

TEXT #1

→ From Tsongkhapa, by Thupten Jinpa, 2019

INTENSIVE RETREATS IN THE WÖLKHA VALLEY 129

Though always moistened by loving-kindness, you burn the
forces of darkness;

Though you have cut fetters so hard to cut, you are tightly
bound by compassion;

Though you possess tranquil equanimity, you care more for
others than yourself;

O Mañjuśrī, reverently I bow to you and offer these praises to
Lord Maitreya.²²³

And may I be able to perfect all the deeds of the enlightened
buddhas.

Here at Dzingchi Ganden Ling, the sacred residence of Maitreya,
May all be filled with the presence of Buddha Śākyamuni's heirs,
Upholders of vinaya, striving in their precepts,
All adopting the life of celibacy praised by the Buddha;
May they strive in the great Buddhist treatises,

Without any distractions by the eight worldly concerns,

And with the thought of shouldering the great task
Of serving the doctrine and sentient beings,

May they perfect the threefold activity of learning.²²¹

This restoration of the statue of Maitreya at Dzingchi would
be later recognized as the first of "the four great deeds of Tsong-
khapa."²²² Later, at another retreat, this time in a part of the Lho-
drak area called Tōri Nyishar (literally, "Summit of Sunrise"),
Tsongkhapa would compose a longer hymn to Maitreya entitled
"Brahmā's Diadem," a moving invocation of Maitreya as well as a
declaration of the heartfelt aspirations to be sustained by Maitreya
throughout all his lives until the attainment of enlightenment. This
long hymn opens with the following verse, which juxtaposes two
apparent contradictions in the first three lines:

Although it cannot be dated exactly, sometime during this long
retreat in the Wölkha Valley, Tsongkhapa composed verses of praise
to his teacher Rendawa. Clearly, they were missing each other and
did manage to communicate occasionally, mostly through mutual
students bringing messages. In his verses of praise, Tsongkhapa
speaks of how Rendawa's wisdom is incomparable, how his com-
mitment to reason never slackens, and how he reveals to others
the essence of the Buddha's teaching based on his own insights.
The text also speaks of how he, Tsongkhapa, recalls his teach-
er's enlightened qualities and kindness while meditating on the
slopes of a mountain.²²⁴ Later, Rendawa's biographer would use
key verses from this praise to highlight the master's attributes and
accomplishments.

A Grand Vision of Mañjuśrī at Gya Sokphu Hermitage

In the winter of 1393, Tsongkhapa and his companions moved
their retreat base to Gya Sokphu, located in the Meilung (Val-
ley of Medicinal Herbs) region of Dakpo, still in the vicinity of
Wölkha Valley.²²⁵ There, Tsongkhapa made great progress in his
meditative practice. One day he experienced a vision of Mañjuśrī
surrounded by a large retinue of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the

Initially, during his stay at Gadong Monastery, Tsongkhapa focused, in his own personal practice, mainly on cultivating tranquility (*samatha*), based on a special instruction from Umapa. One day, Tsongkhapa felt that it might in fact be more beneficial to concentrate on Mañjuśrī practice, so he shifted the focus of his practice. He made fervent supplications to Mañjuśrī, visualized the deity, and recited his mantra. A few days later, Tsongkhapa had his first direct vision of the deity. Mañjuśrī sat resplendent at the center of a ring of light emitting rainbow-colored light rays. The deity was seated cross-legged, his body an orange hue. Before Tsongkhapa had the chance to share this exciting news with Umapa, the mystic remarked, "It seems you too have the vision of the deity's form."¹⁹³

It was also during this sojourn at Gadong Monastery that Tsongkhapa received from Mañjuśrī, through the medium of Umapa, a series of important oral transmissions, which later came to be known as the Mañjuśrī cycle of teachings.¹⁹⁴ Tsongkhapa's student Tokden Jampel Gyatso, who would himself later experience visions of Mañjuśrī, was present at some of these oral teachings.¹⁹⁵ In fact, according to one source, Mañjuśrī instructed Tokden to be the first one to try out the oral instructions he had just given.¹⁹⁶ Also while at Gadong Monastery, Tsongkhapa composed a hymn to Mañjuśrī at the request of one Drakpa Wangchuk.¹⁹⁷

Mañjuśrī's Guide to the View Instruction

One important legacy of Umapa's early encounters with Tsongkhapa was the transmission of a brief oral instruction Umapa passed on from Mañjuśrī known as "Vajra Lines on the View of the Equality of Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa." The following is the full text of this oral instruction:

Through various examples of dependent origination I reveal here the truth of ultimate nature just as it is. Preceded by taking refuge, gather the accumulations and purify negative karma.

