

Meditation for Class One: Do Changing Things Really Change?

Let's consider a sprout. This sprout must have come from somewhere. Let's review the options. The sprout must have been produced in one or another of four ways: a) it was produced without a cause, b) it was produced from itself, c) it was produced by something other than itself, or d) it was produced both from itself and from something other than itself.

First off, the sprout could not have been **produced without any cause**. The sprout didn't just magically pop up into existence; it came from a seed, right? If things like sprouts just popped up into existence without any cause, then there would be no causes for things to arise at a certain place and time and with a certain nature. Anything could pop up anytime, any place, just randomly. Moreover, there would be no point in making any effort at anything at all (e.g., planting a seed, watering it, giving it sunlight), since there would be no causes for things.

Maybe the sprout was **produced from itself**. But things don't just come from themselves. Sprouts don't reproduce sprouts; seeds produce sprouts. If the cause for something and its effect were the same, then it would absurdly follow that the seed and sprout would be exactly the same – they'd have the same shape, color, taste, etc. They would be, in all respects, the same; everything said about one could be said about the other. And they would both be equally apprehendable (or equally non-apprehendable) at all times. But at the time of the seed, the sprout is not there, and at the time of the sprout, the seed is gone. Furthermore, if this sprout came from this sprout, then why would it need to produce itself at all? If this sprout already exists, then producing itself would be senseless. This sprout (the effect) would already exist at the time of its cause. Therefore this sprout could not have been produced from itself.

So I guess this sprout must have been **produced from something other than itself**. This is what we really think: sprouts come from seeds (which are not sprouts). The key here is to think, could an *inherently existing seed that was other than the sprout produce the sprout?*

Is the seed the same as the sprout? No. They are different and other, and we think of them as such. The seed is one thing, the sprout is another. But if they existed that way *really, inherently, self-existent*, then how could the seed produce the sprout? If the cause (seed) and the effect (sprout) existed the way they appear to us – as *inherently* different and other – then they would also be necessarily unrelated to each other, and the one thing could never turn into the other.

Indeed, if they were *truly* separate and other things, seeds would *always* be seeds and sprouts would *always* be sprouts. No change would be possible in *self-existing* things. A seed which inherently existed as a seed could never turn into a sprout . . . or anything else, for that matter.

Finally, if causes were *really* other than effects, then anything could arise from anything else. For if there are inherently existing separate things, then everything is *equally* separate and other; there would be no criteria for specifying which separate and other thing is a cause for any particular effect. A sprout could equally come from a roller coaster or the moon as from a seed.

So causes and effects could not be *inherently* separate and different. A *self-existent* or *inherently existing* cause ("seed") that was separate from and other than its effect ("sprout") is unfindable and nonexistent. Therefore, the sprout doesn't come from something different than itself.

Only one more possibility: **something cannot be produced both from itself and something else**. Since the sprout cannot be produced from itself, nor from something other than itself, than it can't be produced from *both* itself and something other than itself.

Conclusion: There is no inherently existing production of things; sprouts don't *really* come from seeds. Cause and effect can't be working the way it seems, "out there," independently, on its own apart from my projection of it. There is no cause and effect like that. Try to hold this realization of the *absence* of self-existent causation as long as you can. When you begin to waver in your grasp of this *emptiness*, then review the reasoning.

Meditation for Class Two: Am I the Same As or Different From My Parts?

Bring to mind how you ordinarily think of yourself: as a tangible, perceptible, self-existent “me.” Say your name to yourself and hold the image and feeling that are conjured up; or remember how you felt when someone falsely accused you of some wrong deed.

Think: if such a “me” exists, it must either be **the same as (one with, identical to) my parts**, or **different from (other than) my parts**. *And these are the only possibilities.*

If such a “me” were **one with or identical to my parts**, then there would have to be as many “me’s” as there were parts of me – my body and each of my body’s parts would be “me,” and my mind (and each function and moment of my mind) would be “me.” This is absurd, and certainly not the “me” I ordinarily think exists and that I grasp on to. So this “me” is not the same as my parts.

So maybe the “me” is **different from or other than the parts of me**. But if such a “me” were different from its parts, then I should be able to locate it separately, apart from my body and mind. Is there any findable “me” that can be perceived separate from the “me” who thinks, feels, meditates, has a body, etc.? And even if there were, is that the “me” I ordinarily think exists and am so attached to?

So if there isn’t a truly existing “me” that is the same as my parts, nor is there a truly existing “me” that is different from these parts, then there isn’t a truly existing “me” at all. When you’ve convinced yourself of the *absence* of such a self, hold onto that realization for as long as possible. When you lose it or it begins to waver, repeat the reasoning.

Meditation for Class Three: Where is “the Past”?

Start by getting in touch with your past, especially the resentment, upset, anger, disappointment, sadness, regret, and other negative emotions that arise when we think about the painful events of our personal history.

Begin to meditate on what, exactly, this thing we call “the past” is. Does the past exist or not? If the past is over, how can we say “it exists”? If the past exists, how can we say it is “the past”?

Start to think deeply about the fact that the past, as we usually think of it, cannot actually exist. It is done, finished, over. The experiences we are holding onto to that occurred “in the past,” are also over. They no longer exist, for the past does not exist.

Realize that the past exists only conceptually, and in relation to a present and future. The past is only *an idea* in the present mind. Since it exists only conceptually, it is entirely changeable if we re-conceive it. And if we are interested in living happily in the present and having optimism about the future, we must revision a past that is also happy.

So now try to think differently about your past. Begin by being grateful for everything that happened to you. You would not be the person you are now had not everything happened the way it did.

Next, realize that the only person keeping past suffering, resentments, grudges, and hurts alive is you. The only place the past exists is as a conception in the present mind. Decide that you no longer want to suffer needlessly and in a self-inflicted manner by carrying around the negative ideas of the past you have. Decide that you want to try to be happy in the present, and realize you cannot do so with the kind of negative stories you keep telling yourself about what happened in the past.

Unilaterally forgive everyone who ever hurt you, betrayed you, or disappointed you. Visualize them one by one and say “I forgive you” to their faces. Keep doing that until you believe it.

And then just decide to let go of the pain. Re-conceptualize your past as a set of learning opportunities rather than as a series of disappointments and wounds. Imagine all the people in your past who hurt you were really just teachers, trying to help you develop virtues like patience, forgiveness, and compassion.

Create a different back-story for yourself, one that would support a present conceptualization of yourself as a happy person. And review the reasons why this is possible, as well as desirable. The past exists only dependently on the present mind that is imagining it. A present mind that has decided to try to be happy cannot carry out that decision without re-imagining its past.

