

# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

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### Editor's Foreword

This book is the product of many years of patient work. The original discourse in Burmese was delivered over a period of six weeks. The tape recording was patiently transcribed and translated. Over a period of about eight years, I periodically returned to editing the translation to bring it up to an acceptable standard. While staying at Mahāsi Yeikthā in Rangoon, I checked difficult passages with the interpreter for foreign meditators.

It was published in Bangkok by the Buddhadhamma Foundation, in 1999 (ISBN 974-7891-89-1). However, I have not yet been able to locate a supplier in the UK, so I have published this on-line edition.

Dependent Origination is a profound subject, but the Sayādaw clarifies it with detailed explanations. The serious student of Buddhism and the meditator alike will find this book extremely valuable.

# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

## Importance of the Doctrine

**T**HE DOCTRINE of Patīccasamuppāda or Dependent Origination is central to Buddhism. While the bodhisatta was reflecting deeply on the nature of existence, he realised the truth about Dependent Origination, and attained enlightenment. Before he became the Buddha in his final existence, he pondered aging and death — as did every other bodhisatta. For it was only after he had seen the misery of aging, disease, and death that he renounced the world in search of the deathless.

All living beings want to avoid these misfortunes but they cannot escape. These misfortunes pursue them relentlessly from one existence to the next in a perpetual process of birth, aging, and death. For example, the fate of chickens and ducks is terrible. Some are eaten while still in the eggs. Even if they hatch, they live for just a few weeks, and are killed as soon as they put on sufficient weight. They are born only to be killed for human consumption. If it is the fate of living beings to be repeatedly killed like this, then it is a very gloomy and frightful prospect. Nevertheless, chickens and ducks seem content with their lot in life. They apparently enjoy life — quacking, crowing, eating, and fighting with one another. They may think that they have plenty of time to enjoy life, though in fact they may live for just a few days or months.

The span of human life is not very long either. For someone in their fifties or sixties their youth may seem as recent as yesterday. Sixty or seventy years on earth is a day in the life of a deva. The life of a deva is also very brief in the eyes of a brahmā, who may live for the duration of the world system. However, even the lifespan of a brahmā, who outlives hundreds of worlds, is insignificant compared to eternity. Celestial beings, too, eventually have to die. Although they are not subject to disease and marked senility, age tells on them imperceptibly in due course.

## Reflections of the Bodhisatta

Reflecting on the cause of aging, the bodhisatta traced back the chain of Dependent Origination from the end to the beginning. He found that aging (*jarā*) and death (*maranam*) have their origin in birth (*jāti*), which in turn is due to becoming (bhava). Becoming stems from attachment (*upādāna*), which is caused by craving (*taṇhā*). Craving arises from the feeling (*vedanā*) produced by contact (*phassa*), which in turn depends on the six sense-bases (*salāyatana*) such as the eye and visual form. Sense-bases are the product of mind and matter (*nāmarūpa*), which depend on consciousness (*viññāna*). Consciousness is, in turn, dependent on mind and matter (*nāmarūpa*). The full Pāli texts on Dependent Origination attribute consciousness to mental formations (*sankhārā*), and mental formations to ignorance (*avijjā*). However, the bodhisatta's reflection was confined to the interdependence of mind and matter. In other words, he reflected on the correlation between consciousness and mind and matter, leaving out of account the former's relationship to past existence. We may assume, therefore, that for meditators, reflection on the present life will suffice for the successful development of insight.

Concerning the correlation between consciousness, and mind and matter, the bodhisatta reasoned, "This consciousness has no cause other than mind and matter. Mind and matter produce consciousness, and consciousness arises from mind and matter. So, from the correlation between consciousness, and mind and matter, birth, aging, and death arise — there may be successive births or successive deaths." Moreover, consciousness causes

mind and matter, and mind and matter give rise to the six sense-bases. Dependent on the sense-bases contact arises, contact leads to feeling, feeling gives rise to craving, which develops into attachment, and attachment results in rebirth. This, in turn, leads to aging, death, anxiety, grief, and other kinds of mental and physical suffering.

Then the bodhisatta reflected on the reverse order of Dependent Origination. Without consciousness, mind and matter could not arise; without mind and matter, the sense-bases could not arise; and so on. Breaking the first link in the chain of causation eradicates the suffering that has constantly beset us throughout *samsāra*. After this reflection on Dependent Origination in its forward and reverse orders, the bodhisatta contemplated the nature of the aggregates of attachment. Then he attained the successive insights and fruition on the Noble Path, and finally became a fully enlightened Buddha. Every bodhisatta attains supreme enlightenment after such contemplation. They are not taught how to practise, but because of their perfections (*pāramī*) accumulated through innumerable lifetimes, they can contemplate in this way and so attain enlightenment.

## Beyond Reasoning and Speculation

When the Buddha was first considering whether or not to teach, he thought, "This truth that I have realised is very profound. Though it is sublime and conducive to inner peace, it is hard to understand. Since it is subtle and not accessible to mere intellect and logic, it can be realised only by the wise." Great thinkers from all cultures have thought deeply about freedom from the misery of aging, disease, and death, but such freedom would mean *nibbāna*, which is beyond the scope of reason and intellect. It can be realised only by practising the right method of insight meditation. Most great thinkers have relied on intellect and logical reasoning to conceive various principles for the well-being of humanity. As these principles are based on speculations, they do not help anyone to attain insight, let alone the supreme goal of *nibbāna*. Even the lowest stage of insight, namely, analytical knowledge of mind and matter (*nāmarūpa-pariccheda-ñāna*), cannot be realised intellectually. This insight dawns only when one observes the mental and physical process using the systematic method of mindfulness (*satipatthāna*), and when, with the development of concentration, one distinguishes between mental and physical phenomena — for example, between the desire to bend the hand and the bent hand, or between the sound and the hearing. Such knowledge is not vague and speculative, but vivid and empirical.

The Pāli texts say that mind and matter are constantly changing, and that we should observe their arising and passing away. However, for the beginner in meditation, this is easier said than done. One has to exert strenuous effort to overcome mental hindrances (*nīvarana*). Even freedom from such hindrances only helps one to distinguish between mind and matter; it does not ensure insight into the process of their arising and passing away. This insight is attained only on the basis of strong concentration and keen perception developed through the practice of mindfulness. Constant mindfulness of the arising and passing away of phenomena leads to insight into their characteristics of impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*). However, this is merely a lower stage of insight, which is still far from the Path and its Fruition. So, the Dhamma is described as something beyond logic and intellect.

## Dhamma is Only for the Wise

The Dhamma is subtle (*nipuno*) and can be realised only by the wise (*panditavedanīyo*). Here 'the wise' refers to those who have wisdom relating to insight, the Path, and *nibbāna*. The Dhamma has nothing to do with the secular knowledge possessed by world philosophers, religious leaders, writers or great scientists. However, anyone can realise it if they contemplate mental and physical phenomena at the moment they arise. If they pass progressively through the stages of insight, they will attain the Noble Path and its Fruition.

When the Buddha considered the nature of living beings, he found that most were immersed in sensual pleasures. Of course, there were a few exceptions like his five former companions in the forest retreat, or the two brahmins who were later to become the chief disciples of the Buddha. Most people, however, regard the enjoyment of pleasure as the supreme goal in life. Ordinary men and devas esteem such pleasure because they have no sense of the higher values, such as deep concentration, insight, and nibbāna. They are like children who delight in playing with their toys the whole day. Sensual pleasures do not appeal to Buddhas and arahants. A person who delights in sensuality may be compared to villagers living in a remote rural area. To city-dwellers these places seem totally destitute, with poor food, coarse clothing, primitive dwellings, and muddy footpaths, but the villagers are happy, and never think of leaving. Similarly, pleasure-seekers are so enamoured with their families, friends, and possessions that they cannot think of anything more noble and feel ill at ease without the stimulus of sense objects. It is hard for them to appreciate the subtle, profound doctrine of Dependent Origination, and nibbāna.

## **Dhamma is Profound**

The Buddha's teaching has little attraction for the majority since it is diametrically opposed to sensuality. Even an ordinary sermon, let alone a discourse on nibbāna, is unpopular if it has no sensual appeal. People do not seem to be interested in our teaching, and no wonder, for it lacks melodious recitation, anecdotes, jokes, and similar attractions. It is acceptable only to those who have practised meditation or who are earnestly seeking spiritual peace and freedom from the defilements. It is a mistake to deprecate the suttas by confusing them with talks containing stories and jokes. Discourses such as the Anattalakkhana Sutta and the Satipatthāna Sutta differ from popular sermons in that they are profound. The doctrine of Dependent Origination belongs to the Sutta Pitaka, but it can be classified as Abhidhamma because it is explained in the analytical way typical of the Abhidhamma Pitaka. Since this teaching also uses the analytical method, some people confuse it with the Abhidhamma and cannot follow it, much less attain the Path and nibbāna, which it emphasises. Dependent Origination is hard to comprehend because it concerns the correlation between causes and effects. Before the Buddha proclaimed this teaching, it was difficult to understand that no self exists independently of the law of causation.

The commentaries also point out the abstruse character of the doctrine. According to them, four subjects are very profound: the Four Noble Truths, the nature of a living being, the nature of rebirth, and Dependent Origination.

First, it is hard to accept the truths about suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the way to its cessation. Appreciating these truths is hard enough; it is still harder to teach them to other people. Secondly, it is hard to understand that a living being is just a psychophysical process without any abiding self, and that this process is subject to the law of kamma, which determines one's future according to one's actions. Thirdly, it is hard to see how rebirth takes place because of defilements and kamma, without the transfer of mind and matter from a previous life. Lastly, Dependent Origination is hard to comprehend fully, because it embraces the above three abstruse teachings. Its forward order concerns the first two noble truths, the nature of a living being and rebirth, while its reverse order encompasses the other two truths. So the doctrine is very difficult to grasp or to teach. Explaining it to one who has attained the Path and nibbāna, or to one who has studied the Tipitaka, may be easy. However, it will not mean much to someone who has neither insight nor scriptural knowledge.

The writer of the commentary on Dependent Origination was qualified to explain it because he had perhaps attained the lower stages of the Path. At least, he must have had a thorough knowledge of the Tipitaka. He probably stressed its profundity so that it might be studied more seriously, comparing his difficulty in explaining it to the plight of a man who has jumped into the ocean and cannot touch the bottom. He says that he wrote the exegesis based on the Tipitaka and the old commentaries handed down by oral tradition. The same may be said of my teaching. Since the doctrine is hard to explain, one should pay

special attention to it. If one follows the teaching superficially, one will understand nothing, and without a reasonable knowledge of the doctrine one is bound to suffer in many existences.

The substance of the teaching is as follows: Dependent on ignorance (*avijjā*) mental formations (*sankhārā*) arise. From mental-formations rebirth-consciousness (*viññāna*) arises. Consciousness gives rise to mind and matter (*nāmarūpa*). From mind and matter, the six sense-bases (*salāyatana*) arise. From the six sense-bases, contact (*phassa*) arises. Contact causes feeling (*vedanā*), feeling leads to craving (*tanhā*), and from craving, attachment (*upādāna*) results. Attachment produces becoming (*bhava*), and from becoming birth (*jāti*) arises. Finally, birth leads to aging (*jarā*), death (*maranam*), grief (*soka*), lamentation (*parideva*), pain (*dukkha*), sorrow (*domanassa*), and despair (*upāyāsa*). In this way the whole mass of suffering arises.

## What is Ignorance?

According to the Buddha, *avijjā* is ignorance of the Four Noble Truths: the truths about suffering, its cause, its cessation and the way to its cessation. In a positive sense *avijjā* implies misconception or illusion. It makes us take what is false and illusory as true and real. We are led astray, and so *avijjā* is sometimes called ignorance regarding the way of practice. In this sense it differs from ordinary ignorance. If someone does not know the name of a man or a village, it does not necessarily mean that they are deluded, whereas being ignorant of Dependent Origination means more than merely not knowing. *Avijjā* is more like the delusion of a person who has lost all sense of direction and so thinks that east is west or that north is south. The person who does not understand the truth of suffering has an optimistic view of life, although life is [full of pain and sorrow \(dukkha\)](#).<sup>1</sup> It is a mistake to search for the truth of suffering in books as it is to be found in one's own body and mind. Seeing, hearing, and all other psychophysical phenomena arising from the six senses are unsatisfactory because they are impermanent (*anicca*), unreliable (*aniyata*), and do not comply with one's wishes (*anattā*). Life may end at any moment and so it is full of pain and suffering. However, this *dukkha* cannot be realised by those who regard existence as blissful and satisfying. Their efforts to secure what they believe are pleasant sense-objects, such as beautiful sights, melodious sounds, delicious food and so forth, are due to their illusions about life. This ignorance is like the green eyeglass that makes a horse eat dry grass. Similarly, living beings are immersed in sensuality because they see everything through rose-tinted glasses, harbouring illusions about the pleasant nature of sense-objects, and about mind and matter.

A blind man could easily be deceived by a confidence trickster who offered him a worthless garment, saying that it was an expensive one. The blind man would believe him and would like the garment very much. However, if he recovered his sight, he would be disillusioned and would throw it away at once. In the same way, an ignorant person enjoys life as long as he or she is oblivious to impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, but becomes disenchanted when insight reveals the odious nature of existence.

Introspection of mind and matter, or insight meditation, is different from academic knowledge. Insight meditation means thoroughly observing and ceaselessly contemplating all the psychophysical phenomena that comprise the sense-objects and sense-consciousness. As concentration develops, one realises how all phenomena arise and instantly vanish, which leads to a full understanding of their nature. Delusion blinds us to reality only because we are unmindful. Unmindfulness leads us to believe in the illusions of a man, a woman, a hand, a leg, etc., in the conventional sense. We do not know that seeing, for instance, is merely a psychophysical process that arises and vanishes, and that it is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. Since most people do not meditate, they die without knowing anything about mind and matter. The true nature of the psychophysical process can be realised only by a mindful person. However, this insight does not occur initially when concentration is undeveloped. Delusion, which is the usual state of mind, precedes contemplation so the beginner does not gain a clear insight into mind and matter.



It is only through steadfast practice that concentration and perception develop and lead to insight knowledge. If, for example, while practising mindfulness, one feels an itch, one is barely aware of being itchy. One does not think that it is the hand, the leg, or any other part of the body that is itchy. The thought "I feel itchy", regarding oneself as the victim of itchiness, does not occur. Only the continuous sensation of itchiness is known. This sensation does not remain permanently, but passes away as soon as one notes it. The observing mind promptly notes every phenomenon as it occurs, leaving no room for the illusion of hand, leg, and so forth.

Delusion dominates the unmindful person blinding him or her to the unsatisfactoriness of all sense-objects, concealing pain behind pleasure. Avijjā means both ignorance of the truth and the misconception that distorts reality. Since they do not know the truth of suffering, people seek pleasant sense-objects. Thus ignorance leads to effort and kammic activity (sankhārā). According to the scriptures, mental formations arise because of ignorance, but between them there are the two links of craving and attachment. Ignorance leads to craving, which develops into attachment. Craving and attachment stem from the desire for pleasure and are explicitly mentioned in the middle part of the doctrine of Dependent Origination. When the past is fully described, ignorance, craving, attachment, kamma, and mental formations are all included.

## **Ignorance of the Origin of Suffering**

People do not know that craving is the cause of suffering. On the contrary, they believe that attachment makes them happy, that without attachment life would be dreary. So they constantly seek pleasant sense-objects: food, clothing, companions, and so forth. Without these objects of attachment they feel ill at ease, and find life dull. For ordinary people, life without attachment would be wholly without enjoyment. It is craving that conceals the unpleasantness of life and makes it seem agreeable, but for the arahant, who has eradicated craving, indulgence is impossible. He is always bent on nibbāna, the cessation of suffering.

Craving cannot exert much pressure on meditators when they become absorbed in the practice, so some do not enjoy life as much as they did before. On returning from the retreat they grow bored at home and feel ill at ease in the company of their families. To other people, meditators may seem conceited, but in fact their behaviour is a sign that they have lost interest in the everyday world. However, if they cannot overcome sensual desire, this boredom is temporary and they usually re-adjust to domestic life in due course. Their families need not worry over this mood or behaviour for it is hard to become thoroughly disenchanted with household life. Meditators should check to see just how much they are disenchanted with life. If the desire for pleasure lingers, they are still in the grip of craving.

Without craving, people feel discomfited. In association with ignorance, craving blinds them to suffering and creates the illusion of happiness. So they frantically seek sources of pleasure. Consider, for example, people's fondness for films and plays. These entertainments cost time and money but craving makes them irresistible, although they seem troublesome to one who has no interest in them. A more obvious example is smoking. The smoker enjoys inhaling the tobacco smoke, but to the nonsmoker it is a kind of self-inflicted suffering. Nonsmokers are free from all the troubles that beset the smoker. They lead a relatively carefree and happy life because they do not crave for tobacco. Craving as the source of suffering is also obvious in the habit of betel-chewing. Some people enjoy it, although it is a troublesome habit.

Like the smoker and the betel-chewer, people seek to gratify their craving, and this effort is the basis of rebirth, which leads to aging, disease, and death. Suffering, and craving as its cause, are evident in everyday life, but it is hard to accept these truths because they are profound. One cannot realise them through mere reflection but only through the practice of insight meditation.

## Ignorance of the Cessation of Suffering and the Path

Avijjā also means ignorance of the cessation of suffering and the Path leading to it. These two truths are also profound. The truth of the cessation of suffering (*nirodhasacca*) concerns nibbāna, which can be realised only by the Noble Path. The truth of the Path (*maggasacca*) is known with certainty only by the meditator who has attained nibbāna. No wonder, then, that many people are ignorant of these truths. Ignorance of the end of suffering is widespread, so world religions describe the supreme goal in diverse ways. Some say that suffering will cease automatically in due course. Some regard sensual pleasure as the highest bliss and reject the idea of future life. This variety of beliefs is due to ignorance of the real nibbāna. Even among Buddhists some hold that nibbāna is a realm or sort of paradise, and many arguments are put forward about it. These various views show how hard it is to understand nibbāna.

Nibbāna is the total extinction of the incessant psychophysical process that occurs because of conditions. So, according to Dependent Origination, ignorance, mental formations, etc., produce mind and matter and so forth. This causal process involves aging, death, and other misfortunes. If ignorance is extinguished by the Noble Path, so are its effects. This complete extinction of suffering is nibbāna. For example, a lamp that is refuelled will keep on burning, but if it is not refuelled the flame will go out. Likewise, for the meditator on the Noble Path who has attained nibbāna, all the causes such as ignorance have become extinct and so have all the effects such as rebirth. This means total extinction of suffering, that is, nibbāna, which one must understand and appreciate before realising it.

The idea of nibbāna does not appeal to those with a strong craving for life. To them, the cessation of the psychophysical process would mean nothing less than death. Nevertheless, intellectual acceptance of nibbāna is necessary because attainment of the supreme goal depends upon one's wholehearted and persistent effort.

Knowledge of the Path to the end of suffering is also vital. Only a Buddha can proclaim the right path; it is impossible for anyone else to do so, whether they are a deva, a brahmā, or a human being. Nevertheless, speculations about the right path abound. Some advocate ordinary morality such as love, altruism, patience or charity, while others stress the practice of mental absorption (*jhāna*). All these practices are commendable, for they lead to relative well-being in the celestial realms and can be helpful to attain nibbāna. They do not, however, ensure freedom from suffering, for on their own they are not sufficient to attain nibbāna.

Some resort to self-mortification such as fasting, nakedness, and so forth; while others worship deities or animals, or live like animals. From the Buddhist point of view all these are 'sīlabbataparāmāsa', which refers to any practice not concerned with the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Noble Eightfold Path comprises right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The path is of three kinds: the basic path, the preliminary path, and the Noble Path. Of these, the Noble Path is the most vital. However, this path should not be the primary objective of the meditator nor does it require one to spend much time and energy on it. For when insight on the preliminary path matures, insight on the Noble Path occurs for a thought-moment. Though it requires much time and effort to produce fire by friction, ignition takes just a moment. Similarly, the insight on the Noble Path is instantaneous but it presupposes much development of insight on the preliminary path.

## Right View

*Vipassanā* is the insight that occurs at every moment of contemplation. One who notes all psychophysical phenomena becomes aware of their true nature. Thus one focuses attention on the bending of one's arms or legs and discerns the elements of rigidity and motion. This



means right view concerning the element of motion (*vāyodhātu*). Lack of mindfulness will give rise to false perceptions like: "It is a hand", "It is a man", and so forth. Only the mindful meditator sees things as they really are. The same may be said of right view regarding sensations in the body, e.g. heat or pain, and mental activities, e.g. imagination or intention. When the mind becomes steady and calm, one finds that mental and physical phenomena arise and vanish, and so one gains insight into their intrinsic nature. Right view implies right thought and other associated states on the Path. Insight on the Path occurs at every moment of contemplation. With the perfection of insight into the three characteristics, one realises nibbāna. So, if nibbāna is to be realised right now, the practice of insight meditation is essential. One who cannot yet practise meditation should focus on the path that is the basis of insight practice. This basic path means doing meritorious deeds motivated by the belief in kamma. In other words, they should practise charity, morality, and meditation with the aspiration to attain nibbāna.

All the paths — the basic, the preliminary, and the Noble Path — form the eightfold path leading to nibbāna. In particular, one must recognize the Noble Path as the dhamma that is to be sought after, cultivated, and revered. Such an attitude is a prerequisite for strenuous effort in meditation. One must fully appreciate the value of insight meditation and know how to practise it.

Some people are ignorant of the way to nibbāna. Furthermore, they belittle the nibbāna-oriented meritorious deeds of others. Some deprecate the teaching and practice of others though they themselves have never practised insight meditation effectively. Some criticise the right method because they are attached to their own wrong method. All these people have misconceptions about the right path. It is ignorance not to know that charity, morality, and meditation lead to nibbāna and it is ignorance too, to regard them as harmful to one's interests. The most harmful ignorance is ignorance of, and illusion about, the right method of contemplation.

Ignorance of the right path is the most terrible form of ignorance. It makes its victims blind to meritorious deeds and creates illusions, preventing them from attaining even human happiness or divine bliss, let alone the Noble Path and nibbāna. Yet most people remain steeped in ignorance, unmindful of the need to devote themselves to charity, morality, and meditation.

## Notes

The term '*dukkha*' covers all that is difficult to bear. 'Unsatisfactoriness' is used as the translation in most places. (Editor's note)

# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

## From Ignorance, Mental Formations Arise

**S**ENSUAL PLEASURE is the source of happiness for most people. Nibbāna as the extinction of mind and matter is undesirable and the way to it appears arduous and painful. So people seek to gratify their desire through bodily, verbal, and mental action. Some of these actions may be ethical and others may be dishonest. Good people practise charity, morality, and meditation for their well-being after death, while others resort to deceit or robbery to become rich.

A synonym for kamma is sankhārā (mental formations). Mental formations are of three types: physical, vocal, and mental. Mental formations presuppose volition (*cetanā*). The function of volition is to conceive, to urge or to incite. As such it is the basis of all wholesome and unwholesome actions such as almsgiving or killing. The meditator knows its nature empirically through contemplation.

There is another threefold classification of mental formations: meritorious kammas with favourable results (*puññābhisankhārā*), demeritorious kammas with unfavourable results (*apuññābhisankhārā*), and imperturbable kamma (*āneñjābhisankhārā*) that leads to *arūpa-jhāna* (lit. immobile jhāna). *Rūpa-jhāna* and all the wholesome actions having kammic results in the sensual realm are classified as *puññābhisankhārā*. *Puñña* literally means something that cleanses or purifies. Just as one washes the dirt off the body with soap, so we have to rid ourselves of kammic impurities through charity, morality, and meditation. These meritorious deeds are conducive to well-being and prosperity in the present life and after death.

Another meaning of *puñña* is the ability to fulfil the desire of the doer. Meritorious deeds help to fulfil various human desires, e.g. the desire for health, longevity, wealth, and so forth. If a meritorious deed is motivated by the hope for nibbāna, it leads to a life that is conducive to one's goal. Otherwise, it may ensure happiness and well-being until the end of one's last existence. *Abhisankhāra* is the effort to do something for one's own well-being. It has wholesome or unwholesome kammic results. So *puññābhisankhāra* is a meritorious deed with a beneficial kammic result. In the sensual sphere (*kāmāvacara*) there are eight types of meritorious deeds and five types in the fine-material sphere (*rūpāvacara*). All these may be summarised as of three kinds: charity, morality, and meditation.

Giving charity gladly is done with a wholesome consciousness, which is kammically very fruitful. So the donor should rejoice before, during, and after the act of giving. This kind of charity is said to be very effective. The donor may also give charity with indifference, but if the mind is clear the act has high kammic potential. Any charitable act that is based on the belief in kamma is rational. It bears fruit as rebirth with no predisposition to greed, ill-will, and delusion. An act of charity without recognition of its moral value is wholesome but unintelligent. Thus it will lead to a rebirth with no great intelligence. It may bear good kammic fruit in everyday life but it does not make the donor intelligent enough to attain the Path in the next life.

One person may do a meritorious deed without being prompted by others (*asankhārika-kusala*). Another may do so only when prompted (*sasankhārika-kusala*). Of these two kinds of meritorious deeds, the former is more fruitful than the latter. When we multiply the four kinds of meritorious deeds by these two attributes, we have a total of eight types of wholesome consciousness in the sensual sphere. Whenever we do a meritorious deed, we are urged to do so by one of these wholesome states. When we practise meditation, we have to begin with these eight types of wholesome consciousness.

If it is *samatha* meditation, one can attain *rūpāvacara-jhāna* when concentration is well-developed. Jhāna means total concentration of the mind on an object of mental training.

Samatha jhāna is concentration for bare tranquillity. Jhānic concentration is like a flame burning in still air. According to the Sutta Pitaka, the *rūpāvacara jhāna* has four levels; according to the Abhidhamma it has five levels. The five fine-material wholesome types of consciousness (*rūpakusala-citta*) are associated with the five jhānas. They are accessible only through the practice of samatha that leads to jhāna. Meritorious kamma includes the eight wholesome types of sense-sphere consciousness and the five jhānas.

## Unwholesome Kammās

Opposed to wholesome kamma is unwholesome kamma. These immoral deeds lead to lower realms and misfortunes in human life such as ugliness, infirmities, and so forth. The immoral types of consciousness are of twelve kinds: eight rooted in greed (*lobha*), two rooted in ill-will (*dosa*), and two rooted in delusion (*moha*).

Those rooted in greed may be accompanied by wrong view or not. They may be joyful or indifferent, and they may be prompted (*sasankhārika*) or unprompted (*asankhārika*). The combination of these three factors gives a total of eight different types of unwholesome consciousness rooted in greed. Every greed-based kamma is motivated by one of these eight types of consciousness.

The types of consciousness rooted in ill-will are of two kinds: unprompted and prompted. Consciousness rooted in ill-will is the source of anger, dejection, fear, and disgust.

Doubt (*vicikicchā*) and restlessness (*uddhacca*) are the two types of consciousness rooted in delusion. Doubt means doubt about the Buddha, his teaching, his disciples, morality, concentration, a future life, and so forth. Restlessness refers to the wandering mind that is distracted. Unless restrained by meditation, the mind is seldom calm and usually wanders. However, unlike the other eleven unwholesome types of consciousness, restlessness does not lead to the lower realms. Even with a favourable rebirth, the unwholesome kammās usually have bad effects such as ill-health. These twelve unwholesome kammās are called '*apuññābhisankhārā*'.

Everywhere, people wish to be happy, so they strive to gain prosperity in the present life and after death. However, it is usually greed and ill-will that motivate their activities. Wholesome consciousness is confined to those who have wise friends, who have heard their teaching and who think rationally.

Some go morally astray, being misled by their selfish teacher. In the lifetime of the Buddha, a lay Buddhist abused virtuous monks. On his death he became a hungry ghost (*peta*) in the latrine of the very same monastery he had donated to the Sangha. He told Venerable Moggallāna about his misdeed when the latter saw him with his divine eye. What a terrible fate for a man who had materially supported the Sangha for his well-being in the afterlife, but was misguided to the lower realm by his teacher. This shows that the person whose company we seek should possess not only deep knowledge but also an honest character.

The mark of a virtuous person is abstinence from any act, speech or thought that is harmful to others. Those who keep company with wise friends or virtuous bhikkhus have the opportunity to hear the genuine Dhamma. If they think wisely, their reasoning will lead to moral actions, speech, and thoughts. On the other hand, corrupt teachers or friends, false teachings, and improper thoughts may lead to moral disaster. Some who at first had an unblemished character were later ruined by corrupt thoughts. They were convicted of theft, robbery or misappropriation and their former good reputation was irreparably damaged. All their suffering had its origin in the illusion of happiness. Contrary to their expectations, they found themselves in trouble when it was too late. Some misdeeds do not produce immediate kammic results but they ripen in due course and lead to suffering. If retribution does not follow the evildoer in this life, it overtakes him in the afterlife. Such was the fate of the donor who became a hungry ghost for his malicious words. His teacher who had misguided him fared worse after his death. He occupied a place below his former pupil and

had to live on his excreta. The kammic result of his misdeed was frightful. He had committed it for his own ends but it backfired and he had to suffer terribly for it.

Some native people make animal sacrifices to gods for abundant harvest, health or safety. These primitive beliefs still prevail among some townspeople. Some people worship the Chief Nat as if he were the Buddha. Others kill animals to feed guests for religious almsgiving. Even some ignorant Buddhists have doubts about this practice. Whatever the aim of the donor, killing has bad kammic results and it is not a skilful deed despite the belief of the killer to the contrary.

A skilful deed bears the hallmark of moral purity. Killing or hurting living beings cannot be morally pure in any sense. The victims face death or endure ill-treatment only because they cannot avoid it, and will surely retaliate if they can. Victims often pray for vengeance and so the killer is killed in the next existence or has to suffer some other retribution for his or her misdeed. Many instances of the consequences of killing are found in the Buddhist scriptures.

Some long for human or celestial life and devote themselves to charity, morality, and meditation. Their meritorious deeds lead to well-being in future lives and so fulfil their wishes. However, every life is subject to aging and death, and human life is accompanied by ill-health and mental suffering. Some crave for the brahmā realm and practise jhāna. They may live happily for aeons as brahmās, but when life has run its course they will be reborn as human beings or devas. Any demeritorious deed that they then do may lead to the lower realms. So even the glory of the brahmā-life is an illusion.

The illusion of happiness is not confined to ordinary people. The illusion (*vipallāsa*) and ignorance (*avijjā*) that make suffering seem like happiness linger at the first two stages of the Noble Path, and even the non-returner still mistakenly regards the fine-material and immaterial realms as blissful. So meritorious deeds are the aim of the Noble Ones at the first three stages of the Path. However, ordinary people are beguiled by all four illusions, and thus they regard the impermanent as permanent, suffering as happiness, the impersonal as personal, and the unpleasant as pleasant. Because of this misconception and ignorance, every bodily, verbal or mental action leads to wholesome or unwholesome kamma. Wholesome kamma only arises from intention coupled with faith, energy, mindfulness, etc. Left to itself, the mind is liable to produce unwholesome kamma.

