Chapter 2 The Buddhist View of Life

Our mind determines our state of existence. Someone with a mind stained by afflictions is a being in saṃsāra. Someone who has eradicated all afflictive obscurations—mental afflictions and the karma causing rebirth in saṃsāra—is a liberated being, an arhat[2]. Someone whose mind has eliminated even the subtlest cognitive obscurations is a buddha. This is determined by the extent to which that person's mind has been purified. In this regard, the Sublime Continuum speaks of three types of beings: polluted beings, who revolve in cyclic existence; unpolluted beings, who do not revolve in cyclic existence; and completely unpolluted beings, who are buddhas. A person's level of spiritual attainment does not depend on external features but on his or her state of mind.

What is Mind?

Science lacks a cohesive concept of mind, its nature, causes and potential. Although there are many books about the anatomy and physiology of the brain, the mind is rarely mentioned.

Every topic in this series relates to the mind. We will look at the mind from many perspectives: its nature, causes, potential, functions, levels…. We investigate what obscures its potential and how to use antidotes to these obscurations to reveal the potential of the mind in its wondrous glory in full awakening or buddhahood.

The Sanskrit word translated as "mind" may also be translated as "heart."

The mind has two natures: its conventional nature (how it functions and relates to other things) and its ultimate nature (its actual mode of existence).

The **conventional nature**—its clarity and cognisance[3]—may be compared to pure water that is free from contaminants. When dirt is mixed into this water, its pure nature is obscured, although it is still there. No matter how much dirt is in the water, it is not the nature of the water; the water can be purified and the dirt removed. Similarly, the mind is pure even when it is obscured by afflictions. Sometimes our mind is calm and other times it is agitated by anger or attachment. Temporary although the mindstream endures, anger is not always present, because anger and other afflictions have not altered the nature of the mind.

Emotions are not in the nature of the mind - eg, anger and lovingkindness cannot be present in the mind at the same time, but can be there at different times.

Our body is like a house and the mind is its inhabitant. While the body remains, the mind is a long-term resident. However, various mental factors, eg, emotions and attitudes, are like visitors. One day resentment comes, another day compassion comes, but neither remains long. Some are welcome and asked to remain (compassion, lovingkindness). Some (anger) are unwelcome and evicted. It is possible to banish anger and cultivate compassion.

The **ultimate nature of the mind** is its emptiness of independent or inherent[4] existence. Inherent existence is a false mode of existence that we superimpose on

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[2] Someone who has eradicated all afflictive obscurations and is liberated from saṃsāra.

[3] The document uses several variants of the word 'cognise'. Cognisant refers to having knowledge or being aware of something through conscious awareness or direct experience. When someone says they are "cognisant" of something, it implies that they are aware of it and also that have given it some thought or consideration.

[4] Throughout this chapter 'inherent' is used. Both "inherent" and "innate" suggest something natural or essential, "inherent" focuses on qualities that are an inseparable part of something and may apply broadly to objects, concepts or systems. "Innate," is more specifically about qualities or traits present from birth within living beings. 'built-in'

all phenomena; we believe that they have their own findable essence that makes them what they are, that they exist independently of all other factors such as their causes and parts. In fact, they are empty of all such fabricated ways of existing because they exist dependent on other factors.

The Buddha says:

> The mind is devoid of mind, for the nature of mind is clear light.

"The mind is devoid of mind." This leads us to investigate what the mind actually is, its ultimate mode of existence, how it really exists. When we search that clear and cognisant nature, we cannot find something that is the mind. Saying that the mind does not abide in the mind means that an inherently existent mind is not the final mode of existence of the mind. The mind exists, but it is empty of inherent existence—"the nature of mind is clear light". The fact that the mind is empty of inherent existence alone does not mean the afflictions such as ignorance, anger and attachment can be eliminated from it. These afflictions also lack inherent existence, but we cannot say they are pure by nature.

Ignorance is a mental factor that sees things as existing on their own, with their own separate identities. It is the source of all other disturbing emotions, such as anger, craving, jealousy and conceit.

