus we must vow to learn it diligently. On this spiritual path, on the one hand, we must constantly pray to the Three Jewels that our conviction in the sublime teaching of emptiness will never decline; on the other hand, we should have the determination to spread the wonderful teaching to all beings around us who have never heard the names of the Buddha or the Dharma. As Mahayana practitioners, it is our responsibility to help others to make an auspicious connection with the sublime teaching of emptiness. Padmasambhava said, “If people see the true meaning of emptiness, compassion will arise effortlessly.” Therefore, once we cultivate the right view of

emptiness, we shall make use of all means to pass it on to other beings.

D2. Recollect the Sadness of Not Being Able to Receive the Dharma Directly from the Buddha

Verse 42

*Seeing the qualities of this teaching
Pulls [hard] from your heart,
Just like what a hook does to a fish;
Sad it is not to have heard it from you.*

What poor fortune not to have heard that Dharma (directly) from you, to whose mind I am drawn, like a fish to a hook, by seeing your good qualities.

- a. The Dharma draws one's heart, like a hook draws a fish

Lama Tsongkhapa tells us modestly, even humbly, that he feels great sorrow at not having received the teaching directly from Buddha Shakyamuni. The teaching of dependent arising is so profound and marvelous that by seeing its qualities (or the qualities of the Buddha), one's heart is hooked by this supreme teaching, in the same way that a fish becomes fastened to a hook. The teaching can dispel all obstacles and expose their profound and wonderful meanings. Whoever accepts these teachings, will find themselves totally attracted, like a fish that is drawn to a glittering hook and pulled along regardless of his will. When one hears this profound teaching, one can't help take delight in it and soon comes to rely on it. That is why Lama Tsongkhapa felt very sad that he was not able to hear it from the Buddha himself.

When the Buddha taught Prajnaparamita at Vulture Peak, there was a large audience, including Manjushri, Maitreya, and many other great Bodhisattvas, It filled Lama Tsongkhapa with great regret and sadness that he was not being able to join them there. What is this feeling like? It is explained in the following verse.

Verse 43

*The intensity of that sorrow
Does not let go of my mind,
Just like the mind of a mother
[Constantly] goes after her dear child.*

By the strength of that sadness, my mind shall never give up (its regard for you), like the mind of a mother continually following after her dear child.

- b. The intense sadness of not having heard the Dharma directly from the Buddha

Lama Tsongkhapa said that no words could express the intensity of the sorrow that he felt every time that he thought about not having seen the Buddha when he was in this world and receiving the Tathagata's instruction in person. Lama Tsongkhapa's feelings

were like those of a mother who is so filled with love for her dear child, that as soon as the child is out of her view, she misses him constantly.

It is very common that when one has a strong faith in the Buddha or in one's guru, this person will always yearn to be by his side. Khenpo Sodargye, for example, has said that before he met his root guru, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, whenever he heard people talking about Rinpoche's virtues and behaviors, the feeling that he had of wanting to meet this great master and rely on him, was beyond anything that words could describe.

Of course, the way that Lama Tsongkhapa describes himself in these verses is nothing more than a manifestation. In actuality, he is a great and highly realized Bodhisattva who, according to the Mahayana sutras, as he is above the path of great accumulation⁸¹, has the ability to go to the Pure Lands and receive the teachings of numerous Buddhas within the same moment.

Also, there was a prophecy made about Lama Tsongkhapa at the time that the Buddha came into this world. In those days, there was a Bhikshu named Lotus-Scent, who was a previous incarnation of Lama Tsongkhapa. The Buddha concealed a conch shell as a terma and prophesied that Bhikshu Lotus-Scent would reveal it at a certain point in the future. This was an auspicious sign for Lotus-Scent's career of spreading the Dharma and benefiting living beings, and it is also the reason why Drepung Monastery⁸² makes ceremonial use of conch shells to this day.

Before receiving his prophesy, Bhikkhu Lotus-Scent had offered a crystal mala to the Buddha, and the prayer that follows, describes this interaction between Lama Tsongkhapa's earlier incarnation and Buddha Shakyamuni,

*In front of the Buddha at Bodh Gaya,
You offered a crystal mala.
Generating supreme bodhicitta,
You had the right views and favorable conditions.*

Therefore, here Lama Tsongkhapa manifests to ordinary beings that he hasn't seen the Buddha in person and is therefore filled with sorrow.

c. Reflect on our current situation

It is truly a cause for regret, that we ordinary beings didn't have the honor to see the Buddha, or to directly receive his teachings while he was in this world. Even if we had been animals at that time, if we had been in the presence of the Buddha for even a few moments, we would not have had to wander in the samsara for countless generations. When the Buddha's relics were exhibited in Taiwan, Master Hsing Yun quoted this verse from

⁸¹ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Path_of_accumulation

⁸² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drepung_Monastery

the *Essentials of the Pure Land Teachings*:

*When the Buddha was in this world, I was sunken;
After the Buddha entered parinirvana, I was born.
I repent of this body's karmic obstacles, that are so heavy
That I was not able to see the Tathagata's gold-colored body.*

When the Buddha was on the earth, we all sank into the three lower realms; when the Buddha entered parinirvana, we were born into this Saha World. We should feel so ashamed of our negative karma and obscurations, which were the reasons that we did not meet the Buddha.

In Gendün Chöphel's *Guide to India*, he said that there are two footprints of the Buddha at Bodhgaya, one that is real, and the other, which is a replica. The Buddha has told us that people with great capacity, after reading his teachings, will be certain that he had existed in this world and will feel joyous. For people with less capacity, upon seeing the Buddha's footprint, they will also feel joyful, for this footprint will be the strong evidence that they need that the Buddha had truly appeared in this world.

Typically, those of lesser capacity believe what they see, or are convinced as a result of some special or supernatural power. On the other hand, throughout history it has happened that those with great capacity, upon hearing of dependent arising and emptiness, have become instantly enlightened without the need of further explanation from any master. So, for all living beings in the future, the Buddha left his footprint in this world for us to remember him by.

When we study the scriptures on emptiness, we will probably all have the same feeling. We haven't had the great fortune to meet the Buddha in person, but we can still feel joyous and gratified that in this lifetime, we have been able to receive his teachings, and in particular, those of dependent arising and emptiness. So we should be truly grateful that the Dharma still exists in the world and that we are now able to receive these great teachings and generate faith in the Buddha and the Dharma. For this, we should all be grateful and never forget the compassionate kindness of the Buddha.

D3. Recollect the Joyfulness that the Buddha Had Taught the Teaching of Dependent Origination

Verse 44~45

*Here too, as I reflect on your words, I think,
"Blazing with the glory of noble marks
And hallowed in a net of light rays,
This teacher, in a voice of pristine melody,
Spoke thus in such a way."
The instant such a reflection of the Sage's form*

*Appears in my mind it soothes me,
Just as the moon-rays heal fever's pains.*

And so, for this, when I think of your statements, I think of (you,) that Teacher, radiant with the glory of the physical signs and exemplary features, surrounded completely by an aura of light,

And, in that manner, proclaiming these (teachings) with your Brahma-like voice. The mere arising in my mind of the image of your physical form, O Sage, is a medicine like moonlight for the torment of my fever.

