

༥ ། རྟོན་ཅིང་འབྲེལ་བར་འབྱུང་བའི་སྒྲིང་པོའི་རྣམ་བཤད།

An Explanation of the Essence of Dependent Arising

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KHYENTSE VISION
PROJECT

rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba'i snying po'i rnam bshad

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Khyentse Vision Project: Translating the Works of
Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

When a young ascetic named Upatiṣya encountered the monk Aśvajit on his alms rounds, he was taken aback by the serenity of his demeanor and requested to know about his teacher and the doctrine he followed. Aśvajit, who was one of the five first disciples of the Buddha, replied that he was still inexperienced and reluctantly uttered the famous verse encapsulating the essence of the Buddha's doctrine:

Of those phenomena that arise from causes,
Those causes were taught by the Tathāgata,
And also their cessation.
This is the doctrine of the Great Recluse.¹

These words, known as the essence of dependent arising,² indirectly teach the four truths and thus represent a synopsis of the Buddhadharma. Upatiṣya instantly understood their profound meaning and attained stream entry. He then followed Aśvajit to take refuge with his teacher. He was henceforth known as Śāriputra, who was to become one of the foremost disciples of the Awakened One.

The short text translated here originally comes from a work by Pema Karpo (1527–1592), the fourth head of the Drukpa Kagyu lineage and an accomplished master known for consolidating the teachings of his tradition. Entitled *Crushing into Dust: An Explanation of the Essence of Dependent Arising*,³ his work comprises two main parts: a brief synopsis of the various Buddhist systems of thought and praxis on the basis of the essence of dependent arising—which is the text translated here—and a detailed explanation covering considerable ground, ranging from the mistaken views of various non-Buddhist schools to the doctrine of dependent arising as taught by Ārya Nāgārjuna, as well as such details as the ground, path, and fruition in respect to the various vehicles of the Buddha's teachings.

An Explanation of the Essence of Dependent Arising opens with a Tibetan translation of Aśvajit's stanza, unusual in the sense that the Sanskrit word *evam* (literally, "thus") is left untranslated in the third line. This choice of words reflects a particular approach to this verse, possibly indicating the intention to include the tantric dimension of the Buddhist doctrine.⁴ Pema Karpo's text originally also included the Sanskrit verse, along with a word-by-word translation into Tibetan, both of which are omitted in the version included in the Collected Works of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo.

After a brief interpretation of the verse itself, the text elucidates how the followers of the various paths relate to the four truths and achieve their respective accomplishments. The outline follows the traditional gradual approach, beginning with the paths of the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, followed by those of the Mahāyāna: the Pāramitāyāna and the Vajrayāna. The Pāramitāyāna—that is, the sūtra-based path of the bodhisattvas centered around the practice of the perfections or *pāramitās*—is subdivided into the paths of those who follow the second and third turnings of the Dharma wheel, which in this context refers to the followers of the Madhyamaka view and those upholding the teaching on the *tathāgatagarbha* or buddha nature, respectively. The final section of the text is dedicated to the tantra-based approach of Vajrayāna. It specifically explains the four truths according to the tantric systems of the later translation period, with one paragraph referencing the lower tantras and another the highest class of tantra.

རྟེན་སྣོང་རྣམ་བཤད།

An Explanation of the Essence of Dependent Arising

*Namaḥ Śākyamunaye.*⁵

Of those phenomena that arise from causes,
Those causes the Tathāgata taught,
As well as their cessation.
He who teaches thus—*evam*—is the Great Recluse.⁶

The meaning of this stanza is the following. “The phenomena that arise from causes” indicates suffering. Their “causes” refers to origin, which includes afflictions and karma. These describe saṃsāra in terms of cause and result. That which eliminates them is the truth of the path, and their “cessation” is the truth of cessation. These two describe liberation in terms of cause and result.