Unlike clouds, which once gone can reappear, ignorance and afflictions, once they have been eliminated from their root by wisdom, can no longer cloud the mind. Other mental factors, such as love, compassion and fortitude, do not depend on ignorance to exist and remain as part of our mindstream forever.

REFLECTION

1. The conventional nature of the mind is clarity and awareness, meaning the mind can reflect and understand objects.
2. The conventional nature of the mind is pure: the afflictions have not entered into its nature, although they may temporarily colour or obscure the mind.
3. The body is material in nature; it is like a house and the mind is its intangible inhabitant.
4. The ultimate nature of the mind is empty of findable existence; it lacks any thing that is findable when we search for how the mind ultimately exists.

Body, Mind, Rebirth and Self

At the experiential level, there is great difference between the pain we experience due to our own situation and the pain that comes from compassion for others' suffering. The experience of our own pain arises involuntarily and forcefully and we usually respond to it with fear and anger. The pain that is attendant upon compassion for another's suffering has an element of deliberate sharing and embracing of that pain and we react to it with courage.

Tears can well up in our eyes when we are very joyful or very sad. On the physical level, our eyes do not distinguish the two. But on the mental level, there is a big difference in the cause of the tears and how we experience them.

It is difficult to identify the underlying characteristics of mind. On a daily level, we experience sensory perceptions and the thoughts that chase after objects of the senses. Sense perceivers—our visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile consciousnesses—focus on the external world and assume the aspect of the objects they perceive[5]. The conceptual mind that thinks about these objects also as-

[5] The object is reflected in the mind. It is similar to, but not the same as, the image of an object forming on the retina when the visual consciousness sees it. Seeing the aspect—the representation—is the meaning of seeing the object.

sumes the aspect of these external objects and even when our mind is directed inward to our own feelings, it assumes the aspect of the feelings. It is difficult for us to separate out the clarity and awareness happening in the mind and be aware of the mind alone without also being aware of its objects. However, with meditation it is possible to experience the nature of the mind.

Results are produced from concordant causes—ie, causes that have the ability to produce them; they cannot arise from discordant causes. Because the mind is immaterial, its substantial cause—the principal thing that transforms into a particular moment of mind—must also be immaterial. This is the preceding moment of mind. One moment of mind arises due to the previous moment of mind, which arose due to the moment of mind that preceded it. This can be traced back to the time of conception. The moment of mind at the time of conception arose due to a cause, a previous moment of mind and in this way the continuum of mind prior to life is established. This mind does not come from the parents. It must come from a previous moment of mind, which, at the moment of conception, is the mind of a being in the previous life.

At the time of death, the body and mind separate. Here, too, they have different continua. The body becomes a corpse and is recycled in nature. The mind continues on, one moment of mind producing the next. In the case of ordinary beings, the mind usually takes a new body and another life begins.

There are different levels and types of mind. In terms of levels of mind, there are: coarse consciousnesses, such as our five sense consciousnesses; subtler consciousness, such as our mental consciousness that thinks and dreams; and the subtlest mind that becomes manifest in ordinary beings at the time of death. This subtlest mind, which goes from one life to the next, can persist without depending on the coarse physical body, including the brain and nervous system. The subtlest mind is a continuity of ever-changing moments of mind; it is not a permanent self or soul.

The continuity of mind across lifetimes is not the gross level of mind that is dependent on the physical body. It is the subtlest mind—the fundamental, inherent mind of clear light that is the final basis of designation of the person—that connects one life with the next.

Our outlook on life, perceptions, feelings and emotions are all based on the notion of a self. We say, “I did this. I think that. I feel sad or happy.” Although this is our experience, seldom have we stopped to ask ourselves, “Who is this I upon which everything is predicated?” The question about the identity of the self is important because it is the self, the I, that wants to be happy and to avoid suffering. If the self existed independently from other phenomena, we should be able to isolate and identify it. We cannot.

The Buddha taught that a person is composed of five aggregates—form, feelings, discrimination, miscellaneous factors and consciousness. The form aggregate is our body and the other four aggregates constitute our mind.