- a. Visualize the scene of the Buddha teaching the Dharma

Lama Tsongkhapa visualizes the scene of Buddha Shakyamuni teaching the Dharma at Vulture Peak in India. In order to emphasize the precious value of Prajnaparamita, Buddha Shakyamuni himself prepares the Dharma throne, and then expounds the teaching on emptiness to countless living beings. During the teaching, the Buddha is radiant with the glory of the noble marks and is completely surrounded by an aura of light. His voice is a pristine melody, endowed with the sixty-four aspects of Brahma⁸³. Just from hearing this voice, numerous living beings are able to achieve liberation from the ocean of samsara. This is how the Buddha inculcated his disciples. When this scene appears clearly in Lama Tsongkhapa's mind, his sadness and pain are completely wiped out, and it is as if in his mind, clear and cool moonlight arises, dispelling his fever pains and bringing coolness and joy. As followers, we should also visualize the glorious scene when the Buddha was turning the wheel of the Dharma.

Lama Tsongkhapa manifested sadness for not having received the profound teaching from the Buddha himself. Yet he found it a relief to receive such teachings from the lineage masters, and as a result was able to attain full enlightenment. Indeed, achieving such enlightenment is not different from having seen the Buddha himself, because in the latter case, the Buddha also had to use his teaching to guide his followers to realize the nature of all phenomena.

Throughout history, many other great masters had similar experiences, and would meet the Buddha in their pure visions. As an example, in Han Buddhism, Master Chih-che, once saw the Dharma assembly at Vulture Peak in his own vision. Having entered into a profound meditative state, he perceived Buddha Shakyamuni was teaching *The Lotus Sutra*, so he said, "The assembly at Vulture Peak is still going on!"

Initially Master Chih-che relied on a Zen Master named Hui-si, who told him that in a previous life, they had studied together at the feet of the Buddha, and that he should dedicate himself to the study of *The Lotus Sutra*. So Master Chih-che kept studying this sutra, until one day during his chanting, the moment he chanted the sentence that appears

⁸³ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Sixty_aspects_of_the_melodious_speech_of_a_buddha

in the chapter of Bodhisattva Bhaiṣajyarāja⁸⁴, “This is the true perseverance. This is called the true Dharma offering to the Tathāgata”, he attained full enlightenment. Meanwhile, he perceived the whole scene as if he were listening to the teachings while in the presence of the Buddha himself. He later founded the Tiantai School, and used different approaches to lead his students to recognize the nature of mind, in a manner that was similar to the symbol lineage of the Great Perfection.

b. Repay the great kindness of the Buddha

In the past, when great masters, such as Chak Lotsawa⁸⁵, went to India, they would not climb the mountain but rather would stay at its foot, in order to better to visualize how the Buddha taught Prajnaparamita at that place, and to reflect on his great kindness. As followers of the Buddha, we should always be thinking about how we can repay the Buddha's kindness. As *The Shurangama Sutra*⁸⁶ says, “Offer up the body and mind to the myriad Buddha-lands and thus endeavor to repay the Buddha's boundless grace.” If we could contemplate and practice the Dharma with persistence, and devote ourselves to spreading the Dharma by offering our bodies and minds to sentient beings in innumerable realms, we will indeed be repaying the Buddha's kindness.

Each time that we receive the Dharma teachings, we should think that if in the past we had attended the teaching given by the previous lineage masters, Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, we would by now have achieved a high level of accomplishment. Or maybe, it is because we were there in previous lives, that in this life we have the opportunity to receive the Dharma. Indeed, there are many textual references stating that it must have been the offerings that we made to numerous Buddhas in our past lives that has led to our having encountered this teaching in this life. Therefore, we should be filled with gratitude and recognize that by merely listening to the Dharma in this life, we will accumulate great merits. In the *Essence of Clear Light*⁸⁷, Mipham Rinpoche has said that even if one hasn't the least understanding of its profound meaning, just hearing the verses or seeing the texts is enough, in itself, to generate great merits.

Some people have a deep karmic link with Prajnaparamita, and thus they have realized the meaning of emptiness in a very short time and possess the wisdom that is neither reversible nor deprivable. For others, without having achieved this deep sense of realization, with the blessing of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas, as well as because of their own merits, they will also arouse great joy when receiving the teaching of emptiness. For some, even if they do not generate a joyful attitude at the sound of these words, just listening to the teaching, even if only for one time, can bring great benefit to them, because

⁸⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lotus_Sutra

⁸⁵ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Chak_Lotsawa_Chöjé_Pal

⁸⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%9A%C5%ABra%E1%B9%85gama_S%C5%ABtra

⁸⁷ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Essence_of_Clear_Light

in that moment, the seed of emptiness has been planted in their mind. Regardless of what our experience is, we should appreciate how powerful the blessing of Prajnaparamita is and have faith in it.

C2. The Author Exhorts All Beings to Recollect the Buddha

D1. Exhortation to Seek the Profound Teaching of Dependent Origination

E1. One Should Rely on the Writings of the Learned

F1. One Should Not Rely on the Words of the Unlearned

Verse 46

*This excellent system, most marvelous,
Some individuals who are not so learned
Have entangled it in utter confusion,
Just like the tangled balbaza grass.*

Although this excellent system of yours is so wondrous, yet unlearned people have made contentions over so many points, like tangled vines.

This excellent system, which imparts the knowledge of dependent arising and emptiness, is one of Buddhism's truly marvelous and most perfect teachings. Unfortunately, many people have become confused and misled by wrong views and ignorance, and this has prevented them from following the right path of spiritual practice. In their utter confusion, they are unable to maintain their concentration and their thoughts are in such a mess that they can be only compared to tangled balbaza grass. Therefore, not only have they misunderstood the wonderful teaching of dependent arising, but in their arrogance, they have also misinterpreted the ultimate meaning of the profound wisdom of emptiness. Lama Tsongkhapa warns us not to follow people such as these.

There are some who have stated that during Lama Tsongkhapa's time, there were a certain number of Tibetan commentators who had failed to properly comprehend the ultimate meaning of dependent arising and emptiness, and that in this verse, Lama Tsongkhapa is warning his disciples not to subscribe to the mistaken point of view expressed in these poorly informed commentaries. This is an alternative explanation that is also fine, since this verse has a broad meaning.

Certainly, if Buddhist scholars and teachers had any real concerns regarding these teachings, we would not stick to them so stubbornly nor would we use all possible means to preserve and safeguard them. If we had any real doubts, or if we were faced with a greater truth that contradicted what we had believed to be true, we would quickly admit our error, because we believe that everyone should approach the truth in an objective, unbiased and logical manner.

