

NOTES ON “HOW TO SEE YOURSELF AS YOU REALLY ARE”

CHAPTER 4: FEELING THE IMPACT OF INTERRELATEDNESS

This is another chapter that lays the groundwork for the analytical meditations that will be introduced later. We aren't yet doing the analytical meditations, but we are sensitizing ourselves to the observations that go into the meditations. This chapter asks us to do two things: **notice** various ways that things are interrelated, and **feel** how this interrelatedness **conflicts** with the appearance of things as if they exist in their own right.

Feeling this sense of conflict will be an important part of the analytical meditations. The stronger the sense of conflict you can feel between appearance and your observations, then the more powerful your analyses and the more earth-shattering will be your emptiness realizations.

Realizing emptiness – you may have done this on your own so far. But according to the Dalai Lama's plan in the book, we are not there yet in this chapter. We are not doing the analyses yet. We are not trying to resolve any conflicts or find an answer. We are just assembling various tools and insights that will allow us to do the analytic work. At this point, we're just trying to see how it feels when we (i) observe how things are interrelated and (ii) observe how things appear to exist in their own right. We should feel the tension between these two sets of observations.

A Case of Interrelatedness

In the first section, the Dalai Lama reminds us how “unhealthy views” and “afflictive emotions” are purified by realizing emptiness. Then he explains one facet of relatedness: things come into existence dependent upon causes and conditions.

CONFLICT: If something comes into existence dependent on causes and conditions, then it is not inherently existent.

For example, a house. A house seems to have its own “house-ness” and “out-there-ness.” But as we know, the house actually came into being by depending on lumber, carpenters, and other factors. So the reality of the house's construction conflicts with the appearance of existing in its own right.

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Dependent Arising and Realism (Dependence upon Causes and Conditions)

In this next section, “Dependent Arising and Realism,” the Dalai Lama gives us a few more reasons to see things as interrelated. He argues that seeing things as interrelated broadens our view of things. Seeing things as interrelated is more “realistic.” In this sense of the word, to see things in a “realistic” way means to see them **as they really are** (dependent on causes and conditions), and **not as they appear to be** (inherently existent).¹

Looking at things as related and interdependent makes us aware of more aspects of a situation. He gives examples from international politics, medicine, economics and religion that argue for having a wider perspective on things. On the other hand, when we see things under the influence of afflictive emotions, we see things in a very narrow way that obscures various realities of things. As he says,

The chief drawback of afflictive emotions is that they obscure reality. (p. 53)

The Dalai Lama says that seeing things as interdependent and interrelated is in accord with the facts, which is not how they appear. He says,

Recently, a psychotherapist told me that when we generate anger, ninety percent of the ugliness of the object of our anger is due to our own exaggeration. (p. 54)

and a bit later,

If you want to be able to perceive the actual situation, you have to quit voluntarily submitting to afflictive emotions, because in each and every field, they obstruct perception of the facts. (pp. 54-55)

Love and Compassion

The Dalai Lama also says that when we see sentient beings in a realistic way, we will feel love and compassion for them because of their plight. This is because we see them suffering, and it is appropriate to be concerned for their well-being. The depth of our feelings of love and compassion will be enhanced by deeper insight into impermanence and emptiness, as will be covered in the last two chapters in the book.

¹ There is another sense of “realism,” which is used in modern Western philosophy. That sense of the word means just the opposite. Being a “realist” in that sense means that we believe that things exist in an objective, mind-independent way. But in these notes, we will use the term in the Dalai Lama’s sense!

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Love and compassion in this sense are not a case of exaggerated, afflictive emotions. Instead, they are based upon seeing things realistically. It is important to remember the very close connection that the Dalai Lama makes between afflictive emotions and seeing things as being inherently existent.

Dependence Upon Parts

In this section, we examine dependence upon parts. In the earlier section we looked at dependence upon causes and conditions. These two kinds of dependence (1: causes/conditions, 2: parts) are two of the three ways that the Dalai Lama's school sees things as dependent and not inherently existent. The third kind of dependence is more subtle and will be discussed later in the book.

This sets up another kind of conflict that we can meditate on.

CONFLICT: If something depends on parts, then it is not inherently existent.

The Dalai Lama's basic argument in this section is that all phenomena are dependent upon parts. He says,

...all phenomena— impermanent and permanent— exist in dependence upon their own parts. Everything has parts. (pp. 55-56)

First of all, what does he mean by **impermanent and permanent** phenomena? Isn't everything impermanent, according to Buddhism? Well, Buddhism loves drawing distinctions.

