

Law of Karma and Interdependence Origination

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The philosophy of interdependence origination is a very important subject because we all live in a relative state in a relative world. This relative state and relative world constitute the institution of interdependence origination. We are all interconnected by cause and effect. The result does not arise without a cause and the effect does not arise from the wrong cause neither. What our minds are going through right now and what we are going through in our lives are all arisen from causes and conditions. Karma, a Sanskrit word translated into action, is included in the subject of interdependent origination. Action becomes the cause and condition for manifesting effect and result. For example, walking the first step is the result of initiation and it becomes the cause of the second step. Taking the second step is the result of the first step and it creates the cause for the third step and so on. The philosophy of interdependent cause and condition, cause and effect is not a Buddhist belief, but rather it is how everything is constituted and how everything functions universally. We are all functioning within the institution of cause and effect. Without clear understanding and awareness of interdependent cause and effect, it is easy for us to become short-sighted. We perceive this body as permanent, unique and real. Therefore we attach to ourselves and make effort only to bring happiness to this body. But how is this body originated? Historically, some great practitioners, pratyekabuddhas and solitary realizers meditated at the cemeteries and they saw bones, skeletons scattered here and there and aroused sad feelings. We cherished this body so much in our lives. We sacrificed many things for this body. This was the result. They investigated further by asking where did the bones come from? From death. After death, we saw bones. Where did death come from? Death came from aging. We got older and older and when we died, we saw bones. Therefore, bones are not independent. It depends on death and death depends on aging. Aging does not necessarily mean old. We are aging every moment right after birth. Aging comes from birth. We age because we are born. How does birth come about? It comes from causes and conditions that exist. Anything can happen within that existence.

Because of ignorance, we fail to recognize our own intrinsic awareness and as a result our existence is overpowered by grasping. Grasping, holding on to or to keep, is a powerful mental factor. When we see or hear something we like, we want to get it or achieve it. Things that we do not like, we would like to get rid of them. This is a type of grasping. Grasping comes from craving, craving objects. Craving comes from feelings. Feeling comes from contacting objects with our 5 senses -- we see with our eyes, we hear with our ears, we taste with our tongue, we smell with our nose and touch with our body. These 5 senses together with mental form 6 senses. Feeling and contact come from 6 senses. Six senses in turn come from names and forms. When we see form, we label and name it. This is a person, a table, this is beautiful, this is sweet, this is good, this is bad... We do not realize that all these are just labels and names. Labels and names come from consciousness. Consciousness creates labels. Consciousness comes from mental formation. We continuously create karma, mental formation that imprints in our consciousness. What drives our karma? Ignorance is the root cause of all these. Ignorance is a mental factor. It is a type of obscuration that prevent the awareness of mind to perceive wisdom. It obscures the mind. When the mind is obscured, we see things as real, as substantial and we cannot see this interdependence and interconnectedness. Originated and unoriginated -- that which is born free from causes and conditions is unborn, unoriginated. Everything arises from that unorigination is originated in the interdependence. Since everything is interdependent, interconnected in this relative state, all energy and forms are empty. For example, this table here, is it short or long? If you say that it is long compare to that, then this table is long. But if we compare it to

the base of the stage, the base is longer than the table, so the table is short. So the table being long is empty. It does not exist. I did not create emptiness, namely, table being long or short. It is empty by itself. Being long or short are just labels. Without label, we cannot communicate. "What is your name?"

"Alexander."

"Without the name Alexander, we cannot call you. Where is Alexander?"

"is nowhere."

Everything has a label so that we can communicate and function properly. Therefore, there is nothing to attach to or hate. We should not attach to labels -- table being long or short. Knowing this, we can free our minds from grasping, craving. Mind is also empty. For instance, our head does not have any horn, so we have no mind to project horn to your head. This table being long is illusion. You eating lunch is also illusion. Your happiness, your emotions are illusion too. Illusion does not mean negative. This table being long exists illusory, not inherently, only temporarily when compared to that. We cannot deny that this is not long compared to this, but not being inherently long because it is short when compared to the base. Therefore, in this interdependent relative state, everything that exists is illusory, temporary, transitory, momentary, impermanent. Experiences are just illusions and can arise at any moment. They are all empty. So there is nothing to attach to, nothing to hate, nothing to compete with, nothing to reject, no subject or object, no self or others. Because of our ignorance, we fail to recognize the independence and empty nature among all things.