In this modern age, people have so many discriminating thoughts, some of which

may call upon so-called “scientific theory” to refute basic tenets of Buddhist philosophy. Yet, regardless of whether it is being examined and analyzed from a macro or a micro perspective, Buddhist philosophy has shown its overall superiority and has consistently and effectively conveyed the advantages that it offers to those who choose to align their lives in accordance with it. As Buddhists, we should examine different ideas through rigorous reasoning and debate. By doing so, we will not only be able to develop a strong and solid faith in the Buddha, but also, by having been so attentive to our own process of observation, we can help others to develop the right attitude towards Buddhist philosophy. This is very meaningful.

F2. One Should Follow the Teachings of the Learned

Verse 47

*Seeing this situation, I strove
With a multitude of efforts
To follow after the learned ones
And sought your intention again and again.*

Seeing this manner (of theirs), I have followed with a great deal of effort (only) the learned and thereby have repeatedly sought your intended meaning.

Lama Tsongkhapa saw that in Tibet many people had founded their own religious sects and were spreading perverted views based on their own opinions. For this reason, he told those that would listen, that one should never seek the truth from such ignorant people, but should maintain caution and follow such great masters as the Six Ornaments⁸⁸, giving themselves whole-heartedly to the wonderful teachings of these enlightened beings. As a matter of fact, Lama Tsongkhapa has many great teachers himself, and some of them were able speak to Manjushri, face to face, because of the purity of their spiritual vision.

History has recorded that because there were not many great masters near to his hometown, Lama Tsongkhapa left his home and family to seek the Dharma elsewhere. After he had been away for many years, he received a letter from his mother, in which she had included a lock of her hair. The realization that he had been away from his home for so long that his mother's hair had turned grey came upon him suddenly, and his heart was heavy with thoughts of how much he missed her.

Lama Tsongkhapa sought the intention of the Buddha again and again, until eventually he was able to realize the Buddha's ultimate meaning through the teachings of Nagarjuna and Buddhapalita. As followers of the Buddha, we must constantly be wary of our own arrogance and sincerely rely on a qualified teacher who holds the right view of the Middle Way. If we try to rely only on our own abilities, it will be too difficult for us to understand the Buddha's ultimate teachings, and by not having followed the guidance of

⁸⁸ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Six_Ornaments

the learned ones, we will be left with our mind and thoughts as chaotic and confused as a tangled ball of balbaza grass.

E2. Other Doctrines Cannot Dispel Doubts

Verse 48

*At such times as I studied the numerous works
Of both our own [Middle Way] and other schools,
My mind became tormented ever more
Constantly by a network of doubts.*

At that time, when I studied the many various texts of the systems of our own and others' tenets, my mind was completely tormented by a web of one doubt after the next.

In the manifestation of Lama Tsongkhapa, during the course of his study, he became extremely dissatisfied after having read the works of both Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools that did not fully accept emptiness. Thus he felt overcome by a great sadness and his mind was in a state of constant torment. It was as if he had been caught in a web of doubt that had been caused by reading their various theories and philosophical treatises.

The same situation can also happen to us. When we read different kinds of books during our study, we can easily get confused by all of the various points of view and soon we cannot tell which view is the right one. When this happens, we can become so entrapped in doubts and confusion that we can hardly find the right way out. Therefore, it is a necessity that we limit our choice of reading material to only the most essential Buddhist texts that are necessary for our study and practice. Otherwise, it is possible that we can become so tormented that our lives become an endless cycle of suffering as we wander from one doubt to the next. That is why, regarding the Middle Way, it will be of great benefit for us to complete the study of its three major treatises, which are *The Root Stanzas of the Middle Way*, *Introduction to the Middle Way*, and *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*. If we can come to understand these three texts, we can fully grasp the ultimate meaning of emptiness.

E3. Illuminating the Meaning of Dependent Origination Should Depend on the Treatises of Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti

Verse 49~50

*The night-lily grove of Nagarjuna's treatises –
Nagarjuna whom you prophesized
Would unravel your unexcelled vehicle as it is,
Shunning extremes of existence and non-existence –*

*Illuminated by the garland of white lights
Of Candra's well-uttered insights –
Candra, whose stainless wisdom orb is full,*

Who glides freely across scriptures' space,

But, my mind found relief from its exhaustion when, through the kindness of my gurus, I beheld the garden of moonflowers of the textual tradition of Nagarjuna – whom you prophesied would comment correctly upon the ways of your unsurpassable vehicle, getting rid of the extremes of existence and nonexistence – illumined by the array of white light of the excellent explanations of the Glorious Moon, Chandrakirti – the full orb of whose stainless understanding passes without hindrance through the sky of the scriptural pronouncements, dispelling the darkness of the heart of grasping for extremes and outshining the constellations of the speakers of distorted (views).

a. The excellent teaching of Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti

This verse explains by means of metaphors that the Buddha prophesied that the teachings of the unsurpassable Mahayana vehicle, which is free from the extremes of existence and non-existence, would be perfectly unraveled by Nagarjuna whose textual tradition is likened to a night-lily grove. What then can cause these night-lilies to fully bloom? It is Chandrakirti's excellent explanations, which are like the Glorious Moon that illuminates these teachings by its array of white light. The name Chandra, in Sanskrit, means the moon, and his stainless wisdom orb unravels the teachings of Nagarjuna. In other words, Nagarjuna, in his treatises, has most excellently explained the Buddha's ultimate teaching on emptiness, and Chandrakirti has fully expounded them.

The well-uttered insights of Chandrakirti are described as the full moon, which is free to glide unrestrainedly across open space, meaning that the stainless wisdom orb of Chandrakirti is able to glide freely across the scriptures' space with no one being able to stop him. Chandrakirti's great wisdom dispels the darkness of the extremes of existence and non-existence, and outshines the constellations of all false speakers.

This description indicates that the well-spoken teaching of Chandrakirti has four features. First, it explains Nagarjuna's textual tradition. Second, it explains the ultimate truth in accordance with the Buddha's intention. Third, it shuns the extremes, and fourth, it overwhelms all wrong views. So, the brilliant lights of Chandrakirti's wisdom have illuminated the entire world. What Lama Tsongkhapa yearned for was the Buddha's ultimate intention, which can be attained by following the teachings of Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti.

b. The Buddha's prophesy to Nagarjuna

In the *Lankavatara Sutra* the Buddha prophesied to Nagarajuna,

In the south, in the area of Vidarbha,

Will be a monk known widely as Shriman.

Who will also be called Naga.

Destroying the extreme positions of inherent existence and conventional nonexistence.

