

Dependent Origination

從緣生

To arise from conditions

從緣滅

To be extinct from conditions

我有彼有。

If I exist, that exists.

我滅彼滅

If I cease to exist, that ceases to exist.

Commentary by Zen Master Seung Sahn

Dependent Origination means an investigation of how the world came into existence. Shakyamuni Buddha's questioning of the nature of the world had not so much to do with the manifested world as with the world of the human beings, the suffering of the human beings — what the suffering depends on and how it can be stopped.

In the hour of his enlightenment, the Buddha saw very clearly that all things arise from conditions. If conditions cease to exist, things also cease to exist. Human suffering is there because there is human form; human beings continue to be reborn in one sentient form or another because they continue to create karma and cannot break the cycle of death and rebirth. So my world has arisen from certain conditions — my time, my space, my karma — and it continues to exist because those conditions exist. If my time, my space, my karma cease to exist, my world will also cease to exist and will be extinguished. Everything in this world exists because each one of us gives rise to it through our thinking. So long as our thinking exists, this thing also continues to exist. Someone asks, "If I disappear, does the sun also disappear?" Yes, the sun remains, but it is not your sun; it is just "sun." Your sun disappears with you; what remains does not call itself "sun"; it just is. In the same way, we give rise to each thing in the universe through our thinking, and when we cease to exist, that particular universe also ceases to exist.

I first came to America in 1972 and we started the Providence Zen Center. Soon after that I went to Los Angeles and started a Korean temple there. There were stories in the local paper about this new temple, and soon after that an old Korean man about seventy-five years old came to visit me. I offered him tea and we talked a little bit. This man had all kinds of

intellectual understanding about Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Western philosophy. He picked up a cup and asked me, "Where does this cup come from?" This was a Zen-style question, but I was not sure if this man understood Zen or not. So, to check his mind, I said to him, "You already understand." He nodded his head and said, "Yes. Somebody bought this cup at a store and brought it here." This was not Zen understanding at all, but he kept talking. "But where did it come to the store from? Maybe a factory. Now this factory has a president who controls what kind of design, color, or shape this cup will have. So this cup really comes from the president of this factory, right?" "Yes," I said, "that's correct." "So this president has made all the cups in the store. In the same way, somebody must have made the sun, the moon, the stars, and everything else. Who is this somebody?"

I said, "You." This man was startled. "How can I make everything in the universe?" he asked. So I explained to him about the rainbow. What is a rainbow? Who makes the rainbow? A rainbow is made when sunlight hits the water spray and colors are created. My eyes see the color and a rainbow is made. So my eyes and the sunlight together have made a rainbow. Five people are standing in the same spot and each one of them will see a different rainbow, depending on the angle of their eyesight. Someone could stand on a different angle nearby and would not see a rainbow at all. So I make my rainbow and each of these five people make their own rainbows. If no one is there to use their eyes to see the sunlight hitting the water spray there will be no rainbow. This is called dependent origination. This is the intersection of time, space, cause, and effect. □