- **Impermanent phenomena** are things that disintegrate moment-to-moment. They are created because of causes and conditions and disintegrate moment-to-moment. They are made of smaller things. The impermanence is not so much that these things are not eternal and won't last forever. It's more that they are changing at each moment on a microscopic or atomic level, even though at a larger level of focus their continuum seems stable. ***Sentient beings and physical objects are examples of impermanent phenomena.***
- **Permanent Phenomena** are things that **do not** disintegrate moment-to-moment. They are the more abstract, non-physical kinds of things, such as space, emptiness and concepts. They are not composed of physical or spatial parts. There are two kinds of permanent phenomena, according to the Dalai Lama's school. (i) Occasional permanents, which come into existence and go out of existence. The example usually given is the emptiness of the cup, which comes into existence when the cup comes into

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existence, and goes out of existence when the cup goes out of existence. (ii) Non-occasional permanents, which are even more abstract, such as emptiness as a general category. It is always in existence, because there is always something that is empty.

The Dalai Lama's claim in this section is that all of these phenomena depend on parts. It is easy to see how impermanent phenomena depend on parts. A house depends on a floor, walls and a roof. A person depends on a body and a mind.

Even if there were ultimately small, un-splittable particles, they too would depend on parts, such as an "upper" part and a "lower" part, an "east" part and a "west" part. No matter how small the particle is, it couldn't exist if it didn't have these parts. And if the particle were of zero size, then in what sense it is a particle in the first place? And how can it combine to form larger objects?

It is not so easy to see how permanent phenomena depend on parts. The Dalai Lama gives two examples, consciousness and space.

Consciousness

Consciousness is not physical. So it has no physical parts. **But it has temporal parts.** Consciousness is often characterized in Buddhism as "clear and knowing." It is "clear" in that it has no formal aspect on its own. It is "knowing" in that it takes on the aspect of its object. A common example is a crystal glass. If a crystal glass placed on top of a blue piece of fabric, it will take on the blue aspect or reflection of the fabric without losing its clarity. The same thing goes for consciousness looking at a blue vase:

The consciousness involved in looking at a blue vase does not have spatial parts because it is not physical, but it exists as a continuum of moments. Consciousness looking at a blue vase has earlier and later moments in its continuum. (p. 57)

Notice that it is very simply taken for granted, without being argued, that consciousness is a continuum of moments. For people coming to this approach from awareness paths, it is worth noting that consciousness is not assumed to be global, partless, unbroken or unified. It is not assumed to be equivalent with wholeness or oneness.

So consciousness does not have physical parts. It has no "upper," "lower," "east" or "west" parts. It has a beginning, middle and end. The particular perceptual consciousness that cognizes a blue vase will have a beginning, a middle, and an end. And these portions can likewise be divided. So consciousness depends on parts.

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We can reflect on the feeling of conflict with respect to consciousness. On one hand, the consciousness paying attention to a blue vase appears to exist inherently, on its own. On the other hand, we can easily observe this consciousness to be a temporal phenomenon. We can observe it having a beginning, middle, and an end. As a temporal phenomenon, it depends on these kinds of parts. In reality, it can't be both ways. It can't be inherently existent **and** divisible into parts. So we can try to feel the conflict between the way it appears and the way we observe it to be.

Space

Space has no shape of its own, but takes on the shape of the objects it is involved with. But even in the vast stretches of the universe, between stars and planets, space has different directions. Space is reckoned in relation to objects, points of observation, and directions such as "near," "far," "left," "right," "inner," "outer," etc. Without these dependencies, it wouldn't be space. So space depends on these directional parts.

We can also reflect on the feeling of conflict with space. On one hand, the space seems to exist all by itself as a unified whole unrelated to anything. There used to be serious scientific and philosophical concepts of "absolute space" in the Western tradition several hundred years ago. (You can google it.) This is how space appears to exist, whether it is space inside a cup, or the space of the universe. But on the other hand, we can easily observe space to be divisible, and to have different kinds of directional parts. We can think of "near," "far," "left," "right," "inner," "outer," "east," "west," and other kinds of divisions. As a divisible phenomenon, space depends on these kinds of parts. But space can't exist in both ways. It can't be inherently existent **and** divisible into parts. So we can try to feel the conflict between the way it appears and the way we observe it to be.