The Buddha also indicated,

*He will thoroughly teach to the world
The unsurpassed Great Vehicle—my vehicle.
Having done this, he will achieve the Very Joyful ground
And then go to the Blissful Pure Land upon passing away.*

The *Mahamaya Sutra* also contains a prophesy that, 700 years after the Buddha entered parinirvana, a Bhikshu would be born who would be named Nagarjuna, and who would excel at explaining the profound Dharma, pull down the canopy of wrong views and light the torch of the authentic Dharma. According to this scripture, Nagarjuna was, in fact, the one who dismantled the canopy of wrong views and lit the torch of the sublime Dharma.

Therefore, in Chapter 6 of Chandrakirti's *Introduction to the Middle Way*, it is said,

*One who grasped profound and ultimate reality,
Through force of reasoning and by the light of scripture,
Was the Noble Nagarjuna; and following his tradition,
As this still exists, I will proceed to speak.*

As followers of the Buddha, we should by all means dispel our wrong views and realize the ultimate meaning of dependent arising and emptiness conveyed by Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti. This is of great importance.

E4. One Should Rely on Qualified Teachers Who Can Expound These Treatises

Verse 51

*Who dispels the darkness of extremist hearts
And outshines the constellations of false speakers –
When, through my teacher's kindness, I saw this
My mind found rest at last.*

Lama Tsongkhapa said that through the kindness of his root gurus, he realized the true meaning of dependent arising and emptiness imparted by Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti. At that moment, his mind found rest, and abided in a joyful and peaceful state. As Shantideva said in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*,

*When real and nonreal both
Are absent from before the mind,
Nothing else remains for mind to do
But rest in perfect peace, from concepts free.*

It is a state of the non-duality of luminosity and bliss, or the non-duality of emptiness and bliss, which can be attained through one's own aspiration, and with the help of the blessings from various gurus, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. With the coming together of all of these proper causes and conditions, everyone can achieve such realization.

Generally speaking, there are two ways to achieve the realization of dependent arising and emptiness. One way is to follow the logical reasoning described in the texts of

the Middle Way, and use analytical intelligence to infer the true reality of everything. In this way, one will eventually find that nothing possesses an intrinsic nature, and that intrinsic nature is a quality that exists only in our conceptual thoughts. The other way is to engage in the preliminary practices and pray for the blessings from the lineage gurus. Following this path, a disciple can recognize the nature of mind when a guru, who has a deep karmic link to this disciple, directly points it out.

Regardless of which method one follows, the truth that is realized is the same, it is that of the inseparable union of dependent arising and emptiness. Therefore, the ultimate intention of all buddhas and bodhisattvas, as well as all the great masters in India, Tibet and the Han area is the same. Once this truth is realized, this person is free of suffering or attachment, and all of his activities will be dedicated to the benefit of all living beings.

D2. Remember the Buddha through His Teaching of Dependent Origination

Verse 52

*Of all your deeds, your speech is supreme;
Within that too it is this very speech;
So the wise should remember the Buddha
Through this [teaching of dependent origination].*

Of all your enlightening deeds, the deeds of your enlightening speech are supreme. Because that indeed is (in reference to) this very (teaching), learned ones, be continually mindful of Buddha from this!

- a. The deeds of the Buddha's enlightening speech

In *The Sutra of the Great Assembly*, it mentions that all Buddhas are born with the ability to perform four kinds of deeds to benefit sentient beings. They are: 1) the deeds of the body, which refers to the Buddha's ability to benefit sentient beings through manifesting his solemn and luminous appearance; 2) the deeds of magical power, which refers to the Buddha's ability to benefit sentient beings through the use of magical powers; 3) the deeds of the Buddha's names, which refers to the Buddha's ability to benefit sentient beings through letting them remember or call out his various titles or names. The sutras state that it is possible for one to achieve liberation simply through the hearing of the name of Buddha Shakyamuni; 4) the deeds of teaching the dharma by speech, which refers to the Buddha's ability to benefit sentient beings through turning the dharma wheel.

Among all the deeds that can benefit sentient beings, the deeds of speech are the most supreme. The deed of the body and the deed of magical power can only be done while the Buddha is alive. The Buddha passed into parinirvana after living in this world for eighty-one years; therefore, bringing benefit to sentient beings through the body or through the use of magical power could not have lasted any longer than that. The speech of the Buddha, on the other hand, has been recorded by the learned in the Tripitaka, which covers all the

teachings of the Three Vehicles including the Tantrayana, and has thus been passed forward to present times. It is through these words of the Buddha that followers in later generations have been able to attain liberation. While Shakyamuni Buddha was alive, the deed of speech was expressed most often through the direct teachings that he gave to benefit sentient beings.

b. The speech of dependent origination is the most supreme among all

The Buddha is said to have taught the Dharma for 49 years. According to the Tiantai School, Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching life can be divided into five stages, which Master Zhiyuan of Tiantai School⁸⁹ has summarized in this short verse: In the first twenty-one days after enlightenment, the Buddha taught the *Flower Adornment Sutra*; then for the next twelve years he taught the *Agamas*⁹⁰; during the third stage, he taught *Extensive Discourse*⁹¹ for eight years; and during the fourth stage, he taught the *Prajnaparamita Sutras* for twenty-two years; in the final eight years before entering into parinirvana, he taught the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Nirvana Sutra*. This makes it clear that the Buddha spent the majority of his teaching time on Prajnaparamita, the essence of which is the teaching of dependent origination and emptiness.

Dependent origination can be classified as belonging to two categories, the relative and the ultimate. Dependent origination, in the ultimate sense, is related to the ultimate truth of the universe, which has been explained clearly in *the Root Stanzas of the Middle Way*. Relative dependent origination, in contrast, is more related to worldly truth, which is the law of cause and effect. These two types of dependent origination cover all secular knowledge, and moreover, expound upon the reality of all worldly phenomena. With a thorough understanding of dependent origination, the reality of all phenomena can be utterly realized, leaving one in a state that is similar to standing on a mountain peak, wherein everything can be beheld in a single glance. It is for this reason that it is said that the teaching of emptiness and dependent origination is the best among all of the Buddha's teachings, as through its understanding, all wrong views and fallacies can be destroyed.

c. How to remember the Buddha

Here, we are reminded that remembering the Buddha doesn't mean to recall him by gazing at Buddha statues or other images, nor does it mean to remember him by thinking of his magical powers. Rather, it is because of the teaching of dependent origination that we should remember the Buddha.

When we thoroughly comprehend the truth of dependent origination, we will forever hold in our hearts, the Buddha's kindness. No one else in this world, including the greatest

⁸⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiantai>

⁹⁰ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Āgama_\(Buddhism\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Āgama_(Buddhism))

⁹¹ <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198605607.001.0001/acref-9780198605607-e-1958>

scholars of all of history, has had the wisdom and clarity to discover such a profound truth on their own. Only the Buddha had the unparalleled wisdom to realize the truth of dependent origination that subverts all wrong views. The wise will develop this conviction by learning the Buddha's teachings, just as Lama Tsongkhapa and Mipham Rinpoche did.