The self depends on the body: when our body is ill, we say, “I’m sick.” If the self were a separate entity from the body, we could not say this. The self also depends on the mind. When the mind is happy, we say, “I’m happy.” If the self were separate from the mind, we couldn’t say this.

“I” is designated in dependence on our body and mind, yet when we search for a findable thing that is “me,” we can’t find it within the body, the mind, the collec-

tion of the two or separate from them. This indicates that the person exists dependently; we lack an inherent, findable, unchanging essence.

The person or self creates the causes for happiness and suffering. The person also experiences the pleasurable and painful results of these actions. Although we cannot pinpoint anything that is the self, the existence of a person who creates causes and experiences effects is undeniable.

Countless sentient beings have this feeling of self, although it is difficult to identify what that self is. That each and every sentient being wants happiness and not suffering is indisputable; no reason is needed to prove this.

Being born, enjoying life, enduring suffering and dying are products of previous causes.

The self exists, but our view of it is mistaken. This incongruity between how the self actually exists and how we comprehend it is the source of all our confusion and suffering. As we develop correct views, our mental strength increases; this leads to mental peace, which, in turn, brings joy and a sense of fulfilment. A mental state that sees the world as it is—free from fear and anxiety.

REFLECTION

1. The body is material in nature; the mind is immaterial. While the brain and the mind influence each other, they are not the same.
2. Our body and its substantial cause—the sperm and egg of our parents—are both material. Our mind and its substantial cause—the previous moment of mind—are immaterial; they are no more than clarity and cognisance. At the time of conception they meet, forming a new life.
3. At the time of death, the body is a corpse that decomposes into material elements. The mind continues to the next life in the form of the subtle mind.

The Four Truths of the Āryas[6] (Four Noble Truths)

The "four noble truths," form the foundation and structure of the Buddhist path.

Each sentient being has the inherent wish for stable peace, happiness and freedom from suffering. The longing for these motivates us to engage in many activities in an attempt to gain them. However, until now everything we have done has not brought stable peace and joy because we live in cyclic existence (saṃsāra) — the state of having a body and mind under the influence of mental afflictions[7] and karma. Within cyclic existence we encounter only duḥkha—unsatisfactory conditions and suffering.[8]

Without choice, we take a body that gets old, sick and dies and have a mind that becomes anxious, fearful and angry. The I—the person that is designated with dependence upon the body and mind—revolves in cyclic existence. Our five aggregates of body and mind[9] are unsatisfactory by nature and constitute the first truth of the āryas, the truth of duḥkha.

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[6] Someone who has directly and non-conceptually realised the emptiness of inherent existence.

[7] see footnote 1 page 2. Ignorance, Attachment or desire, Aversion or hatred, Pride or ego, Doubt.

[8] Duḥkha (pr dukkha) is often translated as "suffering," but this translation is misleading. Its meaning is more nuanced and refers to all unsatisfactory states and experiences, many of which are not explicitly painful. While the Buddha says that life under the influence of afflictions and polluted karma is unsatisfactory, he does not say that life is suffering. Unsatisfactory experiences of cyclic existence, which are of three types: the duḥkha of pain, the duḥkha of change, and the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning; the first truth of the āryas.

[9] Aggregates. (1) The four or five components of a living being: body, feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors and consciousnesses. (2) In general, the aggregates are a way to categorise all impermanent things. Here form includes the five sense objects, their five cognitive faculties and forms for mental consciousness.

The causes of the five aggregates are mental afflictions—skewed attitudes and disturbing emotions, the chief of which is ignorance (footnote 1 page 2)—and polluted actions.[10] These constitute the second truth, the true origins of duḥkha.

The final true cessation[11]—the third truth—is liberation and nirvāṇa, the state of peace, joy and fulfilment that we seek. Here ignorance, afflictions and polluted actions and the unsatisfactory experiences they cause have been extinguished at the root so that they can no longer arise.

True cessations are attained by a method that eradicates ignorance. This is *true paths*, the fourth truth, which consist primarily of the wisdom realising the ultimate nature—the emptiness of inherent existence of all persons and phenomena—and the virtuous consciousnesses supported by that wisdom.