## Rejection of Good Kamma Means Bad Kamma

Some people misinterpret the arahant's transcendence of kamma and say that we should avoid doing meritorious deeds. For an ordinary person, the rejection of wholesome kamma means the upsurge of unwholesome kamma, just as the exodus of virtuous people from a city leaves only fools and rogues, or the removal of useful trees is followed by the growth of useless grass and weeds. One who rejects meritorious deeds is bound to do demeritorious deeds that will lead to rebirths in the lower realms, from where it is hard to return to the human world. The arahant's lack of wholesome kamma means only that his or her actions are kammically unproductive due to the extinction of ignorance. The arahants do revere the elders, teach the Dhamma, give alms, help others who are in difficulty and so forth. However, due to their full comprehension of the Four Noble Truths and the eradication of ignorance their actions do not have any kammic effect. So the arahants do not generate wholesome kamma, but they do not avoid meritorious deeds.

An ordinary person, who does not care for meritorious deeds because of ignorance and wrong views, will accumulate only unwholesome kammās. In fact, the lack of any desire to do good is a sign of abysmal ignorance that makes the Noble Path and nibbāna very remote. One only becomes inclined towards meritorious deeds as ignorance loses its hold on the mind. A stream-winner is more interested in doing good than an ordinary person. Those at the higher stages of the Path have an increasing desire to give up doing things irrelevant to the Path and devote more time to meditation. So, meritorious deeds should not be confused

with demeritorious deeds and purposely avoided. Every action rooted in ignorance means either wholesome or unwholesome kamma. Without wholesome kamma all one's deeds will be unwholesome kamma.

## **Ignorance and Illusion**

Truth and falsehood are mutually exclusive. If one does not know the truth, one accepts falsehood, and vice-versa. Those who do not know the Four Noble Truths have misconceptions about suffering which, posing as happiness, deceives and oppresses them. Apart from craving, which gives some pleasure when gratified, everything in the sensual realm is suffering. Though all sense-objects are subject to ceaseless change and are unreliable, to the ignorant person they seem desirable and pleasant. People are nostalgic about what they regard as happy days in the past, and optimistic about their future. Because of their misconception, they long for what they consider to be enjoyable and satisfying. This is the cause of their suffering but they do not realise it. On the contrary, they think that their happiness depends on the fulfilment of their desires, so they see nothing wrong with their desire for pleasure. Unfortunately, the truths about the end of suffering and the way to it are alien to most people. Some who learn these truths from others or accept them intellectually do not appreciate them. They do not care for nibbāna or the way to it, thinking that the way is beset with many hardships and privations.

The hope for happiness is the motive for human action. Actions in deed, speech or thought are called kamma or sankhārā. We have referred above to the three kinds of sankhārā. The two kinds of wholesome kamma comprise the first kind: i.e. the eight wholesome kammas of the sensual sphere and the five wholesome kammas in the fine-material sphere. We have also mentioned two kinds of wholesome kamma or consciousness: one associated with intelligence and the other divorced from it. In the practice of insight the meditator's mind is intelligent if one becomes aware of the true nature of mind and matter through contemplation. It is not intelligent if one just recites Pāli words while contemplating superficially. As for morality, a sense of moral values is intelligent if it is associated with the belief in the law of kamma; otherwise it is unintelligent.

Some people say that an intelligent act of charity must involve the contemplation of the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and impersonality of the donor, the recipient, and the offering. This view is based on the Atthasālinī (an Abhidhamma commentary), which mentions the contemplation on impermanence after giving alms. However, the reference is to contemplation after the act of charity, not before, nor while doing it. Moreover, the reason is not to make the act intelligent but to create wholesome kamma in insight practice. If by intelligent almsgiving is meant only the charity that presupposes such contemplation, all the other charity of non-Buddhists would have to be classified as unintelligent, which would be absurd. The accounts of almsgiving by bodhisattas do not mention contemplation nor did the Buddha insist on it as a prerequisite to charity. The scriptures say only that the kammic potential of charity depends on the spiritual maturity of the recipient and this is the only teaching that we should consider in almsgiving. If the donor and the recipient are regarded as mere mind and matter subject to impermanence, they will be on an equal footing. The act of charity would then lack inspiration and much kammic potential. In fact, the object of almsgiving is not insight contemplation but the benefits accruing to the donor. So the Buddha pointed out which recipients can make almsgiving immensely beneficial and he stressed the importance of right reflection (i.e. belief in kamma).

Visākhā, a well-known female disciple, once asked the Buddha for permission to make eight kinds of lifelong offering to the Sangha: 1) bathing robes for the monks, 2) food for guest-monks, 3) food for travelling monks, 4) food for sick monks, 5) food for monks attending sick monks, 6) medicine for sick monks, 7) rice-gruel for the Sangha, and 8) bathing robes for the nuns. The Buddha asked Visākhā what benefits she hoped to obtain in offering such things. The substance of Visākhā's reply was as follows: "At the end of the Rains, monks from all parts of the country will come to see the Lord. They will tell him about the death of certain monks and ask him about their rebirth and stages on the Noble Path that the

deceased monks had attained. The Lord will reveal their spiritual attainments. I will then approach the visiting monks and ask them whether their late fellow-monks had ever visited Sāvattthi. If they say yes, I will conclude that the Noble One must have used one of my offerings. This recollection of my wholesome kamma will fill me with joy. It will be conducive to peace, tranquillity, and self-development."

It is noteworthy that the reference is not to the contemplation on the impermanence of the deceased monks but to their spiritual attainments. Importance is attached to the contemplation that leads to ecstasy and training in self-development. So, the most appropriate object of contemplation in offering alms is the noble quality of the recipient. For example, when laying flowers at a shrine one might reflect on the noble character of the Buddha; when offering food to a monk one might think of his pure mode of life, and so forth.

Teaching or listening to the Dhamma is a wholesome kamma and it is intelligent if the Dhamma is understood. Every meritorious deed based on the belief in kamma is an intelligent kamma. Without it, a meritorious act is wholesome but unintelligent, e.g. when children worship the Buddha image, in imitation their parents, or when people who reject the belief in kamma are helpful, polite, and charitable.

Few people are free from personality-belief. The belief dominates those who do not know that life is a psychophysical process lacking a soul or person. Among those who have some knowledge of Buddhist scriptures, the belief is weak, but their academic knowledge does not help them to overcome it completely. Meditators who have had a clear insight into the true nature of mind and matter through contemplation are usually free from personality-belief. Yet they may revert to it if they stop contemplating before they attain the Path. As for ordinary people, the personality-belief is deeply rooted. This makes them think that it is the self or the personality that is the agent of whatever they do or feel or think. Again, those who believe in total extinction after death, rejecting a future life and kammic results, have unwholesome consciousness rooted in annihilationist beliefs.

Consciousness rooted in ill-will is of two kinds: prompted and unprompted. Anger, envy, anxiety, grief, fear, and hatred are a few of the many kinds of ill-will.

Consciousness rooted in delusion comprises doubt and restlessness. Doubts about the Buddha, nibbāna, the doctrine of not-self, and so forth are termed 'vicikicchā'. The mind is subject to 'uddhacca' whenever it wanders here and there restlessly.

Thus unwholesome kamma comprises eight types of greed-based consciousness, two types of hatred-based consciousness, and two types based on delusion. It is opposed to wholesome kamma, which serves to purify the mind and leads to favourable rebirths with fortunate kammic results. Unwholesome kamma defiles the mind and leads to unfavourable rebirths with unpleasant kammic results.

People do unskilful deeds wishing for happiness. They kill, steal, rob or give false evidence for their own advantage. Even those who kill their parents do so to achieve their own aims. For example, Prince Ajātasattu killed his father to become king. Misguided by his teacher, Devadatta, he concluded that he would rule longer if he killed his father and usurped the throne. For his great crime of parricide (and the murder of a stream-winner at that), he was seized with remorse that caused him physical suffering as well. Later, he was killed by his own son and was reborn in hell, where he is now suffering terribly for his misdeed.

In the time of Kakusandha Buddha the Māra called Dūsī did his utmost to harm the Buddha and the Sangha. Failing to achieve his aim, he took possession of a man and stoned the chief disciple of the Buddha. For this horrible crime he instantly landed in Avīci, the lowest of the thirty-one realms. As a Māra he had lorded it over others but in Avīci he lay prostrate under the heels of the guardians of hell. He had hoped to rejoice over the fulfilment of his



scheme, but now he had to suffer for his unwholesome kamma. This is true of evildoers all over the world.

It is also the hope for happiness that motivates the other two types of action: meritorious kamma and imperturbable kamma. Imperturbable kamma (*āneñjābhisankhārā*) means the four wholesome types of consciousness of the immaterial sphere. 'Āneñjā' means equanimity or self-possession. A loud noise nearby may disturb a meditator who is absorbed in *rūpa-jhāna*, but *arūpa-jhāna* is invulnerable to such distractions. *Arūpa-jhāna* is of four kinds according to its object:

1. The realm of infinite space (*ākāsānañcāyatana*),
2. The realm of infinite consciousness (*viññānañcāyatana*),
3. The realm of nothingness (*ākīñcaññāyatana*), and
4. The realm of neither perception nor non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*).

These four jhānas are the kammās that lead to the four immaterial realms. Demeritorious kamma leads to the four lower realms; meritorious kamma leads to human, celestial, and rūpa-brahmā realms. People do these three kinds of kammās for their well-being and, as a result, consciousness arises. With consciousness as condition, mind and matter, the six senses, contact, feeling, and so forth arise.

# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

## From Mental Formations, Consciousness Arises

**I**GNORANCE leads to mental formations, which in turn cause consciousness. Because of wholesome or unwholesome karmas in the previous life, the stream of consciousness arises, beginning with rebirth-consciousness in the new life. Immoral deeds may, for example, cause rebirth-consciousness to arise in one of the four lower realms. After that the stream of consciousness called *bhavanga* arises. This functions continuously unless the six kinds of thought-process consciousness occur when seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching or thinking. In other words, *bhavanga* is a kind of subconsciousness that occurs during sleep and between moments of active-consciousness. We die with this subconsciousness and it is then called decease-consciousness (*cuticitta*). So the rebirth-consciousness, the subconsciousness, and the decease-consciousness result from the kamma of the previous life.

The five kinds of consciousness associated with the five unpleasant sense-objects such as unpleasant visual-consciousness, auditory consciousness, etc., are due to unwholesome kamma. So too are 1) the consciousness that adverts to these five sense-objects and 2) the investigating-consciousness (*santīraṇa*). Altogether, seven types of consciousness stem from unwholesome kamma. As for imperturbable kamma, because of the four types of immaterial-sphere consciousness the resultant consciousness arises in the four immaterial realms. Rebirth-consciousness arises in the beginning, subconsciousness runs in the middle, and decease-consciousness occurs at the end of existence.

Similarly, because of the five types of fine-material consciousness, five types of resultant consciousness arise in the fine-material realms. Then eight great resultants, which correspond to eight wholesome karmas in the sensual realm, form the rebirth, subconsciousness, and decease-consciousness in the human world and six celestial realms. They also register pleasant sense-objects after the seven impulse-moments (*javana*) that occur on seeing, hearing, etc. Also due to wholesome kamma of the sensual realm are the five kinds of consciousness associated with five pleasant sense-objects, the registering-consciousness, the joyful investigating-consciousness, and the indifferent investigating-consciousness. So, resultant consciousness is of thirty-two kinds: four of the immaterial realm, five of the fine-material realm, seven unwholesome resultants, and sixteen wholesome resultants in the sensual realm. All these thirty-two are resultants of mental formations.

## How Mental Formations Lead to Rebirth

It is very important, but hard to understand, how mental formations lead to rebirth-consciousness. The Venerable Ledi Sayādaw pointed out that this aspect of Dependent Origination leaves much room for misunderstanding. One must distinguish between the cessation of decease-consciousness of the old life and the immediate arising of rebirth-consciousness in the new life. This arising of rebirth-consciousness is the result of wholesome or unwholesome karmas by living beings who are not yet free from defilements. Lack of clear understanding usually leads to the belief in eternalism (*sassataditthi*), or the belief in annihilation after death (*ucchedaditthi*), which is held by modern materialists. The belief in annihilation is due to ignorance of the cause-and-effect relationship. To see how ignorance leads to mental formations is not too difficult. How the sense-bases, contact, feeling, craving, etc., form the chain of causation is also self-evident. However, the emergence of a new existence following death is not apparent, hence the belief that there is nothing after death. Learned people whose reasoning is based on faith usually accept the teaching that mental formations lead to rebirth-consciousness. However,

it does not lend itself to a purely rational and empirical approach, so today it is being challenged by the materialistic view of life.

The way that rebirth takes place is unmistakable to one who has practised insight meditation. One finds that consciousness arises and passes away ceaselessly. This is what one discovers by experience, not what one learns from one's teachers. Of course one does not know this much initially. One discovers this fact only when one attains knowledge by comprehension (*sammasana-ñāna*) and knowledge of arising and passing away (*udayabbaya-ñāna*). The general idea of the death and rebirth of mental units dawns with the development of knowledge by discerning conditionality (*paccaya-pariggaha-ñāna*), but it is *sammasana-ñāna* and *udayabbaya-ñāna* that remove all doubt about rebirth. From these insights, one realises that death means the cessation of the last moment of consciousness in one life, and that rebirth means the arising of the first moment in the next life. This is similar to the arising and cessation of consciousness that one notes during meditation.

Those who do not have insight miss the point. They believe in a permanent soul or self and identify it with the mind. This belief is rejected by those who have a sound knowledge of Abhidhamma, but it lingers in some people because of attachment to it in their previous lives. Even the meditator whose knowledge is immature sometimes feels tempted to accept it.

## Eternalism and Annihilationism

For ordinary people who are wedded to the personality-belief, death means either the extinction of a person or displacement of a person to another existence. The former misconception is called '*ucchedaditthi*' or the belief in annihilation, the latter is called '*sassataditthi*' or the belief in the transmigration of the soul. Others believe that consciousness develops spontaneously with the growth and maturation of the body. This belief is called '*ahetukaditthi*', or the view of no root-cause. Some have misconceptions about the cycle of death and rebirth. They regard the body as the temporary home of the life-principle, which passes on from one life to another. Though the disintegration of the body is undeniable, some people believe in its resurrection and so treat it with respect. These views confirm the Venerable Ledi Sayādaw's statement that the causal link between mental formations and consciousness lends itself to misinterpretation. Buddhists are not necessarily free from these misconceptions, but because of their faith in the doctrine of not-self they do not harbour the illusions so blindly as to harm their insight practice. So even without a thorough knowledge of the nature of death and rebirth, they can enlighten themselves through contemplation.

For example, shortly after the parinibbāna of the Buddha, Venerable Channa practised insight meditation but made little progress because of his personality-belief. Then while he listened to Venerable Ānanda's discourse on Dependent Origination, he contemplated, overcame his illusion and attained arahantship. Again, in the time of the Buddha, Venerable Yamaka believed that the arahant was annihilated after death. Venerable Sāriputta summoned him and taught him. While following the discourse, Venerable Yamaka meditated and achieved liberation. So those who have faith in the Buddha need not be disheartened for if they meditate zealously and wholeheartedly they will become enlightened.

Because of their ignorance and doubt about the process of rebirth, or because of a leaning towards annihilationist beliefs, some people question the possibility of a life after death. This question presupposes a soul (*attā*) or life-force in a living being. Materialism rejects the idea of a soul but the self-illusion is implicit in its differentiation of the living from the dead. The questions of those who accept the self explicitly or implicitly are hard to answer from the Buddhist point of view. If we say that there is a future life, they will conclude that we support the personality-belief. However, Buddhism does not categorically deny the future life, so the Buddha refused to answer such questions. Moreover, producing sufficient

evidence to convince people is difficult. Psychic persons can point out hell or the celestial realms but sceptics will dismiss such exhibitions as black magic or deception. So the Buddha did not affirm the future life directly, but said that without the extinction of defilements the psychophysical process continues after death.

The question of an afterlife does not admit of an intellectual approach. It is to be answered only through certain practices that enable a meditator to gain psychic powers. They can then see the virtuous who have arisen in the celestial realms, and the immoral who are suffering in the lower worlds. Their vision is as clear as that of an observer directly opposite two houses watching people pass from one house to the other. Such meditators can easily find the person whom they want to see among the many living beings of the higher and lower realms.

Insight meditators can also attain psychic powers; no teaching rules out this possibility. Some meditators have had paranormal contact with the other world, but such gifts are rare since they depend on intense concentration, so the easier way is to practise for insight. The problem of life becomes fairly clear when the knowledge by discerning conditionality discloses the nature of death and conception. It becomes even clearer when one attains knowledge by comprehension, knowledge of arising and passing away, and knowledge of dissolution (*bhanga-nāna*). Then one can see vividly how the consecutive units of consciousness arise and pass away ceaselessly. One sees, too, how death is the passing away of the last unit of consciousness followed by conception, or the arising of the first unit in a new existence. However, this insight is still vulnerable. It is only when one attains the stage of a stream-winner that one becomes wholly free from all doubts about future life.

The trouble is that people want to ask about such matters instead of practising meditation. Some seek the verdict of Western scientists and philosophers while others accept the teaching of those who are reputed to be arahants with psychic powers. Instead of relying on other people, however, the best thing is to seek the answer through insight meditation. With the knowledge of arising and passing away, one can clearly see how, after a unit of consciousness has passed away, a new one arises attached to a sense-object. From this one can infer how life begins with rebirth-consciousness, which is conditioned by attachment to an object in the final moment of the preceding life. Before death, the continuous stream of consciousness depends on the physical body, with one moment of consciousness following another uninterruptedly. After death, the body disintegrates and the stream of consciousness shifts to a new physical process elsewhere. This may be compared to light in an electric bulb, which is maintained by the continuous flow of electricity. When the bulb is burnt out, the light goes out but the electric potential still remains. Light reappears when the old bulb is replaced with a new one. Here, the bulb, electricity, and light are all changing physical processes, and we should be mindful of their transience.

The commentary illustrates the process of rebirth with the analogies of an echo, a flame, the impression of a seal, and a reflection in a mirror. An echo is the reflection of a sound produced by the impact of sound waves on a hard surface. However, though the sound is the cause of the echo, the source of the sound does not move to the source of the echo. When we look at a mirror, our face is reflected in it, but although they are causally related, we do not confuse the reflection with our face. If a burning candle is used to light another one, the flame of the second candle is obviously not the flame of the first one, but it is not unrelated to the first flame either. Lastly, the seal leaves an impression that is like its face, but it is not the face, and the impression cannot occur without the seal either.

These analogies help to clarify the nature of rebirth. When a person is dying, their kamma, the signs and visions related to it, or visions of their future life appear. After death, rebirth-consciousness arises, conditioned by one of these visions. So rebirth does not mean the transfer of the deceased-consciousness to another life. However, since it is conditioned by deathbed visions, it is rooted in ignorance and craving, which form the decisive links in the chain of causation. Thus rebirth-consciousness is not the consciousness of the dying person but it is causally related to the previous life. Any two consecutive units of consciousness are

separate but, since they belong to the same stream of consciousness, we speak of the same individual for the whole day, the whole year or the whole lifetime. Likewise, we can speak of the de cease- and rebirth-consciousness as belonging to one individual, and we can say that a person has been reborn without implying the transfer of mind and matter. We speak of a person only because rebirth depends upon a stream of causally related mental units.

So it is annihilationism to believe that we are annihilated at death, and that we have nothing to do with a previous life. Most Buddhists are free from this view. As the two consecutive lives are causally related, one can speak of them as belonging to one person, but we should not adopt the eternalistic view that rebirth means the transfer of the personality to a new existence.

One who has mature insight does not harbour either belief. He or she is fully aware of the rising and passing away of mental units in the present life and of their causal relations. This insight leaves no room for the illusions of immortality or annihilation. The nature of consciousness is evident even to those who think objectively. Joy may be followed by dejection and vice versa, or a serene mind may give way to irritation. These changing states of consciousness clearly show its heterogeneous nature. Moreover, mental states may be associated through similarity, as, for example, the intention to do a certain thing at night may occur again in the morning. The mental states are distinct but causally related. Those who understand this relationship between two consecutive mental states can see that the same relationship holds true between those separated by death.

## Deathbed Visions

Consciousness in the new existence occurs in two modes: as rebirth-consciousness and as the consciousness that flows on during the whole life. Altogether, rebirth-consciousness is of nineteen kinds: one in the lower realms, nine in the sensual realms of human beings and devas, five in the fine-material brahmā realms, and four in the immaterial brahmā realms. As for the other resultant mental states that occur during the rest of life, they number thirty-two. These enumerations will be meaningful only to those who have studied the Abhidhamma. To a dying person, there appears a flashback of a deed they have done in life (*kamma*), or the surrounding conditions associated with the act (*kammanimitta*), or a vision of their future life (*gatinimitta*). Kamma may assume the form of a flashback about the past or an hallucination in the present. On his deathbed, a fisherman may talk as if he were catching fish, or a man who has often given alms may think that he is giving alms. Many years ago, I led a group of pilgrims from Shwebo to visit pagodas in Mandalay and Rangoon. An old man in the group died shortly after our return to Shwebo. He died muttering the words that were reminiscent of his experience during the pilgrimage. The dying person also has visions of the environment in which kammic deeds were done. One may see robes, monasteries, bhikkhus or Buddha images relating to acts of charity; or weapons, murder scenes or victims relating to a murder. Then one sees visions of what one will find in the afterlife. For example, one might see hellfire or demons if one is destined to be born in hell, but celestial beings or mansions if one is to pass on to celestial realms. Once a dying brahmin was told by his friends that a vision of flames portended the brahmā realm. He believed them and died only to find himself in hell. Wrong views are very dangerous. It is said that some people tell their dying friends to visualise their acts of killing a cow for charity, believing that such acts are beneficial.

## The Story of Mahādhammika

In Sāvatti at the time of the Buddha, five hundred lay-supporters each had 500 followers, all of whom practised the Dhamma. The eldest of them, Mahādhammika, the head of all the lay-supporters, had seven sons and seven daughters who also followed the teaching of the Buddha. As he grew old, he became sick and weak. He invited the monks to his house and, while listening to their recitation of the Dhamma, saw a chariot arriving to take him to the celestial realm. He said to the devas, "Please wait." The monks stopped reciting as they

thought that the dying man was addressing them. His sons and daughters cried, believing that he was babbling for fear of death. After the monks' departure, he came round, and told his children to throw a garland of flowers up into the air. They did as they were told and the garland remained hanging in the air. The lay-supporter said that the garland revealed the position of the chariot from Tusita heaven. After advising his children to do skilful deeds for rebirth in heavenly realms, he died and was reborn in Tusita. This is how the vision of the celestial realm appears to the virtuous man on his deathbed. A layman in Moulmein said, just before he died, that he saw a magnificent building. This, too, may have been a vision of the celestial realm. Some people who are to be reborn as human beings have visions of their future parents, house, etc., on their deathbed. A Sayādaw in Moulmein was killed by robbers. Three years later a child from Mergui came to Moulmein and identified by name the Sayādaws with whom he said he had lived in his previous life. He said that the robbers stabbed him when they did not get the money. He then ran away to the jetty where he got into a boat, reached Mergui, and dwelt in the home of his parents. The flight, journey by boat, etc., were perhaps visions of the Sayādaw's afterlife.

Flashbacks of kammic acts and visions of a future life occur even in cases of sudden death. According to the commentary, they occur even when a fly is crushed with a hammer. Nuclear weapons can reduce a big city to ashes in a flash. From the Buddhist point of view, these weapons have appeared because of the unwholesome kamma of their potential victims. Those who are killed by these bombs also see flashbacks and visions. This may sound incredible to those who do not understand how the mind works, but it presents no difficulty to one who contemplates psychophysical phenomena. It is said that in the twinkling of an eye units of consciousness arise and pass away by the billion. Meditators who have attained the knowledge of arising and passing away know empirically that hundreds of mental units arise and dissolve in a moment. So they have no doubt about the possibility of flashbacks and visions in those who meet violent and sudden death.

Consciousness is always focused on objects. We often recall what we have done, and think of the celestial realm or human society. If a person who has done meritorious deeds dies with these thoughts, they will be reborn as a celestial or human being. Visions of the future life on one's deathbed are called 'gatinimitta'. Visions of objects associated with kamma are called 'kammanimitta'. References to these deathbed phenomena are to be found not only in the commentaries, but also in the Tipitaka. In the Bālapandita Sutta the Buddha speaks of deathbed visions of wholesome or unwholesome deeds. He likens them to the shadow of a mountain dominating the plains in the evening. Once I saw a dying woman who showed great fear as if she were face to face with an enemy who was out to treat her cruelly. She was speechless. Her relatives tried to comfort her, but in vain. Perhaps she was having a foretaste of her unhappy future because of unwholesome kamma.

So one must do wholesome kamma that will produce agreeable images at the moment of death or visions of a favourable afterlife. If the meritorious deed is rational, strongly motivated and one of the eight kinds of sense-sphere meritorious deeds, the resultant consciousness will be one of the four kinds of rational consciousness. The rebirth is then associated with non-delusion and as such takes place with three root-conditions: wisdom, goodwill, and generosity. A person reborn with these innate tendencies can attain absorption and psychic powers if they practise tranquillity meditation, or the Noble Path and nibbāna if they devote themselves to insight meditation. Virtuous acts that are motivated by the desire for nibbāna lead to such favourable rebirths and finally to the Path and nibbāna through contemplation or hearing a discourse.

If the motivation is weak, or if it is a meritorious deed divorced from the belief in kamma, the result is one of the four kinds of unintelligent consciousness. The rebirth is then called 'a two-root-condition rebirth', which is accompanied by generosity and goodwill, but lacks wisdom. A person reborn in this way cannot attain absorption or the Noble Path as they lack the innate intelligence for it. If the meritorious deed is unintelligent and halfhearted, the result will be a favourable rebirth without wholesome roots, by reason of which one is likely to have defective sense faculties. So when you do a meritorious deed, you should do it with zeal (*chanda*), and with nibbāna as your objective. If you set your heart on nibbāna,



the meritorious deed will lead you to it, and the zeal with which you do such a deed will ensure a rebirth with wholesome roots. Praying for such a noble rebirth is not necessary because you are assured of it if you do meritorious deeds intelligently and zealously. However, if you lack zeal in doing good, the result will be a rebirth with only generosity and goodwill.

Some people say that charity and morality generate wholesome kamma, which, being rooted in ignorance, leads to rebirth and suffering in samsāra. This is a mistaken view that stems from lack of knowledge. If the practice of charity and morality is motivated by the desire for nibbāna, it will ensure the noblest rebirth and lead to the supreme goal. It was due to charity and morality that Venerable Sāriputta and other disciples of the Buddha finally attained nibbāna. The same may be said of Solitary Buddhas (Pacceka-buddhas).

The bodhisatta, too, attained supreme enlightenment in the same way by praying that his meritorious deeds contribute to the attainment of omniscience. Here, a rebirth with three wholesome roots involved in the genesis of Buddhahood is of two kinds: consciousness associated with joy and consciousness associated with equanimity. Again each of these two types of consciousness is of two kinds: prompted and unprompted. The bodhisatta's rebirth-consciousness was powerful, zealous, and unprompted. According to ancient commentaries, it was joyful consciousness. Since the bodhisatta had infinite loving-kindness for all living beings, and strong loving-kindness is usually coupled with joy, the bodhisatta's rebirth-consciousness must have been tinged with joy. However, the ancient Sri Lankan authority Venerable Mahāsiva suggested that the bodhisatta's rebirth-consciousness was accompanied by equanimity. In his view, the bodhisatta's mind was firm and profound, therefore equanimity rather than joy must have been the characteristic of his rebirth-consciousness. In any event, his rebirth-consciousness had its origin in a meritorious deed motivated by the desire for supreme enlightenment. Thus, although the intelligent wholesome kammās lead to rebirth, they do not prolong the cycle of existence. On the contrary, they contribute to liberation from samsāra.

Consciousness of any kind, whether rebirth-consciousness or otherwise, is only momentary. It lasts for just three instants: arising (*upāda*), being (*thiti*), and dissolution (*bhanga*). According to the commentaries, these mental units arise and pass away by the billion in the blinking of an eye. Each unit is so transient that it does not last even a billionth of a second. The cessation of rebirth-consciousness is followed by the stream of subconsciousness, which flows ceaselessly unless it is interrupted by an active cognitive process (*citta-vīthi*), the kind of mental activity involved in seeing, hearing, and so forth. The stream of subconsciousness lasts throughout life, its origin being mental formations, as with rebirth-consciousness. Its duration, too, depends mainly on kamma. It may be likened to a stone thrown into the air. A stone will travel a long way if it is thrown forcefully, but it will not go very far if thrown feebly. The force of kamma may also be compared to the initial velocity of a bullet or rocket. Death means the dissolution of the consciousness born of the same kammic force. So the initial rebirth-consciousness, the stream of subconsciousness, and the last consciousness of an existence comprise the mental life that is wholly rooted in past kamma.

The five kinds of sense-consciousness involved in seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching are also results of kamma. So too, are the consciousness that adverts to the sense-objects, investigating-consciousness (*santīraṇa*), and the consciousness that registers (*tadārammaṇa*) the objects of impulse moments (*javana*). These have their roots in kamma that leads to rebirth or other kinds of kamma.

The Abhidhamma attributes all kinds of consciousness, including functional-consciousness (*kiriya-citta*), to mental formations. This is reasonable since functional-consciousness evolves from the subconsciousness rooted in mental formations. However, Dependent Origination specifically describes the "three cycles" — defilements, kamma, and kammic results — with their cause-and-effect relationships. So, to mental formations it ascribes only the thirty-two types of mundane resultant consciousness that stem from the cycle of kamma. Of these, we have described nineteen that comprise rebirth-consciousness,

subconsciousness, and de cease-consciousness. Of the other types of consciousness, some are wholesome resultants and some are unwholesome resultants, depending on the mental formations.

In the doctrine of Dependent Origination, ignorance and mental formations are described as the causes in the past; consciousness, mind and matter, the six sense-bases, contact, and feeling as the effects in the present; craving, attachment, and becoming as the causes in the present; and birth, aging, and death as the effects that will occur in the future.

# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

## From Consciousness, Mind and Matter Arises

**C**ONSCIOUSNESS produces mind and matter. Therefore, with the arising of rebirth-consciousness, mind and matter also arise. Rebirth-consciousness is invariably coupled with feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), contact (*phassa*), volition (*cetanā*), attention (*manasikāra*), and other mental properties relating to the objects of deathbed visions. Every unit of consciousness is accompanied by these mental properties (*cetasikā*). The rebirths of some brahmās, devas, and human beings involve the three wholesome roots of generosity, goodwill, and wisdom. Some beings are reborn with just the two roots of generosity and goodwill, while the births of earthbound devas and human beings with defective organs lack any wholesome roots. However, their rebirth is still a favourable rootless-birth as distinct from the unfavourable rootless-birth of the denizens of the lower realms.

Rebirth may take one of three modes: rebirth from a mother, rebirth in putridity (*samsedaja*), or sudden rebirth of the fully developed physical body (*opapātika*). Rebirth from a mother is of two kinds: viviparous for human beings and other mammals, and oviparous for birds and reptiles. These living beings may differ in origin as they do in size and gestation or incubation period. We will leave it at that now, and go on with human rebirth as described in the commentaries.