Thus, on the basis of the utterly pure nature of the mind, free of the four extremes, there occurs the illusion-like [166] arising from the relationship of actions and their results. The only one who taught reality in this way—*evam*—is the “Great Renunciate,” no one else.⁷

As it is taught in the following verse:

I pay homage to Munīndra, lord among sages,
Unequaled and supreme, who taught
That emptiness and dependent arising
Are identical in meaning in the Middle Way.⁸

Since this point is the essence of all true Dharma, it is the essence of dependent arising. In the *Stainless Light*, it is stated that *ye dharmāḥ*⁹ precedes the eighty-four thousand Dharma teachings.¹⁰

The meaning of this is as follows. Śrāvaka disciples following the teachings of the first turning of the Dharma wheel know saṃsāra, characterized by the five skandhas of clinging, to be the truth of suffering, and its cause, which is the view of the perishing collection characterized by the belief in the self of the individual,¹¹ to be the truth of origin. Having come to know this, they realize that for it to cease there are the practices of calm abiding to render the mind perfectly pliable, and special insight, consisting of the familiarization with the sixteen aspects of the four truths, comprising the truth of the path. Its result, which is nirvāṇa with and without remainder, is understood to be the truth of cessation.

In addition to the above, pratyekabuddhas recognize that the principal origin is the belief in the true existence of the apprehended, and in addition to the aspects of the four truths, their truth of the path consists in meditating in particular on profound dependent arising.

The trainees of the causal Mahāyāna who follow the teachings of the middle turning of the Dharma wheel [167] maintain that formative factors are the principal suffering, and its cause, grasping at an inherent identity in phenomena, is the origin. For them, the truth of the path is training by means of the practice of the perfections based on bodhicitta, and the truth of cessation is non-abiding nirvāṇa.

Those who are able to bear the Madhyamaka view through faith and conviction, yet lack the wisdom that cognizes the lack of inherent existence of all the means used to engage in the perfections, are called bodhisattvas with conceptualizations, or bodhisattvas of weaker faculties. Those who engage in the path while holding the view by means of the wisdom that cognizes the lack of inherent existence of all perfections are called bodhisattvas engaged in skillful means, or of sharp faculties.

Due to diverse degrees of wisdom, the amount of time required for these two types of bodhisattvas to attain awakening can vary vastly.¹² As Maitreya stated:

Complete awakening is said to be realized with ease by those of sharp faculties,
But it is difficult to attain for those of weaker acumen.¹³

For those who follow the teachings of the final turning of the Dharma wheel and rely on the vehicle of the essence that dwells in the tathāgatas' sphere of experience,¹⁴ the principal origin is comprised of the stains of discriminative consciousness covering buddha nature. For them, the suffering of conditioned existence that is projected by it refers to the fluctuating modalities of mind, which are the adventitious stains. [168] The truth of the path consists of the four avenues of conviction in the cessation of these stains, wisdom, compassion, and samādhi; and the truth of cessation has the nature of the four perfections of purity, self, bliss, and permanence.¹⁵

In the outer tantras,¹⁶ the consciousness of the universal ground, the ground in which the karmic latencies are placed, is explained to be the principal origin, and suffering refers to the ordinary beings' three doors¹⁷ fabricated by it. Mantra, which transmutes this suffering into pristine wisdom and is preceded by empowerment, is the path. Nondual, uncompounded pristine wisdom is cessation. In his *Commentary on the Higher States of Meditative Absorptions*,¹⁸ Ācārya Buddhaghya explains that the term “mantra” refers to awareness of the deity, of its signs, of its essence, and so forth.

In the Unsurpassed Tantra class, saṃsāra is taught to be the non-recognition of natural, innate, and uncontrived pristine wisdom, while its cause, the karmic latencies of transference, is the principal origin. The truth of the path consists of not being distracted from the two stages of ripening and liberation, and the truth of cessation is the body endowed with the seven aspects of union.

These are merely a few brief remarks. This subject should be learned extensively from the various collections of scriptures and the individual tantras.

This was written down on the basis of the ocean of the scriptures and tantras [169] as they were taught by all perfectly awakened buddhas.

