



Dependent Origination

Buddha's Teaching

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Dependent Origination

For a human being, life in the present time is always dissatisfied because the mind is full of craving in a world of delusion in which things are either pleasant or unpleasant and in a state of flux. Sensation arises and flows according to impulses. Consequently, human beings are anxious and struggle to fulfill their desire which is impossible for anyone to do successfully. The more they search, the more anxious they become. Suffering follows all the way. There is no balance and fulfillment because people's minds are dominated by "Ignorance."¹ Therefore, dissatisfaction will always be present.

Basic Compositions of a person's craving

The Buddha noted upon awakening from his delusion that—

*From dependence on Impulses arises Craving;
From dependence on Craving arises Searching (or Pursuit);
From dependence on Searching arises Fortune;
From dependence on Fortune arises Decision (or Resolve);
From dependence on Resolve arises Love;
From dependence on Love arises Preoccupation;*

¹ Ignorance is not only not knowing, but it also includes not wanting to know. In Buddhism, the deeper level of ignorance refers to a lack of wisdom or insight into the nature of reality.

Ignorance, or not having real wisdom, lies at the basis of all our problems up to the fact that we are not fully enlightened Buddhas, who only experience bliss and no suffering or frustration. Due to our ignorance, we do negative actions and thus create misery in our future). According to Buddhism, all our negative (unhelpful) emotions have their origin in misunderstanding in general and not realizing the wisdom of emptiness. The road to a full realization of this wisdom is usually very long, and can easily take many life-times, but a journey needs to begin with a first step as follows:

To be transformed—avoiding responsibility for one's own life, lack of self-confidence, negative mind-patterns and behavior—WITH study, attending teachings, critical analysis, reflection, meditation INTO wisdom, taking responsibility, feeling confident, thinking and acting positively for ourselves and others.

*From dependence on Preoccupation arises Attachment;
From dependence on Attachment arises Miserliness;
From dependence on Miserliness arises Protection;
From dependence on Protection arises Unwholesome Dhamma (or demerit);*

(Dhamma here is used to mean a phenomenon and/or its properties. Wholesome Dhamma is mind which is full of intelligence, reason wisdom and peace. Unwholesome Dhamma is mind which is not intelligent, but stupid, depressed, cloudy or restless.)

Unwholesome Dhamma is an unskillful action such as killing, quarrelling, squabbling, slandering, lying, and the like. The mind is overcome by Ignorance bound up by the chain of craving which is never fulfilled.

If human beings in this world want to find the way to overcome impulses and craving which are the latent qualities of their mind, they should study Dependent Origination. The Dharma (the state of Nature as it is), which is the Buddha's Transcendental wisdom, is the key to dispel all the Unwholesome Dhamma which makes people plunge into the heap of Suffering so full of anxiety. Peace and contentment will thereby appear in every human being's mind.

Dependent Origination is a law of nature which is necessary for all Buddhists to study because it is the way to understand the states of human mind by the practice of The Four Foundations of mindfulness, applying mindfulness (Sati) and wisdom (Panna) to contemplate the body, feelings, the mind and reality.² This practice is undertaken to understand Suffering, the Cause of Suffering, and to know the way to Cessation of Suffering. This is called practicing the Dharma until wisdom arises. When wisdom appears, Ignorance is eliminated.

Dependent Origination can be broken up into different forms and subsequently analyzed to understand and gain wisdom. They have to contemplate each step in turn in the Cycle. Extinction, therefore, takes place consecutively. Wisdom arises followed by a clear comprehension in

² The four foundations of mindfulness are: (1) mindfulness of the body, (2) mindfulness of feelings (or sensations); (3) mindfulness of mind (or consciousness); and (4) mindfulness of phenomena (or qualities).

the Cycle of Existence. There is no doubt left concerning birth, old age, disease and death. The vision of Truth will appear. The true nature of Suffering will be understood and this is followed by a weariness of birth, old age, disease and death. This realization will free one from the Cycle. The defilements, craving, and attachment will be eliminated. One will gain the Four Noble Paths and their Fruitions and will finally realize Nirvana. This can be called Extinction and is the highest virtue of celestial and human beings.

The Buddha

When the Buddha discovered that Ignorance was the root cause of Suffering, he used the Path of Truth, which is transcendental wisdom, to destroy latent dispositions which are buried deep in the flowing panorama of successive mental states. Consequently, he became enlightened about the three worlds (the sensuous planes, the form planes, and the formless plane),³ the impermanence of Self and Egolessness. What we call Ego consists of the four elements--earth, water, fire and wind.⁴ It is no more than the combination of the element of corporeality and mentality.

Therefore Ignorance is dispelled by his wisdom; the Buddha achieved the real Extinction of Kamma Formations through the Noble Path of Truth and freed himself from the snare of the origin of Suffering. The Transcendental wisdom which appears is compared with the light of virtue that shines in the heart of the one who practices. Right up to the present day, worlds of the followers have always been happy and peaceful.