Contemplate dependent origination, forward and in reverse.

Through profound instructions touching upon

The nature of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind,

O fortunate ones who seek enlightenment,

Abide in equipoise in concentrative states.

This host of aggregates—body, speech, and mind—

None of these exists as the self,

Nor is there a self apart from these.

O fortunate ones who seek enlightenment,

Know the truth of this no-self.

Aggregates, elements, and sense bases,

Appearance and emptiness, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, and so on,

Nothing in this dependent world possesses intrinsic reality.

Devoid of arising, cessation, or persistence,

They transcend words like *exists*, *doesn't exist*, *is*, and *is not*.

The one who knows this profound undifferentiated peace,

Which is free of elaborations, will attain nirvāṇa.¹⁹⁸

In addition to writing these instructions in verse, Tsongkhapa compiled a prose commentary on them. He divides the instruction into three main parts: the opening, followed by preliminary practice (lines 1–3); the main instruction (4–18); and a concluding affirmation (19–20). The main instruction, in turn, consists of two parts: A "common" practice of contemplating the twelve links of dependent origination, both in their forward order and reverse order (line 4), is aimed at generating a genuine desire to attain freedom from saṃsāric existence. The uncommon part of the main

instruction is composed of cultivating tranquility (lines 5–8) and insight (9–18). Here, tranquility is cultivated by taking the enlightened body, speech (mantra), and mind (symbolized by the visual image of the syllable HŪM) as the focus of attention. Cultivation of insight consists of contemplating emptiness in relation to one's own self (9–13) and the factors of one's existence, such as the physical and mental constituents that make up our existence (14–18). The last two lines (19–20) conclude the instruction by stating that someone who understands emptiness attains the true peace of nirvāṇa.¹⁹⁹

Final Meeting with Umapa

In that same fall of 1392, with Umapa having decided to return to his native Kham, Tsongkhapa traveled with the mystic up to Lhasa to see him off. When they reached the holy city, aware that they might not see each other again, they decided to pray to Mañjuśrī together, requesting a special teaching containing essential points of practice.

So, on a fine day, they went to the rooftop of the Jokhang Temple and found a shaded place under the golden roof on the south side. They arranged an altar there and laid out various offerings. Both made fervent supplications to Mañjuśrī. Then, with Umapa as the medium, Tsongkhapa requested an instruction distilling the essential elements of Dharma practice. Mañjuśrī then gave several verses of instruction, which Tsongkhapa wrote down on the spot.²⁰⁰ On the same day, in return, Tsongkhapa conducted the empowerment of Guhyasamāja for the benefit of Umapa. With the teachings over and their stay in Lhasa at an end, Tsongkhapa bade his companion farewell; Umapa began his long journey back to eastern Tibet, and Tsongkhapa returned to Kyormolung Monastery, where he imparted various teachings to the resident monks.

Though Tsongkhapa and Umapa corresponded, the two would never meet again. Tsongkhapa later composed a lengthy hymn to Mañjuśrī entitled *Ocean of Clouds of Praises*, which contains the following lines:

Even if I were to search across all the realms,
I would find no refuge better than you.
So, like a sun-scorched elephant that thinks only of a
watering hole,
My mind naturally turns toward you alone.
When I come to speak of your enlightened attributes,
I become like the impoverished beggar
Who has just seen a benefactor known for his generosity,
Who he knows will help fulfill his wish.²⁰¹

TEXT #3

From The Harmony of Emptiness
and Dependent-Arising, 1992

(Root verses by Tsongkhapa,
commentary by 20th century
Lobsang Gyatso)

Root Text

(by Tsongkhapa)

1. I bow down to him whose insight and speech
Make him unexcelled as sage and teacher;
The victor, who realised (ultimate truth),
Then taught us dependently-related arising.
2. Ignorance is the very root
Of all troubles in this transitory world.
These are averted by understanding
The dependent-arising which you have taught.
3. How then could the intelligent
Not understand that the path
Of dependently-related arising
Is the essence of your teaching?
4. This being so, O Saviour, who could find
Anything more wonderful
To praise you for
Than your teaching of dependent-arising?
5. Whatever depends on conditions
Is empty of inherent existence,
What excellent instruction could there be,
More amazing than these words?
6. Through wrongly holding (dependent-arising),
The childish strengthen bondage to extreme views.
But, for the wise, the same thing is the means
To cut free from the net of elaborations.