In *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*, it is said that, "there is nothing on earth, that does not amaze the wise." Indeed, seeing the truth of dependent origination and emptiness, the wise will be amazed at two points: 1) all seemingly existent phenomena are empty in nature when examined by the reasoning of the Middle Way; 2) sentient beings, in their ignorance, are so attached to the phenomenal world that they do not realize that it does not truly exist.

Through reading the scriptures in the Tripitaka, regardless of whether it is the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, *The Sutra of the Heap of Jewels*, the Vinaya or the tantric scriptures, a person of wisdom will naturally develop confidence in the Buddha and will gradually become more and more aware of the Buddha's unparalleled wisdom. It would be great if everyone would try to calm down, find some time to study the Buddhist texts and develop a logical and unbiased understanding of Buddhism.

B5. Summary

Verse 53

*Following such a teacher and having become a renunciate,
Having studied the Conqueror's words not too poorly,
This monk who strives in the yogic practices,
Such is [the depth of] his reverence to the great Seer!*

In the footsteps of (you,) this Teacher, I became a monastic, and my study of (your) statements, Triumphant One, has not been poor. As a monk who makes effort in the actions of a yogi, I pay respect like this to (you,) that Great Seer.

- a. Lama Tsongkhapa's intelligence in knowledge and diligence in practice

According to Lama Tsongkhapa's biography, following in the footsteps of Shakyamuni Buddha, he received the novice ordination at the age of seven. By diligently studying Buddhist teachings from that point on, Lama Tsongkhapa became proficient in all Buddhist teachings and even from a very young age was able to teach them to others. It is for this reason that Lama Tsongkhapa says he has "studied the Conqueror's words not too poorly". In actuality, Lama Tsongkhapa is claimed by many in Tibet to be an emanation of Manjushri, and as such, is considered to be a great master endowed with profound wisdom.

Once, while Lama Tsongkhapa was talking with some disciples, one of them asked him who was the wisest and most extraordinary Dharma teacher in all of Tibet. Lama Tsongkhapa answered that there had been a great master called *Wisdom Lion*, who was

able to open eleven different Buddhist courses at the same time and teach eleven classes every day. Hearing this, the disciples all praised this master's ability and sincerely requested Lama Tsongkhapa to teach extensively in the same way, to which he agreed.

Later, during a Dharma Assembly, Lama Tsongkhapa announced that he was going to teach fifteen different Buddhist scriptures at the same time. During the period that this was taking place and after having finished teaching two smaller scriptures, Lama Tsongkhapa added two more, so that in the end, he ended up teaching a total of seventeen scriptures. These included Five Treatises of Maitreya⁹², five treatises of the Middle Way, *Commentary on Valid Cognition*, *Compendium of Abhidharma*⁹³, *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*, *Introduction to the Middle Way*, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, *Treasury of Abhidharma*⁹⁴ and a text of Vinaya. Sometime later, Lama Tsongkhapa was able to teach twenty-one texts at the same time. This ability to teach so many courses simultaneously, gives us some idea of the profound wisdom of Lama Tsongkhapa.

As a renounced monk, Lama Tsongkhapa was not only diligent in studying the teachings, but also practiced various kinds of yoga in accordance with the Sutrayana and Tantrayana teachings.

It was with tremendous joy and great devotion to Shakyamuni Buddha, that he composed the poem of *In Praise of Dependent Origination* as an offering to the Buddha.

b. How can we learn from Lama Tsongkhapa

This verse also reminds followers to act in accordance with the teachings in *Treasury of Abhidharma*. First, if we have the opportunity to become a monastic, we should do so; if not, we should keep at least one of the five precepts that have been laid out for lay people to follow. Next, we should, as Lama Tsongkhapa did, study Buddhist teachings extensively and diligently. Third, we need to actually practice what we have learned, otherwise, the Buddha's teachings will never penetrate into our minds and bring us benefit. In summary, we should keep pure precepts, and at the same time study, contemplate and meditate on the Buddhadharma.

It is only because of Shakyamuni Buddha that we are able to learn which precepts to adopt and what authentic Dharma to study and practice. Thus, we should remember the Buddha's kindness and always be grateful to him. If, for one reason or another, we are unable do much to requite the Buddha's kindness, we can, at least, frequently recite *The Sutra of The Recollection of the Noble Three Jewels*⁹⁵; remember the Buddha's kindness when you get up in the morning and recite the names or mantras of the Buddha before

⁹² http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Five_Treatises_of_Maitreya

⁹³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abhidharma-samuccaya>

⁹⁴ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Treasury_of_Abhidharma

⁹⁵ <https://www.nalandatranslation.org/offerings/notes-on-the-daily-chants/commentaries/the-sutra-of-the-recollection-of-the-noble-three-jewels/>

going to sleep in the evening. A good practitioner will pray to the Buddha at any time and in any situation; whereas, a lazy practitioner would not recall the Buddha's kindness even while in solitary retreat.

In summary, there is much that we can and should learn from Lama Tsongkhapa, particularly as regards upholding pure precepts, and studying, contemplating and meditating on the Buddhadharma throughout our lives. This is also the systematic method of following the Buddha that is pointed out by His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche in *The Heart Essence: My Heart's Advice*⁹⁶.

c. How can we benefit sentient beings

One of the best ways to return the Buddha's kindness is to act to bring benefit to sentient beings. If we can bring benefit to even one sentient being, directly or indirectly, it is worth doing. If we don't have the capability or the opportunity to do so at present, we can aspire to act in accordance with the Bodhisattva vows and to never be apart from Bodhicitta. This is, in itself, a dharma offering to all Buddhas of the ten directions and is actually the cause of benefiting sentient beings in the future. Therefore, one can make an aspiration, by repeating the words found in *The King of Aspiration Prayers: Samantabhadra's "Aspiration to Good Actions"*⁹⁷,

*Taming my mind, and striving in the pāramitās,
I will never forget bodhicitta;
May all my harmful actions and the obscurations they cause
Be completely purified, every single one!*

Longchenpa said, in *Finding Comfort and Ease in Meditation*⁹⁸, that a bird not fully grown is not able to fly high into the sky. Likewise, it is hard for fledgling practitioners with little ability to actually be of benefit to others. However, if they make aspirations and call upon the powers of Bodhicitta, their wishes to benefit all beings may come true. Some elderly people, though not well educated, will pray with good aspirations whenever they're turning the prayer wheels, or as they are about to set out on a pilgrimage to the holy mountains or to meet one of the great masters. If we can also dedicate the merits accumulated from any good deeds, for the benefit of all sentient beings, even this simple act of dedication can be very meaningful. There are people that pray to the Three Jewels for wealth, longevity, good children, a peaceful life and so on; although it is possible for secular wishes like these to be fulfilled by the blessing of the Three Jewels, the benefit is, at best, only temporary. Therefore, we should try to abandon shortsighted wishes such as these and make an aspiration to uphold the Dharma and to benefit sentient beings.