With the arising of rebirth-consciousness, three kamma-originated material decads (*kammaja-rūpakalāpa*), or thirty material phenomena occur [simultaneously](#).<sup>1</sup> These are material phenomena that originate from kamma: the body-decad, the sex-decad, and the heart-base decad. Ten material phenomena: solidity, fluidity, heat, motion, colour, smell, taste, nutriment, vitality, and body-sensitivity form the body-decad. The first nine material phenomena with the material quality of sex form the sex-decad. "Material quality of sex" means either of two germinal material phenomena, one for masculinity and the other for femininity. With the maturation of these material phenomena the sexual characteristics of men and women become manifest, as is evident with those who have undergone sex changes.

In the time of the Buddha, Soreyya, the son of a merchant, instantly became a woman for having unwholesome thoughts about [Venerable Mahākaccāyana](#).<sup>2</sup> All his masculine features disappeared and gave way to those of a woman. Soreyya even married and gave birth to two children. It was only when he begged for forgiveness from the elder that he again became a man. Later, he joined the Sangha and became an arahant. It is comparable to the case of a man who develops rabies after having been bitten by a rabid dog.

A person who is neither a male nor a female has no sex decad. He has only a body decad and heart-base decad (*vatthu-rūpa*). The heart-base is the physical basis of all types of consciousness except for the fivefold sense-consciousness. So at the moment of conception the physical basis for rebirth-consciousness already exists. The three decads, or thirty material phenomena, form the embryo (*kalala*), which, according to ancient Buddhist books, marks the beginning of life.

This embryonic materiality is the size of a tiny drop of butter-oil scum on a fine woollen thread. It is so small that it is invisible to the naked eye. We should assume that it arises from the fusion of the semen (*sukka*) and the [ovum](#)<sup>3</sup> (*sonita*) of the parents. If we reject this view, explaining the child's physical resemblance to its parents will be difficult. It is also said in the Sutta Pitaka that the physical body is the product of the four primary elements and the parent's gametes. Moreover, the Suttas specify three conditions necessary for conception: the parents' intercourse, the mother's season, and the existence of a kammic cause to produce an embryo. Thus, according to the scriptures, the embryo clearly has its origin in the fusion of the parents' semen and ovum.

The semen and ovum dissociated from the parents are temperature-originated materiality but it is quite possible for this to assimilate kamma-originated materiality. Surgeons cut out scar tissue from the human body and replace it with healthy tissue. The graft is temperature-originated materiality when first grafted but, as it becomes integrated with the natural tissues, body-sensitivity or kamma-originated materiality appears. Cases can also be cited of transplanting a heart, a liver, a kidney, or a cornea in place of diseased organs. No doubt these transplants develop kamma-originated materiality as body-sensitivity. Likewise, we should assume that the three kamma-originated material phenomena are fused with temperature-originated materiality from the parents.

According to biologists, it is the fusion of the mother's ovum and the father's spermatozoa that gradually develops and becomes a child. The original embryo is so small that it cannot be seen with the naked eye. So modern science agrees well with what the Buddhist books say about conception. Without the help of a microscope or other instruments, the Buddha knew how life begins as an embryo based on the parents' semen and ovum. This was the Buddha's teaching 2,500 years ago though it was only during the last 300 years that Western scientists discovered the facts about conception after prolonged investigation with microscopes. Their discoveries bear testimony to the Buddha's infinite intelligence. However, they are still unable to reveal the genesis of thirty material phenomena, probably because the extremely subtle kamma-originated material phenomena defy microscopic investigation.

Thus the mental states and kamma-originated materiality are born of rebirth-consciousness. Kamma-originated material phenomena are renewed at every thought-moment. Likewise, temperature-originated material phenomena are renewed every moment due to heat. From the arising of the first moment of subconsciousness, consciousness-originated material phenomena also occur, but bare sense-consciousness cannot cause materiality. So consciousness-originated materiality does not arise when bare sense-consciousness arises. However, with the arising of rebirth-consciousness, all other kinds of consciousness develop in due course. After a week, the embryo (*kalala*) becomes turbid froth (*abbuda*), which turns into a lump of flesh (*pesi*) after the second week. This hardens into ghana in the third week, and in the fifth week the *pasākha* develops with four knobs for hands and legs, and one big knob for the head.

The Buddhist books do not describe in detail the development after the fifth week. However, they do say that after eleven weeks the four sensitive bases for seeing, hearing, smelling, and tasting appear. So too, does nutriment-originated materiality — the product of the nutriment in the mother's body. It is also said that the embryo has toenails, fingernails, etc. The books do not go into further details as meditators do not need to know them. Such knowledge is beneficial only to doctors.

## Spontaneous Rebirth

For beings like the Cātumahārājā Devas, when rebirth takes place, seven decads arise: the decads of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, sex, and heart-base. Decads of the same kind are innumerable according to the size of the deva's eyes, ears, etc. The decads for nose, tongue, body, and sex are not found in the three first jhānic realms, the three second jhānic realms, the three third jhānic realms, or in the Vehapphala and Suddhāvāsa realms. There the three decads for eye, ear, and heart-base, and one nonad — a total of four different material groups or thirty-nine material phenomena — arise simultaneously with rebirth-consciousness. Of these four material groups, the vitality nonad takes on the function of the body decad. A brahmā's body is pervaded by vitality nonads, as a deva's body is by body decads. Asaññasattā Brahmās have no consciousness from the moment of rebirth. They have only vitality nonads that assume Brahmanic form. Lacking consciousness and consciousness-born materiality, such a brahmā knows nothing and makes no movement; he is like a wooden statue. More remarkable than these brahmās are the formless brahmās who live for thousands of world-cycles through the successive renewal of mind and its elements.

These accounts do not admit of scientific investigation and are known only to the Buddha and recluses with psychic powers. The denizens of hell and the hungry ghosts who are forever burning and starving are not conceived in wombs, nor can they arise from putrid matter. Because of their unwholesome kamma, they come into being by materialisation. Like the devas, they develop seven decads or seventy material phenomena simultaneously. They seldom have defective sense faculties since they are doomed to suffer through sense-contact with demonic objects.

## Samsedaja Beings

As the *samsedaja* beings are said to have their origin in putrid matter, they are likely to develop gradually. However, the Buddhist books refer to their full-fledged materialisation if they do not have defective sense faculties. We cannot say which is true, development or materialisation, as kamma-originated material phenomena cannot be examined scientifically. So, for the time being, it is better to accept the view as stated in the scriptures. The development of kamma-originated and other material phenomena in *samsedaja* and spontaneous rebirths is generally similar to that for rebirth in the womb. The only difference is that with the former beings, nutriment-born material phenomena arise from the time they eat food or swallow their saliva.

## Active-Consciousness

Active-consciousness (*vīthi-citta*) differs from sub-consciousness. Subconsciousness resembles rebirth-consciousness with respect to objects and process. It is the stream of consciousness that follows rebirth-consciousness having its root in kamma. One of three objects forms its focus: *kamma*, *kammanimitta* or *gatinimitta* of the previous existence. It is not concerned with the objects in the present life, but is the kind of mental state that we have when we are sound asleep. However, certain changes occur when we see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think, and these are called active-consciousness.

Suppose that a visual form is reflected on the retina. Material phenomena, each lasting only seventeen thought-moments, are renewed ceaselessly with the visual objects and their mental images. A group of sensitive eye material phenomena and a visual object occur simultaneously. However, a material phenomenon is not powerful at the moment of arising, so during the moment of subconsciousness, contact between the eye and its object does not occur. In other words, the visual object is not reflected on the eye. The subconsciousness that passes away before such reflection is called past subconsciousness (*atītabhavanga*). Then another bhavanga arises and reflection occurs. As a result, subconsciousness is disrupted, its attention to its usual object wanes and it begins to consider the visual object. This is called vibrating subconsciousness (*bhavangacalana*). Then arresting subconsciousness (*bhavangupaccheda*) takes place, cutting off the stream of subconsciousness. The mind then becomes curious about the visual form impinging on the eye. This inquiring mind is called adverting-consciousness (*āvajjana*). This consciousness can advert to a sense object impinging on any of the five sense-organs. Visual-consciousness follows, then receiving-consciousness (*sampaticchana*), which receives and examines the visual object.

### Vīthi Citta

- Atītabhavaṅga
- Bhavaṅgacalana
- Bhavaṅgupaccheda
- Āvajjana
- Cakkhuvīññāṇa
- Sampaticchana
- Santirāṇa
- Voṭṭhabbana
- Javana
- Javana
- Javana
- Javana
- Javana
- Javana
- Javana
- Javana
- Tadārammaṇa
- Tadārammaṇa

Bhavangais the resultant consciousness that stems from mental formations, as are visual-consciousness and the receiving-consciousness. They are called resultant consciousness (*vipāka-citta*), which is of two kinds, wholesome and unwholesome, depending on the mental formations associated with it. On the other hand, adverting-consciousness is neither wholesome nor unwholesome, nor is it a resultant consciousness. It is termed functional-

consciousness (*kiriya-citta*), which means action without any kammic effect, the kind of consciousness that is usually attributed to arahants.

After the mind has received the visual object, it probes its quality, whether it is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, which is investigating-consciousness (*santirana*). Then decision (*vothabbana*) follows that determines that the object is pleasant, etc. This leads to seven moments of impulsion (*javana*), which follow each other in rapid succession. Impulsion occurs very quickly. It has speed and impetus that are absent in other factors of the process of consciousness. Impulsion is associated with powerful mental properties, which may be wholesome or unwholesome, such as greed or generosity, so it is not surprising that unwholesome minds rush towards their objects. Greed urges us to pursue the desired object and to seize it by force. Anger impels us to attack and destroy its object blindly. Doubt, restlessness, and ignorance, too, speedily associate themselves with their respective objects. The same may be said of wholesome mental properties. Because of their frantic and impulsive nature, sensual desires are also called *kāmajavana*. After the seven impulse moments, two registering moments (*tadārammana*) follow. This consciousness "registers" the object of impulsion and thus its function is to fulfil the lingering desire of its predecessor.

In the process of consciousness, visual-consciousness is dependent on eye-sensitivity that arises with atītabhavanga. Other types of consciousness are dependent on the heart-base (*hadaya-vatthu*) that arises with them. The fourteen types of consciousness from adverting to the second registering-consciousness are focused only on present objects. So these fourteen are active and differ from subconsciousness. After the cessation of the second registering-consciousness, which marks the end of the process of consciousness, the mental life reverts to the subconscious state that is analogous to sleep.

An analogy may help to explain the process of consciousness. A man is sleeping under a mango tree. A mango falls and he wakes up. Picking up the fruit, the man examines it. He smells it and, knowing that it is ripe, he eats it. Then he thinks about its taste and falls asleep again. Here, the subconsciousness with kamma, kammanimitta or gatinimitta as object is like the state of being asleep. Waking up due to the fall of the mango is like the rising and passing away of subconsciousness. Picking up the fruit is adverting. Seeing the visual object is like seeing the fruit. Investigation is like the man examining the fruit. To conclude that the fruit is ripe is decision. Impulsion is like eating the fruit, and registering is like thinking about its taste. Reverting to subconsciousness is like falling asleep again.

If the visible object is not clear, it appears on the eye-organ after atītabhavanga has arisen two or three times. For such objects, the active conscious process does not last until registration but ends in impulsion, after which it reverts to subconsciousness.

If the visible object is still weaker, it is reflected only after atītabhavanga has arisen from five to nine times. The process of consciousness does not reach impulsion, but ends after two or three moments of decision. In the practice of insight meditation, the process of consciousness that thus ends in decision is of great significance. One who practises constant mindfulness does not seek or attend to defiling sense-objects. So reflection is slow, adverting is weak, visual-consciousness is not clear, reception is not proper, inquiry is not effective, and decision is indefinite. So after inquiring two or three times the mind relapses into subconsciousness. The object is not clear enough to defile the mind and one becomes aware of the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and insubstantiality of the phenomena. Just bare awareness of seeing occurs, and so the process of consciousness is wholly free from defilements.

The process of consciousness that we have outlined above for the eye applies similarly to the ear, nose, tongue, and body.



## Active-Consciousness of the Mind-door

The mind-door process of consciousness is of three kinds according to the impulsion involved: kammajavana, *jhānajavana* or *maggaphalajavana*. Here, what matters is the process of consciousness with kammic impulsion. While the stream of subconsciousness is flowing, mental images of familiar sense-objects appear, or sometimes unfamiliar sense-objects. Then subconsciousness is disturbed and the next time it is cut off. This is followed by mind-door advertizing (*mano-dvārāvajjana*), which is similar to decision (*voṭṭhabbana*) in the five sense-door process. Like decision, advertizing leads to impulsion, producing agreeable or disagreeable emotions: fear, anger, confusion, devotion, awe, pity, and so forth. The impulsions arising at the five sense-doors are weak, so they neither lead to rebirth nor produce much other effect. However, the impulsions in the mind-door are potent enough to determine the quality of rebirth and all other kammic results. So it is imperative to guard against these impulses and control them. After seven impulse moments, followed by two moments of registering, the mind sinks into subconsciousness.

## Manodvāravīthi

- [illegible]

Thus the mind-door process of consciousness involves one moment of advertent, seven moments of impulsion and two moments of registering. With dim and indistinct objects, the mind skips registration, reverting to subconsciousness immediately after impulsion. If the object is very weak, the mind does not attain even impulsion but lapses back to subconsciousness after two or three moments of advertent. This is obvious if we bear in mind the way that we have to focus on mind-objects during insight practice. The only resultant consciousness in this mind-door process is registering; the other two are functional, and do not stem from mental formations.

## Follow-Up Active-Consciousness

The mind-door process may review sense-objects after the sense-door active-consciousness. Until this process occurs, the mind has only ultimate materiality (*paramattha-rūpa*) as its object. It is not concerned with concepts such as 'man' or 'woman', so one cannot be misled by appearances. One should try to contemplate immediately after seeing, hearing, etc. This is why we stress the immediate present as the meditator's focus of attention. If one is not mindful of this mind-door consciousness, another mind-door process arises concerning the sense-object. Then the sense-object becomes a specific object of attention as a shape. This process is vulnerable to strong unwholesome impulses. It is followed by another mind-door process where the attention is focused on notions such as 'man' or 'woman', making it more susceptible to unwholesome impulses.

With an unfamiliar object, the process of consciousness involves three stages: seeing, investigation and cognizance of the object in conventional terms. The process stops short of naming the object. The process of consciousness that arises concerning concepts involves hearing, investigation, and cognizance of the concept, and awareness of the relevant object.

## Consciousness and Mental Properties

Dependent on rebirth-consciousness, mental phenomena associated with it arise, such as feeling, remembering, perception or reflection, with three decads (or thirty material phenomena). After the cessation of rebirth-consciousness, mental properties (*cetasikā*) arise with every moment of consciousness. So do material phenomena conditioned by consciousness, kamma, temperature (*utu*), and nutriment (*āhāra*). There is no doubt about the close connection between consciousness and mental properties. When consciousness is active, we feel, remember or think, and so greed, anger, faith, and so forth arise. Equally obvious are the physical phenomena that stem from consciousness when we stand, sit, go

or do anything that we wish to do. According to the commentary, this obvious fact is the basis for inferring that the rebirth-consciousness at conception leads to three decads or thirty material phenomena. The arising of rebirth-consciousness and material phenomena at conception takes place so fast that it is imperceptible even to the divine eye. The divine eye may see what happens shortly before death and after rebirth, but it is only the Buddha's omniscience that can see decess-consciousness and rebirth-consciousness directly. However, from what we know about the cause of physical phenomena, we can infer that at conception materiality arises from rebirth-consciousness.

Some physical phenomena have their origin not in consciousness but in kamma, temperature, or nutriment. However, without consciousness they will have no life. A corpse, although composed of temperature-originated material phenomena, is lifeless. It is because of the contribution of consciousness that the material phenomena based on kamma, temperature, and nutriment exist and form a continuous stream of life. Once death supervenes, cutting off the stream of consciousness, the mental properties and living material phenomena cease. Hence the teaching that mind and matter is conditioned by consciousness.

Because of mental formations (wholesome or unwholesome kamma) consciousness flows on without interruption in the new existence. Coupled with each unit of consciousness is mind and matter, which arises ceaselessly. The duration of mind and matter depends on consciousness. If the stream of consciousness lasts an hour, so does mind and matter. If consciousness flows for a hundred years, we say that the life of mind and matter is a hundred years. In brief, we should understand that life is only a ceaseless causal relationship of mind and matter with consciousness.

## Summary

Ignorance causes mental formations; because of ignorance of the Four Noble Truths people make an effort to be happy. They think that they will be happy if they get what they want. However, the objects of their desire are impermanent and so lead to suffering. Not knowing the truth of suffering, they think, speak, and do things for their well-being in both the present life and after death. These kammās lead to rebirth in lower or higher realms. Beginning with this rebirth-consciousness, a stream of consciousness flows continuously until death, its nature being determined by kamma. The physical body too is conditioned by kamma, as well as by consciousness, temperature, and nutriment.

That physical phenomena are conditioned by consciousness is obvious, for all our bodily and verbal actions, such as moving or speaking, are rooted in it. A meditator has to practise mindfulness based on these consciousness-originated material phenomena. Knowing them empirically is important, so the Buddha said in the Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta, "The bhikkhu knows that he walks when he walks and that he stands when he stands." According to the commentary, if we know experientially the dependence of consciousness-originated material phenomena on consciousness, we can know by inference the contribution of consciousness to material phenomena originated from kamma, temperature, and nutriment. Hence, the teaching of Dependent Origination, "Conditioned by consciousness, mind and matter arise."

One cannot know rebirth-consciousness empirically or, for that matter, any other past consciousness in its ultimate sense. One can only know the reality of consciousness as it is functioning right now, and one can know this only if one is always mindful. If one focuses on present consciousness, one comes to know mind and matter fairly well. For if one notes, "seeing, seeing" and knows visual-consciousness, one also knows the phenomena connected with it. Here, by 'visual-consciousness' we mean not only the visual-consciousness but the whole mental process of seeing. The meditator notes it as a whole and not piecemeal. Moreover, active-consciousness appears to the meditator as a single moment of consciousness. This way of introspection accords with the teaching in the Patisambhidāmagga that says, "The consciousness that focuses on materiality arises and

passes away. The meditator then contemplates the dissolution of the consciousness that has watched the dissolution of materiality." In other words, when a material phenomenon is manifest, consciousness watches it. Since that consciousness has attained insight of dissolution, after seeing impermanence in the material phenomenon, it too then dissolves. Thereupon the dissolving *vipassanā citta* itself becomes the object of contemplation. This *vipassanā citta* is not a simple citta. It is composed of at least advertent and seven impulse moments. However, these eight cittas cannot be watched individually, the whole process of consciousness must be the object of attention.

Here, visual-consciousness means the whole mental process of seeing, which includes wholesome or unwholesome impulses. So observing it leads to awareness of feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), contact (*phassa*), attention (*manasikāra*), volition (*cetanā*), and so forth. However, volition is more apparent with thinking. It comes into full play when we think of what we have to do the next day. It urges and agitates us, and its function is unmistakable. One who constantly watches the mental and physical process is aware of volition in action whenever speaking, or when moving any part of the body. For example, while practising mindfulness, if you feel an itch that you wish to get rid of, you note the urge to remove the itch. It is volition that urges you to scratch. Thus volition is manifested in your everyday action, speech, and thinking. In brief, if you know the visual-consciousness through contemplation, you know the mental aggregates born of it and the material phenomena of the whole body that form its basis. This accords with the teaching, "Dependent on consciousness mind and matter arise."

The same may be said of the other sense faculties. Awareness of consciousness means awareness of all the psychophysical phenomena connected with it. The awareness of contact is based on pleasant and unpleasant sensations when these sensations are manifest. It is based on contact when motion and rigidity are manifest. When you note the desire to bend the arm, you know the volition behind it. When you contemplate the consciousness that thinks, you know the mind and matter associated with it. If you find yourself committing something to memory, you know perception (*saññā*). If you notice your intention to do or say something, you become aware of volition (*cetanā*). On feeling your desire for something, you know that it is greed (*lobha*), and if you are irritated, you know that it is ill-will (*dosa*). Delusion (*moha*) can be known when you regard yourself as a permanent and happy individual. You know non-greed when you note the absence of desire. Your intention to do or say something is followed by action or speech. So through contemplation, you realise that consciousness is the cause of material phenomena in the body.

Consciousness and psychophysical phenomena are interdependent. Just as consciousness produces mind and matter, so too, mind and matter condition consciousness, for it is only through the collective support of mental properties with matter as the physical basis that consciousness arises.

The Mahāpadāna Sutta tells us how the bodhisatta reflected on Dependent Origination just before he attained enlightenment. He found that mind and matter, the six senses, contact, feeling, craving, attachment, and becoming were the links in the chain of causation leading to birth, aging, and death. Then it occurred to him that mind and matter are conditioned by consciousness and vice versa. The discourse ascribes this statement about the correlation between consciousness and mind and matter to Bodhisatta Vipassī. Nevertheless, we should understand that it is a fact discovered by all bodhisattas before they attain supreme enlightenment.

Although consciousness is interdependent with mind and matter, the former is the determining factor, so it is described as the cause of the latter. When consciousness arises because of mental formations, its concomitant mental properties and material phenomena arise simultaneously. So consciousness arises at the moment of rebirth, with mind and matter. Moreover, they include the six senses, contact, and feeling. However, since consciousness is the origin of mind and matter, which is the cause of the six senses and so forth, the Buddha says, "Consciousness conditions mind and matter," to distinguish

between cause and effect. Likewise, a verse in the Dhammapada describes the mind (*mano*) as leading the mental properties:

**“Manopubbangamā dhammā manosetthā manomayā  
Manasā ce padutthena bhāsati vā karoti vā  
Tato nam dukkhamanveti cakkam ‘va vahato padam.”**

“Mind is the forerunner of all states. Mind is chief, and they are mind made. If one speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows, just as the wheels of a cart follow the ox that pulls it.” (Dhp v 1)

Consciousness and mental properties arise together, but consciousness is described as leading the mental properties because of its predominant role. If a man’s mind is corrupt, he does unwholesome deeds, utters foul words, and harbours immoral thoughts. These three kinds of kammās are mental formations born of ignorance. They become potential for unfavourable kammic effect. Every deed, speech or thought is accompanied by seven impulse moments that flash forth several times. If the first impulse moment is favourable, the kamma is productive in the present life; otherwise, it becomes sterile. If the seventh impulse moment is favourable, it produces deathbed visions and produces kammic effects in the next life; otherwise, it is sterile. As for the other five impulse moments, they produce kammic effects from the third existence until the last (the existence when nibbāna is to be attained) under favourable circumstances. They become sterile only after the attainment of nibbāna. Before the attainment of nibbāna, their potential remains intact for innumerable lifetimes, ready to bear fruit when circumstances permit. Unwholesome kamma bears fruit as mental and physical suffering in the lower realms. If by virtue of wholesome kamma, one is reborn in the human world, the unwholesome kamma will bring suffering, whatever one’s station in life.

## **The Story of Venerable Cakkhupāla**

The Dhammapada verse just referred to was uttered by the Buddha concerning Venerable Cakkhupāla. The elder had been a physician in one of his previous lives. He had cured a blind woman and restored her sight. The woman had promised to be his slave if she recovered her sight. However, to escape her promise she lied to him that she was worse off than before. Seeing her trick, the physician gave her an eye-lotion that destroyed her sight completely. For his malicious kamma the man suffered in many lives and in his last existence he became Venerable Cakkhupāla. He practised meditation as instructed by the Buddha with sixty other monks at a forest retreat. He never laid down while meditating. Due to his unwholesome kamma, he developed an eye-infection. He refused to lie down to apply the eye-lotion and so the doctor gave up treating him. Reminding himself of certain death, the elder redoubled his efforts. At midnight he simultaneously became blind and attained arahantship.

To an ordinary person, the elder’s blindness may seem to have been caused by his over-exertion. The main reason, however, was the malicious deed he had committed in his previous life as a doctor. Even if he had not practised meditation, he might have become blind somehow or other. The attainment of arahantship was an immense benefit that he gained from his fervent zeal and strenuous exertion.

We can learn two things from the story of Venerable Cakkhupāla. As an energetic monk, he continued to practise meditation after he became an arahant. As he paced up and down, the insects in his path were trampled to death. When the Buddha was told of this, he said that the elder had no intention of killing the insects, so he was free from any moral responsibility for their death.

So we should note that causing death without volition is not a kammic act. The bodies of arahants have weight if they have no psychic power or if, despite having psychic power, they do not exercise it. Some Buddhists have scruples about their moral purity when they

cook vegetables or drink water containing microbes. They should, of course, remove living beings that they can see, but they need have no qualms about the accidental destruction of life. Some Jains are said to feel guilty over the death of insects that rush against a burning lamp. This is an extreme view. Volition as the keystone of moral problems is borne out by Venerable Moggaliputtatissa's verdict in his reply to King Asoka.

## The Elder's Verdict

When King Asoka supported the Buddhadhamma lavishly, heretics joined the Sangha for the sake of material benefits. The bhikkhus refused to have anything to do with the bogus monks, so for seven years the Pātimokkha recital fell into abeyance at the Asokārāma monastery in Pātaliputta. So King Asoka sent a minister to request the bhikkhus to perform the Pātimokkha, but they refused to comply. They said that the Pātimokkha was to be recited only in an assembly of pure bhikkhus. If there happened to be a morally impure monk in the assembly, he had to be admonished and penalised for any infraction of Vinaya rules. The Sangha held the recital only when there was reason to believe in the purity of every member. They did not hold it with non-bhikkhus, since to do so would be a serious offence. The minister took this reply to be in defiance of the king's order and so put the virtuous monks to the sword. Venerable Tissa, the king's younger brother, escaped death only because the minister recognized him just in time.

On hearing the news, the king was deeply shocked and asked Venerable Moggaliputtatissa whether he was personally responsible for the death of the bhikkhus. The elder asked the king whether he had intended to have the monks killed. When the king replied that he had no such intention, the elder said that he was free from kammic responsibility. The elder gave this verdict based on the Buddha's saying, "*Cetanāham bhikkhave kammam vadāmi* — it is volition, monks, that I call kamma." He also cited the Tittira Jātaka in which the bodhisatta, who was then a rishi, emphasised the primacy of volition in the operation of kamma.

The story of Venerable Cakkhupāla also shows that an arahant has body-weight like ordinary people. This is evident in the death of insects trampled by the elder. In recent years there have been some reputed arahants in Burma. Some women reportedly tested their purity by having flowers on their hands trodden by their feet. It is said that the flowers were not crushed and their hands not hurt. However, arahants who do not have (or exercise) psychic power cannot avoid crushing something if they tread directly on it. A more reliable test is to check whether a person has craving, attachment, anger, depression, fear, anxiety, restlessness, the tendency to speak ill of others, the habit of laughing loudly or is irreverent towards the Buddha. One who has such defects is not an arahant. If a thorough inquiry does not reveal any such weaknesses, one may assume that the person is close to arahantship.

## Pure Thought and Happiness

Just as an impure thought is followed by suffering, a pure thought is followed by happiness. Those who think, speak, and act with pure thoughts cultivate wholesome kamma. Wholesome kamma invariably leads to happiness in the present life and after death. This was emphasised by the Buddha in the story of Matthakundali, the son of a miserly brahmin. When he became severely ill, his father left him to his fate as he did not want to spend any money for medical treatment. He moved his dying son outside the house to prevent those who came to ask about the patient from seeing his possessions.

The Buddha saw the dying boy with his divine eye and knew it would benefit many people if the boy saw him before his death. So, walking for alms with other bhikkhus, the Lord passed the brahmin's house. At the sight of the Lord the boy was filled with devotion. Shortly afterwards he died and was reborn in Tāvātimsa heaven. Reviewing his past, he realised how his devotion to the Buddha had led him to the celestial realm. He also saw his father mourning in the cemetery. As he wished to teach his father a lesson, he came to the

cemetery in the guise of a boy resembling Matthakundali, and started crying. Questioned by the old brahmin, he said that he needed a pair of wheels made from the sun and the moon for his golden chariot. When the brahmin pointed out the futility of his desire, the boy replied that the sun and moon were at least visible, whereas the brahmin was longing for his dead son who could not be seen. He asked who was more foolish, he or the brahmin. This brought the brahmin to his senses. The deva revealed his identity and told him how adoration of the Buddha on his deathbed had benefited him. He urged his father to seek refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha and to observe the five precepts.

The brahmin invited the Buddha and the bhikkhus to his house for the morning meal. Believers and nonbelievers alike were present at the feast. After the feast, the brahmin asked the Lord whether anybody had attained the celestial realm just through devotion to the Buddha. The Lord replied that many people had done so. Matthakundali Deva then appeared and told the Lord how his devotion to the Buddha had led to rebirth in heaven. The people were deeply impressed by the power of faith in the Buddha that had so greatly benefited the young man, although he did not care much for good deeds before his death. Then the Buddha uttered the second verse of the Dhammapada:

**“Manopubbangamā                      dhammā                      manosetthā                      manomayā**  
**Manasā                      ce                      pasannena                      bhāsati                      vā                      karoti                      vā**  
**Tato nam sukhamanveti chāyā ‘va anapāyini.”**

“Mind is the forerunner of all states. Mind is chief, and they are mind made. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows, just like one’s own shadow that never leaves.”

The commentary says that after hearing the verse the brahmin and the deva attained stream-winning. It is noteworthy that the mere thought of the Buddha led to the young man’s rebirth in the celestial realm. He did not seem to have any particular aspiration for nibbāna. His two-root rebirth as a deva was lacking the root condition of wisdom, yet by hearing a verse he became a stream-winner. These two verses from the Dhammapada echo the teaching of Dependent Origination that consciousness is conditioned by mental formations. For the verses say that happiness and misery arise from mental formations. In fact, happiness or misery accompany consciousness. Again, the presence of consciousness implies the existence of associated mental properties and its physical basis of materiality. Hence, the teaching that consciousness conditions mind and matter.

## Notes

1. The following section, which deals with the minute analysis of matter, abounds with technical terms. **Kalāpa** = material groups of ten (decad) or of nine material qualities (nonad). **Rūpas** = material phenomena. **Bhāva** = sex. **Kāya** = body. **Vatthu** = heart-base. **Kammaja** = kamma-originated. Similarly, **cittaja** = consciousness-originated, **utuja** = temperature-originated, **āhāraja** = nutriment-originated. (Editor’s note).
2. On going for his bath, Soreyya saw the Elder Mahākaccāyana adjusting his robes. Seeing the golden complexion of the elder’s body, Soreyya thought, “How I wish the elder were my wife, or my wife’s complexion was like his.” (Editor’s note. See Dhammapada commentary to verse 43).
3. Lit. ‘blood’, but ‘ovum’ is more accurate. (Editor’s note)



# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

## From Mind and Matter, the Six Sense-Bases Arise

**M**IND AND MATTER conditions the six senses. Here, mind means the [three aggregates of mental properties](#)<sup>1</sup> while matter refers to the four primary elements, the six sense-bases, vitality, and nutriment.