These paths require time and diligent effort to develop. How to cultivate these paths and actualise nirvāṇa is the subject of this series.

The process of attaining nirvāṇa begins with understanding the first truth, the nature of duḥkha[12] and the various types of unsatisfactory circumstances and suffering that afflict sentient beings in cyclic existence.

Because the root cause of duḥkha, ignorance—a mental factor that misconceives reality and grasps phenomena as actually existent—is erroneous, it can be eliminated by the wisdom that sees things as they really are—empty of inherent existence. By gradually eradicating ignorance and other afflictions, we can bring greater satisfaction and freedom into our lives.

With the final true cessation of duḥkha and its causes, we attain nirvāṇa.[13]

While nirvāṇa may sound like a far-off goal, we can easily see steps going in that direction: the more we cease anger, the greater harmony we experience and the more our greed diminishes, the greater contentment we have. As we gradually reduce ignorance and afflictions through the application of wisdom, tranquility and fulfilment correspondingly increase, culminating in nirvāṇa.

The Buddha spoke of three types of duḥkha. The first is the duḥkha of pain. This is the physical and mental suffering that all beings see as undesirable. All world religions agree that destructive actions, such as killing, stealing and lying, bring physical and/or mental pain.

The second type of duḥkha is the duḥkha of change, which refers to worldly happiness. Why did the Buddha call what is conventionally considered happiness—such as pleasant sensations—duḥkha? Worldly happiness is unsatisfactory because the activities, people and things that initially give us pleasure do not continue to do so. Although eating, being with friends, receiving praise and hearing good music may initially relieve pain or boredom and bring pleasure, if we continue to do them, they will eventually bring discomfort or fatigue. Most people do not recognise worldly happiness as being unsatisfactory by nature.

The third type of duḥkha—the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning—is the fact that we have a body and mind that are not under our control. Without choice, we take a body that is born, falls ill, ages and dies. Between birth and death, we encounter

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[10] The Sanskrit term āsrava is translated as “polluted,” “contaminated,” or “tainted,” meaning under the influence of ignorance or its latencies.

[11] The cessation of afflictions, their seeds and the polluted karma that produces rebirth in cyclic existence; liberation.

[12] Duḥkha. Unsatisfactory experiences of cyclic existence, which are of three types: the duḥkha of pain, the duḥkha of change and the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning; the first truth of the āryas.

[13] Nirvāṇa. Liberation; the cessation of afflictive obscurations and the rebirth in saṃsāra that they cause.

problems even though we try to avoid them. We cannot obtain everything we want even though we try hard to get it and even when our desires are fulfilled, that happiness is not stable: we become disillusioned or separated from what we crave.

The description of the third type of duḥkha—the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning—is unique to Buddhadharma. Other religions nor science do not identify our taking a body and mind that is under the control of ignorance, afflictions and polluted karma as problematic.

Having identified the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning as the basic unsatisfactory condition we sentient beings suffer from, the Buddha sought out its root cause. He identified it as our ignorance grasping at inherent existence and saw that this ignorance can be eliminated completely only by cultivating its opposite, the wisdom perceiving the emptiness of inherent existence. Here the Buddha's teachings on selflessness (anātman)[14] become important. He explained that when we search for what ignorance perceives—the inherent or independent existence of persons and phenomena—we cannot find it. The wisdom that realises this—the true path—has the ability to gradually eradicate all ignorance from the mind, resulting in nirvana, the final true cessation.

In this way, the **Dharma**—true cessations and true paths—is a unique refuge. The Buddha who taught this Dharma is a unique teacher and the Saṅgha—those followers who have realised directly the lack of inherent existence—are unique companions on the path. These three objects of **refuge** as described in Buddhism are unequaled and are not found elsewhere.

REFLECTION

1. The first two of the four truths of the āryas describe our present experience: we are subject to three main types of unsatisfactory circumstances: pain, change and pervasive conditioning. These are rooted in ignorance of the ultimate nature of reality.
2. The last two of the four truths describe possibilities: a state of freedom from ignorance and duḥkha exists and a path to that state also exists.
3. It is up to us to learn and reflect on these, to gain conviction in them and to cultivate wisdom in order to free ourselves.