Though difficulties may exist during the process of spreading the dharma, if we can

⁹⁶ <http://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/khenpo-jigme-phuntsok/drops-advice-my-heart>

⁹⁷ <http://www.lotsawahouse.org/words-of-the-buddha/samantabhadra-aspiration-good-actions>

⁹⁸ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Finding_Comfort_and_Ease_in_Meditation

strengthen our motivation, things will become easier to accomplish. These days, there are many Buddhist practitioners who are quite confused and uncertain as to the best way to make progress along the path. Comparatively speaking, many of us have been following qualified teachers and through constant study, contemplation and meditation, are now able to fully comprehend the profound teachings of Mahayana Buddhism. Therefore, if we can help even one person around us to make the slightest progress on the spiritual path, we're actually taking on the responsibility of spreading the Dharma and benefiting beings.

A3. Ending

B1. Aspiration and Dedication

C1. Dedicate the Merits for All Beings to Be Sustained by Qualified Spiritual Masters

Verse 54

*Since it is due to my teacher's kindness
I have met with the teaching of the unexcelled teacher,
I dedicate this virtue too towards the cause
For all beings to be sustained by sublime spiritual mentors.*

To have met like this with the teachings of (you,) the Unsurpassable Teacher, is due to the kindness of my gurus. Thus, I dedicate this constructive force as a cause for all wandering beings, barring none, to be upheld by hallowed spiritual masters.

Here, Lama Tsongkhapa says that due to his teacher's kindness, he has met with the supreme Mahayana teachings of the unexcelled teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha. Without the kindness and blessing of our teachers, we may not have enough merit to meet such precious Mahayana teachings; and even if we have met such teachings, without our teachers, we may not be able to fully comprehend the meaning of dependent origination and emptiness. Therefore, Lama Tsongkhapa dedicates the virtue of his actions, "towards the cause for all beings to be sustained by sublime spiritual mentors" rather than towards the cause for all beings to become wealthy, healthy and happy. Likewise, we should emulate Lama Tsongkhapa in dedicating our merits of teaching or studying this poem and the merits of studying, contemplating and meditating on the Buddhadharma in general, for all beings to be sustained by qualified spiritual masters.

This verse reminds us of the importance of meeting with qualified spiritual teachers. For any being, especially beings in this degenerate age, it is only through the guidance of spiritual teachers who know all kinds of expedient means that one can step onto the path of liberation. People with power or wealth may bestow status or money upon us, but all these things are temporary and won't lead us to ultimate liberation.

Being sustained by qualified spiritual masters will bring us a lot of merits. In the chapter *Entry into the Realm of Reality of The Flower Ornament Sutra*, it says "Sustained

by spiritual benefactors, enlightening beings⁹⁹ do not fall into bad ways; supported by spiritual benefactors, enlightening beings do not fall away from the Great Vehicle; minded by spiritual benefactors, enlightening beings do not overstep the precepts of enlightening beings..." It is said in a great Gelug master's writing called *The Jewel Garland from a Mountain Hermitage*, that, as it is a rare chance to meet with sublime spiritual teachers, once one has found a teacher, they should stay as close to them as a child who tightly grasps onto his or her mother's clothing. Otherwise, without the guidance of a spiritual teacher, one may get lost on the path to liberation. His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche says that it is a sign of being possessed by Mara for a student to want to leave their teacher.

Therefore, everyone should make an aspiration to be sustained by a qualified spiritual teacher and to always have the opportunity to receive teachings directly from them. Our aspiration can follow the words found in *The King of Aspiration Prayers*,

*May I always meet spiritual friends
Who long to be of true help to me,
And who teach me the Good Actions;
Never will I disappoint them!*¹⁰⁰

Why is it so extremely important to be sustained by sublime spiritual teachers? It is because they can bring positive influence on our mentality and behavior. Where there are qualified spiritual teachers, the Buddhadharma will flourish and the knowledge that sentient beings require to attain liberation is easy to find. On the other hand, if there are unqualified spiritual teachers who preach wrong or mistaken views, it is likely that many people will be negatively influenced by them and will then fall into the Hell Realm, for who knows how many lifetimes. For this reason, we should always pray for all sentient beings to be sustained by qualified spiritual teachers. Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche has said that, for himself, though he hasn't made any great contribution to Buddhism, he has a sincere and irreversible faith in the Buddha and feels joyful to be learning the Buddhist teachings. He owes all this to his guru, saying that, "I know that this is all due to His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and I am truly grateful for his guidance."

C2. Dedicate the Merits for the World to Be Filled With Those Who Find Conviction in the Dharma

Verse 55

*May the teaching of this Beneficent One till world's end
Be unshaken by the winds of evil thoughts;
May it always be filled with those who find conviction
In the teacher by understanding the teaching's true nature.*

Till the end of existence, may the teachings, as well, of (you,) that Benefactor, remain

⁹⁹ *Enlightening beings* refers to *bodhisattvas*, those who have generated the mind of bodhicitta

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.lotsawahouse.org/words-of-the-buddha/samantabhadra-aspiration-good-actions>

unshaken by the winds of misconception. And may they always be filled with those who have found confident belief in (you), their Teacher, by having understood this manner of (your) teachings.

a. Two key points of dedication

First, Lama Tsongkhapa dedicates the merits to the teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha, and wish for it to exist until the world's end and never be shaken by wrong views or evil thoughts. These days, there are people who, though they know nothing about Buddhism, claim that they are true Buddhists, great Dharma masters or reincarnated lamas. They advocate wrong views but claim that they are promoting Buddhism, while, in fact, they are exerting a negative influence on Buddhism. Therefore, we should pray for the true Buddhadharma, that it will not be shaken by wrong views such as these.

Moreover, Lama Tsongkhapa aspires that all beings may understand the true meaning of the profound Dharma, and generate genuine faith in the Buddha. There are many people who seem to believe in Buddhism, but have little understanding of Buddhist principles or Buddhist philosophy. It seems that they suffer from a kind of blindness, as they can neither differentiate Avalokitesvara from worldly deities, nor can they differentiate the Buddha from the gods of other religions. There are even some so-called great masters who, in spite of the fact that they may have a great number of disciples, will bring no benefit to either the disciples or themselves, because they do not even know the wisdom and realization level of the Buddha, or the merits of the Buddhadharma. Therefore, it's important not to have a blind faith in Buddhism, but rather to develop a faith that is logical and based on reason and understanding.

Liang Qichao¹⁰¹, a famous scholar in the Qing Dynasty, said: "Buddhism is a rational faith rather than a superstition. It believes in universal goodness rather than individual goodness. Buddhism is more engaged rather than seclusive." Indeed, Liang has comprehended the true essence of Buddhism. It is not as some people think, that it is only those who can't be successful in a secular society that would choose to live in the seclusion of the mountains as monastics. It is, in fact, a choice of the wise.

b. The current situation and how can we change

Indeed, Buddhists should always seek to improve themselves. These days, there are many so-called Buddhists that have only what can be called a blind faith in Buddhism. This situation must change and the quality of Buddhist practice improved in such a way that the number of Buddhists with faith that is based on rationality, and wisdom that is based on valid knowledge, is increased.