*Sarva maṅgalam.*¹⁹

NOTES

1. *rten 'brel snying po*. The Sanskrit verse reads: *ye dharmā hetuprabhavā betuṃ teṣāṃ tathāgataḥ hyavadat/ teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃ vādi mahāśramaṇaḥ*. In Tibetan translation: *chos rnams thams cad rgyu las byung/ de rgyu de bzhin gshegs pas gsungs/ rgyu la 'gog pa gang yin pa/ dge sbyong chen pos 'di skad gsungs//*.
2. These verses should not be confused with Nāgārjuna's *Verses on the Essence of Dependent Arising* (*Pratītyasamutpādayakārikā*; *rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba'i snying po'i tshig le'ur byas pa*), a short teaching on the twelve links of dependent arising, causality, and emptiness.
3. *rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba'i snying po'i rnam par bshad pa zhib mo rnam par 'thag pa*.
4. In tantric Buddhist literature, the word *evaṃ*—which famously opens the discourses of the Buddha with the phrase *evaṃ mayā śrutam ekasmin samaye* (“Thus have I once heard”)—carries a special, esoteric meaning. Its two phonemes *e* and *vaṃ* are interpreted to indicate the integration of dualistic principles into the nondual path of Secret Mantra. See Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Taye, *Systems of Buddhist Tantra*, 42.
5. “Homage to Śākyamuni!”
6. In the word-by-word translation of this verse from Sanskrit into Tibetan included in Pema Karpo's original work, *evaṃ* (“thus”) is glossed with “in these words” (*'di skad*). To reflect the importance of this word, the Sanskrit is preserved here as well.
7. As mentioned in the introduction, the usage of the Sanskrit word *evaṃ* in the Tibetan text could indicate the tantric dimension of the Buddhist doctrine. This section in particular has a distinct Vajrayāna tone to it, stating that the two aspects of the path—that is, the wisdom seeing the illusory nature of things and the method based on the relation of causes and results—are taught *evaṃ* (“in this way”), which strongly suggests the tantric usage of this term in the sense of union.
8. This is the concluding homage of Nāgārjuna's *Dispeller of Disputes* (*Vigrahavyāvartanikārikā*), 29a6. The reading of this stanza is in accordance with the Derge edition, which reads: *gang zbig stong dang rten 'byung dag/ dbu ma'i lam du don gcig par/ gsung mchog mtsbhungs pa med pa yi/ sangs rgyas de la phyag 'tshal lo//*.
9. The phrase *ye dharmā*, which literally means “those dharmas,” is a simple abbreviation standing for the entire *Pratītyasamutpādagāthā*, the *dhāraṇī* that serves as the subject of this text and is found in the note above.