Dependent Arising and Emptiness

In the above explanations of the four truths, several topics arose repeatedly: ignorance, which grasps at inherent existence; the emptiness of inherent existence, which is the ultimate nature of all persons and phenomena; the wisdom of realising emptiness that counteracts ignorance; and nirvāṇa, which is the state of peace attained from doing so. Another essential topic—**dependent arising**—ties all of these together. Three levels of dependent arising.[15]

1. The first, which is common to all Buddhist tenet systems, is **causal dependence**—the fact that products (conditioned things) depend on causes. Such dependency rules out the possibility of things arising haphazardly without any cause. It also precludes things arising due to discordant causes—things that do not have the ability to cause them. **Karma** and its effects is another system

[14] In this context, "self" does not mean a person but refers to inherent, independent or true existence. "Selflessness" is the absence of independent existence, not the absence of a person.

[15] Dependent arising. This is of three types
(1) causal dependence—things arising due to causes and conditions,
(2) mutual dependence—phenomena existing in relation to other phenomena,
(3) dependent designation—phenomena existing by being merely designated by terms and concepts.

of causal dependence. Karma is volitional actions done physically, verbally or mentally. These causes bring their effects: the rebirths we take, our experiences in our lives and the environment in which we are born.

2. The second type of dependency is **dependent designation**, which has two branches: mutual dependence and designation only by name and concept.

a. **Mutual dependence** refers to things existing in relation to each other. Objects and terms are defined with relation to each other and derive meaning only in the context of these mutually dependent relations.[16]

a. **designation only by name and concept**. The collection of arms, legs, a torso, head and so on, the *mind* conceives and designates "body." With the collection of body and mind, the *mind* conceives and imputes "person." In this way, all phenomena exist in dependence upon mind. Whatever identity an object has is dependent on the interaction between a basis of designation and a mind that conceives and designates an object on that basis. All existent objects exist just by being designated by term and concept. Being dependent, all phenomena are empty of independent existence. This is the subtlest meaning of dependent arising.

Dependent Arising and the Three Jewels

Indicating the importance of realising dependent arising, the Buddha says:

> Monastics, whoever sees dependent arising sees the Dharma. Whoever sees the Dharma sees the Tathāgata [the Buddha].

A process of progressive understanding is needed to understand the above.

When we realise **causal dependence**—that everything we perceive and experience arises as a result of its own causes and conditions—our perspective on the world and on our inner experiences shifts. Understanding that these exist only because their causes and conditions exist means our world, our experience and even ourselves no longer seem so fixed and solid. Being dependent, they have no essence of their own.

As our understanding of **mutual dependence** and **designation only by name and concept** deepens, we appreciate that a disparity exists between the way things appear and the way they exist. While things appear to be autonomous, objective, independent realities "out there," they do not in fact exist in this way.

Dependent on the collection of parts of a tree[17] (the basis of designation of a tree) and on the mind that conceives and designates "tree," a tree exists. Because it is dependent on all these factors, the tree is empty of independent or inherent existence. It does not exist in isolation—from its own side or under its own power—because it depends on causes, parts and the conceiving and designating mind.

Although an inherently existent tree cannot be found under analysis, a tree still exists. How does it exist? It exists dependently. Ie, emptiness and dependent aris-

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[16] Eg, long and short, parent and child, whole and parts and agent, object and action. Our body—which is a "whole" —depends on its parts—arms, legs, skin and internal organs. The organs and limbs only become "parts" in dependence upon the body as a whole.

[17] If we focus repeatedly on branches, trunk, twigs and leaves arranged in a certain manner and question, "What makes this collection of things a tree?" we will begin to understand that neither the individual parts nor the collection of those parts is a tree and that the tree exists by being merely designated in dependence on its parts.

ing are not contradictory and, in fact, are mutually complementary. Everything is empty of inherent existence and simultaneously everything exists, just not in the independent fashion that it appears to. It exists dependent on other factors.