³ These three worlds (*Trailokya*) are identified in Hindu and early Buddhist texts. They are karmic rebirth destinations: *Kāmaloka*—world of desire, typified by base desires, populated by [hell beings](#), [preta](#), animals, ghosts, humans and lower demi-gods; *Rūpaloka*—world of form, predominately free of baser desires, populated by [jhana](#)-dwelling gods, possible rebirth destination for those well practiced in jhanic absorption; *Arūpaloka*—world of formlessness, non-corporal realm populated with four heavens, possible rebirth destination for practitioners of the four formlessness stages.

⁴Vajrayana Buddhism includes two others elements (space) and consciousness. They are known known as the ‘bases of suffering’, arise with the assistance of the six elements as co-operating conditions: earth element which is solidity; water element of liquids; fire element through which digestion occurs; wind element of the respiratory system; space element of the body’s cavities; consciousness.

The Origin of Dependent Origination

The causes of Dependent Origination (Suffering) are as follows:

*From Dependence on Ignorance arise Karma Formations.
From Dependence on Karma Formations arises Consciousness.
From Dependence on Consciousness arises Mind and Matter.
From Dependence on Mind and Matter arise the Six Sense-Bases.
From Dependence on the Six Sense - Bases arise Contact.
From Dependence on Contact arises Feeling.
From Dependence on Feeling arises Craving.
From Dependence on Craving arises Clinging.
From Dependence on Clinging arises Becoming.
From Dependence on Becoming arises Birth.
From Dependence on Birth arises Decay and death, sorrow,
lamentation, pain, grief and despair.*

The arising of this whole mass of suffering is called "Dependent Origination."

Dependent Extinction

In reference to the fourth Noble Truth, Dependent Extinction expresses as follows:

*Through the total fading away and extinction of ignorance,
Kamma-Formations are extinguished.
Through the extinction of Karma-Formations, Consciousness is
extinguished.
Through the extinction of Consciousness, Mind and Matter are
extinguished.
Through the extinction of Mind and Matter, the Six Sense-Bases are
extinguished.
Through the extinction of the Six Sense-Bases, Contact is
extinguished.
Through the extinction of Contact, Feeling is extinguished.
Through the extinction of Feeling, Craving is extinguished.
Through the extinction of Craving, Clinging is extinguished.
Through the extinction of Clinging, Becoming is extinguished.*

*Through the extinction of Becoming, Birth is extinguished.
Through the extinction of Birth, Decay, Death, sorrow, lamentation,
pain, grief and despair are extinguished.*

The extinction of this whole mass of suffering means freeing oneself from the cycle, snare, or loop of Dependent Origination.

Component Parts of Dependent Origination

1. Ignorance (*Avijja*) is ignorance of the real nature of Suffering in the mind, its cause, Cessation of Suffering (in the mind), and the Path leading to Cessation of Suffering.
2. Karma Formations (*Sankhara*) are Volitional activities:
 - Bodily Formations
 - Verbal Formations
 - Mental Formations

From Dependence on Karma Formations, Consciousness arises.

3. Consciousness (*Vinnyana*) is the rising of consciousness of the sense object through the six sense organs.
 -
 - Eyes Consciousness
 - Ears Consciousness
 - Nose Consciousness
 - Tongue Consciousness
 - Body Consciousness

From Dependence on Consciousness, Mind and Matter arise.

4. Mind and Matter (*Nama-Rupa*): *Nama* is Mind within the physical body. It is subtle and delicate in nature and branches out into—
 - Feeling or Sensation (*Vedana*)
 - Perception, Memory (*Sanya*)
 - Volition (*Cetana*)
 - Contact (*Phassa*),
 - Mental Impression, Mental Application, Pondering (*Manasikara*)

Matter (*Rupa*) is the physical body which can be contacted by eyes. Its nature is gross and combined with the four Primary Elements of Earth, Water, Fire and Wind.

From dependence on Mind and Matter, the six Sense Organs arise.

The Six Sense Organs (*Salayatana*): The Six Sense Objects, forms, sounds, odors, sapids, tangible and mental objects, collide with their respective sense organs giving rise to six types of Consciousness.

- Eyes - Eye contact
- Ears - Ear contact
- Nose - Nose contact
- Tongue - Tongue Contact
- Body - Body Contact
- Mind - Mind Contact

From Dependence on the Six Sense Organs, Contact arises.

Contact, Mental Impression (*Phassa*) is the conjunction of the sense bases, sense object, and the resultant Consciousness.

- Visual consciousness - eye (and forms)
- Auditory consciousness - ear (and sounds)
- Olfactory consciousness - nose (and odours)
- Gustatory consciousness - tongue (and sapids)
- Tactile consciousness - body (and tangible objects)
- Mind consciousness - Mind (and mental objects)

From Dependence on Contact, Sensation arises.