During the Tang Dynasty, the Emperors not only praised Buddhism, but were Buddhists themselves. In that period of history, the ruling powers established many

¹⁰¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liang_Qichao

translation bureaus, and many famous translators, such as Xuanzang¹⁰², Yijing¹⁰³ and Amoghavajra¹⁰⁴, came forward and made important contributions to the Buddhist philosophy in the history. It was also the time when many of the patriarchs of the eight schools of Chinese Buddhism were born into the world, including Master Xuanzang of the Dharma Characteristics' school, Master Huineng¹⁰⁵ of the Zen school, Master Jizang¹⁰⁶ of the Three-Treatise school, Master Shandao¹⁰⁷ of the Pure Land school, Master Daoxuan¹⁰⁸ of the Vinaya school and Master Subhakarasiṃha¹⁰⁹ of Esoteric Buddhism. It was a period during which Buddhism flourished and Buddhist study, contemplation and meditation on the Buddhadharma was widespread. The fact that we in the modern era are able to study the complete and authentic Buddhadharma, including the Dharma of transmission and the Dharma of realization, is because the patriarchs of each of these schools, who transmitted the Dharma to us, were not driven by blind faith, but had a true understanding of the teachings. Therefore, Lama Tsongkhapa's aspiration was that the world would become filled with Buddhists who had true conviction in the Buddha's teachings, and that those others, who spread wrong views in the name of Buddhism, would cease to exist in the world.

Nowadays, in both Tibet and the Han region, it is not easy to find genuine Buddhist practitioners. This is due, in part, to the bad karma of sentient beings in general, along with various other causes and conditions. If we are able to set up Dharma centers or in any other way, help to spread the Buddhadharma, we should do our best to provide both monastics and lay people with the opportunity to study the Buddhist teachings. If people are able to truly comprehend the Buddha's teachings, their conduct, as well as their state of mind, will change in a positive way, thus, it is important to make an aspiration for this to happen; reciting Lama Tsongkhapa's five verses for dedication is one relatively easy method to make this aspiration.

c. What is real Buddhism?

During the reign of King Songtsen Gampo¹¹⁰ and King Trisong Detsen¹¹¹, Buddhism was thriving in Tibet, and was in many ways experiencing the same kind of prosperity that Buddhism enjoyed during the Tang Dynasty in the Han region. When we mention the flourishing of Buddhism during those periods of history, it is not a reference to the splendid

¹⁰² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xuanzang>

¹⁰³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yijing_\(monk\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yijing_(monk))

¹⁰⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amoghavajra>

¹⁰⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huineng>

¹⁰⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jizang>

¹⁰⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shandao>

¹⁰⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C3%A0oxu%C4%81n>

¹⁰⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%9Aubhakarasi%E1%B9%83ha>

¹¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Songtsen_Gampo

¹¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trisong_Detsen

temples that were built during those time periods, as in spite of the magnificent appearance of these structures they do not actually represent anything meaningful about Buddhism.

It is true that these magnificent Buddhist buildings help create favorable conditions for promoting Buddhism, as well as support for the practice of genuine Buddhist followers, however, although the construction of a sutra hall is a good way to accumulate merit, in the end, it is nothing more than a concrete building. What matters most is that the existence of such a building offers people the opportunity to develop rational faith and right views, which, in truth, convey the meaning of Buddhism far better than any architectural achievement. By establishing right view, people will perform virtuous actions that will bring them long-term happiness and joy. With this in mind, we should seek to develop the right understanding that contributes to a rational faith in Buddhism.

C3. Dedicate the Merits for Having the Courage to Sacrifice Life to Uphold the Dharma in All Lifetimes without Slacking Off

Verse 56

*May I never falter even for an instant
To uphold the excellent way of the Sage,
Which illuminates the principle of dependent origination,
Through all my births even giving away my body and life.*

In all my lifetimes, may I uphold, even at the cost of my body or life, this excellent system of (you,) the Sage, which clarifies reality in terms of dependent arising, and never loosen (my hold), for even a mere instant.

a. The importance of upholding the Dharma

Lama Tsongkhapa aspires to uphold the authentic Dharma through all his lives and disseminate the profound teaching of dependent origination, and to even sacrifice his life, if necessary, to uphold, propagate and practice the precious teachings, without allowing himself to become slack, sluggish or lazy for even an instant. Thus, every one of us should also aspire in this way at every moment throughout all of our present and future lives. As Buddhist followers, we should not waste time, aspiring towards smooth-skinned hands or long and shiny hair in our future lives. The most important aspiration is to meet the authentic Dharma and uphold and propagate the Buddhadharmā, which is so precious that it is worth even sacrificing our lives to protect it, just as Shakyamuni Buddha did in his causal stage.

In the sutra of *The Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala*¹¹², Queen Srimala made three great aspirations that we should always bear in mind. The three great aspirations that Queen Srimala made in the presence of the Buddha are:

¹¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Śrīmālādevī_Simhanāda_Sūtra

“Lord, by this blessing of truth and by the virtuous root consisting of accumulated merit from bringing benefit to innumerable sentient beings, may I comprehend the Illustrious Doctrine in all my lives.

Lord, having obtained the comprehension of the Illustrious Doctrine, may I teach the Doctrine to the sentient beings without rest or weariness. This is my second great aspiration.

Lord, while teaching the Illustrious Doctrine, then, without regard to my body, life force, or possessions, may I seek to protect and to uphold the Illustrious Doctrine. This is my third great aspiration.”

To sum it up, we should first obtain a true comprehension of the Buddhadharma and then tirelessly teach it to others. Moreover, we should uphold and propagate the Buddhadharma without regard to the body or its life force.

Based on the last part of the sutra of *The Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala*, Lama Tsongkhapa wrote a verse, which summarizes the essence of all the Bodhisattva aspirations. The verse says, although a Bodhisattva's aspirations are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, they can all be contained within the aspiration to uphold the Buddhadharma: therefore we should dedicate all virtuous roots accumulated in all our lives so that the Buddhadharma may flourish.

b. The stories of great masters of the past

There are many true stories of those great beings, who were ready to give up their lives in order to uphold the Dharma, one of which is the story of Master Faxian¹¹³. One day, his teacher said to Faxian and his other disciples, “you must uphold the Dharma after I have passed away, even at the cost of your lives”. Later, with the teacher's words still resonant in their minds, Faxian and his dharma friends left for India to seek further Dharma knowledge. During the trip, some of them fell into an abyss and died, some starved to death, and some died from bad weather. Faxian was the only one that survived these hardships. Along the way, he also encountered such fierce animals as tigers, leopards and lions etc. In the end, he survived the arduous journey to India and after having studied Mahayana Buddhism there, he returned to India by sea bringing with him such classic Buddhist texts as the *Nirvana Sutra*, *Dirgha Agama Sutra*, *Samyukta Agama Sutra*¹¹⁴, as well as miscellaneous other Buddhist texts which he then translated into Mandarin Chinese.