Investigating how our mind perceives and interprets the things we encounter, we develop insight into the functions of the mind and the different types and levels of consciousness operating within us. We come to appreciate that although some of our emotional states seem very strong and their objects appear very vividly, they are similar to illusions as they do not exist in the way they appear to us.

Dependent arising is the foundation for all Dharma practices. The two levels of dependent arising—causal dependence and dependent designation—are the main factors through which spiritual practitioners accomplish their aspirations. By developing a deep understanding of the nature of reality in terms of **causal dependence**, we come to appreciate the workings of karma and its results: our actions bring results. Pain and suffering are due to destructive actions and happiness and desirable experiences are the results of constructive actions. Understanding this, we choose to live with good ethical conduct, which enables us to have a higher rebirth in the future.

Through deep contemplation of **dependent designation**, we come to realise **emptiness**, the ultimate mode of existence. This wisdom tackles the fundamental ignorance that keeps us bound in cyclic existence, allowing us to fulfil our spiritual goals of liberation and full awakening.

Dependent arising also underlies the **four truths**. Through reflection and analysis, we understand that our self-grasping ignorance that mis-comprehends reality gives rise to our mental afflictions (true origins) and that these, in turn, bring about the suffering we experience (true duḥkha).

Understanding dependent arising also enables us to realise that persons and phenomena lack of independent existence— their emptiness. This wisdom of realising emptiness (true path) has the power to overcome all ignorance (wrong views) and afflictions because they lack a valid basis. Yet emptiness and dependent arising can be proven by reasoning as well as direct experience. Thus, we can realise that a state exists in which all ignorance and afflictions have been removed. This is nirvāṇa, true cessations (the third truth). Thus the Dharma Jewel—true cessation and true paths—exists.

If such a state as nirvāṇa exists, individuals must be able to actualise it. This leads us to understand the existence of the ārya Saṅgha—those beings who perceive emptiness directly. It also demonstrates the existence of the buddhas—omniscient beings who have perfected this state of cessation. In this way, the understanding of dependent arising leads us to establish the existence of the Three Jewels of refuge: the Buddhas, Dharma and Saṅgha. For this reason, the Buddha said that those who see dependent arising see the Dharma and those who see the Dharma see the Tathāgata [the Buddha].[18]

REFLECTION

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[18] HHDL: I believe this statement of the Buddha could also mean that by seeing dependent arising on the level of conventional appearance, we see causal relationships and understand karma, compassion, bodhicitta and the method aspect of the path. By accomplishing the method aspect of the path, we come to "see" the form body of a buddha. By understanding dependent arising in relation to the ultimate mode of existence, we experience the meaning of emptiness—the essential characteristic of all phenomena—and we "see" the truth body of a buddha, a buddha's mind, specifically an awakened one's wisdom of ultimate reality. In this way, both body and mind of a buddha are actualised.

1. All persons and phenomena exist in dependence on other factors. There are three types of dependence: causal dependence (for impermanent things only), mutual dependence and designation only by name and concept.
2. Dependent arising contradicts the possibility of independent or inherent existence. Understanding this can eradicate grasping inherent existence, the root of our duḥkha in cyclic existence.
3. The wisdom that eradicates ignorance (the true paths) and the freedom from duḥkha that comes about due to it (true cessations) are the Dharma Jewel.
4. People who have actualised the Dharma Jewel in their minds are the Saṅgha Jewel and the Buddha Jewel. Thus the Three Jewels of refuge exist.

The Possibility of Ending Duḥkha

If duḥkha is a given (ie always present), trying to eliminate it would be a waste of effort. From the Buddhist viewpoint, two factors make liberation possible: the clear-light nature of the mind[19] and the unplanned nature of the defilements (ie happen because of external factors or chance).

The clear-light nature of the mind here refers to the basic capacity of the mind to cognise objects, its clear and aware nature. The mind's failure to know objects must then be due to obstructing factors. Obstructing factors may be physical; if we put our hand over our eyes, we cannot see. But in a deeper sense, our seeing is hindered by two types of obstructions: afflictive obscurations that prevent liberation from cyclic existence (afflictions and polluted karma) and cognitive obscurations that prevent full awakening (ignorance and dualistic view).