Dependent upon mind and matter the six sense-bases arise: eye-, ear-, nose-, tongue-, body-, and mind-base. These sense-bases are the doors through which the processes of consciousness occur. In the immaterial realm, every unit of consciousness throughout life is born of associated mental properties. However, for most people this will remain academic knowledge as it can be understood empirically only by Noble Ones in the immaterial realm. Furthermore, in any existence such as a human life, which comprises both mentality and materiality, every resultant consciousness from the moment of conception arises conditioned by its associated mental properties. Resultant consciousness here means the kind of consciousness that simply sees, hears, etc., the pleasant or unpleasant objects.

Visual-consciousness, for example, cannot arise by itself, for it presupposes attention, which considers the object; contact, which impacts on the object; and volition, which strives to see the object. Consciousness can arise only when these mental properties arise concurrently. This rule of conascence condition is called 'sahajāta-paccaya'. A load that can be raised by four men working together cannot be moved by the foreman on his own. Similarly, although consciousness is the basis of mental life, it counts for little by itself and can function only in association with other mental properties.

Moreover, these associated mental properties contribute to the five senses by conascence at rebirth. Of course, immediately before conception, only materiality exists. However, in the case of spontaneous rebirth, the five senses may exist from the very beginning. The conditioning of the sense-bases by consciousness and mental properties at conception is difficult to understand. Nevertheless, we have to accept it on the authority of the Buddha. At other times, resultant and non-resultant consciousness helps to maintain the six senses. This is understandable since, without mind, it is impossible for matter to exist.

## Materiality and Sense-bases

Rebirth-consciousness arises from the heart-base. The mind sense depends on the other five senses. Thought and consciousness also have the heart as their physical basis. All the secondary physical phenomena, such as the eye and visual objects, depend on the four primary elements. The five sensitive material bases are rooted in the primary elements and their kamma-originated material phenomena are rooted in vitality. The five senses also depend on nutriment. To sum up, consciousness is conditioned by at least three mental properties: attention, contact, and volition. Unwholesome states like greed, craving, anger, illusion, pride, doubt, restlessness, worry, envy, ill-will, anxiety, fear, and so forth arise repeatedly when the supporting conditions are present. Similarly, faith, piety, moral sense, non-attachment, compassion, sympathetic joy, appreciation of the law of kamma, reflection on the three characteristics, and other wholesome mental states occur when conditions are more favourable. Thus the meditator realises the dependence of consciousness on wholesome or unwholesome mental properties, the visual-consciousness on the eye. So the mind base (*manāyatana*) is clearly dependent on mind and matter.

The mind is also vital to the existence of living matter. So the five senses that produce sense-organs are dependent on the mind. The sense-organs cannot exist without their gross physical bases just as the reflecting mirror cannot exist without the gross matter of glass. So the eye presupposes the gross matter of solidity (*pathavī*), cohesion (*āpo*), heat (*tejo*), and motion (*vāyo*). In brief, the ability to see depends on the physical eye. The same may be said of the other sense faculties. Furthermore, we can maintain life only

because of vitality and nutriment. This shows how the five senses originate with mind and matter. The sixth sense, the mind, comprising thought, reflection, volition, and so forth, depends on various mental states such as greed or faith. It also depends on contact and the heart base. It arises from its root, subconsciousness, which in turn forms the basis for the mind-door process of consciousness.

## All Phenomena are the Effects of Causes

Seeing involves the sensitive eye-organ and consciousness. The eye-organ depends on consciousness, life-force, nutriment, and physical base. Visual-consciousness depends on the eye-organ and the three mental properties of attention, mental formations, and contact. In short, the eye and visual-consciousness depend on mind and matter and the same may be said of the other five senses. A thorough knowledge of the origin of the six senses based on mind and matter is possible only for bodhisattas. Among the Buddha's disciples, even Venerables Sāriputta and Moggallāna did not seem to understand it comprehensively before they attained stream-winning. For it is said that the ascetic Upatissa (later known as Venerable Sāriputta) attained the first stage of the Noble Path on hearing the verse uttered by Venerable Assaji:

**"Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā, tesam hetum tathāgato āha  
Tesañca yo nirodho, evam vādī mahāsamano." (Vin i 40)**

This verse says, "All phenomena are the effects of certain other phenomena, which are the causes. The Buddha pointed out these causes, and the cessation of the effects with the cessation of the causes." Upatissa and his friend Kolita (later known as Venerable Moggallāna) are said to have attained stream-winning after hearing this verse. Nevertheless, they could not have reflected deeply on Dependent Origination in such a short time. One may understand the Buddha's teaching on the doctrine according to one's intellect, but to grasp it fully is possible only for a Buddha. The commentary explains the verse in terms of the Four Noble Truths. "All phenomena are the effects" refers to the truth of suffering. The "cause" (*hetu*) refers to craving as the cause of suffering (*samudayasacca*). So the verse epitomises the truth about suffering and its cause.

In those days there were many views about the soul (*attā*): that it was immortal and passed on to another realm after death, that it was annihilated after the dissolution of the body, that it was created by God, that it was infinite, and so forth. The verse recognizes only the existence of cause and effect, and denies both the immortality and the annihilation of the soul. This teaching afforded the two ascetics a special insight into the nature of life.

The Visuddhimagga Mahātīkā identifies this verse with the teaching on Dependent Origination. It refers to a discourse in the Samyuttanikāya which says, "If this cause arises, then that effect follows. If this cause ceases, then that effect also ends. Ignorance causes mental formations, etc., so there is suffering. With the cessation of ignorance there follows the cessation of mental formations and so on until suffering becomes extinct." According to the Mahātīkā, the substance of this teaching is implicit in the above verse regarding both the arising and cessation of suffering. The Mahāyāna Pitaka describes this verse as a summary of Dependent Origination. Any writing of the verse is said to be beneficial if it is enshrined in a *cetiya* (pagoda). So it is not surprising that many such inscriptions are found in ancient pagodas. Both views in the commentary and the Mahātīkā are plausible, for the first two noble truths imply Dependent Origination with respect to the arising of suffering and its cause. The other two noble truths imply the doctrine with respect to the cessation of suffering.

The causes and effects in the chain of causation may be summarised thus: ignorance in a past life leads to acts, speech, and thoughts, and these mental formations produce consciousness. The five effects in the present life are consciousness, mind and matter, the six senses, contact, and feeling. These effects become causes, sowing the seeds for a

future life and so for craving, attachment, becoming, and birth. As a result there is aging, death, grief, and suffering in store for the future life.

That Dependent Origination is profound is borne out by the Buddha's reply to Venerable Ānanda. Venerable Ānanda reflected on the doctrine from the beginning to the end, and vice versa. To him it was clear, and it presented no difficulty. He approached the Buddha and said, "Lord, this Dependent Origination is very profound, but for me it seems so easy to understand." The Buddha chided him, saying, "You should not say that, Ānanda." According to the commentary, the Buddha's words imply a compliment as well as a reproach to Venerable Ānanda. The Buddha meant to say in effect, "Ānanda, you are highly intelligent, so understanding the doctrine is easy for you, but do not think that it may be so clear to others." Venerable Ānanda's ability to understand the doctrine was due to four factors: the perfections that he had developed in his previous lives, the instructions of his teachers, his wide knowledge, and his attainment of the first stage on the Noble Path.

In a previous life, Venerable Ānanda was Prince Sumana, the brother of Padumuttara Buddha. As a provincial governor, he successfully subdued an uprising. The king was very pleased and invited him to ask for anything he wished. Prince Sumana asked for permission to serve the Buddha for the three months of the rainy season. The king did not wish to grant this boon and so he said evasively that it was difficult to know the Buddha's intention. He could not do anything if the Lord was reluctant to go to the prince's palace. On the advice of the bhikkhus, the prince requested an elder, also named Sumana, to arrange for an interview with the Buddha. When Prince Sumana met the Buddha, he told the Lord how Venerable Sumana had done a thing that was beyond the power of other bhikkhus. He asked what kind of meritorious deeds a man should do to be so intimate with the Lord. The Buddha said that one could become like Venerable Sumana by practising generosity and morality. Prince Sumana asked the Lord to spend the rainy season in his city as he wished to do meritorious deeds, aspiring to become a privileged elder like Venerable Sumana in the Sangha of a future Buddha. Seeing that his visit there might be of benefit to many, the Buddha said, "Sumana, the Buddha loves solitude", which implied acceptance of the invitation.

The prince then ordered more than a hundred monasteries to be built along the route, where the Buddha and the Sangha might rest comfortably at night. He bought a park and turned it into a magnificent monastery with dwellings for the Buddha and many monks. When all was ready, he sent word to his father and invited the Buddha to come to his city. The prince and his people welcomed the Buddha and his disciples. Honouring them with flowers and scents, they led them to the monastery. There the prince formally donated the monastery and the park to the Buddha. After performing this act of charity, the prince summoned his wives and ministers and said, "The Buddha has come here out of compassion for us. The Buddhas do not care for material well-being. They care only for the practice of the Dhamma. I wish to honour the Buddha with practice so that he may be well pleased. I will observe the ten precepts and stay at the residence of the Buddha. You must feed and serve all the arahants every day during the rains-retreat as I have done today."

## **The Buddha's High Regard for Practice**

Incidentally, there is a story showing the importance that the Buddha attached to the practice of the Dhamma. Once, the Buddha left the Jetavana monastery to go on tour. King Kosala, the merchant Anāthapindika and other lay disciples requested the Buddha not to go, but in vain. The merchant was unhappy because he had lost the opportunity to hear the Dhamma or to make offerings to the Lord and the bhikkhus. His slave-girl, Punnā by name, said that she would ask the Buddha to come back. The merchant promised to free her if she could persuade the Buddha to return to the monastery. So, Punnā followed the Buddha quickly and implored the Lord to return. The Buddha asked her what she would do. She replied that she had nothing to offer, but that she would take the three refuges and observe the five precepts if the Lord spent the rainy-season in Sāvattthi. Saying, "Sādhu", the Buddha blessed her and returned to Jetavana Monastery. The news spread and the

merchant set Punnā free, adopting her as his daughter. She was now free to do what she liked and to shape her own destiny. So, by virtue of her kammic potential, she joined the Sangha. She practised meditation, and when she had developed insight into impermanence, the Buddha exhorted her, "My daughter, just as the moon is full on the fifteenth day, so too you should practise insight to the end. When your insight is complete, you will attain the end of suffering."

After hearing this exhortation, Sister Punnā became an arahant. Of course, the Buddha had foreseen Punnā's destiny. It was his concern for her spiritual development that prompted him to cancel the projected tour and turn back in response to her appeal. This is an example of the high regard for the practice of Dhamma that Gotama Buddha had in common with other Buddhas.

So (to return to the story of Venerable Ānanda's past life) Prince Sumana observed the ten precepts and dwelt at the residence of the Buddha. He spent his time near Venerable Sumana and closely watched him serving the Buddha. Shortly before the end of the rainy season, he returned home and donated lavishly to the Sangha. In his prayer to the Buddha, he affirmed his aspiration to become an intimate attendant of a future Buddha. The Buddha blessed him and the prince developed perfections for innumerable lifetimes. The Jātakas refer to many lives that Sumana devoted to perfecting himself in collaboration with the bodhisatta. Sometimes the bodhisatta was king and he was the king's minister, or the bodhisatta was a human being and he happened to be a deva or Sakka. However, their positions were often reversed. In some Jātakas they were brothers. Thus they developed perfections in close parallel throughout innumerable lives. Finally, Ānanda (formerly Prince Sumana) was the nephew of King Suddhodana. After spending the first rainy season near Benares, the Buddha went to Rājagaha and from there he continued to Kapilavatthu at the invitation of his father. When he left his native place, Ānanda, Devadatta, and some other Sakyan princes followed the Buddha and joined the Sangha.

The perfections that Venerable Ānanda had cultivated through many lifetimes made it easy for him to understand the law of Dependent Origination, which baffled so many others. Moreover, Venerable Ānanda had received instructions from his teachers. He had not only lived with them, but had also studied and memorised the doctrine. This kind of learning helped him to understand Dependent Origination. He attained the first stage of the Noble Path after hearing the discourse of the noted teacher, Venerable Punna. Venerable Ānanda paid a high tribute to Venerable Punna for his illuminating discourse, the substance of which is as follows: "Self-conceit arises from attachment to the body, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. It cannot arise without the five aggregates any more than the reflection of a man's face can appear without a mirror. These five aggregates are not permanent. Since they are impermanent, you should meditate to realise that none of them, whether past, present or future, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, distant or near, is yours, yourself or your soul. The well-informed disciple of the Buddha who contemplates thus and realises the truth is disillusioned with the five aggregates. He becomes detached and free. He knows that his mind is free, that he has done what has to be done, that he has nothing else to do for his freedom."

This was what Venerable Punna taught Venerable Ānanda. As a stream-winner, Venerable Ānanda realised the cause-and-effect relationships of Dependent Origination. He had this insight when he practised meditation, so he knew that ignorance, craving, attachment, becoming, birth, consciousness, and so forth, form the links in the chain of causation. Here, illusion or ignorance is *avijjā*, craving is *tanhā*, attachment is *upādāna*, becoming is *kammabhava*. So when it is said that kamma leads to rebirth, we should understand that rebirth is also conditioned by attachment, etc. The past involves ignorance, mental formations, craving, attachment, and becoming as causes. One who realises this through contemplation is free from all doubts, which cannot be removed merely through learning and reflection.

As the best-informed disciple of the Buddha, Venerable Ānanda also gained the recognition of the Teacher in matters of knowledge. He usually accompanied the Buddha on tour and

memorised all the discourses. He could repeat a discourse verbatim after he had heard it only once. As for the Buddha's talks given in his absence, he heard these from others and memorised them too. The suttas that he had thus learnt by heart are said to number eighty-four thousand.

Venerable Ānanda was famous for his retentive memory. The commentary on the Mahāvedalla Sutta says that he could memorise hundreds of verses in a short time. With his wide knowledge of the teachings of the Buddha, it is no wonder that the doctrine of Dependent Origination did not present much difficulty to him. Even today, given a thorough knowledge of the Tipitaka, a man may understand the cause-and-effect relationship in the doctrine.

## **The Abstruseness of the Doctrine**

Nevertheless, the doctrine is abstruse in terms of effects, causes, teaching, and empirical knowledge (*pativedha*). In the first place, understanding mental formations, etc., as the result of ignorance and other causes is very difficult. Most people mistake the suffering of mind and matter for happiness. It is ignorance not to know that happiness is an illusion. They believe that their egos think; they do not know mental formations as an effect of ignorance, but think that they themselves create them. So it is difficult for them to see wholesome or unwholesome deeds as the effects of ignorance. More difficult to understand is the causal relation between the mental formations of the previous life and the rebirth-consciousness of the present existence. Likewise, it is hard to understand that mind and matter, the six senses, etc., are conditioned by consciousness and so forth. Equally hard to grasp are the causes involved in Dependent Origination, for people believe that they shape their own destiny. Some say that they are created by God or Brahmā while others insist that everything happens by chance. Most of them do not see ignorance, etc., as the basis of their existence. Again, some teachings of the Buddha on the doctrine begin with ignorance and end with death. Some are set forth in reverse order. Some begin with the middle links in the chain and go back to the beginning or on to the end. These various versions of the doctrine add to the difficulty of understanding it. To gain an insight into the doctrine, one has to practise insight meditation and realise the complex causal relations empirically. This practical approach to the study of Dependent Origination is not easy, for the method must be right, and one must practise it steadfastly and thoroughly.

In spite of these difficulties, the doctrine seemed clear to Venerable Ānanda because of his unusual qualifications. So the Buddha's words, "Do not say this, Ānanda", may be an implicit compliment to him. However, according to the commentary, the Buddha's saying may be an indirect reproach. It may mean, in effect, "Ānanda, you say that Dependent Origination is easy to understand. Then why did you become a stream-winner only after hearing my teaching? Why have you not attained any stage higher than the first stage on the Path? You should think of your shortcomings: you are my disciple with average, limited intelligence and what you say does not agree with my words. It is a saying that should not have been uttered by a close disciple like you. I have had to develop intelligence for aeons to know this doctrine and so you should not speak lightly of it." Thus, after chiding Venerable Ānanda implicitly by a few words, the Buddha stressed the profundity of Dependent Origination. "This Dependent Origination is profound, Ānanda, and it appears profound. It is through not understanding and not penetrating this law that this world of living beings resembles a tangled ball of thread, or a bird's nest of sedge or reed. Thus they do not escape from the lower states of existence, from suffering, from the cycle of existence."

In other words, this law concerning the conditioning of consciousness, mind and matter, etc., by ignorance, mental formations and so forth, is very profound. So people do not know that only cause-and-effect relationships continue, and that there is no permanent being. They believe that a continuous being exists from the time of conception, that it is a person who develops and grows up. Some maintain that this person, being or soul has had many previous lives. All these illusions are due to ignorance of Dependent Origination.

A person's actions, speech, and thoughts are clearly due to ignorance of the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination. Undeniably, skilful acts bear sweet fruits, unskilful acts bear bitter fruits, and everyone fares according to their deeds. So ignorance leads to karmas or mental formations, which in turn lead to rebirth, consciousness, etc. This fact is clear to an intelligent person.

Because of their inability to understand Dependent Origination, living beings remain trapped, wandering endlessly from one existence to another. Mostly, they are reborn in the lower realms, gaining the celestial realms only occasionally by virtue of their wholesome karma. When the karmic effects run out, they revert to the lower realms, from where it is hard to regain human or celestial births. The attainment of the higher planes of existence is possible only when a dying being has memories of meritorious deeds. A virtuous act is unthinkable among the lower forms of life. The law of the jungle prevails in the animal kingdom, leaving no room for love, compassion or other spiritual values. They usually die stricken with pain and fear. So an animal is very likely to be born again in the lower realms.

Due to ignorance of Dependent Origination, a living being is unable to get free from the cycle of existence. No matter how long it goes round and round, an ox yoked to a mortar cannot leave the strictly limited area of its mobility. Likewise, the ignorant person is trapped in the cycle of existence, which largely means confinement to the lower realms. Thus they remain subject to existence for aeons.

Understanding Dependent Origination is as vital as realising the Four Noble Truths, and they amount to the same thing. Insight meditation aims to gain insight into these teachings, both intellectually and empirically, but they are profound. Even through meditation it is not easy to fully understand ignorance, mental formations, etc.

The Buddha reflected on Dependent Origination before, and shortly after, his attainment of supreme enlightenment. For seven days he was absorbed in the peace of liberation, then, on the seventh night, he contemplated Dependent Origination.

## Notes

Feelings, perceptions, and mental formations (Editor's Note)



# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

## From the Six Sense-Bases, Contact Arises

**H**AVING dealt with the first links in the chain of causation, we will now deal with contact, which is conditioned by the six senses. *Salāyatana* means the six sense-organs and the six sense-objects: visual form, sound, smell, taste, tactile objects, and mind-objects. The contact between a sense organ and the corresponding sense-object is called *phassa*. It is a subtle component of mental life but it shows itself clearly when the object has an unmistakable impact on the mind. For example, we are shocked when we see someone being ill-treated. It makes us tremble when we see a man whose life is in danger at the top of a tree. Seeing a ghost will send shivers down the spine. Seeing a thought-provoking film, or reading a moving story, often leaves a lasting impression.

These examples all illustrate the nature of contact. The impact is occasionally very violent, producing outbursts of passion or anger. The commentary on the *Anguttaranikāya* says that in the time of the King *Dutthagāmanī*, a young monk and a young woman happened to look at each other. Both of them were so consumed with desire that they died. Again, an elderly monk became insane after looking unmindfully at the queen of King *Mahānāga*.

In the *Mudulakkhana Jātaka*, the bodhisatta was a hermit who went to the king's palace to have his meal. He went there by air as he had psychic powers. When the hermit appeared suddenly, the queen rose to her feet in a hurry and her garment slipped. The queen's half-naked body instantly aroused the long-dormant sexual desire of the hermit. He could not eat any food. His psychic powers having vanished, he walked back to his hut and lay there, tormented by the fires of lust and passion. On learning what had happened, the king offered the queen to the hermit as he was confident of the hermit's ability to recover his composure in time. He instructed the queen to do her best for the welfare of the hermit. Taking the queen with him, the hermit left the king's palace. Once outside the gate, the queen told him to go back and ask the king for a house. The hermit was offered an old house but once there he had to fetch a hoe and a basket to dispose of excreta and filth. Repeatedly, he had to go and ask the king for other things that he needed. Going to and fro and doing all the household chores at the bidding of the queen, the hermit became exhausted. Nevertheless, he did not come to his senses as he was still dominated by lust and passion. Having done everything that he was told to do, he sat down near the queen to take a rest. Then she pulled his moustache with a jerk and said, "Are you not an ascetic whose object is to do away with passions and desires? Are you so much out of your senses?" This awakened the hermit to his folly. After returning the queen to the king, he went to the Himalayan forest, practised meditation, and recovered his psychic powers. On his death he attained the *brahmā* realm.

The moral is that even a person of high spiritual calibre like the bodhisatta could not escape the fires of defilements. The hermit might have casually seen the queen before but the impact was not violent enough to jolt his emotional life. It was the clear, vivid impression of the queen's figure that harassed and engulfed him with the fires of lust and passion for many days.

In the *Ummadantī Jātaka*, King *Sivi* became almost crazy after seeing *Ummadantī*. The woman was so famous for her beauty that the king sent his brahmin advisers to see whether she had the qualities of a noble lady. However, at the sight of the woman they were so bewitched by her beauty that they made fools of themselves at the feast given by their host. Disgusted by their behaviour, *Ummadantī* had them hustled out of the house. So, the disgruntled brahmins reported to the king that she was not qualified to be a queen. The king lost interest in her and thus she became the wife of the commander-in-chief. She was, however, determined to correct this injustice, so when the king toured the city during a festival she displayed her beauty and charms to the best of her ability. The king was beside himself with infatuation for the woman. Unable to sleep, he raved about her, giving vent to



his passion in a verse. This verse says that if he were granted a boon by the king of devas, he would ask for an opportunity to sleep one or two nights with Ummadanti.

The impact of a sense-object depends largely on the nature of the impression it makes. If the impression is vague, it produces only mild feeling and craving, but strong feelings follow in the wake of clear and vivid impressions. The impact may also lead to an outburst of temper. We feel aversion at the sight of an offensive object, and we fear a frightful object. Unpleasant words are irritating to us. Pride swells up in us when we think of something that boosts our self-esteem. We hold wrong views when we entertain the idea of soul, or believe a teaching that ridicules kamma and its fruit. Desirable objects belonging to others make us envious, and prized possessions that we do not wish to share with others make us mean. These are examples of contacts that fuel unwholesome kammās.

Wholesome kammās also arise from contact. Objects of devotion arouse faith; those whom we should forgive or tolerate help to foster forbearance. Contemplation of the Buddha or the arahants makes us mindful, kindly, and so forth. So the Patisambhidāmagga says, "Conditioned by contact, fifty mental formations arise." It attributes feeling, perception, and mental formations to contact.

We can see because of the contact that occurs dependent upon the eye, the visual object, and visual-consciousness. The Abhidhamma makes a distinction between visual-consciousness and the visual object. People usually confuse the former with the latter. However, the Buddha stated that visual-consciousness arises from the eye and the visual object. Thus the eye, the visual object, and consciousness form the necessary and sufficient conditions for visual contact.

The nature of contact is realised empirically by one who notes, "seeing, seeing" at every moment of seeing. As concentration develops, one realises that seeing is not uncaused, and that it is not made or created by a person. One realises that it is a psychophysical phenomenon, having the eye and the visual object as its cause, and visual-consciousness as its effect.

# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

## From Contact, Feeling Arises

**T**HE IMPACT on the sense-organs leads to feelings, which may be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral according to the nature of the sense-object. If the object is beautiful, pleasant feeling arises. If it is ugly, we have unpleasant feeling. The feeling is neutral if the object is ordinary. Neutral feeling does not cause any comment, whether favourable or unfavourable. It is not even recognized as a feeling, though it is accepted by the ego. In fact, feelings have nothing to do with the ego or self, but are aspects of the mental process stemming from sense-contact.

## Freedom from Doubt

Understanding the law of Dependent Origination means freedom from doubt and delusion. Since this freedom is an essential attribute of a stream-winner, understanding the doctrine is important. Ignorance of it fosters doubts about the Buddha, doubts about the Dhamma, and so forth. These doubts are of eight kinds.

1. Doubt about the Buddha: The sceptic raises such questions as, "Was the Buddha really free from all defilements, or was he just an ordinary man who commanded the blind faith of his followers?"
2. Doubt about the Teaching: "Do the Path and nibbāna really ensure the extinction of greed, hatred, and delusion?"
3. Doubt about the Sangha: "Are there any Noble Ones who are really free from defilements? Are there stream-winners who, having overcome illusion and doubt, will never be reborn in the lower realms? Are there once-returners, who do not have much sensual desire and anger? Are there non-returners, who are wholly free from sensual desire and anger? Are there arahants who have freed themselves from all defilements?"
4. Doubt about the practice: "Is the practice of morality or meditation beneficial and necessary for spiritual progress?"
5. Doubt about the past: "Did I exist in the past? Why and how did I exist in the past? What kind of person was I in my previous life?"
6. Doubt about the future: "Will I exist after my death? What kind of person will I become in my next life?"
7. Doubt about both the past and the future: According to the subcommentaries, this doubt refers to the present life. This interpretation agrees with a text from the Sutta Pitaka that says, "Now doubt regarding oneself in the present arises, such as, 'Am I really myself? Does the self exist or does it not exist? If the self exists, what kind of entity is it? Is it big or small? Why or how does the self exist? Was it created or did it come into being spontaneously? Where did the self come from and where will it go after the final dissolution of the body?'" One overcomes all these doubts and illusions about the self or personality on attaining purification by overcoming doubt (*kankhāvitarana-visuddhi*).
8. The last subject that raises much doubt is the doctrine of Dependent Origination, which emphasises the primacy of the cause-and-effect relationship in the world of living beings. Are mental formations really due to ignorance of the true Dhamma? Is rebirth really conditioned by kamma? Is unwholesome kamma harmful and wholesome kamma beneficial to a future life? Is there really a cause for every phenomenon? Is everything the outcome of the random combination of atoms and electrons? These doubts centre on causal links (ignorance, mental formations, etc.) and resultant links (consciousness, rebirth, etc.) in the causal sequence as described in the doctrine of Dependent Origination.

In the end, these doubts lead to wrong views that conflict with Dependent Origination. Speculations on the nature of life that are beyond one's intellectual abilities at first produce doubts and eventually turn the sceptic into one who clings to illusions. Scepticism and wrong views are due to ignorance of Dependent Origination. One who clearly understands the teaching, harbours no doubts, let alone illusions.

In the final analysis, a sentient being is a compound of causes and effects, as are insentient things like the earth, the sun or trees. The law of causation governs the universe, leaving no room for creation or spontaneous occurrence. Science offers compelling evidence for the total dependence of the inanimate world on the law of cause and effect. It confirms the Buddha's teaching about the conditionality of everything, whether life, mind, or matter.

The Buddha stressed the conditioned nature of man's inner life. His teaching is not concerned with inanimate matter because the material world is not subject to rebirth or suffering. From the Buddhist point of view, sentient beings are most important. Left to itself, a sentient being passes through innumerable lives and, for the most part, the individual suffers in the lower realms of existence. However, if we understand the process and act wisely, we can make gradual progress towards liberation. Even if we do not gain liberation, we can improve our circumstances in the cycle of existence. A clear understanding of Dependent Origination is vital, for it ensures the complete extinction of defilements.

## **The Origin of Rebirth-consciousness**

We have described ignorance as the cause of mental formations, and becoming as the cause of rebirth. We should say something more about the origin of rebirth-consciousness. In a discourse of the *Anguttaranikāya*, the Buddha likens wholesome or unwholesome kamma to a fertile field, consciousness to seeds, and craving to irrigation water. The planting of trees requires fields and nurseries. Likewise, rebirth-consciousness presupposes fertile land in the form of kamma. Kamma produces the potential for rebirth, and although the former states of consciousness disappear, the potential for rebirth remains. Like a budding plant, it does not materialise immediately, but it is bound to appear under favourable circumstances just as a criminal is liable to become a prisoner, or as a conscientious worker is likely to gain promotion.

Furthermore, rebirth depends on wholesome or unwholesome consciousness no less than a plant depends on seeds for its germination. The wholesome or unwholesome cittas arise and pass away, but they stimulate a steady stream of similar states of consciousness. These states are the outcome of former kammic consciousness just like the transformation of a snake's skin. The most vital of them is the decease-consciousness centring on one's kamma, on an object associated with it (*kammanimitta*), or on a vision of a future life (*gatinimitta*). This encounter of a dying person with signs and visions is called '*upatthānasamangita*' which means the foreshadowing of the future life as conditioned by kamma. It marks the transition from decease-consciousness to rebirth-consciousness, not unlike the development of a sprout from a seed. A seed needs water to turn into a plant. Without water, or moisture from the air, it will remain sterile. In the same way, although kamma forms the basis for a future life, rebirth cannot occur without craving. So for arahants, although consciousness and the kamma that they have done as ordinary persons are conditions for rebirth, the rebirth-consciousness cannot arise because they have destroyed craving.

Craving is inherent in all those who are not arahants and is very powerful in ordinary people. It makes the sense-objects seem pleasant, attractive and irresistible. It creates the illusions of enjoyment, happiness, and optimism. Craving likes what is pleasant, and makes happiness and prosperity the main goal for humankind. It motivates the kammic consciousness, which leads to other mental states. At the approach of death, these mental states produce signs and visions. The dying person delights in pleasant visions, and becomes lively and cheerful. This shows that the kammic seeds are beginning to sprout.

One does not welcome unpleasant visions, but one is still attached to them, which leads to the germination of the kammic seed.

Therefore, for ordinary people, rebirth is conditioned by three factors: kamma, the thought-process that is linked to kamma, and craving. That kamma is the fertile soil for rebirth is evident in deathbed visions. The germination of the seed is shown by the dying person's interest in these visions. So rebirth-consciousness arises, conditioned by the mental state at the last moment of the previous life. Rebirth-consciousness brings into play mind and matter, the six senses, contact, feeling, and their interrelations that concern one's whole life. So we may regard it as the seed of the present existence. It is inextricably related to mind and matter. All material phenomena, whether internal or external, are suffering, as they are subject to constant arising and passing away. However, ignorance makes us blind to suffering, creates illusions and attachment, and keeps us engaged in the pursuit of sense-objects. This preoccupation leads to the renewal of existence.

Having rebirth-consciousness as the basis of a new existence, the physical body arises with the concomitant mental properties such as contact, feeling, and perception. When rebirth-consciousness ceases, other mental states follow in succession, which may stimulate unwholesome or wholesome kammās such as greed, anger, contentment or forbearance. These mental states lead to physical actions such as sitting, standing or walking. So the Buddha said, "The world is led by the mind. It draws the world wherever it pleases. The whole world follows the mind." Here the world refers to sentient beings. The mind leads sentient beings well or badly. The mind of people who develop virtues such as faith or morality will lead them to do meritorious deeds. It will urge them to listen to the Dhamma and to practise insight meditation. It will lead them to the higher planes of existence or bring them to the goal of nibbāna. On the other hand, the mind of ignoble individuals will motivate them to seek sensual objects and to do immoral deeds. After death, it will take them to the lower realms and cause them much suffering. This verse shows that all material phenomena are dominated by the mind. This accords with the teaching of Dependent Origination, which says that because of consciousness, psychophysical phenomena such as contact arise. We have already given a full account of contact arising from the eye, so we will now explain the process of hearing.

