

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

Chapter 7 – Valuing Dependent-Arising and Emptiness

“...it is crucial to understand that emptiness means dependent-arising, and dependent-arising means emptiness.” (p. 75)

This is the last chapter in Part 2, which is called “How to Undermine Ignorance.” Next week, Chapter 8 begins Part 3. Part 3 is all about meditative stabilization and how it helps insight. And three weeks later, we get to start with the emptiness meditations themselves.

For the last few chapters, we’ve been dealing with the concepts of emptiness and dependent arising. They are different enough so that when we think about one of them, it seems perhaps distant from the other one. Chapter 6 was about how to avoid nihilism and essentialism. Basically, to avoid nihilism, think more about dependent arising, especially the cause-and-effect aspect. And to avoid essentialism, focus more on emptiness. You will discover the two to be the same after a while.

Chapter 7 is about how better to balance them. Specifically, it’s about how you can reason back and forth between them. That is, you can start with emptiness and end up at dependent arising. And you can start with dependent arising and end up with emptiness.

You need to know from the depths of your being that understanding dependent-arising promotes understanding emptiness, and understanding emptiness promotes understanding dependent-arising. (p. 76)

Chapter 7 – Valuing Dependent-Arising and Emptiness

More On Inherent Existence

The Dalai Lama emphasizes that in doing emptiness meditation, we are refuting inherent existence, not conventional existence. So let’s review a little bit about the various terms related to **inherent existence**.

Term	Features
Inherent existence	A way that we think that we and phenomena exist. Nothing exists this way, though we think it does. Refuted by emptiness meditation.
The inherent self	Another way to refer to the inherently existent self, which does not exist. Refuted by emptiness meditation.
Essence	Same as inherent existence, though it also carries the connotation of that which gives the object its identity , as opposed to its existence .
Exaggerated existence	Same as inherent existence . A way we feel that things exist. Nothing exists in this way.
Conception of inherent existence	The mind’s prereflective automatic assent to the appearance things have of existing inherently. Whereas inherent existence does not exist, the conception of inherent existence does exist. Refuting inherent existence dissolves the conception of it. Sometimes called “ignorance” or “the innate view of inherent existence.” This is more subtle than the “artificial” view of inherent existence (see “Essentialism” below).
Essentialism	Assenting to the appearance of inherent existence after thinking about it. This is when you actually accept or defend the appearances of inherent existence. Quite often, essentialism is one’s official, believed view of things. Sometimes called “the artificial view of inherent existence” because it is learned and solidified through spiritual or philosophical teachings. It is less subtle than the innate view of inherent existence.
Objectivism, realism, foundationalism	Like essentialism . In Western philosophy, these are types of views that assent to the conception of inherent existence. Essence and true existence, in these views, are thought to be true and accurate.
Conventional existence	Everyday existence, devoid of essences. Not refuted by emptiness meditation. Instead of being refuted by emptiness meditation, conventional existence is transformed and liberated.
The conventional self	The person that is empty, because it depends on other things. Not refuted by emptiness meditation. The conventional self is the one that suffers, meditates, realizes emptiness, and finds freedom from suffering.

Causality is Feasible

The Dalai Lama puts great emphasis on the feasibility of cause and effect. As we saw last week, feasibility means the ability to produce results or respond to conditions. This kind of cause and effect is not what you find with causal powers being transmitted from object to object (that kind of cause and effect would be **inherent** cause and effect, which is refuted). Instead, all we

Chapter 7 – Valuing Dependent-Arising and Emptiness

need in order for things to function is to pay attention to everyday regularities between phenomena.

“When this happens, that happens. When this doesn’t happen, that doesn’t happen.”

This is all that is needed, for emptiness meditation or to build rocket ships. But if your emptiness meditation makes it seem like nothing works and there’s no point to anything, then the meditation has begun to refute this conventional kind of cause and effect. This is a case of refuting too much, even by mistake, by not knowing exactly where to draw the line. That is not easy, but the better our understanding of emptiness, the better we’ll understand just what is inherent and what is conventional!

If you find yourself feeling nihilistic, as though nothing works or nothing matters, in such cases the Dalai Lama recommends that you revisit the insights about how things are dependent arisings. That insight will reduce nihilism and also carry you through to a view of emptiness.

Special Recommendation

For those who feel their confidence in conventional cause and effect is getting weakened by emptiness study, the Dalai Lama makes a special recommendation: think about someone you admire spiritually. It could be a beloved or revered mentor, a teacher, a guru, or even a deity or bodhisattva figure. Think about the great impact that being has on you and on others. Would this be able to happen if there were absolutely, utterly no cause and effect of any kind?

How to Reason from Emptiness to Dependent Arising

Reasoning back and forth between emptiness and dependent arising is the main task of this chapter. Let’s start with the emptiness of a teacup.

1. You realize that the teacup is empty.
2. This means that you realize that the teacup does not exist in a self-powered, self-dependent or non-dependent way.
3. If the teacup doesn’t depend on nothing or on itself, then it must depend on other things. It can’t be both ways, and it can’t be neither. **X depends on non-X.**
4. Because you realize that the teacup depends on other things, you can see that it is a dependent arising.

Chapter 7 – Valuing Dependent-Arising and Emptiness

How to Reason from Dependent Arising to Emptiness

1. You realize that the teacup is a dependent arising.
2. This means that its appearance and continued existence depends on other things. **X depends on non-X.**
3. Because the teacup is depending on other things, it is not depending on nothing. It is not depending on itself. Its appearance and continued existence are not due to an essence, a true nature, or the teacup's own power over itself. There is no essence present, and no essence needed.
4. Because you realize that the teacup doesn't need or have an essence, you see that it is empty.

Falsity and Contradictions

On page 76, the Dalai Lama says,

“Within falsity, contradictions are completely feasible...”

What does this mean??

- **Falsity** = the world of appearances, where things appear to exist in a way (inherently) that they do not exist.
- **Contradictions** = changes in an object, such as a young person becoming old, a poor person becoming rich, or a bare-branched tree sprouting lush green leaves.

It is exactly the lack of inherent existence and true nature that allows for these changes. If things had true natures or fixed essences, then no change would be possible.

Logic: The logic goes like this

1. If the tree were inherently existent, it could not change.
2. The tree changes.
3. Therefore, the tree is not inherently existent.

Take-away insight: Changing means being a dependent arising. Because it changes, it is empty. Because it is empty, it changes.

Chapter 7 – Valuing Dependent-Arising and Emptiness

The Emptiness of Emptiness

Nevertheless, when you consider that the emptiness of yourself depends on yourself or that the emptiness of a car depends on the car, that substratum of which emptiness is a quality seems almost more important than emptiness itself. (p. 79)

The Dalai Lama mentioned this in order to encourage us that when we refute the inherent object, we are not refuting the conventional object.

But it also can show us something else. Notice that emptiness is itself dependent:

...the emptiness of yourself depends on yourself...

...the emptiness of a car depends on the car...

If even emptiness depends on something other than itself, then it too is empty. In other words, there cannot be the emptiness of the self without a (conventional) self to be empty. This is another reason why refuting the inherent self cannot possibly refute the conventional self. If it did, then the self could not possibly be empty, because there would be no self to be empty. This is very good and empowering news!!!

Refining the Target of Refutation

The target of refutation is the inherently-existent “I” (which does not exist).

It is not the conventionally existent I (which does exist).