Nāgārjuna, the great second-century Indian sage notes that thinking things that actually arise from causes and conditions, exist in their own right is ignorance. The clear-light nature of mind has the ability to discern all objects, but ignorance[20] and its latencies[21] obstruct this. All faulty states of mind are based on and depend on ignorance and the twelve links of dependent arising (See Appendix)—the process through which cyclic existence arises lifetime after lifetime—follow from ignorance.

Āryadeva, Nāgārjuna's chief disciple, states:

> The consciousness that is the seed of existence has objects as its sphere of activity.
> When selflessness is seen in objects, the seed of existence is destroyed.

What is the consciousness that is the seed of cyclic existence? If consciousness in general were the root of cyclic existence, there would be no way to overcome cyclic existence because consciousness has a clear and cognisant nature and nothing can counteract its nature or sever its continuity. Here Āryadeva is not referring to general consciousness but to a specific type of consciousness—ignorance.

His point is that cyclic existence does not arise without a cause. Cyclic existence arises from an undisciplined, ignorant mind.

By saying that consciousness 'has objects as its sphere of activity', Āryadeva indicates the mind's potential to discern objects. Then, by discerning selflessness, self-grasping ignorance can be eliminated. Since ignorance grasps inherent existence (self), it can be overcome by wisdom perceiving the opposite—the emptiness of inherent existence. Removing the ignorance that obscures our knowledge of phenomena, the ability to perceive all objects is possible.

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[19] A mind that has always been and will continue to be pure; emptiness. The term clear light has different meanings depending on the context. It may also refer to the emptiness of inherent existence or to the subtlest mind.

[20] **Ignorance**. A mental factor that is obscured and grasps the opposite of what exists. There are two types: ignorance regarding reality that is the root of saṃsāra and ignorance regarding karma and its effects.

[21] **Latencies**. Predispositions, imprints, remains or tendencies. There are latencies of karma and latencies of afflictions.

Nāgārjuna says, "That which is dependent arising is explained to be empty." When objects appear to us, they do not appear to be dependent or related to other factors. They appear as independent, discrete objects that exist under their own power—with their own inherent essence, from their own side. This appearance of objects as existing in their own right is false and the idea that objects exist in that way is erroneous and can be refuted by reasoning.

Using investigation and analysis, we can establish the emptiness of inherent existence for ourselves. Inherent existence—also called existence from its own side—is called the object of negation; it is what is refuted or negated by analysis and reasoning. Once the analysis is complete, the consciousness realising that persons and phenomena do not exist from their own side is generated in our mindstream. This wisdom consciousness damages and eventually completely overcomes the conception and grasping that objects exist inherently.

Dharmakīrti says that mental states influenced by ignorance, like any other wrong conception or erroneous consciousness, lack a valid foundation and mental states influenced by wisdom, like any other accurate consciousness, have a valid foundation. Thus the more we become accustomed to correct consciousnesses, the more the faulty ones will diminish. Wisdom's mode of understanding directly contradicts that of ignorance, so by familiarising ourselves with wisdom, ignorance decreases and is finally extinguished.

Here we see a unique quality of the Buddhist approach: erroneous mental states can be eradicated by cultivating their opposite—accurate states of mind; not by prayer, requests to the Buddha or deities, but by single-pointed meditation.

Because ignorance has an antidote, it can be removed. This is the meaning of ignorance being adventitious (accidental, unplanned or by chance). Thus because of the two factors mentioned earlier—the mind being the nature of clear light and defilements being adventitious—liberation is an attainable possibility.

> This clear and luminous nature of mind is as changeless as space. It is not afflicted by desire and so on, the adventitious stains that spring from false conceptions.

Nirvāṇa or liberation is the quality of the mind of having separated forever from defilements that cause cyclic existence by application of antidotes to those defilements. We discover the ultimate nature of mind is free from defilements. The ultimate nature of mind is called *buddha nature* or *buddha potential*. When it achieves the quality of having separated from defilements, it is called nirvāṇa. Therefore, the very basis for nirvāṇa, the emptiness of the mind, is always with us. It's not something that is newly created or gained from outside.