

From: 84,000 translation of The Rice Seedling Sutra

1.15 “The sprout is not created by itself, not created by another, not created by both, not created by Īśvara, not transformed by time, not derived from *prakṛti*, and not born without any cause. Nevertheless, through the coming together of the elements of earth, water, fire, wind, space, and season, the sprout forms as the seed is ceasing.

“Thus is the conditional relation in outer dependent arising to be seen.

1.16 “Here, outer dependent arising is to be seen in terms of five aspects. Which five? As not permanent, as not discontinuous, as not involving transmigration, as the formation of a large result from a small cause, and as a continuity of similar type.

1.17 “How is it not permanent? It is not permanent because the sprout and the seed are different. The sprout is not the seed. [F.118.b] The sprout does not come from the seed after it has ceased, nor does it come from the seed while it has not yet ceased.¹⁹ Rather, the sprout is born precisely as the seed ceases.

1.18 “How is it not discontinuous? It is not discontinuous because a sprout is not born from a seed that has already ceased, nor from a seed that has not yet ceased. Rather, like the beam of a scale tilting from up to down, a sprout is born precisely when the seed has ceased.

1.19 “How does it not involve transmigration? It does not involve transmigration because the sprout and the seed are different; that which is the sprout is not the seed.

1.20 “How does it entail the formation of a large result from a small cause? A large fruit forms from planting a small seed. Therefore, it entails the formation of a large result from a small cause.

1.21 “Lastly, fruit forms precisely according to the type of seed planted. Therefore, it involves a continuity of similar type.

“Thus is outer dependent arising to be seen in terms of five aspects.

From: The Rice Seedling Sutra by Geshe Yeshe Thabkhe

Dependent Arising Of Composite Phenomena

The Rice Seedling Sutra explains the dependent arising of a composite phenomenon by using a rice seedling as an illustration. If a rice seedling were produced without any causes or conditions, it would have to be produced constantly in all places or it would never be produced anywhere at any time. Instead, it is sometimes produced and sometimes not produced, so we can establish that it has causes and conditions.

Some might assert, as did some Indian philosophers, that the seedling already exists at the time of its causes and conditions and that it is simply not yet manifest. But if the seedling had already been produced and existed at that time, it would then be unnecessary for it to be produced yet again by its causes and conditions. Furthermore, if we postulate that the seedling’s causal continuum is somehow broken and that it is produced from something other than its causal continuum, the effect (the seedling) would have to be independent of its causes. As it would be produced without any relationship to its causes and conditions, anything would be able to produce it.

Nothing that is indivisibly unitary, unchangeably permanent, and substantially independent can give rise to an effect. Thus causes with such characteristics cannot produce a rice seedling. Instead, the seedling must be produced from a cause that is a composite thing, is dependently arisen, has multiple parts, and changes every moment. Therefore, as we

will investigate in more detail in the next chapter, there can be no master of the world, no divine creator who creates the world merely by thinking it. The world is definitely created from causes and conditions.

An assemblage of causes and conditions such as a seed, water, fertilizer, warmth, and moisture produces the seedling. This assemblage carries a capacity that corresponds with the production of its effect and is connected to the effect — the seedling — through a gradual transformation, moment by moment. It is impossible for this seedling to arise from a cause that does not itself undergo momentary change or without this process of change contributing to the production of the effect.

A cause has the quality of producing the entity of its effect; in other words, it has the property of reaching its effect. The only way for a cause to produce its effect it's through a gradual process of transformation of the cause. Given that an effect cannot occur without some aspect of the cause undergoing transformation, there can be no cause that becomes its effect directly. Nevertheless, it is not the case that an effect occurs only after the cause has completely ceased to exist, such that the continuum of the cause has been cut. It is instead like the two sides of a scale, where when the one side goes down, the other side simultaneously goes up; when the cause ceases to exist, the effect occurs simultaneously. Therefore the effect arises in a way that is linked to the cause.

In this manner, a seedling does not exist at the time of its causes and conditions; that is to say, it does not exist simultaneously with its cause. Moreover, it does not come from somewhere else later on. A seedling is a dependent arising that appears and disappears like a magician's illusion: it arises suddenly, composed from causes at a certain point in the continuum of momentary transformations of its causes, and when it ceases to exist, it does not go somewhere else.

It is impossible for any effect or cause to be established independently. All transformations within a continuum do not arise and cease on their own, but do so by the power of their specific causes and conditions. In the collection of causes and conditions, there is a constant change or flux; they are never static. The effect arises in a way that is linked or connected to the constantly changing continuum of causes. This is then aptly called "the dependent and linked arising of composite phenomena."

In the same manner, a rice seedling is not produced in isolation but from the transformation that is the dependent arising of its causes and conditions; no independent divine creator or master of the universe is involved. A rice seedling is momentary in the sense that the rice seedling of the first moment has ceased to exist in the second moment of the rice seedling. So the second moment of a rice seedling did not exist previously. It was produced newly and adventitiously from its causes and conditions — that is, from both the preceding moment that is part of a continuum of rice seedling moments that are of similar type and conditions such as warmth, moisture, and air. It is not the case that a portion of the rice seedling's continuum that has already been produced lingers on.

Therefore all external and internal composite things — rice seedlings, people, thoughts — are produced in dependence on an aggregation of their multiple and varied causes and conditions, which are specific to each thing, composed of parts, and ever changing. When these things are produced, it is impossible for them to be produced as singular partless things. Since any effect is produced only from an assemblage of multiple and varied parts, it is impossible for it to come into being without depending or relying on a collection of parts, which is its basis of imputation.