## **Auditory Consciousness**

As with seeing, hearing also involves three factors: the ear, the sound, and auditory consciousness. Hearing is impossible without the ear-sensitivity and the sound. Scientists say that sound-waves travel at the rate of 1,100 feet per second. This is the speed of sound in air, but radio can broadcast it all over the world in a moment. When the sound-wave contacts the ear, it is like a stone striking a drum, and hearing occurs. However, it is a mistake to believe that it is the owner of the ear who hears. The sensitive organs of the ear are always changing. The material phenomena involved are forever arising and passing away. They are like the ever-changing waters of a flowing stream. The contact of sound-waves with the stream of material phenomena awakens auditory consciousness, which occurs only for an instant and then vanishes. This is followed by the consciousness that focuses on the sound, investigates it and decides. Each moment of consciousness occurs just for an instant, then vanishes. Then seven successive impulse-moments flash forth, after which two registering moments occur focused on the sound.

Such is the process of consciousness involved in hearing. Whenever we hear a sound, auditory consciousness is renewed based on the ear and the sound. So one who practises mindfulness realises that hearing is conditioned by the ear and the sound, and that there is no one who hears. The meditator is more acutely aware of the causal relation in hearing than in seeing. Thus hearing means the conjunction of the ear, the sound, and auditory consciousness. The impact of the sound is contact, which is quite clear to the meditator. Some meditators are so sensitive that when they hear a harsh sound, they feel as if their ears are being bombarded. Some may even be startled by the dropping of a leaf. The impact is evident when, out of a variety of sounds that reach our ears, we select and attend

to the sound that we wish to hear. As for loud, harsh, and piercing sounds, we cannot avoid hearing them. We may avert our eyes from an unpleasant sight, but a sound cannot be ignored.

We have pleasant or unpleasant feelings according to the sounds that we hear. Songs and sweet voices are welcome while harsh sounds and abusive words are odious to us. When we hear ordinary sounds, we have feelings that are neither pleasant nor unpleasant. In such cases we may not even be aware of our feeling — neutral feelings are so subtle that they escape our notice. Although the Abhidhamma books say that we have only neutral feelings in connection with consciousness of the eye, ear, nose or tongue, these moments are too subtle to be discerned. Instead, one should contemplate the whole process of consciousness, which involves pleasant feeling along with some thought-moments, e.g. investigation, impulsion, and registering, and unpleasant feelings along with impulsion.

## Neutral Feeling

Although sense consciousness may be accompanied by neutral feeling at the moment of its arising, it will be accompanied by unpleasant feeling if it is the result of unwholesome kamma. This is evident in our contact with unpleasant sense-objects that cause negative emotions such as fear. Loud noises may make us deaf, foul smells may cause headaches, while rotten food may make us ill. Likewise, the neutral feeling that is conditioned by the four kinds of pleasant sense-objects implies pleasant feelings. We enjoy seeing beautiful objects, hearing pleasant sounds, etc. This shows the pleasant character of neutral feeling that is the product of wholesome kamma. In this connection the sub-commentary on the Visuddhimagga says, "The neutral feeling that is the full-blown product of low kamma is suffering, and as such, it is of low character." In other words, the neutral feeling that is based on unwholesome kamma may be indifferent and neutral. However, because it stems from unwholesome kamma, it is low just like the flower that blooms in a heap of dung. Moreover, although it is not as unpleasant as painful feeling, it is disagreeable and so it is low. So the effect of a demeritorious deed is never free from pain and suffering.

Elaborating on the function of feeling in the chain of causation, the sub-commentary says, "The neutral feeling that results from unwholesome kamma should be described as suffering since it is undesirable. The neutral feeling that has its origin in wholesome kamma should be described as pleasant since it is desirable." It is evident in the pleasant feeling that we have when we hear a pleasant sound. Sweet words are welcome to the ear while harsh words jar on it. The feelings caused by ordinary sounds are neutral.

The three kinds of feeling due to hearing are distinctly familiar to the diligent meditator. One knows that painful or pleasant feelings arise from contact between sound and the ear, that there is no soul or self to be affected by it. One knows, too, that the feelings arise and vanish instantly. As concentration develops, one becomes aware of the ceaseless arising and vanishing of all the three kinds of feelings.

Smelling, or olfactory consciousness arises from the contact between the nose and the odour. Without an odour and the sensitive part of the nose, smelling is impossible. People without a sense of smell are rare. Once I met a monk who said that he detected practically no scent even when he smelled a handkerchief moistened with perfume. Even if the nose is sensitive you cannot smell if you plug it, or if there is no scent. The scent is detected only when it is wafted in the air and meets the sensitive part of the nose. People think that they can smell. In fact, it is the contact between the air-borne scent and the material phenomena of the nose that causes olfactory consciousness. As with seeing, olfactory consciousness involves advertence, investigation, impulsion, and other types of consciousness. The main point is, of course, that olfactory consciousness ceaselessly arises and vanishes, depending on the nose and the smell. We are all familiar with the offensive odour of something rotten, or the pleasing fragrance of a flower. Most people believe that they can smell. However, meditators know that it is only a phenomenon arising from the

conjunction of the nose, the odour, and consciousness. Thus they realise the instability of everything. That is the difference between meditators and ordinary people.

Feelings vary according to the nature of contact. Scents of flowers and perfumes cause pleasant feelings whereas the stench of decomposing matter is offensive. Ordinary smells cause neutral feelings — a feeling that is so subtle that we do not notice it. The meditator notes the olfactory consciousness and becomes aware of the three kinds of feelings, and their arising and dissolution.

Gustatory consciousness arises from contact between the tongue and the food. Without the tongue or the flavour of food, there can be no gustatory consciousness. However, if the tongue is unhealthy and lacks sensitivity, the food will be tasteless. Ordinary people believe that it is a person who tastes and enjoys the flavour. In fact, the material phenomena forming the sensitive part of the tongue are constantly changing. It is from the contact of these material phenomena and the flavour of food that gustatory consciousness arises, which involves the thought-moments that we have mentioned before. The events at this stage are so rapid that they seem to form a single thought-moment. The consciousness changes at every moment, depending on the tongue and the flavour. It is this consciousness that knows sweetness, sourness, bitterness, and so forth.

The conjunction of the tongue, the flavour, and consciousness means contact. This is familiar to everybody, but people think that they experience the flavour. Only one who notes all the mental and physical events that occur while eating knows taste as a phenomenon dependent on the tongue, the flavour, and consciousness. Later, they gain a clear insight into its impermanence. Contact with flavour is followed by feelings that vary according to the taste. Eating delicious food gives us pleasure since we like it, whereas we complain about unpalatable food or the bitter taste of some medicine. The feeling we have when we eat some types of food is neutral. Although this is neutral feeling, the opportunity to eat is the outcome of wholesome kamma. Therefore, eating such food also has a pleasant aspect and leads to attachment. However, with developed concentration, the meditator becomes aware of the arising and passing away of all sensations — pleasant, unpleasant or neutral.

## **Tactile Consciousness**

Another source of contact, feeling, etc., is the sensitive part of the body. It is said, "Tactile consciousness arises from the body and a tangible object. From the conjunction of the body, the tangible object and consciousness, contact arises, and the contact conditions feeling."

This needs some elaboration. Seeing, hearing, smelling, and tasting each concern only their respective organs, so are restricted in locality and duration. You are conscious of tasting only when you are eating, conscious of hearing only when listening. However, tactile consciousness is present in every part of your body. You have tactile impression somewhere on your body whenever you think of it. So its sphere is extensive and its duration is long. Contemplation of tactile impression is most important for the beginner in insight practice, so meditators should know something about it.

The fine, sensitive matter that can receive tactile impressions exists in every healthy part of the body and so it can produce tactile consciousness everywhere through contact with an object. These material phenomena are constantly changing. They are like the current that passes through a bulb and emits light. In this state of constant change, the sensitive materiality that has not yet passed away collides with an external or internal material phenomenon, producing tactile consciousness. As with seeing, this consciousness involves a series of seventeen thought-moments: consciousness that adverts to the object, consciousness that knows, consciousness that registers and so on. However, these thought-moments arise and vanish so rapidly that the tactile consciousness appears to involve only a single thought-moment. Tactile consciousness is always present. It is not apparent when the mind is absorbed in an object other than the body. However, if attention is directed to



the body, a tactile impression will be felt somewhere, for example, the contact between the body and the floor, the body and clothes, and so forth.

## The Four Primary Elements

One who practises mindfulness regarding physical contact of the body is aware of its conditionality. One knows that it is neither created by God nor uncaused. One knows that it depends on the conjunction of a tactile object and the sensitive base in healthy condition. The object of contact is called *photthabba* and is of three kinds: solidity (*pathavī*), heat (*tejo*), and motion (*vāyo*).

The element of solidity has the attribute of hardness or coarseness. This attribute can be known if one focuses on a part of the body that gives a clear impression of contact. Softness too is to be regarded as solidity, since softness and hardness are just different degrees of the same quality. We call velvet a smooth object in comparison with many things that are coarser, but it seems rough when it touches the soft part of the eye. So softness and hardness are relative terms that differ only in degree, not in kind. Roughness and smoothness are also characteristics of the element of solidity.

The commentaries say that solidity is the support of the other elements that depend on it just as all objects depend on the earth. For example, when mixed with water, rice-powder turns into a lump of dough, which may be called earth because of its predominantly solid nature. The dough is held together by the element of fluidity (*āpodhātu*). The lump also contains the fire element, which makes it hot or cold, and the air element, which supports stiffness and expansion. So this lump of dough contains all four elements. Solidity is the basis of the other elements, but the other three elements are also present. So, just as the rice powder is the support of fire, water and air, solidity is the support of its associated material phenomena. This is the function of the element of solidity.

To the meditator, solidity appears to be the basis for its co-elements. This is its manifestation (*paccupatthāna*), as are heaviness and lightness. In the Dhammasaṅgani and its commentary, solidity is described as heavy and light. So when you move a thing and feel that it is heavy or light, that is a manifestation of the element of solidity. You are also aware of the characteristics of solidity through its roughness, softness or smoothness. You are aware of its function (*rasa*) when you realise that it serves as the basis of other material phenomena. You are aware of its manifestation when you know that other material phenomena lie in the element of solidity, that it bears other material phenomena, that it is heavy or light. Such awareness of solidity as to characteristics (*lakkhana*), function (*rasa*), and manifestation (*paccupatthāna*) means realisation of ultimate realities and discriminative insight into the true nature of mind and matter. For ordinary people, solidity is usually understood as hands, legs, clothes, a person, and so forth. This way of thinking is wrong, but the meditator realises the ultimate realities through mindfulness.

The element of heat means temperature. It is evident when we change the position of the body because we feel hot somewhere. Coldness too is a weak form of heat. Something is only hot or cold in comparison with other things. The shade of a tree is cool in comparison with the heat of the sun, but hot compared with the interior of a cave. Water in a pot is cool compared with that in the open air, but warm when compared to iced water. Hot, warm, and cool are relative terms that mean, essentially, the element of heat.

Temperature or heat is essential to maturation and development. The function of heat is to mature or ripen organisms. Aging and decay of trees, buildings, the earth and rocks, are due to the heat of the sun. The heat of the physical body causes grey hair, decaying teeth, wrinkled skin, and other signs of aging. The greater the heat, the more rapid is the process of maturation. The element of heat makes material phenomena soft and pliant. So as one notes, "hot", "hot", one realises its function — to soften and loosen. When heat or cold is manifested in the body, the mindful meditator is aware of the element of heat regarding its characteristics. One knows its function when one knows that it makes things soft and pliant.



Thus one has discriminative insight into the nature of mind and matter. One is free from the illusion that ordinary people have when they regard the element of heat as an entity like a hand, a man or a woman.

The element of motion has the characteristics of stiffness and rigidity. If you sit erect, stretch your back, and look within, you will find rigidity. Again, stretch your arm and fix your mind inside the hand. You will find stiffness there. So if you sit and note mentally, "sitting", you become aware of the element of motion through its characteristics. You know it not as self, but as stiffness. This insight into the true nature of the element of motion is important.

Initially, however, insight will not necessarily be confined to the reality of stiffness. Ideas of substance, self, and so forth, continue to obtrude, since the average person's concentration is weak, and he or she lets the mind wander freely. The mind is often dominated by sensual desire and other hindrances that impede the development of tranquillity and insight. As a result, the mind is not confined to the reality of elements. Some teachers would have us believe that all conventional notions can be dismissed from the beginning, but this is impossible. To be pure in mind and view is extremely rare for a beginner. Those who heard the Dhamma directly from the Buddha and attained the Noble Path were exceptional; such kind of attainment is unthinkable for others.

Mindfulness does not lead to insight at once, but while contemplating mind and matter, one develops strong concentration and vigilant mindfulness, leaving little room for stray thoughts. It is only at this stage of mental purity that insight into the true nature of mind and matter arises. Even so, conventional notions linger before the attainment of knowledge of dissolution (*bhanga-ñāna*). So it is said in the Visuddhimagga that at the earlier stage of insight (*udayabbaya-ñāna*), the meditator sees "...the lights and flowers on the pagoda platform, or fishes and turtles in the sea." Later, however, both the mental and material objects of contemplation and the contemplating mind are found to pass away repeatedly. Conventional ideas such as name or form do not arise any longer. As the Visuddhimagga says, "attention is fixed on cessation, disappearance, and dissolution."

Therefore, initially, one knows only the object that one contemplates in the right way. Rigidity (the element of motion) is evident when lifting the foot. To make us aware of this, the Buddha says, "When he (the meditator) walks, he knows that he is walking." Here, one is instructed to be aware only of the fact that one is walking; one is not told to reflect on the element of motion or rigidity. This means that names are not relevant. What matters most is to see things as they really are, so one can note them in conventional terms. Again, the element of motion is manifest in the movement of any part of the body. Awareness of rigidity in such movements, or in the abdominal rising and falling, means awareness of the true characteristics of the element of motion. Looseness too is a mark of the element of motion, for we speak comparatively when we refer to the tightness or looseness of anything.

It is also the function of the element of motion to move, incline, tilt or displace. One notes the motion of the hands when one bends them and becomes aware of the element of motion. One knows it, too, when one focuses on walking or lifting. At such moments, one does not think of the object as a man, a woman, the body, and so forth. One is aware only of the gradual movement, which means the element of motion. Also, one is aware of something pushing or leading from one place to the other. Thus one knows the element of motion by means of the phenomena that appear. This is awareness by manifestation (*paccupatthāna*), which the scriptures describe as "abhinīhāra-paccupatthāna — the phenomenon that appears as leading."

Solidity, heat, and motion can be known only by touching. They cannot be known by the other senses. You can hear the sound of something, but you cannot say whether it is coarse or soft, hot or cold, rigid, stable or moving. Neither its smell, taste nor visual form will tell you anything about its primary quality. Yet, it is a popular belief that we can identify the primary elements by seeing. A rock or an iron bar looks hard, no doubt, but this is not due

to seeing. It is just an inference based on past experience. What we know by seeing is only the appearance, which sometimes gives a false impression. This is evident when we tread on what looks like solid ground and stumble into a quagmire, or when we get burnt by handling a hot iron bar unknowingly. Nor can we know the element of motion just by looking. We know that an object is moving because we see it first here and then there, but its motion is only inferred. When one of two trains at rest starts moving, the other one seems to be in motion. To a traveller in a fast-moving train, the trees seem to be moving in the opposite direction. These optical illusions show that we cannot rely on seeing to know the truth about motion.

Once, an elderly layman who was interested in meditation told us about his exchange with a monk. Taking a pillow and shaking it, he asked him, "Venerable sir, what dhammas do you see passing away?"

The monk replied, "I see the element of motion passing away."

"Venerable sir, you are mistaken. What you can see is only the visual form. If you are mindful at the moment of seeing, you can know only what happens to the visual form. You cannot know anything empirically about the element of motion at that moment. Insight meditation is a practice that gives priority to what can be known directly by introspection. Only afterwards are other facts to be noted and known by reasoning. Contemplating each sense-object through its respective sense-organ is natural. The element of motion can be known only through body-contact. We can know motion if we contemplate while walking or bending. Now, without being in contact with the element of motion, you say that you know its dissolution. What you say is unnatural and wrong."

My informant's criticism contains much truth. Instead of relying on the Satipatthāna Sutta and other discourses for information, some teachers give purely speculative instructions based on Abhidhamma books that deal exclusively with natural phenomena. Some meditators practise according to these instructions. The practice may benefit them, but they should not rely on it for the attainment of genuine insight on the Noble Path. Only a few gifted meditators gain insight through speculative introspection.

The best way is to follow the Buddha's instruction in the Satipatthāna Sutta to contemplate the psychophysical phenomena that arise from the six senses. This is, as the Buddha says, "the only way (*ekayāno maggo*)."<sup>1</sup> We should note and recognize the tactile-impression when we are aware of any contact internally or externally. Otherwise, the impression may dominate us, accompanied by ignorance and other defilements. We may harbour illusions of permanence, pleasure, and selfhood. Thus, through contact, we become attached to certain parts of the body, we consider them permanent and make distinctions according to our preferences. If we note each contact and realise its sensory, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and insubstantial nature, attachment will not occur. Then we are on the right path leading to enlightenment and nibbāna.

Body-sensitivity is a quality that pervades the whole body when it is healthy. Many things, such as clothes or wind, can produce tactile impressions. The body itself can also produce impressions. Thus external and internal tangible objects are always available. A moment's reflection will reveal that any place, however small, responds to contact. This contact produces tactile consciousness. From the conjunction of body-sensitivity, the tangible object, and consciousness, a clear impression arises. Pleasant impressions of contact produce pleasant feelings while unpleasant impressions result in painful feelings. The deeper the impression the more intense is the feeling.

## **Mind-door and Consciousness**

The mind-consciousness that thinks, conceives and cognizes has its origin in the mind and mind-objects. The mind that forms its basis is the subconsciousness that flows on from the moment of conception. It occurs ceaselessly because of kamma and is the basis for

perception and cognition. When we are asleep, or when the mind is otherwise occupied, our mental life is just subconsciousness. It becomes active in the face of mind-objects and then volition and cognition arise. So we can think and know only because of subconsciousness. Although this consciousness is always present, lacking volition and cognition, it can lead to mental events only when it is strong.

At times we cannot think because we are drowsy, or our thinking may be futile, in spite of our efforts. This is due to the weakness of subconsciousness. Thus subconsciousness by itself serves little purpose, and becomes active only when it makes contact with a new sense-object. Thereupon, it is called active subconsciousness, vibrating subconsciousness or arresting subconsciousness. This last subconsciousness leads to volition and cognition. According to the commentaries, advertence is also the basis for mental activity. Advertence forms the first stage in the process of consciousness. It arises as the inquiring state of mind regarding the object. If it is alert and sharp, it is mindful of all the essential facts and objects. Expert writers select the most important facts for their books, and eloquent speakers choose the most appropriate words for their speeches. Thus their work comes to perfection. Later, this advertence leads to wholesome or unwholesome kamma, depending on whether it is intent on noble or ignoble objectives. It is open to introspection and cognition since we can know that intention and awareness arise from advertence.

Equally vital to mental activity is the mind-object. An object always arises when we reflect. Without an object, mental activity is not possible. Sometimes we try to think of something but give up because we cannot recall the essential facts. So, mental activity depends on the conjunction of subconsciousness, advertence and a mind-object.

According to the commentaries, the heart forms the physical basis of all mental events. However, doctors can remove the diseased heart of a patient and replace it with a healthy substitute, giving the patient a new lease of life. This may raise doubts about the role of the heart in the mental life of humanity.

The facts admit of two explanations. Although the heart is removed, its potency may not become extinct and subconsciousness may still linger in its place just like the tail of a lizard that moves after it has been cut off. Moreover, the subconsciousness may become active again when the transplant gets a new lease of life from the blood, just as grafted tissue has new sensitivity. Alternatively, we can reply to the question based on the *Paṭṭhāna*, a book of the *Abhidhamma*. This describes the physical basis of mind-consciousness simply as "the physical organ that conditions the mind as its basis." It does not specifically mention any organ or part of the body. Thus, according to this canonical book, a certain part of the body is the seat of the mind — perhaps it is in the heart or the brain. Those who do not wish to regard the heart as the seat of the mind may regard the brain as its physical basis.

Here we can mention the analogy of the spider and the evolution of mind, as set forth in the *Abhidhamma* commentary. The spider builds a web for catching flies. It can do so instinctively in a matter of days after its birth, whereas by contrast even a year-old child can do nothing for itself. The spider waits in the centre of its web, eats up any creature that gets entangled there and returns to its lair. Similarly, mind-consciousness abides in the heart, and the blood pumped by the heart flows through the blood-vessels, spreading all over the body like the threads of the spider's web. So a visual image in the eye stirs the subconsciousness in the heart, arousing visual-consciousness through its process (*vīthi*). Subconsciousness (*bhavanga*) then reverts to its original base. The same may be said of the other senses with their respective sense-organs.

So subconsciousness with its original activity, thinking and knowing, clearly forms the basis of our mental life. When a visual object occurs, visual-consciousness arises with the eye as its basis, and then mind-consciousness reflects on it. The same is true of auditory consciousness and other senses with the ear, the nose, and the tongue as their bases. As for tactile consciousness, its sphere is extensive as it depends on the size of the body.

When sense-objects are not apparent, the mind that comprises thinking and knowing dominates mental life. Sometimes we are so absorbed in thought that we remain unmindful of other sense-objects. Preoccupation with an important matter may even make us sleepless. We are then dominated by thoughts that arise ceaselessly based on mental activity as conditioned by subconsciousness, advertence, and mind-objects. To one who notes every thought as it arises, these thoughts will appear to arise and vanish separately in fragments.

Every mental event depends on the conjunction of the mind, a mind-object, and cognition. This is followed by contact with mental images. These images, which may be real or unreal, factual or fictitious, are present in imagination whenever we think or intend to do something. This should be familiar to those who have read the Jātaka stories. Reading these stories produces mental images of cities and kings coloured by Burmese beliefs and traditions. These images must be far from the historical truth, since the stories have their origin in India, and so the people and places described must have conformed to the Indian culture and way of life. Modern novels evoke images of towns, villages, men, women, criminals, and so forth. The reader knows that they are fictitious, yet while he or she is reading, they seem real, hence the delight, sorrow, and other emotions that a moving story arouses. All this is due to contact with mental images. As the Buddha says in the Brahmajāla Sutta, "These teachings and beliefs stem from the vivid imagination that makes them clear and real." In short, a vivid imagination is necessary when we speak, write, hold a belief, think, or let the mind wander freely.

Imagination leads to feeling. Pleasant images cause pleasant feelings as, for example, images related to our past affluence or the prospect of becoming affluent in the future. On the other hand, unpleasant images make us unhappy. Recalling past suffering revives painful memories. Equally unpleasant is the fear of hardship, or anxiety about accidents that might happen. The cause may sometimes be purely imaginary, as when people grieve over the reported death of a relative, only to learn later that he is still alive.

The image that is neither pleasant nor unpleasant will cause neutral feeling. We are then neither happy nor sad. We seem to have no feeling at all, but this simply shows the extremely subtle nature of neutral feeling, which, according to the commentaries, can be known by the analogy of the deer tracks. When a deer runs across a large rock, the track is lost since the animal leaves no footprints on it. However, if footprints are found on both sides of the rock, we can conclude that the deer has run across the rock. Similarly, though one is well aware of pleasant or unpleasant feelings, one does not notice neutral ones, but is mindful only of seeing, hearing and so forth. However, when one again has a pleasant or an unpleasant feeling, one concludes that a neutral feeling occurred while being mindful of ordinary mental events. So the Buddha said, "Conditioned by the mind and mind-object mind-consciousness arises; the conjunction of mind, mind-object, and consciousness is contact, and contact gives rise to feeling."

This natural process of cause and effect has nothing to do with a self or a Creator. Mind-objects include the five sense-objects and imagined objects. So mind-consciousness involves all the six sense-objects, whether real or imagined. Every sense-object leads to sense-contact, which in turn causes feeling. For most people, these mental events seem to belong to an ego, self or soul. Such illusions are incompatible with the law of causation. This is realised empirically if one notes every mental event, traces its cause and becomes aware of subconsciousness, advertence, and the mind-object. So one knows that every mental event means only the interrelation of cause and effect, leaving no room for chance, a self or a Creator.

One knows too that mental activity leads to sense-contact, which in turn produces feeling. This knowledge is not academic but empirical. If the mind wanders to one's home while meditating, one directs attention to the wandering mind. One then notes the contact between the mind and its object, i.e. images of home. Similarly, one notes and follows the corresponding thoughts that distract the mind if thoughts of, say, the Shwedagon Pagoda or a foreign country occur. This contact with mind-objects is called 'phassa'. The feeling

resulting from contact is equally clear. While meditating, one feels delighted on thinking of something pleasant, unhappy when a sad thought occurs, and amused when one thinks of something funny. So one knows that feeling is merely the outcome of contact. However, the insight of one who notes mind and matter at every moment is deeper than this knowledge of the origin of feeling. For, as concentration and tranquillity develop, one finds that each object, and the consciousness that knows it, passes away. So one gains a clear insight into the impermanence of all mental events such as thinking or feeling. One also sees their unsatisfactoriness or unreliability, and their impersonality or insubstantiality. Such insight means the realisation and comprehension of Dependent Origination.

## Review of the Anterior Life-Cycle

The doctrine of Dependent Origination consists of twelve links beginning with ignorance and ending in death. It has ignorance and craving as two root-causes, and there are two life-cycles. The anterior cycle begins with ignorance and ends in feeling, while the posterior cycle begins with craving and ends in aging and death. The first part of this discourse explained the links in the chain of causation up to the feelings that arise from contact. Avijjā is ignorance of the Four Noble Truths. It makes people oblivious to the impermanence and insubstantiality of sense-objects. So they think, speak, and act with the hope of securing happiness in the present life or after death. These thoughts, words or bodily actions, which may be either wholesome or unwholesome, are called mental formations (*sankhārā*).

Mental formations lead to a new existence. The dying person has flashbacks of kamma and visions of a future life that impress the mind and condition subconsciousness in a new life. Lacking any special object that concerns the new consciousness, the latter occurs repeatedly with the deathbed impression of the previous life as its object.

Subconsciousness gives way to active consciousness at the moment of seeing, for example. After a moment of adverting, visual-consciousness arises dependent on the eye and form. It is part of mental life as conditioned by mental formations. The sense-object may be pleasant or unpleasant. The nature of the corresponding sense consciousness is due to the ethical character of our past deeds. This applies to the six types of consciousness arising from the six senses. The last type of consciousness, implicit in mental activity such as thinking, imagining, or willing, is dependent on subconsciousness, mental advertence, the physical basis, and the mental image. This mental activity involves seven impulse thought-moments and two registering thought-moments. Registering is the product of wholesome or unwholesome kamma. Impulsion is not the result of kamma, but it is termed sankhārā-based consciousness in that it arises from subconsciousness, the product of mental formations.

With the arising of consciousness, other concomitant mental properties and material phenomena also occur. So, consciousness leads to mind and matter, which is followed by the six sense-organs and their corresponding impressions. Contact means the conjunction of the mind, the mind-object, and the sense-organ. It produces feeling, which may be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Neutral feeling seems like the absence of any feeling. However, according to the Abhidhamma, it is in fact a subtle kind of enjoyment that implies only the absence of pain.

# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

## From Feeling, Craving Arises

**B**ECAUSE of pleasant or unpleasant feeling, craving (*tanhā*) arises. It craves for sensual objects that one lacks or for more of the objects that one has already. Its thirst for sensual objects is unquenchable. A certain deva said that devas were like hungry ghosts because, just as hungry ghosts are starving due to lack of food or drink, devas are unsatiated although they indulge in all kinds of pleasures. This is quite plausible, for the lifespan of a Tāvātimsa Deva is millions of years, and life is still longer in the higher celestial realms such as Yāma or Nimmānarati. Yet, in spite of their fabulous and lifelong enjoyment of bliss, the devas are never satisfied. The same is true of human beings. Poor people seek pleasure to the best of their ability. However, due to their poverty, they can seldom fulfil their desires. The craving of the rich is even greater due to the nature of craving. The more it is fed, the more voracious it becomes, so it is more oppressive in wealthy countries than in poor ones.

Craving never tires of pleasant objects; it yearns for attractive men or women. It hearkens after melodious sounds, it pines for fragrant scents, hungers for delicious food, and thirsts for sweet drinks. It craves tactile sensations, which is surely the most acute form of craving for pleasure-loving people. Craving also includes high esteem for mental-objects, which are inaccessible to the other senses. 'Mental-objects' include the five sense faculties, subtle elements like cohesion, and mental properties, i.e. concepts of forms, qualities, names, etc. People long to have keen senses because they want to see clearly, to hear distinctly, or to have a delicate sense of touch. They seek the element of fluidity as they wish to keep their mouth, throat, and skin moist. They delight in the awareness of their own sex and of the opposite sex, so they are attached to masculinity or femininity. They want to live long and to move easily, which shows their desire for the subtle material phenomena of vitality and lightness, etc. Their yearning for happiness, a retentive memory, and sharp intelligence points to their desire for keen mental faculties. Love of one's own appearance or that of the opposite sex, and the wish for praise and fame, again shows the delight in concepts.

For the six sense-objects there are six kinds of craving. These six cravings may mean just craving for sensual pleasures (*kāmatanhā*), or may be associated with craving for existence (*bhavatanhā*), which implies eternalism. Craving is also linked with desire for non-existence (*vibhavatanhā*), implying annihilationism, which makes some people excessively attached to sensuality. So, for each of the six sense objects, there are three kinds of craving (*kāmatanhā*, *bhavatanhā* and *vibhavatanhā*), or eighteen altogether. Each of these may have objects in one's own body or external objects, giving thirty-six kinds of craving. Again, since each of these may relate to objects in the past, present or future, altogether one hundred and eight kinds of craving can be defined. However, these can be summarised in just three groups: craving for sensuality, craving for existence and craving for non-existence.

People who have to tolerate unpleasant sense-objects long for pleasant ones. Those who are in pain seek relief from it. In brief, the suffering person longs for happiness. People seek freedom from pain, poverty, and unpleasant feelings, because the absence of suffering means happiness. We seek freedom from preoccupation with unpleasant thoughts, from anxiety about food, clothing, and shelter. However, once we have all the necessities of life, we are inclined to develop other cravings. The wealthy man wants to increase his wealth, for craving is insatiable. We wish to enjoy life continuously, and to increase our possessions. The more we have, the more we want, and the higher the quality of life is, the greater is the desire to enhance it. Craving never ends for it is fuelled and perpetuated by feeling.

As for the craving associated with neutral feeling, the commentary describes neutral feeling as pleasant because of its poise and subtlety. In the case of contact with ordinary sense-objects, neither a pleasant nor an unpleasant feeling is apparent. However, since neutral feeling is fine and subtle, it is tinged with enjoyment, so it makes us crave for more definite pleasure. It leads to discontent with the ordinary sense-objects and kindles the desire for better food, finer clothes, more refined pleasures and improved living conditions. In brief, beautiful objects stimulate attachment and craving for exquisite things. Unpleasant objects create the desire to be rid of them. When the sense-objects produce neutral feelings, we are still discontented and crave for enjoyment. This shows how feeling produces craving.