7. Since this teaching is not found elsewhere,
You alone are the 'Teacher.'
For a Tirthika, this name would be a flattery,
Like calling a fox a lion.
8. O wondrous teacher! O wondrous refuge!
Supreme speaker! Great protector!
I pay homage to the great teacher
Who so clearly explained dependent-arising.
9. O benefactor! To heal all beings
You proclaimed (dependent-arising),
The peerless reason for ascertaining
Emptiness, the heart of the teaching.
10. How could those who see the way
Of profound dependent-arising
As contradictory or unproven
Ever understand your system?
11. When one perceives 'empty'
As the meaning of 'dependent-arising',
Empty of inherent existence does not contradict
The function of agent and action.
12. Whereas if one perceives the opposite,
Since there can be neither action in voidness
Nor emptiness in what has action,
One would fall into a dreadful abyss.
13. Therefore understanding dependent-arising,
As you have taught, is well praised.
(Things) are not totally non-existent,
Nor are they inherently existent.
14. The independent is like a sky-flower.
Therefore, nothing is not dependent.
Existence with self-nature precludes
Establishment by causes and conditions.

15. Thus it is taught that because nothing exists
Other than the dependently-arisen,
There is no existing thing
Which is not empty of inherent existence.
16. Since inherent existence can never come to an end
If phenomena had any inherent nature,
Nirvana would be impossible,
And all fabrications could not be stopped.
17. Therefore, who could challenge him
Who, in assemblies of the wise,
Has clearly proclaimed with lion's roar
"Things do not have inherent existence."
18. Since lack of inherent nature,
And the ability to function do not contradict,
Never mind that dependent-arising
And emptiness co-exist.
19. 'By the reason of dependent-arising,
There are no grounds for extreme views.'
For this fine teaching, O Protector,
Your speech is unexcelled.
20. 'All is empty of self-nature'
And, 'From this cause arises that effect!'
These two knowledges assist each other
And abide in harmony.
21. What is more wonderful than this?
What is more marvellous than this?
If you are praised for this principle,
That is real praise; nothing else.
22. Those held in slavery by delusions,
Hopelessly resent you (so free and clear).
Small wonder that they find intolerable
That sound of, 'Non-inherent existence.'

[36 more verses are omitted here]

From The Harmony of Emptiness and Dependent Arising

II

The Root of all Troubles



2. Ignorance is the very root

Of all troubles in this transitory world.

These are averted by understanding

The dependent-arising which you have taught.

All creatures are engaged in seeking happiness and trying to avoid suffering. Of those beings who are born with sufficient intelligence to be aware of their own motivation and have sufficient leisure to analyse what goals to aim at in life, many spend all their time in the pursuit of temporary forms of fulfillment, doubtful that there is any such thing as a permanent state of happiness, where suffering is completely abandoned. If pressed, these people may well admit that they suppose suffering, for instance in the form of old age, sickness and death, is ultimately inevitable and when such questions as, "Why are we here?" and, "Why is there dissatisfaction?" are posed their answer would be that, in these regions of investigation, man's lot is perplexity in the face of a mystery.