In the twenty-third chapter of *Pancaviṃsatisahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra*¹¹⁵, it also records a similar story of Bodhisattva Sadaparudita who was willing to give up his life in pursuit of the teaching of prajnaparamita. In history, there were a lot of great masters

¹¹³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faxian>

¹¹⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E0%A0%A0Buddhism%29>

¹¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahaprajnaparamita_Sutra

who would give up their lives while seeking the Dharma. Therefore, we should also aspire to uphold the Dharma by following in their courageous footsteps.

C4. Dedicate the Merits for Being Able to Constantly Reflect on Skillful Means of Spreading the Dharma

Verse 57

*May I spend day and night carefully reflecting,
"By what means can I enhance
This teaching achieved by the supreme savior
Through strenuous efforts over countless eons?"*

May I spend day and night in examination, thinking of methods by which I can further these (teachings), which (you,) that Supreme Guide, realized by taking earnestly to heart immeasurable hardships.

a. The importance of spreading the Dharma

Here Lama Tsongkhapa aspires to spend day and night, life after life, reflecting on the most proper means to spread the entire Buddhadharma, particularly the essence of it, including the Mahayana teaching of dependent origination, which was achieved by the Buddha through immeasurable effort. We should also always be mindful of the importance of spreading the Buddhadharma, which is the only way to truly benefit all sentient beings. If, rather than taking on this meaningful mission, we pay attention only to such trivial things as food and clothing, we will be no different from the animals and will have wasted the value of a life as a human being.

If we were to give such material things as money, high position, villa, and luxury cars to sentient beings, it may not bring them any benefit, because these things only serve to increase their attachment and will thus make them suffer even more. Being aware that the only thing that can bring true benefits is the Buddhadharma, we should think constantly about applying various kinds of proper means to spread its wisdom. We could utilize such modern technologies as the Internet or television to spread the teachings, or we might engage in charity activities such as building hospitals, which would certainly benefit others; both of these are appropriate ways of spreading the Dharma. During the process, the key is to strengthen our own aspiration to spread the Dharma by thinking of the hardships that the Buddha endured without regard even to his life and body, in order to achieve the Dharma.

It is because the teachings of Buddhism, including the idea of compassion, equality and emptiness, can bring true benefit to all sentient beings, that we should always be thinking of spreading the Dharma.

b. Who should spread the Dharma and how can we spread it

This is an aspiration that every Buddhist should have. Some lay people may think

that only monastics have the ability to spread the Dharma and that it is their responsibility to do so. Actually, due to the limited number of monastics, lay Buddhists should also take on the responsibility of spreading the Dharma. This was actually requested by the Buddha, in *The Sutra of the Heap of Jewels*, where the Buddha says “lay Bodhisattvas should take the responsibility to spread the Dharma and benefit beings...they should endeavor to liberate sentient beings tirelessly.”

Therefore, we should think about sharing the jewel-like sublime Buddhadharma with all beings with whom we have karmic connections. It's as if, all the students at a particular school were climbing a mountain. Everyone is hungry and thirsty. Then, one of them suddenly finds a tree covered in delicious and nutritious fruits. It is certain that his first thoughts will be about sharing these fruits with his classmates. We should also think in the same way, while we're enjoying the teaching of compassion and emptiness. Always aspire to benefit others, and gradually we'll be able to achieve it. Even if we, especially the old who are in poor physical condition, are not able to spread the Dharma to benefit others within this lifetime, we can make the aspiration to achieve the goal in our very next life after having been reborn as a capable human. We can find many examples of this in *The Sutra of the Wise and Foolish*¹¹⁶.

C5. Dedicate the Merits for Being Protected by Dharmapalas When Practicing and Spreading the Dharma

Verse 58

*As I strive in this with pure intention,
May Brahma, Indra and the world's guardians
And protectors such as Mahakala
Unswervingly, always assist me.*

When I make efforts in that manner, with pure exceptional resolve, may I always be unswervingly assisted by worldly protectors, such as Brahma and Indra, and guardians (of the Dharma), like Excellent Mahakala and the rest.

Here, Lama Tsongkhapa aspires that when striving in his practice, and upholding and spreading the Buddhadharma with an altruistic intention, he will always be protected and blessed by Dharmapalas.

It's difficult to succeed in practicing and spreading Buddhism by oneself. Therefore, we must rely on the Dharma guardians such as Brahma¹¹⁷, Indra¹¹⁸, the Four Heavenly

¹¹⁶ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Sutra_of_the_Wise_and_the_Foolish

¹¹⁷ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Brahma>

¹¹⁸ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Indra>

Kings¹¹⁹, the 12 tenma goddesses¹²⁰, Mahakala¹²¹ and others, who vowed in front of Shakyamuni Buddha and the great masters of the past, to lend their support to Buddhist practitioners like us. During ancient times in the Han Region, Kublai Khan of the Yuan Dynasty was a devout believer in Mahakala. In the Qing Dynasty, Kangxi Emperor and Qianlong Emperor also often prayed to Mahakala. In order to gain the assistance of Dharma guardians, praying to them is very important. Without praying, we won't get their assistance, in the same way that without praying to the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel, we won't receive its benefits.

B2. Conclude by the Five Perfections of Writing Background

This hymn entitled "Essence of Well-Uttered Insights," praising the unexcelled Teacher – the great friend to the entire world [even] to the unfamiliar – for teaching the profound dependent origination, was composed by the well-read monk Lobsang Drakpai Pal. It was written at the heavenly retreat of Lhading on the towering mountain of Odé Gungyal, otherwise known as [Ganden] Nampar Gyalwai Ling. The scribe was Namkha Pal.

Here, "Essence of Well-Uttered Insights" is the subtitle of *In Praise of Dependent Origination*. The first perfection is regarding the perfect object of praise, which is the unexcelled teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha. The second perfection is regarding the perfect subject of praise, the poem of *In Praise of Dependent Origination: Essence of Well-Uttered Insights*. The third perfection is the perfect author of this poem, the well-read monk Lobsang Drakpai Pal, which was the original name of Lama Tsongkhapa. He received the name "Tsongkhapa", because he was born in the Tsongkha region of Amdo. The fourth perfection is the perfect environment where the poem was written, which was Nampar Gyalwai Ling where Lama Tsongkhapa was living when composing the poem. The fifth perfection is the perfect scribe, Namkha Pal who wrote down the words to the poem as, they were recited by the master.

¹¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Heavenly_Kings

¹²⁰ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Twelve_Tenma_Sisters

¹²¹ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Mahakala>