So our lives start with ignorance. From ignorance, life goes down to the 12-interdependent link. When ignorance is there, a chain of this life continues just like a wheel with no beginning and ending, go around and around no matter what we do. In this wheel, no matter how much we do, we are not free from suffering. Even if you are very successful in your business and you can do anything that is expected, are you free from suffering at that moment. Why? Because we cannot break the chain. Arhats, pratyekabuddhas realized this: everybody, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, is constituted in this institution of interdependent origination. This is the universal law and it does not matter who you are. As human beings however, we are specially gifted with our intelligence. We can utilize our special brains in the best possible way so that we may have the opportunity to cut the chain of suffering and confusion and attain liberation. Therefore, knowing the philosophy of interdependent cause and condition is a special method to dispel ignorance, cut the chain of suffering and confusion and blossom wisdom. Right now, we are here and think that we are one solid independent body. We are not solid independent bodies. Our bodies are made up of six elements: fire, water, wind, earth, space and consciousness. All 6 elements have to be balanced. If any of them is absent or imbalance, we cannot function. Therefore, we are not one piece but a combination of many pieces. When there is imbalance, we have to balance it through different ways. For example, when we feel cold, we need more heat. When we feel thirsty, we need to drink. Suffering and happiness are not independent. They depend on causes (primary causes) and conditions (contributory causes). For instance, when farmers farm potatoes, the seed of the potatoes is the primary cause. To grow potatoes, we need good location, good soil, good climate and adequate water. They are contributory causes. Neither one cause is sufficient, we need both to grow and manifest. We look into ourselves, when we have suffering -- physical or mental, we usually blame somebody else. We have this problem now because of this or that person. So this or that person is the contributory cause of our problem. However, the primary cause, the real cause, we planted the seed long time ago. For example, we have headache due to sunshine and strong wind, therefore to avoid headache, we wear hats, take pills and avoid sunshine. However, these are just the contributory causes. The real primary cause, the karma that causes us headache, the seed of the karma we planted long time ago. If in case sunshine or wind

is the only real cause for headache, then anybody who goes outside and exposes himself or herself to sunshine or wind will definitely get a headache. Knowing the philosophy of interdependent cause and condition is a special method to dispel ignorance, cut the chain of suffering and confusion and blossom wisdom. When we clearly know the causes and conditions interdependent on each other, we can be sincere and truthful to ourselves. We become fully aware of what karma we are creating. We watch our thoughts and actions carefully and consciously so that we do not create negative karma. We will whole-heartedly try to create positive cause/karma and avoid negative cause/karma. We will have the courage to take responsibility, accept consequences and to correct and improve our situations. It is impossible to deny suffering or avoid suffering. We have to accept it and learn from it. We cannot ignore karma, but we can always purify negative karma. Once upon a time, a mother who had only one child and that child died. She could not bear the pain and could not accept that. She held onto the child and put him on her left shoulder. She went from place to place crying bitterly while asking "Can you revive my child?" She asked one after the other and nobody could show her anything. In desperation, she cried in front of Buddha and said, "Please make alive my child. I cannot accept this. This is my only child." Buddha said, "Go and find a house where no one has died in that house and bring a handful of mustard seed from that same house then your child will revive." After hearing this, she left the body of the child next to Buddha and went from house to house, place to place asking that question. At the end, she finally realized that it's not only her child died., everybody died. It is nature. So she should accept this because there is no other choice. The next story illustrates how easy it is to hurt or destroy others and how difficult it is to help others. It is easy for us to create negative karma, have negative thoughts such as anger, attachment, pride and jealousy and it is very difficult indeed to have positive karma , cultivate positive thoughts such as compassion and loving kindness. Once upon a time, there is a village in a country. Inside that village, lived a giant demon who ate human flesh. One day, the demon came and gave the people two choices. "Either I eat all of you today or I eat you one by one each day." The people were all very frightened and decided that it's better to be eaten one by one. They suffered so much so they asked Buddha for help. So Buddha came to the village and met the demon. The demon said, "I'll eat you." Buddha said, " That is why I am here. But before you do that, I would like to ask you two questions." The demon replied, " What are they?" Buddha asked, "Can you cut down all the branches and leaves on this tree?" The demon raised his big knife and cut down all the branches and leaves on the tree in a short moment. "What is the next question?" asked the demon impatiently. Buddha said, "Please put all the branches and leaves back to the tree." The demon was shocked and stunned. "How can I put them back? It is impossible. I cannot do this.", cried the demon. Then Buddha explained, "You have taken many people's lives and for you, it's easy. However, to keep people's lives is not easy. Look at your own life. If someone take your life , how would you feel? Think about it. Meditate on it. If somebody helps you, how would you feel?" He felt deep remorse and received Buddha's blessings and gave up taking lives. The point is that, because of our deeply-rooted habits, it is so easy to create negative karma and hard to create positive karma. Some people say, "I believe in karma" or "I do not believe in karma". Karma, as mentioned before, is a Sanskrit word translated into action. Action becomes the cause to manifest effect or result and is not a belief system. If it is the case that if we believe in karma, there is karma and if we do not believe in karma, there is no karma, then it is better not believe in karma, including myself, since we create more negative karma anyway. Let's forget it. Just because it is not the case, we cannot deny, reject or ignore karma. It is a universal law as stated in the Bible -- If you plant poison, poison will grow. If you plant medicine, medicine will grow. Once we create karma, we either have to experience it or purify it. It is unavoidable. This is the profound wisdom.