Those who have determinedly sought to penetrate this mystery have offered many paths of prayer and philosophy to the world, too many to be summarised properly here. There are those who have understood some aspects of the theory of karma, that we reap what we sow, in some form of future life if not in this, and make it their main practice to purify the seeds or potentials of bad actions they have previously committed, by confession, prayer or by voluntarily undergoing the hardship of physical penance. Others, tracing the origin of our problems back beyond the negative actions we have previously committed to the unwholesome conceptions that initiated them, principally endeavour to still the mind, to abandon all conception and eliminate discrimination as harmful in itself, in favour of

some form of mental quietism. Others cultivate the practice of virtue. They practise generosity, patience and moral discipline. They live the life of love. The practice of benefiting others is most certainly supremely important, but thinking that that, by itself, is the whole path to the highest happiness in this or a future existence is mistaken, and the same applies to the other two types of practice we have mentioned. They are mistaken according to Tsong Khapa because, without understanding the profound dependent-arising, one cannot gain the ultimate view, without familiarising oneself again and again with the ultimate view, one cannot destroy ignorance; without destroying ignorance, one cannot find release from the sufferings of this transitory world, nor can one attain the enormous beneficial potential of a fully enlightened being. Hence the utterly essential need to understand dependent-arising, set forth in many different ways by the Buddha and condensed and celebrated here by Tsong Khapa.

We will thus be extremely fortunate if we can find a teacher who can explain dependent-arising to us flawlessly, for even within Buddhist philosophy there are a variety of different treatments of this central issue. Our way to proceed will be by bringing together the teachings of a living master or masters, and our own analysis and study of the Buddhist texts. There are four Buddhist schools, called the Particularists, the Sutra-followers, the Proponents of Mind Only and the Proponents of the Middle Way. The last school has two divisions, the Autonomists and the Consequentialists.² The explanation of dependent-arising reaches its fullest power in the commentaries of the Consequentialists whose foremost exponent in the Land of Snow was Tsong Khapa. Briefly at this stage, the schools of Mind Only and below only understand dependent-arising in terms of effects dependent on their causes, taking no account of uncaused or permanent i.e. unchanging phenomena. The Middle Way Autonomists extend the meaning of dependent-arising by showing how all phenomena, caused and uncaused, exist within the nature of dependent-arising, in the sense that they depend on their parts. For instance, a pot is not self-powered; it depends for its existence on its causes. Also it depends on its parts because, without perceiving the parts of a pot, one cannot perceive a pot. The Consequentialists accept the above viewpoints but add various perspectives of their own, arguing

that cause and effect are mutually dependent, as are self and other, and further reinterpret all other forms of dependent relationship in the light of their being dependently arisen in the sense of being mere imputations, upon a basis of designation, by a designating consciousness.

The above brief review of dependent-arising's various manifestations in the various schools of Buddhism maps out part of the route our investigation will take in later chapters. However, before we discuss how to cultivate the wisdom understanding dependent-arising, the antidote which will eliminate all our suffering, we first have to justify the diagnosis that ignorance is the primary cause of the disease, 'The root of all troubles in this transitory world.' First we will base our investigation on the teaching of the four truths and second on the teaching of twelve links of dependent-arising.

THE FOUR TRUTHS

If someone is ill, in order to treat the person and make him well, the doctor first has to take careful note of the symptoms of the disease and from them determine its root causes. Just administering medicine to relieve the symptoms will not do; the patient wants a remedy that will cure the disease completely and bring him to sound health. Having made his diagnosis, the doctor then prescribes a course of treatment appropriate to the disease which is designed to get rid of it. Finally the patient follows the doctor's instructions and is cured. This analogy serves well to introduce the four truths and their sequence. According to the analogy we are the patients and our condition is known as true suffering, which is the first of the truths. True suffering refers to all the trouble we face, all the forms of pain and dissatisfaction we encounter in this round of existence. However exalted our worldly status, we have to endure physical pain and mental anxiety. We do not escape the pangs of birth, aging, sickness and death. We never seem to be satisfied; we may have what we need, but we always crave for more. If we get what we desire, after enjoying it for a while we start to hanker after something else. If we do feel we are happy at a certain moment, we have to acknowledge the unsatisfactory feeling that, in the nature of things, we are bound to undergo suffering again, sooner or later.

From The Harmony of Emptiness
and Dependent Arising,
(Root verses by Tsongkhapa,
commentary by 20th century
Lobsang Gyatso)

VII

Illusion and Reality



15. Thus it is taught that because nothing exists
Other than the dependently-arisen
There is no existing thing
Which is not empty of inherent existence.
16. Since inherent existence can never come to an end
If phenomena had any inherent nature,
Nirvana would be impossible,
And all fabrications could not be stopped.