## **Craving and the Cycle of Existence**

Simultaneous with the arising of sense consciousness, mind and matter, sense-bases, contact, and feeling arise. For everyone who is not yet free from defilements, feeling leads to craving. Craving in turn causes attachment, which motivates wholesome or unwholesome deeds (kammabhava). With the right supporting conditions, kammabhava leads to rebirth and so to aging, disease, death, and all other mental and physical suffering. Thus feelings lead to suffering in the cycle of existence. Nobody can prevent the arising of mind and matter, sense-bases, contact, and feeling as concomitants of consciousness. Even the Buddha and the arahants have pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feelings because of contact with sense-objects. They feel pain that arises from physical affliction but they do not suffer mentally, nor do they take delight in pleasant sensations. So they are free from craving and attachment. They do not strive for pleasure and happiness, and because of their non-kammic way of life, they do away with rebirth, mind and matter and other causes of suffering. This is the extinction of suffering for the arahant who is completely free from defilements. So it is said, "Due to the complete extinction of craving rooted in pleasant or unpleasant feeling on the Noble Path, the extinction of attachment comes about."

Pleasant and unpleasant feelings make one long for enjoyment. However, they do not affect the arahants. This may sound incredible, but the most alluring sense-object has no appeal for arahants, who have no desire for pleasure. They are entirely free from craving and attachment, which means the complete extinction of kamma, rebirth and its attendant suffering. So it is said, "The extinction of attachment leads to the extinction of kammic effort. The extinction of kammic effort leads to extinction of rebirth, and extinction of rebirth leads to extinction of aging, death, grief, lamentation, and despair."

## **The Extinction of Craving**

With the extinction of craving all its effects cease, resulting in the extinction of suffering. It does not imply the end of happiness or of a living being. It is simply the cessation of the psychophysical process that is the origin of suffering. Just as arahantship means the complete extinction of craving, the attainment of non-returning means the extinction of sensual desire and rebirth in the sensual realm. At the stream-winner stage, one has eradicated all craving that might lead to the lower realms, or to more than seven existences. Thus implicit in Dependent Origination is the alleviation of suffering with the reduction of craving. Likewise, insight ensures the momentary extinction of craving. Sense-objects lead to pleasant and unpleasant feelings, which, in the absence of insight, end in craving and its attendant suffering. However, one who practises constant mindfulness and has developed insight sees only the arising and passing away of all phenomena, their impermanence, suffering, and impersonality. Pleasant or unpleasant feelings are also seen to arise and pass away instantly. One does not delight in the feelings that arise, nor does one crave for others, so one is free from craving.

Extinction of craving on the Noble Path differs from temporary extinction by insight. In the former case, the extinction is permanent and concerns every sense-object, whereas in the latter case extinction is neither permanent nor universal. Craving is extinct only at the moment of contemplation and only with respect to the object contemplated. Therefore, it is called momentary or partial extinction of defilements (tadanga-nibbuti). One who practises mindfulness is aware just of seeing, hearing, etc. This bare awareness leaves no room for craving, and its attendant attachment, kamma, rebirth, etc., cease to occur. In other



words, with the cessation of craving, the cycle of suffering is partly cut off, which is called "tadanga-nibbuti."

### **The Story of Venerable Mahātissa**

Venerable Mahātissa of Sri Lanka overcame craving through the practice of both samatha and vipassanā. One day, on the way to Anurādhapura for his alms round, he met a woman who had left her home after quarrelling with her husband. At the sight of the elder, a lustful desire arose in her and she laughed aloud lasciviously. On looking at her, the elder noticed her teeth. Since he had been contemplating a skeleton, the body of the woman looked like a heap of bones. Concentrating on this mental image he attained jhāna. Then, after contemplating this image with his jhānic state of mind, he attained arahantship. The elder continued his journey and met the woman's husband, who asked him whether he had seen a woman. The elder replied that he did see something but did not know whether it was a man or a woman. All that he noticed was a skeleton that passed him on the way. He saw just the woman's teeth, but his practice of contemplation turned the impression of her body into the image of a skeleton. Therefore, there was no chance for lust or any other defilement to arise from his seeing the woman. Then practising vipassanā based on his jhānic consciousness, he became free from defilements and attained arahantship.

Non-meditators might doubt that an image of a skeleton could arise at the sight of a person's teeth. However, without practice one cannot know what mind-training can do. Just concentrating without any training cannot help to create mental images, for they depend on steadfast and prolonged practice of contemplation. Imagination is the power of perception. Repeated contemplation strengthens perception, which then helps to create any kind of image. That this is possible even for a parrot is illustrated by a story from the commentary on the Satipatthāna Sutta.

### **The Story of a Parrot**

A dancer stayed for the night with the bhikkhunīs and left an intelligent parrot when she went away. The bird was cared for by the novices. The senior bhikkhunī thought that the bird should have something to contemplate while living among spiritual aspirants. So she taught her to contemplate "atthi — bones." One morning, the parrot was seized by an eagle. Because of the outcry raised by the novices, the eagle dropped the parrot. The bhikkhunī asked the parrot what it contemplated when it was seized by the eagle. The bird replied, "I thought of a skeleton being carried off and I wondered where it would be scattered." The bhikkhunī said, "Well done! This contemplation will contribute to your liberation from existence."

A thing that is repeatedly contemplated will become fixed in the mind. If even a parrot can visualize a skeleton, a human being can do the same. The parrot imagined itself and others to be skeletons. Because of this contemplation, it had no fear, anger or worry when it was taken away by the eagle.

So Satipatthāna meditation is extolled as a practice that helps to overcome grief and anxiety and to extinguish mental and physical suffering. However, many people are not as wise as this parrot since they never take any interest in the Dhamma nor do they practise it. The meditator should resolve to surpass the parrot in the practice of insight. If Venerable Mahātissa had failed to regard the laughing woman as a skeleton, he might have become lustful and yielded to temptation in the solitude of the forest. Even if he had had no sexual desire then, any attractive impression of the woman could have made him vulnerable to temptation later. However, thanks to his insight through contemplation of the skeleton, he overcame defilements and achieved final liberation.

## **Contemplation and Extinction**

With the total extinction of craving, attachment is extinguished, which entails the eradication of all the consequences. Contemplation of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self ensures the partial extinction of craving, attachment, kamma, rebirth, etc. The aim of insight meditation is to eradicate defilements and to put an end to all suffering, so it

deserves the attention of everyone who seeks happiness. Without this practice, pleasant or unpleasant feelings at every moment of seeing are sure to lead to craving, kamma, and rebirth. The consciousness involved in every moment of seeing is due to ignorance and mental formations in the previous existence. Seeing occurs with consciousness, mind and matter, the sense-bases, contact, and feeling. The Pāli texts treat each of these separately when explaining their causal relations, but they do not arise separately. If consciousness arises from mental formations, it arises with its respective mind and matter, sense-bases, contact, and feeling. All these phenomena are the product of past mental formations. They are called the cycle of resultants. The cycle of defilements — ignorance, craving, and attachment — produces the cycle of kamma — mental formations and becoming. This leads to the cycle of resultants — consciousness, mind and matter, sense-organs, contact, and feeling. This again leads to the cycle of defilements.

The arising of these five resultants when seeing just means seeing to most people. In fact, seeing is the product of consciousness, mind and matter, the eye-base, contact, and feeling. It is the same with other psychophysical events such as hearing, smelling, and so forth. Seeing involves consciousness together with attention, volition, etc., based on the eye. It also requires eye-sensitivity, visual object, visual-consciousness, and mental advertence (*dhammāyatana*). Contact with the visual object is *phassa*, and the pleasant or unpleasant feelings that the object occasions are *vedanā*. So all five resultants accompany every moment of seeing. The same may be said of other phenomena that arise from hearing, smelling, and so forth.

## Cutting Off at the Foundation

This constant stream of five psychophysical resultants is what we call a man, a deva, or a living being. However, these are just conventional terms that refer to the five mental and physical aggregates. Ultimately, no substantial, permanent being can be found. The only reality is the arising and passing away of psychophysical phenomena. For the mindful meditator this insight means the extinction of craving, attachment, kamma, rebirth, and suffering — a chain of consequences that, for an unmindful person, might result from feeling. This is how to end the cycle of existence through the elimination of its key link — craving, as conditioned by feeling. To prevent feeling from giving rise to craving, one should note all phenomena that arise from the six senses. The most obvious is the tactile sensation that accompanies the four primary elements. So, the beginner should start contemplation with tactile sensations.

This method is according to the Buddha's teaching in the *Satipatthāna Sutta*, "One knows 'I am walking' when one walks." How does one know it? One knows it by mentally noting, "walking, walking". One practises mindfulness, too, when one stands, lies down, bends the arms, or does anything else. When no bodily action or movement can be noted, one should direct the attention to the abdominal rising and falling. One should also note any thought or mental activity and any feeling that may arise. In brief, one must be mindful of all the psychophysical phenomena that arise from the six senses. As concentration develops, such mindfulness leads to insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, an insight that leaves no room for craving. With the extinction of craving, attachment ceases, and therefore rebirth too, with all its attendant suffering. This is the way to stop the cycle of existence through the elimination of its root cause, craving.

Technology has created machines that cannot be operated without knowing how they work, but those who know how can control them just by turning a key. Similarly, the key to the cycle of Dependent Origination is the link between craving and feeling. However, this is true only if feeling is conjoined with two kinds of latent tendencies: *santānānusaya* and *ārammanānusaya*. Arahants are free from these tendencies and so, although they have feelings, they have no craving. This extinction of craving leaves no room for new kamma and neutralises old kamma, so the arahant is not reborn. Other people have latent defilements, which does not mean the existence of immoral desires lying dormant somewhere, but only the possibility of their arising under suitable circumstances. Hence, the term '*santānānusaya kilesa*'. These latent defilements may become greed, hatred, ignorance or other defects in those who fail to contemplate, and who thus embrace illusions

of permanence, happiness and selfhood. Defilements that may arise from sense-objects in the absence of insight are called ārammanānusaya kilesa.

## Defilements and Unmindfulness

Greed and ill-will regarding what one has seen or heard are manifestations of the second kind of latent tendency. The impressions we retain are of permanent, lovely or repulsive objects. So recall of those images leads to greed, hatred or delusion. Greed is a synonym for craving. It usually arises directly in response to pleasant feeling, but it may also arise when unpleasant feelings make us crave for pleasure. Delusion leads to unmindfulness, and therefore to attachment and craving. Only the practice of bare awareness rules out the possibility of craving and nostalgia. Without it, craving dominates us and leads to suffering.

In the Mora Jātaka, the bodhisatta was a peacock who used to utter a verse of protection in the morning after he awoke and at night before he went to sleep. So, for 700 years he escaped the traps set by a hunter. Then the hunter employed a peahen as a decoy. Enticed by her, the peacock forgot to recite the verse and so fell into the trap.

Guttila was a harpist in Benares. He courted a woman but was ridiculed and scorned. So at night he sang a sweet song and played his harp in front of her house. Fascinated by the music, she rushed out, stumbled, and fell to her death. In the Mora Jātaka it was the female voice, and here it was the male voice that led to death.

No-one can deny that sound is impermanent. Every sound vanishes instantly, yet we enjoy songs and music because of their apparent continuity. If we note every sound as, "hearing", "hearing", our realisation of impermanence makes it impossible for pleasant feeling to engender craving. This means the non-arising of attachment and its resultant suffering.

Smell is seldom predominant. A meditator must, of course, note it and see that it does not lead to craving.

Mindfulness is especially important in eating. Unmindful people love delicious food. They are fond of such pleasure, and always want to enjoy it. According to the Bālapandita Sutta, those who do misdeeds for the sake of delicious food are reborn as animals that eat grass, leaves or human excreta. Unpalatable food creates the desire for delicious food. So, when eating, one must note carefully each movement of the hand and mouth, and every taste. Through such mindfulness, one realises that all actions and feelings vanish. Thus one gains an insight into impermanence, an insight leading to the extinction of craving and its attendant suffering.

## Thoughts and Tactile Impressions

Tactile impression is always present over the entire physical body. Thinking, too, is always present unless one is asleep. So thoughts and tactile impressions form the objects of insight practice most of the time. One should contemplate them when nothing else engages one's attention. Thoughts should be noted, even if they happen to be unpleasant. A beginner is often assailed by distractions, but they usually disappear as one gains experience and develops concentration. Thoughts about the Dhamma may occur sometimes, and should also be noted. Contemplation of thoughts ensures insight into impermanence and the extinction of suffering.

Some readers may be wondering how insight meditation relates to Dependent Origination. The doctrine explains the chain of effects conditioned by their respective causes. I want to show how to stop the suffering that results from the interaction of cause and effect. So I should describe the practice wherever it is relevant. Thus when it is said, "Ignorance leads to mental formations" and "mental formations lead to rebirth", I must show how to remove ignorance. Similarly, concerning consciousness, etc., I must stress how to break the link between feeling and craving, which is the main cause of suffering.

## Three Kinds of Craving

If feeling is not rightly contemplated, it leads to one of three kinds of craving: craving for sensual pleasure, craving for existence or craving for non-existence. The first, craving for sensual pleasures, is focused on sensual objects and is most prevalent among the beings of the sensual realm. Craving for existence is based on the eternity-belief. It assumes the permanence of living beings and the indestructibility of the self despite the dissolution of the physical body. This belief is not deep-rooted among Buddhists, but non-Buddhists hold it so firmly that it is a major impediment to their liberation. Their craving for existence is evident in their illusion of a permanent self and their love of pleasure. Craving for non-existence is born of annihilationism. This view is not found among Buddhists, and one is not a true Buddhist if one holds it. Craving for non-existence means the desire for the cessation of the life-stream after death, and the love of pleasure rooted in the materialistic view of life.

Each of these three cravings stems from the failure to realise impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self through the introspection of feelings. So to forestall craving and its consequences, namely, rebirth and suffering, one should contemplate all phenomena and try to see everything as it really is.

# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

## From Craving, Attachment Arises

**D**EPENDENT on craving, attachment (upādāna) arises. The term upādāna is a compound of upa = intense, extreme, and ādāna = grasp, take. Thus it means to grasp firmly, or intense, obsessive craving. Attachment is of four kinds: 1) attachment to sensual pleasures, 2) attachment to wrong views, 3) attachment to rituals as the way to salvation, and 4) attachment to the belief in a soul, or personality-belief.

## Attachment to Sensual Pleasures

Sensual objects arouse desire in everyone who is not free from sensual craving. These objects are five in number: sight, sound, odour, taste, and touch.

Men, women, and consumer goods may possess natural beauty or may seem beautiful in the eyes of the beholder. It is the physical appearance of women that attracts men, and vice versa. Both men and women like clothes, jewellery, cars, etc. It is not merely the shape or colour that arouses desire. Men and women are drawn towards each other, not only by the complexion but by the whole persona of the opposite sex. Consumer goods are designed to make people want them. Shape and colour announce or identify sense objects just as the cry of an animal helps the hunter to track it. The voices of men and women, songs or music are pleasing to the ear. Some sounds and voices are really melodious while others seem pleasing only to a few. Again, it is not the mere sound that attracts us for when we delight in hearing a sound or a voice, it is the whole thing or the being producing it that forms the focus of our attachment.

Fragrant odours include all kinds of scents: flowers, powders, perfumes, etc. Men and women apply perfumes to their bodies and delight in these scents. Then, it is not the scents alone, but the whole physical body giving out the scent that arouses desire.

The pleasure that we get from eating or drinking is based on food and drink. For pigs, dogs, and other animals, even scraps and waste may be pleasurable. Some people are very fond of bitter or spicy food, while others like intoxicants. Their pleasure is more apparent than real since most people do not share their preferences. The pleasure of eating is not confined to food, but also involves the preparation of food, or the person who prepares it. This is evident when a man enjoys eating food prepared by his wife although her cooking may not impress others.

Another source of pleasure is physical contact. Soft beds, luxurious clothing, warm things in the cold season, cool things in the hot season, the body of the opposite sex — all of these produce not only the craving for touch, but also the wish to possess the object of desire. Physical contact paves the way for attachment to the body.

Animate and inanimate things provide the means for enjoyment, for example, money, jewellery, food, animals, vehicles, houses, land, and dependants. People work hard to secure these sources of pleasure so that they can have delicious food, beautiful clothes, and fine houses, and enjoy entertainments.

Craving usually leads to attachment. When a man starts smoking, he enjoys it, and as he grows accustomed to the habit he becomes addicted. Through habit one becomes excessively fond of certain objects and feels frustrated or restless on not getting them. So, sensual craving gradually develops into sensual attachment, grasping or infatuation (kāmuṇādāna). Attachment cannot arise without craving. Foreign songs and music do not

appeal as much as those from one's own culture, so people do not enthuse about them. The same is often true of exotic foreign dishes, which enjoy great popularity in their country of origin.

## **Attachment to Wrong Views**

Another kind of attachment is attachment to wrong views (*ditthupādāna*). It covers all the wrong views, apart from those in the third and fourth categories of attachment. So every wrong view is to be regarded as attachment. Here, we will describe at length ten wrong views that have a firm hold on many people.

The first view is that charity is not a meritorious deed — that it is only a waste of money. This view rejects the value and benefits of a good deed, but it is baseless. An act of charity makes the donor joyful, benefits the recipient in body and mind, and may even save one's life if one is starving. The donor is popular and highly respected, and after death is reborn in a celestial realm. Convincing sceptics of this reward after death is difficult, but the results of kamma can be seen by those with psychic powers. One of these is the divine eye, which enables one to see donors prospering in celestial realms, or to see immoral, non-donors suffering in the lower realms. Such visions may even appear to meditators who lack psychic powers but have deep concentration. Sceptics may dismiss these visions as just imagination, but the widespread agreement of accounts about other realms lends weight to their credibility.

The second wrong view denies the kammic benefits of charity on a grand scale.

The third view rejects the kammic benefits of feeding guests, giving gifts on New Year's Day and so forth. This view is essentially the same as the first. It refers to small acts of charity that were customary in ancient India but dismissed as futile by heretics.

The fourth view denies the kammic result of any virtuous or immoral act. Plenty of evidence can be found for the effects of a man's actions in this very life. As for the results after death, those with psychic powers can testify to them. However, people who are excessively fond of sensual pleasures like to give a free rein to their desires. They resent moral values and noble ideals, which they regard as an obstruction to their material progress. So they put forward many arguments to justify their rejection of the kammic law. In the end, all this prevarication is due to their excessive love of pleasure.

The fifth and sixth views deny that we owe any respect, honour or support to our mother and father for their loving care in our childhood. It is said that parents have children through the indiscretion of sexual intercourse, that they bring them up from a sense of responsibility, so why should children be grateful to them? Therefore, it is not a duty to look after one's parents nor is it immoral to ill-treat them. This is a despicable view, and those who hold it will not be respected by their children.

The seventh view denies the existence of any realm other than the human and the animal worlds. It also rejects the possibility that an animal may be reborn as a human being.

The eighth view denies the rebirth of human beings in celestial or animal realms, or in hell, and teaches annihilation after death.

The ninth view denies spontaneous rebirth. In other words, it denies the existence of living beings that appear spontaneously without being conceived in the womb. This view is untenable since encounters with benevolent or malevolent spirits are reported from all over the world, and mediums and witch-doctors can invoke them. Celestial beings or spirits are sometimes visible to meditators.

The tenth view is that no recluse or priest can speak of this world or the other world and still conform to his own teaching. The view implies that no-one can speak objectively about kamma based on personal experience. It means that all their teaching is guesswork and

speculation, and so erroneous and corrupt. Today this view is echoed by those who scoff at religion. They reject the existence of Buddhas and arahants who, through their own effort, know the world as it really is. However, the logic underlying this view is self-defeating. By the same kind of reasoning, one can reject this view since those who hold it also do not really know anything about this or the other world. As for the Buddhadhamma, it rests on extraordinary insight. So it lends itself to empirical investigation, and much scientific evidence supports it. The man who taught the Indian brand of scepticism in the time of the Buddha was Ajita. He attacked all religious teaching without qualification, so presumably the arahants and the Buddha were also targets of his denunciation.

All these wrong views amount to the denial of the law of kamma. The rejection of kamma means rejection of any benefit from charity, reverence to parents and other meritorious deeds. So, the potential for arahantship or Buddhahood is also rejected. Conversely, the ten right views are based on the belief in kamma, or moral accountability.

The first right view is that charity is beneficial. A donor is admired at least by the recipients, who will respect their benefactors, praise them and help them in times of trouble. The donor dies calmly with pleasant deathbed visions and after death attains a favourable rebirth in either the celestial or human realms. A favourable rebirth may finally lead to the Noble Path and nibbāna. It was usually with an act of charity that the bodhisatta and others embarked on their long spiritual journey leading to the goal of Buddhahood, Paccekabuddhahood or arahantship. The kammic benefit of almsgiving is also evident in the disparate prosperity of various people engaged in trading or farming. Some prosper while others make a loss. Some meet with success easily while others fail to prosper despite their hard work. Other things being equal, this disparity is no doubt due to charity or the lack of it in a previous life.

As for the second and third views: One who believes in kamma will have no doubt about the value of giving alms lavishly, or the benefit of small acts of generosity such as feeding guests, giving presents, and so forth. These three right views are implicit in the law of kamma or moral accountability. That we fare according to our wholesome or unwholesome deeds is undeniable. Someone who leads a virtuous life according to the instruction of their parents and teachers is popular, gets help from others and achieves success. As they grow older, their prosperity increases. Similarly, because of wholesome kamma in a previous life one may be born in a noble family and be blessed with health, wealth, good looks, and sincere friends. The unfavourable effects of unwholesome kamma such as poor health, poverty, ugliness, etc., are also obvious.

The fourth view, the belief in kamma, also implies a recognition of deep indebtedness to our parents (the fifth and sixth views). Parents take care of their children from the time of conception. A pregnant woman is especially careful about her health, diet, and movements for the sake of the child in her womb. If she is a pious Buddhist, she keeps the eight precepts and contemplates the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha in the hope of influencing her child spiritually. After the child is born, the parents provide all its physical needs and education. When the child comes of age, they give whatever financial support they can to provide it with a start in life. For all these reasons, it is our obligation to respect and care for our parents. This wholesome kamma benefits us tremendously. At the very least, children who respect their parents will be respected in turn by their children. However, if they mistreat their parents they are very likely to be disdained by their own children.

The seventh, eighth, and ninth views concern the existence of this world, the other world, and beings that are reborn spontaneously. These right views also imply the belief in kamma. The law of kamma makes it possible for an animal or deva to be reborn as a human being, or vice versa. This can be verified to a certain extent but the observer must possess psychic powers, insight knowledge, or the ability to think rationally. Through the practice of mental absorption, one can attain the power of recalling previous lives and the divine eye, which can see the condition of a person who has passed on to a new existence. This psychic power is also accessible to those who practise insight meditation. Those who cannot practise meditation must rely on reasoning. In the Buddhist scriptures many individuals are



accredited with the ability to recall their previous lives. They describe their past lives as human beings, animals, spirits or ghosts. To the rational mind, these accounts clearly corroborate rebirth in other realms after death and the sudden materialisation of certain beings.

It is relevant to mention the wise attitude regarding life after death. Suppose that one person accepts the belief in kamma and life after death while another rejects it. The second person will not do meritorious deeds such as charity and taking precepts, and will not avoid doing wrong. He or she will give a free rein to desire and so has no virtue worthy of respect or emulation. If the law of kamma is true, he or she is sure to be born in the lower realms and to suffer for many lifetimes. On the other hand, the person who believes in kamma and life after death will avoid immorality and cultivate virtue. So even if kamma and the afterlife are illusory, he or she will be praised and respected as a good person and will rejoice on recalling charitable deeds. As a respectable citizen, he or she will lead a peaceful life. These are the present benefits from the belief in kamma. If there is a life after death, one is assured of happiness in the future. So accepting the belief in life after death is pragmatic since it serves our present and future interests in any event. This is the infallible way of thinking that the Buddha recommended in the *Apannaka Sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya*.

The tenth view concerns faith in the Buddha, the arahants, and sages who can claim transcendent knowledge about this and other realms, and whose character lends credence to their teachings. Such faith also implies the belief in kamma because the attainment of the arahants and the Buddha rests in part on their perfections, which do not differ essentially from wholesome kamma. Development of perfections is a kind of learning. Just as a child has to learn many things to become well-educated, a bodhisatta has to seek knowledge and training for the attainment of his goal.

Some parents take their children to films and plays while others take theirs to pagodas and monasteries. So children learn skilful or unskilful habits and develop a taste for pleasure or appreciation of spiritual values. Skilful habits and self-discipline are a kind of perfection. Some children are spontaneously inclined towards a religious life. A few individuals have immense zeal for insight meditation. Such unusual interest in religion or strong inclination to practise meditation is born of the perfections in a previous life.

Prince Siddhattha became the Buddha because he had gradually developed and perfected virtues such as charity, morality, and renunciation over innumerable lifetimes. His enlightenment was not a matter of quick accomplishment in a single lifetime. The cumulative kammic potential strengthened his resolve to leave his family and the luxuries of the palace to seek enlightenment. Many people speak of their disillusionment with life, but it is very rare for a man to renounce all his wealth and become a monk. The kind of renunciation that distinguished the bodhisatta is barely conceivable. The bodhisatta cultivated nine other perfections in previous lives for the sake of enlightenment: generosity, morality, wisdom, energy, forbearance, resolution, truthfulness, kindness, and equanimity. Consequently, in his final existence he was able to reflect and realise independently the nature of life, its Dependent Origination, etc. So, the perfections finally led to supreme enlightenment. The spiritual attainments of Paccekabuddhas and arahants were also based on their perfections. So, the belief in kamma makes it possible for one to become an arahant, Paccekabuddha or a Buddha. One who accepts this belief has no doubt about the transcendent knowledge of the Buddha and other sages.

So, attachment to wrong views is generally synonymous with denial of the law of kamma. This view was not so widespread in the time of the Buddha, or even a hundred years ago. However, now it is gaining ground, mainly due to books that criticise the doctrine of kamma in the name of scientific inquiry. As the scriptures say, wrong views are usually rooted in craving. With man's increasing greed for consumer goods, scepticism about kamma is likely to become stronger, so pious people should guard themselves against it.

Apart from the rejection of kamma, ditthupādāna also means strong attachment to ego-belief, annihilationism, and so forth. Attachment to rituals (sīlabbatupādāna) and attachment to belief in a soul (attavādupādāna) are the other two kinds of wrong views.

## Attachment to Rituals

Sīlabbatupādāna is attachment to futile practices that do not lead to the end of suffering. It is the view that imitating cows, dogs or other animals leads to the end of suffering. It found expression among some ascetics in the time of the Buddha. Like animals, they lived naked, slept on the ground, and ate, defecated, and went about on all fours. They believed that such a way of life served to purge them of all unwholesome kamma and forestall new kamma, thus assuring them of an end to suffering and eternal bliss after death.

This view may sound incredible, but some people's preferences are very odd as they differ in their beliefs and inclinations. Once two ascetics, one named Punna (who lived like an ox) and another named Seniya (who lived like a dog), came to see the Buddha. They asked the Lord about the benefits of their practice. The Lord was reluctant to answer, but when pressed he replied that one who fully imitated the habits of an ox would be reborn as an ox after death, while one who imitated a dog would be reborn as a dog. He said that to believe such practices led to the celestial realm was mistaken, and that one who held a wrong view would be reborn either in hell or as an animal. The Buddha went on to describe the immoral practices that bear bitter fruits, the moral practices that bear sweet fruits, the immoral practices mixed with moral practices, and the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path, which leads to the total extinction of wholesome and unwholesome kammās. On hearing this discourse Punna became a lay disciple of the Buddha. Seniya joined the Sangha and attained arahantship through the practice of the Dhamma.

### The Story of Korakhattiya

Korakhattiya was an ascetic who lived like a dog. One day the Buddha passed by him, accompanied by a Licchavi bhikkhu named Sunakkhatta. Sunakkhatta saw the ascetic moving on all fours and eating his food on the ground without the help of his hands. He thought the ascetic must be an arahant who had no desires. However, the ascetic's mode of life was a kind of attachment to rituals that would lead him to one of the four lower realms. Such behaviour is abhorrent to those who have high ideals and aspirations. It appealed to Sunakkhatta only because of his own low tastes and desires. The Licchavi monk was exceptional in this respect. Unlike now, many people preferred wrong views and futile practices that did not accord with the Buddha's teaching. This was probably a residue from wrong attachments in their previous lives.

The Buddha divined Sunakkhatta's thoughts and said, "So you regard that ascetic as an arahant! I wonder why you do not feel ashamed of being called a disciple of the Buddha." Sunakkhatta then accused the Lord of envying the ascetic's arahantship. This, of course, is the kind of retort to be expected from an ignorant man when someone speaks the truth about his misguided teacher. The Buddha explained that his aim was to remove the monk's illusions, which would do him great harm. Then he went on to predict that after seven days the ascetic would die of indigestion and be reborn in the lowest asura realm; that his body would be dumped in a cemetery where there was a certain kind of grass; and that if Sunakkhatta went there and asked where the ascetic had been reborn, the dead body would reveal it. The Buddha made this prophecy to restore Sunakkhatta's faith in him. Through the practice of concentration, Sunakkhatta had attained the divine eye, with which he had seen the gods and goddesses. Since he wished to hear their voices, he asked the Buddha how to attain the divine ear. However, the Lord denied his request because he knew that Sunakkhatta's obstructive kamma would prevent his attainment. Then he would blame the Lord for his non-attainment of the divine ear. Nevertheless, Sunakkhatta lost faith in the Lord because he thought this refusal was motivated by envy. So the Buddha predicted the ascetic's fate to impress Sunakkhatta and salvage his faith.

Sunakkhatta informed the ascetic of the Lord's prediction and warned him against overeating. The ascetic fasted for six days but on the seventh day he could no longer resist the temptation. He wolfed down the food provided by a lay follower and died of indigestion that very night. His fellow ascetics dragged his dead body to dump it at a cemetery unlike that predicted by the Buddha. They got to a cemetery but found it had the very kind of grass specified by the Buddha. They tried to drag the body away but the rope snapped and all their efforts to remove it were in vain. So they had to abandon the corpse there. Sunakkhatta heard the news, but still hoped to disprove the latter part of the Lord's prediction. He went to the cemetery and, rapping on the dead man's chest, asked where he had been reborn. The corpse rose, saying that he was in the Kalakañjika Asura realm, then fell back on the ground. Kalakañjika is the lowest asura realm. An asura is a kind of hungry ghost with a monstrous body and a mouth that is so small that it cannot drink and eat well. According to the commentary, it was the Buddha's psychic power that caused the dead body to become possessed by the asura peta. Given the ability of some sorcerers to raise the dead, there is no need to doubt the Buddha's ability to resurrect the dead ascetic. Sunakkhatta came back crestfallen and had to admit that the Lord's prediction had been accurate. Even so, he did not have complete faith in the Buddha. He later left the Sangha and disparaged the Lord.