Interdependence and emptiness are not created by Buddha, but rather Buddha realized how everything functioned within that relative state. Emptiness does not mean negative or negation. It is a

wisdom. Knowing the interdependent and emptiness philosophy opens up wisdom and provide great space to develop unconditional compassion, loving kindness. This great space is unoriginated and infinite. The self-occurring intrinsic awareness, that dwells there in its natural place of rest, is not sullied by any flaw.

Indeed, infinite supreme qualities manifest unceasingly from that. This great space does not depend on anything but we all depend on space. Without space, we cannot function and the whole planet would not exist. The nature of mind living in that space is infinite, beyond causes and conditions. Our lives which is functioning in that mind is unlimited. If we do not know this, we suffer. Even though we know this intellectually, our minds still wander. Our minds are controlled by two opposite forces. On the one hand, we would like to cultivate good thoughts while the other mind resists that. It's very difficult to hold positive thoughts. It is because we have been so habitulize in our concepts and ways of thinking --- attachment, hatred, pride, jealousy, afflicted emotions and so on. The seed of inveterate propensity has grown so large that we feel that they are natural. They arise effortlessly when we encounter the proper conditions. We suffer unnecessarily. Because of our deeply-rooted habits, it will take us a lot of time, patience and wisdom to fully cultivate positive thoughts and develop Boddhicitta, unconditional loving-kindness and compassion. Therefore, we need to do meditation practices--meditate on the interdependent cause and effect, meditate on impermanence and meditate on the Boddhicitta, in order to train our mind and to penetrate into the wisdom, the essence of all knowledge.

Knowledge is infinite, like stars in the sky. There is so much to learn and our lives are short. We do not have enough time to study them all. Therefore, it is important to know the essence of knowledge, apply it and put it into action. Just like Milarepa, who worked so hard, said, "When I know one thing, it opens the door to everything." So when he attained enlightenment, without studying all subjects, he knew everything. He got "the special button" to push and this button opened up every door of knowledge that existed in the whole universe. In order to cultivate Boddhicitta, we need make effort to train ourselves on the six perfections and 10 virtues and avoid 10 non-virtues. (The six perfections are -- generosity, patience, perseverance, moral ethics, meditative concentration, wisdom awareness. The 10 virtues are: protecting lives of others, practicing great generosity, maintaining moral ethics, speak truthfully, harmonizing those who are unfriendly, speaking peacefully and polite, speak meaningfully, practicing the reduction of attachment and development of contentment, practicing loving-kindness and engaging in the perfect meaning. The 10 non-virtues are: taking life, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh words, idle talk, covetousness, harmful thought and wrong view.) Boddhicitta is a special cause, a special technique to purify negative karma, open our wisdom and dispel all ignorance which is the root cause of suffering.