Verse 15 and 16 develop the main theme of the *Praise for Dependent-Arising*, that there is no phenomena of the past, present or future that is inherently existent and not dependently existent. Being inherently existent is simply impossible. If something was inherently or intrinsically established then no causes or circumstances could have any effect on it. Once in existence it would never succumb to change and disappear or transform into something else. If the delusions in the mind of the sentient being who became the enlightened one of our era, Shakyamuni Buddha, were intrinsically established, how could he ever have got rid of them? How could 'elaborations', meaning deluded conceptual minds, be stopped? If he inherently existed as a being in cyclic existence how could he have left it and entered the state beyond suffering? For him 'Nirvana would be impossible' (Verse 16). Not even the Buddhas, nor the dharma, nor the Sangha, none of the Three Jewels to which the Buddhist goes for refuge, exist from their own side. Emptiness itself is also empty of inherent existence. Even some scholars within the Buddhist fold have held that emptiness has some absolute status beyond the interplay of dependent-arising. Emptiness is called ultimate truth,

which might lead to the impression that is an absolute, objective reality transcending the relative. But this is far from being the case. The emptiness of inherent existence, for example, of a tree is called an ultimate truth because it is a phenomena such that, when it is perceived directly, the way it appears to the mind and the ways it actually exists are completely concordant. On the other hand a tree is called a conventional truth because it is a phenomena such that when it is perceived by anyone except a Buddha, the way it appears and the way it actually exists are not concordant, since a tree always appears to the mind of anyone who is not a Buddha to be inherently existent, but it is not. So emptiness is given the name 'ultimate' because the only consciousness that experiences it directly is one that has removed all the superimpositions of ignorance.

If we meditate deeply on the emptiness of the self and the objects of use of the self for a long period of time, gradually ignorance and the other delusions will be erased from our minds forever. Meditation on emptiness is the most powerful antidote for sufferings of cyclic existence there is, but of itself emptiness cannot do anything. From its own side it has no power or intention to relieve us of our sufferings. It is just one facet of the way things are. It is not something that anyone bows down to and worships. It is not an ultimate in the way that, for instance, the Christian God might perhaps be called "the ultimate one." It may be thought of it in terms of individual phenomena. We can reflect very fruitfully on the emptiness of a cup or a table for example. Just remembering that without a cup there would be no emptiness of inherent existence of a cup establishes that the emptiness of inherent existence of a cup is a dependent-arising, since it is dependent on the cup.

17. Therefore, who could challenge him
Who, in assemblies of the wise,
Has clearly proclaimed with lion's roar
"Things do not have inherent existence."
18. Since lack of inherent nature
And the ability to function do not contradict,
Never mind that dependent-arising
And emptiness co-exist.

19. 'By the reason of dependent-arising,
There are no grounds for extreme views.'
For this fine teaching, O Protector,
Your speech is unexcelled.

20. 'All is empty of self-nature!
And, 'From this cause arises that effect!'
These two knowledges assist each other
And abide in harmony.

21. What is more wonderful than this?
What is more marvellous than this?
If you are praised for this principle,
That is real praise, nothing else.

At the time the Buddha taught in India, many different schools of philosophy and many different esoteric mental disciplines which were supposed to be the key to liberation existed. Before these scholars and adepts listened to Buddha's teachings, none of them had heard about dependent-arising and emptiness, but once his teachings were revealed to them they had nothing with which to rebut his formidable arguments in the 'assemblies of the wise' (verse 17). Some of Buddha's first disciples were famous teachers in their own right. Shariputra and Maudgalyayana were two whose followers are said to have numbered in the hundreds. When they heard Buddha's teachings proclaimed: 'By the reason of dependent-arising there are no grounds for extreme views' (verse 19) and 'All is empty of self-nature!' (verse 20), they found nothing to equal them in either profundity or extensiveness. When these noted teachers converted to Buddhism they brought their many followers with them, the twin ideas of dependent-arising and emptiness being the unique teachings of Buddha's system that won them over. Buddha's teaching that these two, dependent-arising and emptiness assist or mutually support each other is the principle of verse 21 that Buddha is worthy to be praised for above all else.

22. Those held in slavery by delusions,
Hopelessly resent you (so free and clear).
Small wonder that they find intolerable
That sound of, 'Non-inherent existence.'