Other practices, besides imitating animals, can also be described as rituals. Some people deify elephants, horses, and so forth. In other words, they worship animals. The commentary refers to king-worshippers, which may include people in Burma who worship various Nats. This Nat-worship is not motivated by desire for liberation. It stems from the hope for material benefits in the present life. As such, it does not fall within the scope of attachment to rituals, but attachment to this view leads some people to make animal sacrifices. There are also fire-worship, nāga-worship, moon-worship, sun-worship, spirit-worship, and so forth. If the aim of any kind of worship is to gain bliss or liberation after death, then it is attachment to rituals. In short, all practices divorced from the Noble Eightfold Path are called rituals, and attachment to them as the way to salvation is attachment to rituals.

The stream-winner knows the path to nibbāna, and is thus totally free from belief in futile practices. He or she knows empirically that the end of suffering is only possible through introspection of mind and matter and the development of the Noble Path. For example, if you know your way to Shwedagon Pagoda, you will not be misled by anyone who points out the wrong route. Likewise, the stream-winner has no illusions about belief in God, Nat-worship or asceticism that pass for the way to liberation.

Those who do not know the right path are not free from such illusion. They may have learnt it from their parents, teachers or friends, or they might have been misguided by books that advocate wrong views and practices. Ordinary people are ignorant of the right path to nibbāna, so if they follow a misguided teacher or wrong practice, they will meet with a lot of suffering. For example, the practice of austerities will cause unnecessary hardship and pain, while making animal sacrifices will certainly lead to the lower realms.

It is also attachment to rituals to believe that rūpa-jhāna or arūpa-jhāna means salvation. Even moral perfection or jhānic attainment, though commendable, may lead to attachment to rituals if they are regarded as sufficient for liberation without cultivating insight. The Uddaka Sutta of the Samyuttanikāya refers to the hermit Uddaka. Having attained the immaterial realm through arūpa-jhāna, he declared that he had uprooted the cause of suffering and made an end to it. This was also the illusion of another hermit called Ælāra. This illusion or attachment led to their wholesome kamma, which in turn led to their rebirth in the immaterial realms. So in his discourse to Baka Brahmā, the Buddha said, "I see the dangers of birth, aging, and death inherent in the sensual, fine-material, and immaterial realms. I see those who seek nibbāna still bound to existence, so I do not extol any kind of existence. I have rejected all attachment to existence." Like the two hermits, those who do not know the Buddha's teaching never attain their goal. Although they seek eternal happiness, they follow the wrong path and remain entangled in suffering. So we can hardly overemphasise the need to cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path.

## Attachment to Belief in the Soul

Attavādupādāna is a compound of attavāda and upādāna. Attavāda means belief in a soul and so attavādupādāna is attachment to the view that every person has a soul. Attachment to the ego-belief is of two kinds: ordinary attachment and deep-rooted attachment. The ordinary attachment that prevails among ignorant Buddhists is not obstructive to progress on the Path. The belief is not deeply entrenched because they accept the Buddha's teaching, which denies a soul and recognizes mind and matter as the only reality behind a living being. Intelligent Buddhists are still less vulnerable to the belief, for they know that seeing, hearing, etc., involve only the sense-organs, the corresponding sense-objects, and the corresponding states of consciousness. However, most people are not wholly free from ego-belief. Even the insight meditator may fall for it, and everyone who has not attained the Noble Path is likely to find it attractive. Those who taught ego-belief described the self as the owner of the five aggregates, as an independent entity, possessing free-will and self-determination. It was this view of the soul that the Buddha rebutted in his debate with the wandering ascetic Saccaka. The Buddha asked, "You say that this physical body is your soul. Can you then always keep it well, free from anything unpleasant?" Saccaka had to admit that he could not. Further questioning by the Lord elicited that he had no control over any of the five aggregates. So Buddhist teachers translate "rūpam anattā" as "the body is not subject to our control." This amounts to the denial of the wrong view of a soul as a controlling entity (sāmi-attā). Every ordinary person holds this view and believes in free-will. He can overcome it completely only through insight.

The proponents of the soul belief also say that the soul exists permanently in the physical body. This means the personality, which is said to persist throughout life. Again, they say that the soul is the agent of all actions, thus identifying it with the aggregate of mental formations. It is the belief that creates the illusions, "I see", "I hear", etc. They also say that the soul is the living entity that feels, that is happy or unhappy. In other words, they describe the soul in terms of feeling. Thus although those who believe in the soul insist that it has nothing to do with the five aggregates, they say that it owns the body, resides in the body, and has subjectivity and feeling. Therefore, they implicitly identify it with the five aggregates. The ego-illusion is rooted in the five aggregates and one can get free from it completely only when one realises the true nature of the aggregates through insight meditation.

Of the four kinds of attachment, attachment to sensual pleasures is the developed form of craving. The other three kinds of attachment all relate to views: belief in the soul, belief in rites and rituals, and any other wrong view. All wrong views arise through craving, since people adopt and cling to a particular view because they like it. Thus all four kinds of attachment undoubtedly stem from craving. Hence the Buddha's teaching, "Dependent on craving, attachment arises." So, craving is the cause and attachment is the effect.

# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

## From Attachment, Becoming Arises

**A**TTACHMENT leads to becoming (bhava), of which there are two kinds: kammabhava and upapattibhava. Kammabhava means the kamma that leads to rebirth. The Buddha describes it as the wholesome, unwholesome and imperturbable kammās that lead to the sensual realms or the fine-material and immaterial realms. He also identifies kammabhava with all kammās that produce new existence. Of the three kammās, wholesome kamma comprises the eight wholesome volitions of the sensual sphere, and five of the fine-material sphere. Unwholesome kamma is the twelve unwholesome volitions. Imperturbable kamma is the four wholesome volitions of the immaterial sphere. Kammās that arise with wholesome thoughts of the sensual sphere also lead to rebirth. This means abstaining from covetousness, ill-will, and wrong views. In short, kammabhava is the wholesome or unwholesome volition that leads to rebirth.

Upapattibhava is of nine kinds: 1) kāmabhava means the mind and matter of living beings in the sensual realm. In other words, it refers to existences in hell and celestial realms, or among human beings, animals, and hungry ghosts. 2) Rūpabhava is the aggregates of brahmās with form. 3) Arūpabhava is the mental aggregates of formless brahmās. 4) Saññībhava is the mental and material aggregates of beings with gross perceptions, i.e. beings in twenty-nine realms other than the realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. 5) Asaññībhava is the material aggregate of Asaññī-brahmās. 6) Nevasaññī-nāsaññībhava is the mental aggregates of higher brahmās. 7) Ekavokārabhava is the becoming with only the material aggregate. 8) Catuvokārabhava is the becoming with four mental aggregates. 9) Pañcavokārabhava is the becoming with five mental and material aggregates. In short, upapattibhava means the aggregates of existence that result from kamma. It comprises consciousness, mind and matter, sense-bases, contact, and feeling. The becoming conditioned by attachment is kammabhava; upapattibhava is merely its by-product.

From contact with the six pleasant or unpleasant sense-objects, six pleasant or unpleasant feelings arise. Feelings lead to craving, and craving develops into attachment. Attachment may become excessive to the point of longing for reunion with one's family in a future life or attainment of nibbāna with one's beloved. The awesome power of attachment is evident in the story of the merchant Mendaka.

### The Story of Mendaka

Mendaka had been a rich merchant in a previous life. In that life, during a famine, his provisions gradually dwindled and ran out. Finally, he had to send away all his servants, and was left with just his wife, his son and daughter-in-law, and one slave. His wife had cooked rice that was just sufficient for their own needs when a Paccekabuddha appeared, collecting almsfood. At the sight of the Paccekabuddha, the merchant thought of his lack of charity in previous lives, which had led to hunger in this one. So he offered his share of rice to the Paccekabuddha and prayed for an abundant supply of food and reunion with the members of his household in his future lives. His wife, too, donated her share of rice and expressed a similar wish. The son and his wife followed suit and prayed similarly for an unlimited supply of food and money and reunion with the same wife, husband, parents, and slaves. The prayers of the merchant and his family clearly point to the powerful influence of sensual attachment.

Most people today are subject to the same kind of attachment. However, more appalling is the attachment of the slave Punna. After offering his share of rice, he prayed for abundance of food and rebirth as the slave of the same family! It never occurred to him to pray for a

rebirth as a king or a merchant. His attachment to his master and mistress was so strong that he wanted only to be their slave again in the future.

Once, a village headman stood well with government officials. Those were the days of British rule when most of the high-ranking officials in Burma were English. The headman took great delight in paying respect to them. He said that he enjoyed saying, Phayā, "Yes, my Lord," when he was called by an officer. His attachment was essentially the same as that of Punna.

The Paccekabuddha blessed Mendaka's household and departed. By means of his psychic power they saw him fly back to the Himalayas and share the food with five hundred other Paccekabuddhas. On that very day, the merchant and his family found their acts of charity miraculously bearing fruit. They found the rice pot full of rice, and after they had eaten to their heart's content, the pot was still full of rice. They found their granaries, too, overflowing with grain. Their prayers were fulfilled in the lifetime of Buddha Gotama for they again became members of the same household in Bhaddiya, a city of the Māgadha country. The news of the fulfilment of their prayers was so remarkable that the king had a minister investigate it. He found that it was indeed true. This story is mentioned in the Vinaya Pitaka.

When desire for an object develops into intense craving, a person becomes desperate and tries to secure it by any means. Theft, robbery, fraud, murder, and so forth, which are rampant nowadays, stem from attachment. Some crimes are rooted in sensual attachment while others arise from one of the three kinds of illusion based on attachment. People commit crimes not only because of their unwholesome desire but also because of their blind attachment to wives, husbands, etc. The following story illustrates the unfavourable results of sensual attachment.

### **Puppharatta Jātaka**

Long ago, there was a poor man in Benares. He and his wife had only white clothes. He washed them to wear during a festival, but his wife disliked them and craved for pink garments. All his efforts to reason with her being in vain, he finally sneaked into the royal garden at night to steal the flower needed to dye his wife's garments. He fell into the hands of the guards and was ordered by the king to be impaled. He suffered terribly with the crows pecking at his eyes. Yet he murmured that his agony was nothing compared with the grief that overwhelmed him when he thought of the non-fulfilment of his wife's desire and his inability to enjoy the festival with her. So mourning over his misfortune, he died and landed in hell.

Many people do wrong due to the pressure of those whom they love. All these immoral deeds comprise karmas stemming from attachment. So the Visuddhimagga says, "Under the influence of sensual attachment, people act immorally in deed, speech, and thought, craving to get and keep sensual objects. Such immoral deeds usually lead to the lower realms."

### **Right and Wrong Good Intentions**

Some well-intentioned deeds are skilful, but some so-called good deeds are harmful, and produce unwholesome karma. For example, some people believe it is kind to end the suffering of sick animals by "mercy killing". All living beings are afraid to die, so killing animals is definitely wrong. Some people think it is compassionate to hasten the death of someone suffering from an incurable and painful disease. However, the patient does not really want to die, but just wants to be free from pain. Even if they express the wish to die, causing death is always unethical from the Buddhist point of view. If one directly or indirectly causes the premature death of a parent by euthanasia it is a heavy karma that inevitably leads to hell.

"Craving for the pleasures of human and celestial realms, being misled by false teachings, some people do misdeeds such as killing to attain their objective, but because of their unwholesome kamma, they are reborn in the lower realms after death." According to the commentary, these misconceptions arise from corrupt teachers, lack of wholesome kamma in the past and the failure to protect oneself. Reliance on corrupt teachers leads to unwholesome kamma. Much unwholesome kamma in the previous life makes it easy to adopt wrong views and unskilful habits. Lack of vigilance makes one an easy prey to temptation.

True religion is called saddhamma, "the religion of the virtuous." Those who follow the true religion hear wise teachings, avoid immoral deeds, words, and thoughts, and acquire right views about the future life, kamma and its fruits. So, for their own benefit, they cultivate wholesome thoughts and practise charity, morality, and meditation. Such practices are noble because they are blameless and acceptable to everybody. Nobody will blame a man who avoids killing, stealing, slander, and other misdeeds. The meritorious deeds that we do are wholesome kammas stemming from attachment to the sensual realm. They lead to rebirth in the human or celestial realms. So the Visuddhimagga says, "Those who hear the true teaching believe in kamma and the efficacy of meritorious deeds as a passport to a better life in the sensual realms as wealthy men or divine beings. So they do meritorious deeds from sensual attachment and are reborn in the human and celestial realms."



# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

## From Becoming, Birth Arises

**R**EBIRTH OCCURS in the human, celestial or lower realms because of wholesome or unwholesome kamma. So rebirth stems from kamma, which results from attachment and craving. Craving is rooted in the contact between the six sense-objects and their corresponding sense-organs. In other words, consciousness, mind and matter, six sense-bases, contact, and feeling arise in the present life as the result of ignorance, mental formations, etc., in a previous life. Furthermore, craving and attachment produce new kamma, thus providing the basis for more rebirth. It is like a man committing a crime while on parole for a previous conviction, or incurring a new debt before the old one has been settled. Such fresh kammās accumulate by the thousand in a single lifetime. Under the right conditions one of these kammās becomes a deathbed vision and leads to rebirth, while other kammās will cause rebirths in the future. If any residual kammās from previous lives possess great force, they can take precedence over present kamma, appear as deathbed visions and cause rebirth in a lower or higher realm. The destiny of the person after death in such cases is determined by this kamma.

## Four Kinds of Kamma

Kamma is of four kinds according to the manner in which it bears fruit: 1) weighty kamma (garukamma), 2) habitual kamma (bahula or ācinnaka kamma), 3) death-proximate kamma (āsanna kamma), and 4) residual kamma (katattā kamma).

The five weighty unwholesome kammās are killing one's mother or father, killing an arahant, injuring a Buddha, and causing a schism in the Sangha. The weighty wholesome kammās are the rūpa and arūpa jhānas which lead to rebirth in the fine-material and immaterial realms. Weighty kamma delays the fruition of other kammās and leads to rebirth. Weighty unwholesome kamma leads directly to hell after death, so it is termed 'ānantariyakamma' — kamma (with results) that follow without delay. One who murders their father or mother, whether knowingly or unknowingly,<sup>1</sup> can never attain jhāna or nibbāna in the present life; they are condemned to hell after death, nor can any amount of wholesome kamma save them. This is evident in the story of Ajātasattu.

## The Story of Ajātasattu

Ajātasattu was the son of King Bimbisāra of Māgadha, a devoted follower of the Buddha. Before the birth of the prince, the queen had a craving to drink blood from the king's right arm. When the king learnt of this, he had the blood taken out to fulfil her wish. The astrologers predicted that the unborn child would become the king's enemy. So he was given the name 'Ajātasattu', which means 'the unborn enemy'. The queen tried to abort the child but as the king's kamma and the child's kamma were powerful she did not succeed. Thereafter, the king ordered the queen to be supervised closely until the child was born. When the young prince came of age, he was appointed heir-apparent. Then he fell into the clutches of the evil-minded Devadatta, who misused his psychic power to manipulate Ajātasattu. Turning himself into a boy with a snake coiled around his waist, he appeared before Ajātasattu and then showed himself as a bhikkhu. The prince was deeply impressed, which is not surprising, for people are very interested in miracles and have blind faith in anyone who can perform them.

The prince held Devadatta in high esteem and became his devoted follower. Then Devadatta made another move for the success of his wicked scheme. He told the prince that since people did not live long, he (the prince) should kill his father and become king

while still in the prime of his life. He (Devadatta), on his part, would kill the Buddha. The prince failed in his attempt on the life of the king, but when Bimbisāra learnt of his son's ambition, he handed over his kingdom. The transfer of power nevertheless fell short of Devadatta's scheme. On his advice, Ajātasattu imprisoned his father and starved him. The queen was the only person who was allowed to visit the king. She secretly brought food by various means until she was forbidden to visit the prison. From that day, the king got nothing to eat, but managed to keep himself healthy by pacing to and fro. Then, on Ajātasattu's order, the barbers caused such injury to his father's feet as to make it impossible for him to walk. According to the commentary, he was thus injured because in a previous life he walked with footwear on the platform of a pagoda and trod with unwashed feet on a mat meant for the bhikkhus.

King Bimbisāra probably died at the age of 67. His son Ajātasattu was not evil-minded at heart. His good nature was evident in his devotion to the Buddha after he had killed his father, his adoration and enshrinement of the Buddha relics, and the wholehearted support that he gave to the First Council. It was his association with a corrupt teacher that led him astray to the point of parricide. His life affords us a lesson that we should carefully bear in mind.

On the very day of his father's death, his wife gave birth to a son. On hearing the news, he became overwhelmed with great affection for the child. This reminded him of his father and he ordered the imprisoned king's release, but it was too late. When he later learnt from his mother how much he was loved and cared for by his father in his childhood, he was seized with remorse. His life became wretched and miserable. He could not sleep at night, being haunted by visions of hell and smitten by his conscience for the crime against his father, who was a devout disciple of the Buddha.

So, led by the physician Jīvaka, he went to see the Buddha. At that time the Lord was surrounded by more than a thousand bhikkhus. However, since they were deep in meditation, there was absolute silence. Deeply impressed, the king said, "May my son Udayabhadda be blessed with the kind of serenity that these bhikkhus possess!" Perhaps he feared that his son would learn how he had seized power and would try to do the same. His fear later became a reality, for right down to his great grandson, each son ascended the throne after killing his father. King Ajātasattu asked the Buddha about the immediate benefits of life in the Sangha. The Lord enlarged on the benefits accruing from the holy life: the reverence and support of the lay community, moral purity, the first jhāna and other higher states of consciousness in the mundane sphere, psychic powers, extinction of defilements and the attainments of the Noble Path. After hearing the discourse, Ajātasattu formally declared himself a disciple of the Buddha. If not for his parricide, he would have attained the first stage on the Path. Nevertheless, from that time on he had peace of mind, and after his death, he was spared the terrors of the deepest hell (Avīci) that would have been in store for him had he not met the Buddha.

The other three weighty karmas — killing an arahant, causing injury to the Buddha and wilfully causing a schism in the Sangha — are also bound to drag the offender to hell.

### **Habitual and Death-Proximate Karmas**

Another type of karma is habitual karma. Immorality may become habitual, and will have unpleasant effects in a future life, if no step is taken to change it. So lay Buddhists should live by the five precepts. If they fail, they should reaffirm their will to guard their moral life more vigilantly. Moral purity is equally vital for a bhikkhu. Failure to make amends for any violation of a Vinaya rule, whether deliberate or unintentional, will create habitual karma. So the bhikkhu should regain moral purity through confession and reaffirm his will to preserve it. Good habits like regular almsgiving, reverence for parents and teachers, contemplation of the Buddha, meditation, etc., are also habitual karmas that can bear immediate fruits.

In the absence of any decisive habitual kamma, some action done near the end of life determines rebirth. In one Abhidhamma book, death-proximate kamma is described as more potent than habitual kamma, but perhaps that is so only in exceptional cases. As the commentaries say, habitual kamma probably takes precedence in bearing fruit. Nevertheless, in the light of stories in ancient Buddhist literature we can confidently rely on death-proximate kamma. A dying man who had been an executioner for over fifty years was reborn in Tusita heaven after offering food to Venerable Sāriputta and hearing his discourse. This story finds an echo in the case of a Sinhalese fisherman who was reborn in the celestial realm after his encounter with a therā just before his death.

Unwholesome death-proximate kamma is just as potent. A Sinhalese layman who practised meditation for many years was disappointed because he had never seen any lights. He then concluded that the Buddha's teaching was not the way to liberation. Because of this wrong view he became a hungry ghost after his death. Failure to encounter lights, etc., in the practice of meditation may be due to a wrong method, insufficient effort or the lack of basic potential. Similarly, the monk Sunakkhatta, mentioned before, attained the divine-eye but not the divine-ear because he did not have the potential for it, and was impeded by his obstructive kamma. So one should not be disheartened if the meditation practice does not produce the desired effect. Mostly, practice along the right path leads to unusual experiences. With tranquillity and purity of mind, the object of contemplation and the contemplating consciousness become clearly distinct. So too, do their causal relations and their constant, rapid arising and dissolution. At that stage, one may see light, or at least one experiences joy, ecstasy, tranquillity, equanimity, etc., which are the factors of enlightenment (bojjhanga), so vital to the development of insight. Provided there is no impediment, contemplation of mind and matter will lead to these higher states of consciousness if the method is right, and the effort is sufficient.

In the absence of habitual or death-proximate kamma, residual kamma, which means a kamma that one has done once in this or the previous lives, will give its effect instead.

Notes

1. This means whether he knows they are parents or not. The intention to kill them must also be present. (Editor's note)

# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

## From Birth, Aging, Death, Grief, etc., Arise

**K**AMMA'S ROLE in the chain of causation is emphasised in the teaching, "Dependent on mental formations, rebirth consciousness arises", which we have already explained in detail. Since the dying person is attached to the signs and visions relating to kamma, kamma-based material phenomena arise after death with rebirth-consciousness conditioned by deathbed attachment. Contact with sense-objects leads to feeling, which in turn produces craving. It does not matter whether the feeling is pleasant or unpleasant. Pleasant feeling creates desire for pleasant objects while unpleasant feeling also makes us crave for pleasant ones. When the desire becomes strong and develops into attachment, it leads us to make efforts for its fulfilment. People do wholesome or unwholesome deeds, which they hope will help to satisfy their needs and desires. It is this kammabhava rooted in craving that causes rebirth. Rebirth is accompanied by suffering wherever it takes place.

It is unnecessary to dwell on the sufferings in the animal and other lower realms. For human beings, too, suffering is inescapable. One has to work hard to make a living. One may be harassed by employers or landlords. Even if one avoids most of the suffering inherent in the struggle for survival, one will finally have to face aging, disease, and death. Suffering begins in the womb; from the time of conception, one is heading inexorably towards aging, disease, and death. Though one may live an apparently carefree, happy life, both body and mind are constantly aging and decaying.

An Indian fable illustrates the inevitability of aging, disease, and death. One man, being afraid of aging, rose into the air with the elixir of life in his mouth and hid in the sky. Another man hid under the sea to escape disease and a third hid in a cave in the Himalayas to avoid death. When their sons searched for them they found that the first man had become old and decrepit, the second man was terminally ill, and the third man was already dead. Everyone is subject to aging, disease, and death. Once one is reborn, nothing will protect one from these misfortunes. As the Buddha says in the Dhammapada, "There is no place in the sky, on land, or in the ocean where one can escape from death."

Aging, disease, and death are inevitable as long as rebirth takes place. Rebirth also leads to grief, anxiety, lamentation, and despair. We grieve when a member of our family dies. The grief is overwhelming when we lose our parents or someone on whom we depend, or a son or a daughter whom we love dearly. Another cause for grief is the loss of material possessions through corrupt officials, thieves, fires, floods, storms or unworthy heirs. Grief also results from disease and decline of health. Some patients are so depressed that their mental state becomes a hindrance to their recovery. For scrupulous monks and laymen, any defect in their morality causes remorse. Thus the hermit Isisinga suffered terrible anguish when he was seduced by a goddess. Anxiety and remorse also torment those who realise they have been following wrong views due to the influence of a misguided teacher. Many other misfortunes such as accidents, robbery, unemployment, and so forth, also cause grief, anxiety, and despair.

Because of his intelligence, man also suffers anguish whenever he is in contact with unpleasant sense-objects. Since he has to suffer mentally as well, it is like adding insult to injury. This does not apply to the arahant or the non-returner, since, being free from ill-will, they remain unperturbed in the face of physical suffering. It is similar for the mindful meditator who is free from ego-illusion, which is inclined to increase feelings of self-pity. Hence, the importance of the Buddha's teaching that we should be aware of unpleasant feeling whenever we suffer from it.

People are unhappy when they think of the frustrations and misfortunes that beset them in the past and the present or that may beset them in future. They feel bitter and

disappointed when they find themselves in difficulty and burdened with misfortunes. All these sufferings are rooted in birth. Life is unsatisfactory and impersonal, and would lack any lasting enjoyment even if a self did exist to enjoy it. According to the doctrine of Dependent Origination, the only thing that links one existence with another is cause and effect. From craving, kammic effort, etc., based on ignorance in one existence, five effects arise: consciousness, body and mind, sense-organs, contact, and feeling. These effects begin with birth and end in death with aging, anxiety, and other types of suffering in between.

This teaching of the Buddha does not appeal to ordinary people who harbour illusions of happiness and selfhood. However, impersonality and suffering are undeniable — even beings in the celestial realms are not exempt from it. Some earth-bound devas have to struggle hard for survival and are more miserable than human beings. They are called Vinipātika Devas, and comprise ghosts, goblins, etc., who belong to the lowest order of devas. Some devas in the celestial realms are dissatisfied because they do not have magnificent mansions and enough attendants. Even Sakka, the king of the devas, admitted to Venerable Mahākassapa that he was not so luminous, since his attainment of the celestial realm was due to wholesome kamma done long before the propagation of the Buddha's teaching. He said that he had to hide when he saw those devas who outshone him because they had done wholesome kamma in the time of the Buddha. Thus Sakka was not always happy, nor were his female attendants. They told Venerable Mahākassapa that they were wretched and miserable since they counted for little among the high-ranking queen-goddesses.

Some devas become unhappy on the approach of death, which is heralded by the withering of their flower garlands, sweating from their armpits and other signs of aging. Other devas die suddenly while indulging in celestial pleasure just like a man whose life is cut short by a stroke. Death may take only a second, like the snuffing of a candle. This is borne out by the story of Subrahma Deva.

### **The Story of Subrahma**

Subrahma Deva was enjoying life when his attendant goddesses, who were singing and plucking flowers, died suddenly and landed in hell, where he could see them suffering. He also realised that he too would die in a few days and share the same fate. Greatly alarmed, he went to the Buddha and asked the Lord to show him where he could live without fear. The Lord replied that the only way was by cultivating the factors of enlightenment, by ascetic practices (dhutanga) and right exertion (sammappadhāna) that eradicate defilements, sense-restraint (indriya-samvara-sīla) that wards off defilements, and nibbāna, which means the renunciation of everything. On hearing this, the deva and his attendants attained stream-winning.

Here, what we should note is the sudden death of the goddesses. The fate of those who die suddenly while engaged in the pursuit of pleasure is terrible since they are likely to be born in hell because of unwholesome kammic impulses. If any sign appears that heralds the approach of death, it creates fear and adds to their suffering. Suffering that stems from attachment to pleasure is not confined to the sensual realm, for it is also the lot of the brahmās in the immaterial realms. In the brahmā realm, there is no sexual pleasure or sensuality. The objects that brahmās can see, hear or think of have no sexual overtones. However, as the Visuddhimagga says, some people crave for the pleasures of the brahmā realm because they believe, either through hearsay or speculation, that such pleasures are superior to those of the human and celestial realms. It is nothing other than their sensual craving that leads to the attainment of rūpa-jhāna or arūpa-jhāna and finally takes them to the fine-material or immaterial realms. It is not surprising that some people think or speak of the sensuality in the brahmā realm. Those who know the true teaching of the Buddha will reject the idea but it probably appeals to ignorant people. The Indian religious books portray Brahmā with his wife, and some people even regard nibbāna as a heavenly realm with celestial mansions where one can dwell with one's family and attendants.

## Excessive Attachment

Kāmapādāna means not only excessive attachment to sensual pleasures, it also means craving for the fine-material and immaterial realms. Therefore, according to the Visuddhimagga, one can eradicate this insatiable craving only at the final stage of the Path, and it is this craving that underlies every effort to attain rūpa- or arūpa-jhāna. For ordinary people, such jhāna means kammic effort based on sensual craving, which leads to rebirths in the fine-material or immaterial realms of brahmās. The incessant aging of mind and matter begins from the moment of rebirth. The aging of a brahmā is not apparent as it is for human beings, but when his lifespan ends he cannot avoid death. Being free from hatred, a brahmā is not subject to grief and anxiety. Lack of a body ensures freedom from physical pain. However, a brahmā cannot escape aging and death, which are inherent in every kind of existence. So escape from aging and death presupposes the end of rebirth. To avoid rebirth, we must strive to avoid unwholesome kamma and even wholesome kamma. Negation of kammic existence calls for the effacement of attachment and craving. For this purpose, the mental process must end at feeling and stop short of developing the desire for anything. This avoidance of craving through contemplating impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self in all phenomena is the only way to avoid rebirth and the other links in the sequence that leads to aging and death. This means the temporary extinction of suffering which one can finally overcome when one develops insight on the Noble Path.

# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

## Attachment to Views as the Cause of Rebirth

**D**ITTHUPĀDĀNA means the attachment to the view that denies future life and kamma. So, the annihilationist view (ucchedaditthi), which asserts the annihilation of a being after death, is attachment to views. People who hold such views will have no reason to do good or to avoid wrong-doing. They will do nothing for their well-being in the afterlife and will seek to enjoy life as much as possible. As they have no scruples, most of their acts will be unwholesome kammās that create deathbed visions leading to the lower realms. This is evident in the story of the peta Nandaka.

Nandaka was a general in the time of King Pingala who ruled the country of Surattā (which lay to the north of the present province of Bombay). He held that giving alms and other good deeds are useless. After his death he became a hungry ghost in a banyan tree. However, when his daughter offered food to a monk and shared her merit with him, he received an unlimited supply of celestial food. He then realised the truth of the kammic law and repented of his wrong views. One day, he led King Pingala to his tree and entertained the king and his followers to a celestial feast. The king was greatly surprised, and in response to his inquiry, the ghost gave an account of his rebirth as a peta. He said it was due to his wrong views, immorality, and opposition to almsgiving. He then told of the sudden change in his fortunes after his daughter shared her merit with him. He also described the suffering that he would have to undergo after death, the torment in hell that he would share with others who held wrong views and vilified monks. So, attachment to wrong views leads to immoral acts and rebirth in the lower realms.

Kamma may also be motivated by eternalism, the belief that upholds the illusion of personality. Those who hold it believe in a permanent self that will bear the consequences of present deeds in a future life. So they devote themselves to what they regard as noble deeds, though some of those deeds may be ignoble. Either way, all deeds rooted in eternity belief lead to rebirth, and so to suffering.

## Superstition and Unfavourable Rebirth

Another basis of kamma is superstition. There are many superstitions, for example, that seeing a man of low caste is a bad omen, that a beehive or an iguana in a house is a sure sign of poverty, etc. Under the influence of such beliefs, a person may do wrong, such as mistreating an outcaste or killing bees. This is borne out by the Cittasambhūta Jātaka. In that Jātaka the bodhisatta was a low caste man called Citta. Venerable Ānanda was then his cousin, named Sambhūta. They made their living by dancing with bamboos. One day, the daughter of a merchant and the daughter of a high-caste brahmin, who were both very superstitious, went for a picnic with their attendants. At the sight of the two dancers, which they considered a bad omen, they returned home. Their irate followers then beat the two men for denying them the pleasure of the picnic.

So the two dancers went to Taxila disguised as brahmins and devoted themselves to learning. Citta became the students' leader by virtue of his intelligence. One day, their teacher sent them to a place where they had to recite the brahmanical parittas. When he burned his mouth by unmindfully drinking hot milk, Sambhūta uttered, "Khalu, Khalu" in his dialect and Citta absent-mindedly said, "niggala, niggala" ("spit it out"). These slips of the tongue led to their undoing, for their high caste brahmin students discovered their secret. So, they were beaten and expelled from the school. On the advice of their teacher they became hermits. After they died they passed on to the animal realm, first as two deer, then as two eagles. In his next existence, Citta became the son of the chief brahmin and remembered his three previous lives. He led the life of a hermit and attained jhāna with



psychic powers. Sambhūta became a king, who remembered his low caste life and spent his time in the pursuit of sensuality.