10. The *Stainless Light* (*Vimalaprabhā*) is a commentary on the *Laghukālacakratantra* found in both the Kangyur (Toh. 845) and the Tengyur (Toh. 1347). The relevant passage from this (Toh. 845, 230a) reads as follows: *de bzbin du yan lag bcu gnyis 'gags pas shes rab ma'ang dag pa'o/ 'dir theg pa gsum la rgyas gdab pa ni chos kyi phung po brgyad khri bzhi stong gi ye d+harmAH 'o/ lha rnams kyi rgyas gdab pa ni sangs rgyas so/ dge 'dun rnām pa bzhi'i rgyas gdab pa ni dge slong ngo/ de bzbin du dge slong sngon du 'gro ba ni dge 'dun no/ ye d+harmAH sngon du 'gro ba ni chos so/ sangs rgyas sngon du 'gro ba ni byang chub sems dpa' dang kbro bo dang lha'i tshogs so//*. This passage could be rendered as follows: “In this way, the wisdom consort too is purified due to the cessation of the twelve links. Here, the seal for the three vehicles is the *ye dharmāḥ* of the eighty-four thousand Dharma teachings. The seal of the deities is the Buddha. The seal of the four classes of Saṅgha is the monk. Thus, the monk precedes the Saṅgha; the Dharma precedes *ye dharmāḥ*; and the assembly of the bodhisattvas, wrathful ones, and deities precedes the Buddha.”
11. The edition from Pema Karpo's works was followed here, which reads: *de'i rgyu gang zag gi bdag tu 'dzin pa'i mtshan nyid can gyi* (not *gyis*) *'jig tshogs* (not *jigs tshogs*) *la lta ba*.
12. Emended *myur bul che ba byung* to *myur bul ches che ba byung*, following Pema Karpo.
13. *Ornament of Clear Realization* (*Abhisamayālaṃkāra*), 4.34cd. Emended *rtogs bla* to *rtogs sla*, according to both Pema Karpo and the Derge edition of the text (*mdo 'grel* (ta) 161a).
14. That is, the *tathāgatagarbha*, or buddha nature.
15. The doctrine of buddha nature is extensively taught in Maitreya's *Sublime Continuum* (*Uttaratantra*, also known as the *Ratnagotravibhāga*), the most renowned Indian śāstra dedicated to this subject. Its commentary by Asaṅga contains many quotations from the sūtras to substantiate the various points alluded to in this paragraph. For instance, in the commentary on *Uttaratantra* 1.12, cessation is equated with the dharmakāya, which in verses 1.35 and 1.36 is explained to possess the four qualities of purity, self, bliss, and permanence. In classical Hindu philosophy, these qualities are commonly associated with the self (*ātman*), the existence of which the Buddha famously refuted. This contradiction is resolved in Asaṅga's commentary on verse 1.36. In brief, the Buddha taught impurity, no-self, suffering, and impermanence to counteract four mistaken notions regarding the compounded phenomena of the world. To counteract the four mistaken notions regarding the highest realization, he then taught these four characteristics of the dharmakāya. See Brunnhölzl, *When the Clouds Part*, 361f.
16. Here, the term “outer tantras” (*rgyud sde phyi ma*) refers to the lower classes of Tantra, in opposition to the explanation in accordance with the highest class of Tantra given next.
17. Body, speech, and mind.
18. The *Commentary on the Higher States of Meditative Absorptions* (*Dhyānottaraṣaṭaṭīkā*) by Buddhaguhya is a commentary on the *Dhyānottaraṣaṭalakrama*, an important text belonging to the Kriyā Tantra class. For a summary of the content of the latter, see Lessing and Wayman, *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric Systems*, 137f.
19. “May all be auspicious!”

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GLOSSARY

afflictions

ཉོན་ཐོངས་པ། • *nyon mongs pa* • kleśa

The mental states which make the mind unpeaceful and distort perception.

Awakened One

སངས་རྒྱལ། • *sangs rgyas* • buddha

Literal translation of the Sanskrit “buddha.”

bodhisattva

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔལ། • *byang chub sems dpa'* • bodhisattva

Name given to an individual who has generated the resolve to attain the state of complete buddhahood for the sake of other beings and who traverses the stages of the bodhisattva path.

buddha nature

དེ་བཞིན་གསལ་བཤིག་པའི་སྤྱིང་པོ། • *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po* • tathāgatagarbha

The mind's true nature and the basis for awakening present in sentient beings.

calm abiding

ཞི་གནས། • *zhi gnas* • śamatha

Calm abiding meditation, aimed at developing stability and clarity of mind. Paired with special insight it becomes a powerful tool to uproot ignorance, the root cause of all suffering.

consciousness of the universal ground

ཀུན་གཞིའི་རྣམ་ཤེས། • *kun gzhi'i rnam shes* • ālayavijñāna

The consciousness of the universal ground, also “all-base consciousness,” is the eighth aspect of consciousness in the eight-consciousness model of the mind according to Yogācāra philosophy. In addition to the six types of consciousness based on the six sense faculties, the consciousness of the universal ground is the subtle continuum of the mind stream that functions as the basis for storing the latencies generated by actions of body, speech, and mind, and thus for the experience of their results. It comprises two aspects: a

causal aspect composed of seeds and latencies and a resultant aspect that is this consciousness itself, the ground for the experience of the maturation of these seeds and the support for the placement of future seeds. The seventh consciousness is the afflicted mind, the innate identification with the subtle continuum of experience.

dependent arising

རྟེན་ཅིང་འབྲེལ་བར་འབྱུང་བ། • *rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba* • pratītyasamutpāda

