



Dolpo Tulku e.V.

Great Interconnectedness

Today, our topic is the subject of great interconnectedness - how we are connected to everything.

This is a vast topic, but, I will try to distill it. In order to do this, I will use my own life experiences and studies as the basis for my lecture.

In Buddhism, we use the expression 'dependent arising' for interconnectedness. This includes, for example, how phenomena are connected to each other, or related to one another, and how they appear. So this is part of Buddhist vocabulary. Looking at it from another point of view, we can also substitute a word from science: 'relativity'. You might know the Theory of Relativity. If we include this, we have a complete picture of the topic.

The reason we need to address this topic of interconnectedness, is simply because it will bring about a positive change in our behaviour.

We start to understand correlations which are larger than our normal scope of thinking. This has a deep impact on our lives in society. We can create conditions that not only bring happiness and well-being to ourselves, but, also to others. All of us are driven by this wish for happiness and well-being, but, often we do not have the insight that this is only possible in connection with others, and that it is based on certain causes and conditions.

We are very closely linked with our family, neighbours and colleagues in our everyday life. We need their support and goodwill to be well. It is not possible for us to accomplish anything much just by ourselves. Other people not only contribute to our happiness, but also to our environment, the elements, and whatever else we interact with on a daily basis. If this thought and understanding has taken root in us, we will naturally treat both our environment and the people around us better. Additionally, if we understand that we are connected with them, we will automatically refrain from harming others,

So, the moment we gain some understanding, that nothing can be accomplished just by ourselves, but that everything depends on our social interactions, we immediately become more mindful and make more effort to treat others properly.

Our health is also deeply connected with the environment around us. In Tibetan Traditional Medicine we often speak about the interaction of the elements – the ones making up our body and the ones influencing us from the outside. If the elements around us are in balance, then it follows that our body can also be healthy. If they are not, we can easily become sick.

We can examine this insight into interconnectedness far more deeply. Our well-being, for example, is dependent on the way our town is designed; or the status of the political situation in our country. Eventually we get to a point where we can see that we do indeed have an influence on the whole world, and, in turn, the whole world influences us on some level. This is why we use this term of 'great interconnectedness'.

The film *Avatar*, which was in the cinemas a few years ago, deals with this subject quite well. At some point, people from another planet want to cut down a forest, but then become aware that this will also have some destructive consequences for their own planet. This illustrates both the 'interconnectedness', which actually affects the whole universe, and, the consequence, that once we understand that we are not alone and separate from others, our self-centredness immediately decreases and our attention shifts to others. This helps us to achieve both inner and outer harmony, which keeps us healthy on a physical and mental level.

So what I really want to stress here is the ethical dimension. If we just focus on science and use our insights only to further material development in order to achieve short-term goals, then the effect for us all could be catastrophic. For example, the research on atoms and their behaviour led eventually to the development of the most dangerous bomb in human history.

Our point of view and attitude determine how we treat others, governs our conduct, what we support, and what we oppose. This shapes our character. This is why we need to be very careful with our attitudes and check them again and again to make sure that they are in sync with reality. If they're only helpful on a theoretical level, but useless when implemented or maybe even harmful - because they ignore this interconnectedness with others - then we need to get rid of them.

I would like to mention the famous story of three blind people, who describe an elephant after having touched it for the very first time. The first one tugs at the tail and says: „Oh an elephant is like a rope!“ The second one touches the stomach and says: „No, no, an elephant is like a big ball!“ Whilst the third squeezes the trunk and says: „Oh, an elephant is very soft like a balloon!“ Each one of them bases his statement on his own impression, but of course, this is not complete and whatever is missing is only dealt with on a theoretical level, which is insufficient. So, when we talk about this interdependent origination and interconnectedness, then we know it is something all encompassing that we can also look at theoretically, but, we always need to ensure it is also an authentic reflection of reality.

What we call here 'interdependent origination' or 'interconnectedness' is something that has been discussed in Asia for more than 3000 years. Classicists and modern physicists in Western countries have also developed several theories, some of them quite different from each other, like the theories of Newton and Einstein, which are widely debated. The Lord Buddha talked about the premise that phenomena are either in relation to one another, or, connected in some way. The same thought is basically ascertained through the theory of

relativity. The descriptions are of course a little different, and a variety of names are used, but in their essence, they are very closely connected to one another.

Who knows the Four Truths of the Noble Ones, often also called the Four Noble Truths? Buddha talked in this teaching about suffering, and the causes which lead to suffering. These are the first two truths. The second couple of truths is that lasting happiness and well-being is possible, and what causes of these are needed. So, in his very first teaching Buddha already illustrated the connection between causes and their results.

It is useless to desire happiness without doing anything to reach this goal, or even worse, to engage in harmful actions, like killing or stealing, thinking that we can somehow profit by doing so. The result from a harmful action can only be further suffering. It is simply not possible that something positive and wholesome ensues from something negative. This is because causes and conditions are what brings forth the ultimate result. Therefore, we need to know very clearly what our aim is, and what can deliver us there, what we need, and, what the right causes and circumstances are. Or else we can liken it to saying that we want to go North but we actually walk towards the East. We will just simply never arrive at our correct destination.

When we look back in history, we can easily comprehend that the two World Wars of the last century were based on a neglect of reality. We can see that thoughts and concepts were implemented which had nothing to do with the actual situation, which did not embrace the relations between the countries and people. This is especially true when neighbouring countries are fully dependent on one another to live a good life and to develop prosperity. If this is ignored, then conflicts arise, and thousands and thousands of people are made to suffer, often even having to pay with their lives.

At the moment, we live in very peaceful and happy times in Europe compared to the last century. A huge contributing factor is, that politicians have understood that only good co-operation and friendly relations, which consider the needs and wishes of the others, can ensure long lasting peace.

This kind of thinking lead to the establishment of international bodies like the European Union and the United Nations. But unfortunately all over the world, nationalistic ideas resurface, believing that every nation has to first of all secure its own interests. Everyone else is considered less important. This approach lacks the understanding of the fact that isolation is inherently detrimental to development and prosperity.

I believe, therefore, that it is crucial to explain to the younger generation what interdependent origination is, and how we are connected to others - this is true within families, within our cities, within our countries and across borders with other countries and our environment.

To only teach subjects such as Mathematics, Physics, English and so on, free from any kind of ethical consideration, will not be sufficient to ensure long lasting physical and mental well-being. It is simply not possible to achieve harmony, peace and happiness through violence, selfishness and by ignoring the needs of others. This is true on both an individual and on a general level, because this is reality.

Sometimes contemplating matters in this way is so easy, that some people actually find it problematic, as it is too simple for them. But we should appreciate this as a very simple truth that we can easily implement, the moment we fully understand it. Often we feel

attracted to new theories or very profound topics, which also appeals to me. I do not want to denigrate this, but we often forget what is directly in front of us and is easy to comprehend. The great interconnectedness is actually very close to us emotionally and conceptionally, because it is so simple. Often, this is why we do not give it enough attention. In my home, we have a proverb saying that 'we are not able to see our own eyelash because it is too close to our eye'.

The great interconnectedness in which we live, is very much alive. It happens right in front of our eyes, and we are also right in the middle of it, even if we're not always aware of it. Please contemplate this and use whatever insight you may gain. Then I can promise you, it will be easier for you to deal with your life and do whatever is necessary to achieve your goals and to live in harmony with others and your environment.

Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche

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*Translated from Tibetan & transcribed from English by Daniela Hartmann
Edited by Jacqueline Bourbon*