Sensation, Feeling (*Vedana*) is the feeling that experiences an object when it comes in contact with the senses, whether it is pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent.

- Feeling arisen from visual contact - eyes
- Feeling arisen from auditory contact - ears
- Feeling arisen from olfactory contact - nose
- Feeling arisen from gustatory contact - tongue

- Feeling arisen from physical contact - body
- Feeling arisen from mental contact - mind.

From Dependence on Sensation, Craving arises.

Craving (*Tanha*) There are six kinds of craving corresponding to the six sense objects.

- Craving for forms
- Craving for sounds
- Craving for odors
- Craving for tastes
- Craving for tangible objects
- Craving for mental objects.

From Dependence on Craving, Grasping arises.

Grasping (*Upadana*) Grasping is clinging to sense-objects and the five aggregates.

- Clinging to sensuality
- Clinging to views
- Clinging to mere rules and ritual
- Clinging to ego-belief (belief that the five aggregates⁵ are Ego⁶).

From Dependence on Grasping, Becoming arises.

Becoming (*Bhava*) is the mind which searches, full of impulses and emotions. It is the mind of an ordinary man who is dominated by craving, of one who intends to take a rebirth through craving for existence as the result of attachment in the previous physical forms and lives. There are three planes of existence. (Refer to footnote 3.) From Dependence on Becoming, Birth arises.

⁵ Aggregates—form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—that compose the whole mental and physical existence of human beings.

⁶ Can be defined as emotional and cognitive obscurations, the grasping at a personal ego or “self” of the individual and the grasping at phenomena as truly existent or the “self” of phenomena.

Birth (*Jati*) is Rebirth which is the arising of psycho-physical phenomena. Men and women form attachment to one another leading to sexual intercourse. Consequently, beings with aggregates and senses are born.

From Dependence on birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair arise.

Old Age (*Jara*) and Death (*Marana*). *Jara* means decay such as the hair turning grey, teeth dropping out, wrinkled skin, getting older, and the decline of sense faculties. These are impermanent conditions and are full of suffering. *Marana* means movement, destruction, death, the breaking up of the aggregates, the elimination of the sense faculties.

The source of all this Suffering is Ignorance which can be compared with a plant. The plant grows into a tree, complete with roots, trunks, leaves, flowers and fruit. However, its origin cannot be found. In the same way a physical and mental factors of a sentient being arise dependent on Ignorance, of which no one can trace its origin. It has already appeared as a chain of Dependent Origination.

The Dependent Origination of causes and effects has five special features:

1. The sprout, for example, arises after the seed has ceased and not while the seed is present unceasingly. Phenomena, therefore, are not permanent.
2. The sprout does not arise from discontinuance, the seed having ceased completely. The cessation of the seed and the growth of the sprout occur simultaneously like the two sides of a set of scales, or a see-saw: one goes up as the other goes down. Since there is not interruption of the continuum, there is no discontinuance.
3. The seed and the sprout are not one in terms of their identity or their function, so the former is not transferred into the latter.
4. Tiny seeds can grow into enormous trees, so therefore small causes can produce large effects.
5. Wheat seeds produce wheat crops and virtue produces happiness, so there is a correlation between cause and effect: they are of a similar continuum.

For example, ignorance, formation, and consciousness serve as propelling links. The four from name-and-form to sensation are the propelled results. The three links of craving, grasping, and becoming are the fully establishing link. And, birth, old age, and death are the fully established links.

An ordinary person can only stop the Cycle of Dependent Origination temporarily because the person has no transcendental wisdom about the five aggregates.

On the other hand, an ordinary person who has awakened can stop the Cycle permanently by transcendental wisdom⁷. Such a person will never take a Rebirth again. It is the real extinguishing and is like a fire which has completely gone out once its fuel has been consumed. The five aggregates are really understood by the appearance of wisdom (by means of two accumulations—merit and wisdom itself as it arises from within).



WHEEL OF LIFE

⁷ *I.e.*, The primordial and non-dual knowing aspect of the nature of mind. There are five aspects to wisdom, and they are as follows: wisdom of dharmadhatu, mirror-like wisdom, wisdom of equality, wisdom of discernment, and all-accomplishing wisdom. These five wisdoms may be condensed into two: ‘the wisdom that knows the nature of all phenomena’ which comprises the ‘wisdom of the dharmadhatu (all-encompassing space),’ ‘mirror-like wisdom,’ ‘the wisdom of equality,’ and ‘the wisdom that knows the multiplicity of phenomena’ which comprises discriminating and all-accomplishing wisdom. Actually, they can all be condensed into a single wisdom: the wisdom of omniscience (the knowledge of all things in their nature and in all their multiplicity).