Core teaching of the Buddha describing the dependent nature of all phenomena.

empowerment

དབང་བསྐྱུར། • *dbang bskur* • abhiṣeka

A ritual that functions as the entrance to the path of Secret Mantra.

emptiness

སྟོང་པ་ཉིད། • *stong pa nyid* • śūnyatā

Ultimate reality, the lack of inherent and true existence.

final turning of the Dharma wheel

འཁོར་ལོ་ཐ་མ། • *'khor lo tha ma* • antya dharmacakra

The third of the three general classes of teachings given by the Buddha according to the Mahāyāna tradition. Intended for the followers of the bodhisattva path, the focus of these teachings is the distinction between the definitive and expedient meaning of the Buddha's discourses, as well as buddha nature.

first turning of the Dharma wheel

འཁོར་ལོ་དང་པོ། • *'khor lo dang po* • prathama dharmacakra

The first of the three general classes of teachings given by the Buddha according to the Mahāyāna tradition. The focus of these teachings are the four truths of suffering, origin, cessation, and the path, with the aim of mainly guiding those aspiring to individual liberation from suffering.

formative factors

འདུ་བྱེད། • *'du byed* • saṃskāra

One of the five skandhas or groups of psychophysical phenomena, making up the entirety of human experience. The five are form (*rūpa*; *gzugs*), feeling (*vedanā*; *tshor ba*), perception (*saṃjñā*; *'du shes*), formative factors (*saṃskāra*; *'du byed*) and consciousness (*viññāna*; *rnam shes*). Formative factors are mental events that condition perception and thus function as the basis for the accumulation of karma.

four truths

བདེན་པ་བཞི། • *bden pa bzhi* • catuḥsatya

The fundamental framework of the Buddha's teachings: understanding suffering, relinquishing its origin, actualizing the cessation of suffering, and cultivating the path leading to this cessation.

karma

ལས། • *las* • karma

Actions and, by extension, the causal relationship between actions and their results.

karmic latencies

བག་ཆགས། • *bag chags* • *vāsanā*

The karmic potential of an intentional deed left in the mind stream.

Madhyamaka

དབུ་མ། • *dbu ma*

Literally, “Middle Way.” One of the two philosophical systems of the Mahāyāna, the other being the Cittamātra, or Mind Only. Dating back to the writings of the Indian master Nāgārjuna, the Madhyamaka school emphasizes the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena, based on the doctrine of dependent arising. It is called the Middle Way because it frees the mind of the two conceptual extremes of existence and nonexistence.

Mahāyāna

ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ། • *theg pa chen po*

Literally, “great vehicle.” The system of Buddhist thought and praxis based on the Mahāyāna scriptures. It is distinguished from the Hīnayāna on the basis of authoritative scriptures and philosophical tenet systems, as well as its paths and results. One of the key distinguishing features defining the Mahāyāna path is bodhicitta, the altruistic intention to gain true and complete awakening for the benefit of all beings and the practices motivated by this resolve. The Mahāyāna encompasses two systems of practice—Pāramitāyāna (*phar phyin theg pa*) based on the sūtras, and Secret Mantra Vajrayāna (*gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa*) based on the tantras—and two philosophical tenet systems: Cittamātra (*sems tsam*) and Madhyamaka (*dbu ma*).

middle turning of the Dharma wheel

འཁོར་ལོ་བར་པ། • *'khor lo bar pa* • *madhya dharmacakra*

The second of the three general classes of teachings given by the Buddha according to the Mahāyāna tradition. Intended for followers of the bodhisattva path, the focus of these teachings is the lack of inherent existence, or emptiness.

Middle Way

དབུ་མ་འི་ལམ། • *dbu ma'i lam* • *madhyamā-pratipad*

A name for the path taught by the Buddha, which is free of extreme forms of conduct and extreme views.

nirvāṇa

ཐུ་དན་ལས་འདས་པ། • *mya ngan las 'das pa* • *nirvāṇa*

Liberation from saṃsāra, suffering, and dissatisfaction. Two types of nirvāṇa are distinguished: the nirvāṇa of the Hīnayāna (individual liberation from saṃsāra, karma, and rebirth resulting from the cessation of the afflictions and karma) and the nirvāṇa of the Mahāyāna (a state that is beyond both ordinary existence in saṃsāra and the cessation defined by Hīnayāna, and is therefore called “non-abiding nirvāṇa”).

non-abiding nirvāṇa

མི་གནས་པའི་ཐུ་དན་ལས་འདས་པ། • *mi gnas pa'i mya ngan las 'das pa* • *apratiṣṭha nirvāṇa*

The type of nirvāṇa defined by Mahāyāna, which is beyond both ordinary existence in saṃsāra and the cessation defined by Hīnayāna.

perfections

པ་རོལ་དུ་ཕྱིན་པ། • *pha rol tu phyin pa* • pāramitā

The qualities cultivated on the Mahāyāna path to bring one's spiritual potential to full maturation. The primary six are: generosity (*dāna*; *sbyin pa*); discipline (*śīla*; *tshul khrims*); forbearance (*kṣānti*; *bzod pa*); diligence (*vīrya*; *brtson 'grus*); meditative stability (*dhyāna*; *bsam gtan*); and wisdom (*prajñā*; *shes rab*). To this list, four more pāramitās are added to complete the bodhisattva path: means (*upāya*; *thabs*); aspiration (*praṇidhāna*; *smon lam*); power (*bala*; *stobs*) and pristine wisdom (*jñāna*; *ye shes*).

pratyekabuddha

རང་རྒྱལ། • *rang rgyal*

A person on the Hīnayāna path of individual liberation who practices the Dharma during periods when no teachings of a buddha are available. Pratyekabuddhas practice in solitude without relying on a teacher and become realized through their insight into the principle of dependent arising.

pristine wisdom

ཡེ་ཤེས། • *ye shes* • jñāna

In a general Mahāyāna context, pristine wisdom is the direct cognition of ultimate reality of an ārya being.

samādhi

ཉིང་ངེ་འཛིན། • *ting nge 'dzin*

Meditative concentration.

samsāra

འཁོར་བ། • *'khor ba*

The beginningless and ceaselessly repetitive cycle of uncontrolled birth and death which beings are subject to as long as they are not enlightened. This perpetual cycle of worldly existence is characterized by unsatisfactoriness and a lack of true freedom.

seven aspects of union

ཁ་སྐྱོར་ཡན་ལག་བདུན། • *kha sbyor yan lag bdun*

The seven aspects of union are the marks of the saṃbhogakaya: perfect enjoyment, union, great bliss, lack of self-nature, all-encompassing compassion, uninterrupted continuity, and non-cessation.

special insight

ལྷག་མཐོང་། • *lhag mthong* • vipaśyanā

The cultivation of insight into the true nature of reality in order to eliminate mental afflictions and the suffering they produce. One of the two main branches of Buddhist meditation. The practice of special insight must be paired with calm abiding—the other branch—in order to function as a liberating method.

śrāvaka

ཉན་ཐོས་པ། • *nyan thos pa*

The disciples of the Buddha who follow the Hīnayāna path of individual liberation, as opposed to the bodhisattvas who follow the Mahāyāna path to liberate all sentient beings.

stream entry

རྒྱུན་ཞུགས། • *rgyun zbugs* • śrotāpanna

The first of four successive levels of attainment on the path of liberation according to the Hīnayāna, the other three being: once-returner, non-returner, and arhat.

Tathāgata

དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ། • *de bzhin gshogs pa*

Literally “Thus-Gone.” Epithet for a fully awakened buddha.

two stages of ripening and liberation

སྒྲིབ་བྱེད་དུ་སྒོམ་བའི་རིམ་པ་གཉིས། • *smin byed du grol ba'i rim pa gnyis*

The stage of ripening refers to the process of empowerment and the stage of liberation to the processes of creation and completion.

Unsurpassed Tantra Class

ལྷ་མེད་ཀྱི་རྒྱུད། • *bla med kyi rgyud* • anuttaratantra

The highest of the four classes of Tantra according to the New Translation schools.