By means of his psychic power, Citta knew his brother's spiritual immaturity. After waiting for fifty years, he came to the king's garden. The king recognized the hermit as his brother in a previous life and was prepared to share his royal pleasures with him. However, being aware of the kammic effects of wholesome and unwholesome deeds, the bodhisatta had pledged himself to a life of self-restraint, renunciation, and detachment. He reminded the king of their close associations in their previous lives as low-caste men, as deer, and as birds. His aim was to point out the erratic course of kamma and to urge the king to become a hermit for further spiritual progress. However, it was hard for Sambhūta to give up pleasure, so the bodhisatta returned to the Himalayas. The king finally became disenchanted and went to the Himalayas where he was welcomed by the hermit. As a hermit he devoted himself to spiritual exercises and attained jhāna and psychic powers.

Citta and Sambhūta were blameless, but their opponents made unwholesome kamma due to their superstitious prejudice. The story of Koka, the hunter also shows the evil consequences of superstition.

In the time of the Buddha, a hunter named Koka lived in a certain village. One day he set out with his dogs to hunt in the forest. On the way he met a monk, who was on his alms round. The hunter considered this encounter to be a bad omen. As luck would have it, he did not catch any prey the whole day. On his return he again met the monk. Now blind with fury, he set his dogs on the monk. The monk had to run and climb up a tree where he could only sit on a low branch. The hunter pricked the monk's feet with an arrow, so that he had to lift his feet, one after the other. Eventually, his robe worked loose and slipped down, falling onto the hunter. Seeing him wrapped up in the robe, the dogs mistook him for the monk and attacked him. Thus he was killed by his own dogs. Realising that they had killed their master, the dogs ran away. The monk got down from the tree and reported the matter to the Buddha. Then, the Lord uttered the following verse.

**"If a fool harms one who is pure and blameless, his ignoble deed recoils on him like dust thrown against the wind." (Dhp. v 125)**

Here, the hunter's gruesome death and his rebirth in hell resulted from an ignoble deed rooted in superstition.

Some people get alarmed if an astrologer says that the position of the planets warns of misfortune. So they offer flowers and candles to the Buddha image, give alms to the monks, listen to discourses, and practise meditation. Some have the parittas recited to ward off danger that they associate with unpleasant dreams. Their meritorious deeds lead to favourable rebirths but, like the rebirths that stem from demeritorious deeds, they also lead to suffering.

Some ignorant people will do wrong to ward off misfortunes that they are in fear of. The Jātakas mention the animal sacrifice of some kings that involved the killing of four goats, four horses, four men, and so forth as propitiatory offerings to gods. Once, this kind of rite was planned by King Kosala in the time of the Buddha.

The king took a fancy to a married woman, so he sent her husband on an errand to a distant place. Should he fail to accomplish the task entrusted to him and return to the capital on the same day, he was to be punished. The man carried out the king's order and returned before sunset. However, the city gate was closed, so being unable to enter the city, he spent the night at Jetavana Monastery. Overwhelmed with lust and evil desires, the king could not sleep. He heard the voices of four men who were suffering in hell for having committed adultery in their previous lives. It was perhaps by virtue of the Buddha's psychic power that the king heard these voices from hell. The king so was alarmed that, in the morning, he sought the advice of his brahmin counsellor. The brahmin said that the voices warned of imminent misfortune. To ward it off, the king should sacrifice a hundred

elephants, horses, etc. So the king made preparations for the sacrifice. How cruel human nature is, that one can sacrifice a thousand lives to save one's own.

Human beings were also among the potential victims. Hearing their cries, Queen Mallikā asked the king to seek the Buddha's advice. The Buddha told the king that the voices were those of four young men who, having seduced married women in the time of Kassapa Buddha, were now suffering in Lohakumbhi hell. They were now repentant and belatedly trying to express their desire to do good after their release from hell. The king was very frightened and vowed never to lust after another man's wife. He told the Buddha how the previous night had seemed very long because he could not sleep. The man who had fetched what the king wanted, said that he had travelled a long journey the previous day.

Then, the Buddha uttered the verse:

**"Long is the night to the sleepless, long is the journey to the weary, long is the cycle of existence for the foolish who do not know the sublime truth."  
(Dhp. v 60)**

After hearing this verse, many people attained stream-winning and other stages on the Noble Path. The king ordered the release of all the living beings that were to be sacrificed. If not for the Buddha's teaching, he would have committed heavy unwholesome kamma, so this story also shows that superstition leads to demeritorious deeds.

## **Fanaticism or Religious Attachment**

Wholesome or unwholesome kammās are also born of attachment to religion. People usually believe that theirs is the only true religion, that all others are wrong. So they try to spread their religion, convert other people by force or persecute non-believers. All these injustices have their origins in religious attachment. Kamma may also stem from attachment to political views or ideologies. Some people seek to impose their opinions on others by every means in their power. They propagate it in various ways and discredit, slander, or undermine the unity of those who do not agree with them. All these efforts and activities are becoming, which is due to fanaticism. In brief, all obsession with practices, and with beliefs other than the ego-belief, means attachment to views that leads to kamma.

## **Attachment to Rituals**

Some people believe they can attain salvation through practices that have nothing to do with the Noble Eightfold Path. Such a belief is called *sīlabbatupādāna*. It is attachment to rituals to worship animals, to adopt an animal's way of life, or to perform rites in the hope of attaining salvation. According to the *Visuddhimagga*, some people rely on these practices as the way to salvation and do kammic deeds that lead to rebirth in the human, celestial, fine-material, and immaterial realms. The *Visuddhimagga* refers only to kammās leading to the human, and other higher realms; it does not mention kammās leading to lower realms. However, it does not follow that attachment to rituals does not cause unwholesome kamma. The commentary does not mention this only because it is so obvious.

In the *Kukkuravatika Sutta* and elsewhere the Buddha says that one is reborn as an ox or a dog if one lives exactly like those animals in deed, word, and thought. If one accepts the wrong view but does not practise it fully, one is reborn in hell or the animal world. Of course, making animal sacrifices to gods leads to the lower realms. So do other misdeeds resulting from attachment to certain forms of worship, rites, and ceremonies. In short, every belief in the efficacy of rituals as an antidote to misfortune is attachment to rituals.

According to the commentaries on the *Visuddhimagga* it is also attachment to rituals to rely entirely on conventional morality and mundane *jhāna* as the way to liberation. The immaterial *jhānas* attained by Ālāra and Uddaka originated in this attachment and so do the common religious practices that are based on faith in God. All these attachments lead to rebirth and therefore to suffering.

## Attachment to Belief in the Soul

Attavādupādānais attachment to belief in a soul. It is a strong conviction that a permanent self is the agent of every deed, speech, and thought. Few people are free from this attachment. The average person firmly believes in illusions such as, "I see", "I hear" or "I did it". These illusions are the basis of self-love and concern about one's own well-being. The pervasiveness and power of self-love are illustrated by Queen Mallikā's reply to King Kosala.

Mallikā was the daughter of a flower vendor. One day she met the Buddha and offered her food to him. After eating the food, the Lord told Venerable Ānanda that the young woman would become the queen of King Kosala. On that very day, King Kosala, who was defeated in battle, fled on horseback. Utterly exhausted and dejected, the king rested in a flower-garden where he was tenderly cared for by Mallikā. Enchanted by her, the king took her to the palace and made her his chief queen. The Buddha's prophecy came true because of her recent wholesome kamma and her meritorious deed in the past existence. However, Mallikā was not as beautiful as the other queens. Moreover, as a woman from a poor family, she felt awkward among the courtiers. So to reassure her, the king one day asked her whom she loved most. The answer he expected was, "I love you the most." He would then tell her that he, on his part, loved her more than anyone else. This expression of his love would, he thought, increase their intimacy and make her more at ease in the palace.

However, as an intelligent woman who had the courage of conviction, Mallikā replied frankly that there was no-one whom she loved more than herself. She asked the king whom he loved most. The king had to admit that he too loved himself more than anyone else. He reported this exchange to the Buddha. Then the Lord said, "No-one in this world loves anyone more than themselves. So everyone should have sympathy and avoid ill-treating others."

In this saying of the Buddha, the word 'self' (attā) does not mean the attā of the ego-belief. It refers only to self in its conventional sense, i.e. the self that one speaks of to distinguish oneself from others. Ego-belief is also a source of self-love. The more powerful the belief is, the greater is the love of oneself. One loves one's wife, husband or child only as a helpmate, companion or support. Marital or parental love is not fundamentally different from love of precious jewellery. So if anyone says that they love someone else more than themselves they should not be taken too seriously.

Because of this self-love based on ego-belief, people will resort to any means to secure their own well-being or that of their family. They do not hesitate to do wrong to serve their own interests. The belief in a permanent self can also lead to wholesome kamma. It motivates some people to practise charity, morality or meditation for their well-being in future lives. As a result they attain the celestial realms, but they still have to face aging, death, and other misfortunes.

Every effort to seek well-being in the present life or after death is rooted in ego-belief. Such kammic effort differs from that arising from sensual attachment only in its basis being obsession with personal identity instead of craving pleasure. Nevertheless, in those who are attached to ego-belief, egoism is closely linked to sensual desire. The Noble Ones, who are wholly free from ego-belief, are motivated only by sensual attachment when they do good. Thus the charity, morality, and meditation of Anāthapindika, Visākhā, Mahānāma, and others, stemmed from their desire for better lives in the human and celestial realms, or for attainment of higher stages on the Path.

### The Story of the Householder Ugga

Non-returners do good presumably because of their desire for bliss in fine-material and immaterial realms, and for arahantship. It is, of course, the path of arahantship that can remove all craving. The desire for arahantship as the motivation for the non-returner to do good is evident in the story of Ugga. The Buddha spoke of the eight wonderful attributes

possessed by Ugga, who was a householder in Vesālī. A monk asked Ugga about the Lord's reference to his attributes, Ugga replied that he did not know what qualities the Lord had referred to, but said that he did have eight distinctive qualities as follows.

1) When he saw the Buddha for the first time, he concluded decisively that Gotama was the true, fully enlightened Buddha. 2) He attained insight into the Four Noble Truths to the stage of the non-returner when he heard the Buddha's discourse. After that he observed the five precepts including abstinence from sexual intercourse. 3) Having four young wives, he told them about his sexual abstinence and permitted them to return to their parents' homes or to marry the men of their own choice. At the request of his eldest wife, he gave her away to the man she loved and performed the wedding ceremony himself. 4) He had resolved to spend all his wealth on giving alms to wise men of high moral character. 5) He approached the bhikkhus respectfully. 6) He heard the bhikkhus' discourses respectfully, and if the bhikkhus did not give a discourse, he gave one himself. 7) The devas came to him and said, "The doctrine of the Buddha is superb." He replied that the Dhamma was superb whether or not they said so. He did not feel conceited because of his conversation with the devas. 8) He found himself free from the five fetters that lead to the lower, sensual realms.

One day, Ugga offered his favourite food and robes to the Buddha. The Lord commented on the nature of charity as follows: "One who offers something that he cherishes greatly gets something that he adores. One who offers alms to a Noble One of high moral character is doing an act of charity that it is hard for ordinary people to do. Therefore he gets what he wants most." Some years later, Ugga died and passed on to the Suddhāvāsa Brahmā realm. Before long he came and paid respect to the Buddha. He said that he had attained arahantship, which was the object of his aspiration when he offered his favourite food to the Lord in his previous existence. The Buddha again commented on the kammic benefits of almsgiving. He said that the giver got what he cared for most if he offered his prized possessions, that he attained a rare object if he offered rare things, and that he attained an exalted stage if he offered exalted objects.

The moral of this story is that one may even attain arahantship, the highest goal of the spiritual life, as the result of giving away one's most cherished possessions. Ugga's almsgiving was motivated by the desire for arahantship, and it was sensual attachment that formed his motivation. Some may object to making sensual attachment synonymous with the desire for arahantship, and would rather call it wholesome desire (*kusalachanda*). However, they should then explain what kind of attachment it is that leads to meritorious acts of a stream-winner or once-returner such as charity or morality.

## **Insight Meditation and Attachment**

The practice of insight, too, should be attributed to the sensual attachment of one who seeks final release from the cycle of existence. Ordinary people have to meditate to be free from all four attachments while stream-winners and once-returners have to overcome sensual attachment. So, insight practice implies the conquest of attachment. According to the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Sammohavinodanī*, ignorance is the indirect cause of meritorious acts since one must do good to remove ignorance. It is also said that insight meditation is a good deed in the sensual realm that one has to do for such liberation.

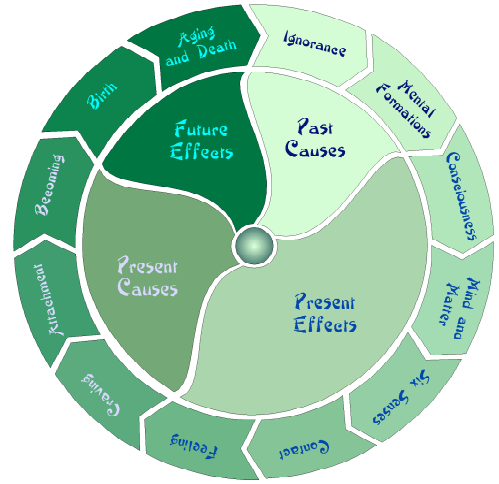
The question then arises whether insight practice can lead to rebirth. The commentaries on the *Anguttaranikāya* and *Paṭṭhāna* indicate such a possibility. The commentary on the *Anguttaranikāya* says that the first three right views lead to favourable rebirths. However, the last two right views, namely, the view born of fruition and the view resulting from insight practice, lead one out of *samsāra*. It says, however, on the authority of a learned elder, Venerable Cūlābhaya, that one is subject to seven rebirths before attaining arahantship. According to the *Paṭṭhāna*, contemplation of the conditions of existence (*appamāna*) leads to rebirth in the sensual realm, and the commentary defines *appamāna-cetanā* as maturity (*gotrabhū cetanā*). Therefore, assuming that insight meditation can produce rebirth before arahantship is won is reasonable.

However, meditation can ensure freedom from samsāra through insight into the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self characteristics of all sense-objects, an insight that wards off sensual craving. The non-arising of craving means the non-arising of kamma and rebirth. Thus insight helps to offset kamma and its consequences by momentary abandoning of defilements (tadanga-pahāna). Moreover, through inference, one realises the three characteristics of other phenomena. Thus one wards off the defilements and their kammic potential by suppression (vikkhambhana-pahāna). The insight on the Noble Path follows, which roots out the defilements. The emergence of this insight may be likened to the signing of an official letter by the head of a government department. The act of the officer-in-charge gives the final touch to all the work done by the staff. We cannot ignore the major contribution of insight practice in the pursuit of enlightenment any more than we can ignore the work of the office staff in producing the letter. Similarly, it is the preliminary use of a saw that makes it possible to fell a tree with a final blow of an axe. As the sub-commentary on the Visuddhimagga says, "Transcendent insight on the Path uproots only the defilements that one has striven to overcome through mundane insight." Non-meditators labour under the illusion of happiness and selfhood. This illusion leads to craving, becoming, rebirth and all the suffering inherent in life.

# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

## The Three Periods in the Cycle of Existence

**D**EPENDENT ORIGINATION encompasses two life-cycles, the anterior life-cycle and the posterior life-cycle. The anterior cycle begins with ignorance as its main source and ends with feeling, while the posterior cycle begins with craving and ends with aging and death. In the anterior cycle, ignorance and mental formations in the past life lead to rebirth, while in the posterior cycle, craving, attachment, and becoming cause rebirth in the future. The two cycles show how a person's lives are linked through cause and effect. Again, if the doctrine of Dependent Origination is described on this time scale, ignorance and mental formations are two links in the past life, the links from consciousness to becoming concern the present life, while birth, aging, and death are the links in the future. Thus the doctrine refers to three periods.



## Distinction Between Mental Formations and Becoming

The doctrine describes the past cause as only ignorance and mental formations, but ignorance is invariably followed by craving and attachment. Mental formations, too, always lead to becoming. So the Patisambhidāmagga comments on the doctrine as follows. "Avijjā is ignorance that dominates us while doing a kammic deed. Sankhārā means composing and exerting effort. Tanhā is the craving for the results of an action in the present life and after death. Upādāna is the obsession with action and its result. Kammabhava is volition. These five factors in the past make up the causes of the present rebirth." Thus we have to consider all these five links — ignorance, craving, attachment, mental formations, and becoming — if we are to fully describe the past causes. Of these, ignorance, craving, and attachment are called the cycle of defilements. Mental formations and becoming are called the cycle of kamma. The commentary makes a distinction between mental formations and becoming. It describes the effort, planning, etc., before an act as mental formations and the volition while doing the act as becoming. So seeking money, buying things, etc., before an act of charity are mental formations while the state of consciousness at the time of offering is becoming. Plotting a murder is mental formations, and volition while killing is becoming.

Another distinction between mental formations and becoming is based on the moments of impulsion. All acts of murder or almsgiving involve seven impulse-moments. The first six impulse-moments are called mental formations while the last is termed becoming.

A third way of distinguishing the two is to describe volition as becoming and other mental states associated with volition as mental formations. The third method of classification is helpful when we speak of meritorious deeds in the fine-material and immaterial realms. All the three distinctions apply to wholesome or unwholesome acts in the sensual realm, but the first distinction is very illuminating for those who are not well informed.

Alternatively, the Visuddhimagga attributes rebirth to the visions that hold a dying person's attention at the last moment of life. So according to this commentary, becoming may be defined as the volition that motivated wholesome or unwholesome acts in the past, and mental formations may be defined as the mental state conditioned by deathbed experiences.

## Present Effects Due to Past Causes

Thus, owing to the cycles of defilements and kamma comprising the five causes in the past, rebirth-consciousness arises together with mind and matter, six senses, contact, and feeling. These five effects are collectively called the cycle of resultants. Because of their ignorance, ordinary people have the illusion of pleasure regarding sense-objects and mind-objects. They develop craving, thus perpetuating the vicious cycle of cause and effect that makes up their round of suffering. Consciousness, the six sense-bases, etc., arise as the result of past kammās. It is a matter of cause and effect, just like all other phenomena. This leaves no room for a self, God or Prime Mover. The only difference lies in the moral law governing this relationship, the nature of feeling, whether pleasant or unpleasant, being dependent on wholesome or unwholesome mental formations in the past. In reality no 'person' has pleasant or unpleasant feeling, and no 'being' causes one to have such an experience. Life is only the continuum of consciousness, contact, feeling, etc., as conditioned by ignorance, craving, attachment, and so forth.

## Knowledge for Insight Practice

Those who have some knowledge of Dependent Origination or Abhidhamma say that it is impossible to practise meditation without such knowledge. However, one who practises meditation under the guidance of a learned teacher need not bother about higher Buddhist philosophy. One can follow the teacher's instructions if one knows only that life is a psychophysical process characterised by impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. The adequacy of this simple knowledge to meet the intellectual needs of one who is intent on arahantship is borne out by the Cūḷatanhāsankhaya Sutta, where the Buddha talks about insight practice. The meditator's understanding of mind and matter is termed 'abhiññānā', which the commentary explains as full comprehension. It refers to analytical knowledge of mind and matter (nāmarūpa-pariccheda-ñāna) and knowledge by discerning conditionality (paccaya-pariggaha-ñāna). Through contemplation, one knows all phenomena analytically (pariññānā) as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. Here, pariññānā refers to knowledge by comprehension (sammasana-ñāna) and other insights.

Knowledge of the conditionality and cause-effect relationship that denies a soul or self is enough for the practice of insight. It is not necessary to know thoroughly the twelve links, or the twenty main points of the doctrine. If the practice of insight presupposed such comprehensive knowledge, a man of low intelligence like Venerable Cūḷapanthaka would be unable to practice it. The elder's memory was so poor that he could not even memorise a few verses, though he had studied them for four months, yet he attained arahantship in a few hours when he meditated as instructed by the Buddha.

A laywoman, Mātikamātā by name, attained the stage of non-returning before some bhikkhus who were her meditation teachers. She did not know much about Abhidhamma or Dependent Origination. Many others were also like this woman and Venerable Cūḷapanthaka. So although one may not have studied the Abhidhamma thoroughly one can attain the Noble Path if one meditates earnestly.

To overlook the true nature of feelings is ignorance. It is craving to like a sense-object and attachment to cling to it. To do noble or ignoble deeds from desire for one's happiness in the present life or after death means mental formations and becoming. These five factors are present causes and lead to rebirth after death. Dependent Origination mentions only three causes: feeling, craving, and attachment. However, these three factors imply two others: ignorance and mental formations, since these two are the basis of craving and becoming respectively. So the Patisambhidāmagga describes all these five factors as causes of rebirth in future.



## Removing the Present Causes

Every wholesome or unwholesome act means the conjunction of these five present causes, which may happen many thousands of times in a single lifetime. Under favourable circumstances these causes may lead to rebirth after death, or to two or three rebirths in succession. Every existence is accompanied by aging, grief, and death, so to avoid this suffering, we should remove the causes. Thus we should note all phenomena the moment they occur. With the development of concentration, we will notice their instant passing away and so realise their impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and unreliability. This realisation helps us to overcome the ignorance and illusion that fuel craving, attachment, and kammic effort. Thus we render the five present causes inactive, forestalling rebirth and consequent suffering.

This is called 'tadangapahāna', 'partial, or momentary abandoning of defilements.' By this method, one attains 'tadanganibbuti', 'partial or momentary, extinction of defilements'. Later, insight on the Noble Path arises, which means the extinction of all mental formations and the realisation of nibbāna, which is extinction through cutting off. The defilements and kammās are then eradicated. Stream-winners overcome the defilements and kammās that lead to the lower realms, and those that may cause more than seven rebirths. Once-returners overcome defilements that may cause more than one rebirth, while non-returners remove those that lead to rebirths in sensual realms. Finally, the arahant eradicates the remaining defilements and kamma and becomes a Noble One who is worthy of honour because he is wholly free from defilements.

## The Arahant's Outlook on Life

Arahants have no illusions about the nature of sense-objects. They are aware of their unsatisfactoriness, which means they fully realise the truth of suffering because they are free from delusion. So they have no craving for anything. Inevitably, they have to fulfil the biological needs of the body such as eating, sleeping, etc., but they regard this as conditioned suffering and find nothing agreeable. The question arises whether they should long for a speedy death to end such suffering. Nevertheless, the desire for early death or dissolution of the physical body is aversion, which the arahant has also removed. In the Theragāthā, the Elder's Verses, an arahant says that he neither wishes to die nor to live. The arahant does not wish to live a long life, for life means a burden of suffering inherent in the aggregates. Although the aggregates need constant care and attention, they are not reliable in the least. To many middle-aged or old people, life offers little more than frustration, disappointment, and bitterness. Living conditions deteriorate, physical health declines and only disability and death await them. Yet, because of ignorance and attachment, many people take delight in existence. However, the arahants are disillusioned, so they find life unattractive.

Yet the arahants don't desire death either, since they have conquered ill-will. They equanimously anticipate their parinibbāna, an expectation that is analogous to a worker's expectation of wages. A worker does not like to face hardships and privations to make a living, but does not want to be unemployed either. A worker wants only money and expects payment. Likewise, the arahants await death, so when they think of their lifespan, they wonder how long they must bear the burden of the body. Because of their total disillusionment, their life-stream ceases completely after parinibbāna, so it is called cessation without any remainder (anupādisesanibbāna).

## Not Annihilation but Extinction of Suffering

Those who believe in the soul deprecate nibbāna as the annihilation of a living being. In fact, it is the extinction of suffering due to the non-arising of phenomena with their causes, i.e. kamma and defilements. The Buddha pointed out the cessation of attachment with the cessation of craving, the cessation of becoming with the cessation of attachment, and so on. With the non-arising of rebirth, there is the complete cessation of aging, death, and other

kinds of suffering. The popular view is that birth, aging, and death are misfortunes afflicting living beings. However, these misfortunes characterise only the psychophysical process and have nothing to do with a living being. Since there is no soul, it makes no sense to speak of the annihilation of a being with the cessation of rebirth. So those who regard nibbāna as annihilation are not free from the illusion of selfhood. To the intelligent Buddhist, nibbāna means only extinction of suffering. This is evident in the story of Venerable Yamaka.

### **The Story of Venerable Yamaka**

Venerable Yamaka believed that the arahant was annihilated after death. He clung to this view although other bhikkhus pointed out that it was wrong. When Venerable Sāriputta summoned him and questioned him, Venerable Yamaka admitted that all the five aggregates are impermanent and suffering, that it would be a mistake to regard them as one's self or as one's possessions. Venerable Sāriputta told him to see the five aggregates as they really are. He would then become disillusioned, detached, and liberated.

While listening to the discourse, Venerable Yamaka attained the stream-winner stage. He was now free from wrong view. Venerable Sāriputta then questioned him again. In response to the elder's questions, Venerable Yamaka said that he did not identify the arahant with the physical body, feeling, perception, mental formations or consciousness. Nor did he believe that the arahant existed elsewhere without the aggregates. Therefore, since even during life the arahant is not to be found as a living being, it makes no sense to speak of the arahant's annihilation after death. Venerable Yamaka confessed his mistaken view. He was now free from it and so knew what to say about the destiny of the arahant. If someone were to ask him, "What happens when the arahant passes away?" he would answer, "The death of the arahant means the complete cessation of suffering inherent in the five aggregates."

This statement about the arahant was verified by Venerable Sāriputta. The elder likened the aggregates to a murderer in the guise of a friend and said that identifying the aggregates with oneself is like welcoming the murderer.

Venerable Yamaka at first believed that the arahant was annihilated after death, leaving nothing, which implies the belief in a soul. The annihilation view of nibbāna is 'uccchedaditthi', the view that nibbāna means annihilation after death. When he realised the truth and attained stream-winning, Venerable Yamaka said that the death of the arahant means the complete extinction of suffering inherent in the five aggregates. Failure to note seeing, hearing, and other psychophysical phenomena leads to the arising of ignorance, craving, attachment, kamma, and mental formations. These in turn cause birth, aging, and death. Mindfulness forestalls these five present causes and the five consequences that involve suffering.

### **The Famous Saying of Bhikkhunī Vajirā**

The extinction of suffering is also stressed in the famous saying of Sister Vajirā. Māra appeared while she was sitting under a tree near Jetavana Monastery. To discomfit her, he asked, "Hey, bhikkhunī! Who created a living being? Where is the Creator? How did a living being originate and how will it cease?"

Sister Vajirā replied, "Oh, Māra! What do you think a living being is? Is your belief in a living being not an illusion? What you regard as a living being is nothing but a heap of aggregates. No being is to be found in this heap. A living being is merely a term for the combination of materiality, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness, just as 'chariot' is a term for the combination of the wheels, the axle, yoke, etc. No being can be found apart from the five aggregates — it is only suffering that arises, exists and ends."

So a being should be understood only in the popular usage of the term. It does not exist in any absolute sense, only a psychophysical process continues. This comprises ignorance, craving, attachment, kamma, and kammic effort as causes, and consciousness, body-mind,

sense-bases, contact, and feelings, as effects. These effects in turn become causes that lead to rebirth and further suffering.

# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

## Other Aspects of Dependent Origination

**F**OUR GROUPS of factors are involved in the chain of causation: the first group of causes in the past, the second group of effects in the present, the third group of causes in the present, and the fourth group of effects in the future. The groups are termed 'sangaha' or 'sankhepa'. They may also be translated as layers. These four groups have three connections. 1) The connection between the past cause and the present effect, with mental formations as the cause and consciousness as the effect. 2) The connection between the present cause and the present effect, with feeling as the cause and craving as the effect. 3) The connection between the present cause and the future effect, with becoming as the cause and birth as the effect. Again, twenty factors (*ākāra*) are involved in the psychophysical process: five causes in the past, five effects in the present, five causes in the present and five effects in the future.

## Three Cycles

Again the doctrine of Dependent Origination deals with three cycles or rounds (*vattas*): defilements, kamma, and resultants. The first cycle comprises ignorance, desire, and attachment; the second comprises mental formations and becoming; and the third comprises consciousness, mind and matter, sense-bases, contact, and feeling. The third cycle leads again to the cycle of defilements, which gives rise to the cycle of kamma, and so on without end. The three cycles drive the samsāric round of suffering. Samsāra means the continuum of the psychophysical process occurring in a cause-effect relationship.

To liberate ourselves from samsāra, we must do meritorious deeds. We should study the Buddha's teaching about the Four Noble Truths, practise contemplation on seeing, hearing, etc., and thus realise the ceaseless arising and dissolution of psychophysical phenomena. This insight forestalls illusion and frees us from the craving and attachment that lead to rebirth and suffering.

The Visuddhimagga describes the contribution of kamma to the cycle of defilements. The meditator sees how the mind-body complex is born from the cycle of kamma and the cycle of resultants. One realises that there are only kamma and its fruits. Because of kamma in the past, mind and matter arise in the present life; mind and matter produces kamma in this life, which leads to rebirth. Thus mind and matter arise without end. The arising of mind and matter means the arising of phenomena from the senses, e.g. seeing, hearing, etc. These lead to defilements, kamma, and rebirth successively. Thus the psychophysical process is conditioned by the cycle of kamma and its fruit. According to the Visuddhimagga, this insight means knowledge by discerning conditionality (*paccaya-pariggaha-ñāna*) and purification by overcoming doubt (*kankhāvitaraṇa-visuddhi*).

## Four Points to Bear in Mind

Four special features of Dependent Origination should be borne in mind. The first is the individual character of the psychophysical process that comprises the three successive existences. Although the doctrine stresses the conditionality of all phenomena, it is a mistake to believe that ignorance, craving, and other causes concern one person, while consciousness, mind and matter, and other effects concern another person. This belief implies the extinction of a living being after death, which is annihilationism — a view that Buddhism rejects. The psychophysical process is analogous to the evolution of a mango tree. A mango seed sprouts into a seedling, the seedling becomes a sapling, and the sapling

grows into a tree. Here the seed, the seedling, the sapling, and the tree form an unbroken line of causal relationship. Strictly speaking, distinguishing between the tree and the sapling is impossible. Likewise, ignorance, mental formations, consciousness, etc., occur in unbroken succession as causes and effects. Therefore, to speak in the conventional way of a particular person is not wrong. It was Devadatta, for example, who created a schism, and it is Devadatta who is now suffering in hell. The merchant Anāthapindika did meritorious deeds, and he was the one who went to the celestial realm after his death.

## **The Wrong View of Bhikkhu Sāti**

This identification of the doer of kamma with the bearer of its fruit makes it possible for us to avoid the annihilation view. On the other hand, some people believe in the transmigration of a living being from one life to another. This mistaken view of eternalism was held by Bhikkhu Sāti in the time of the Buddha. The Jātakas led Bhikkhu Sāti to hold this view. The Buddha identified himself with the leading characters in these birth stories, so he reasoned thus: "The physical body of the bodhisatta disintegrated after his death and no part passed on to his final existence. It was only consciousness that survived death and formed the core of the bodhisatta's personality in each of his existences. The same may be said of every other living being. Unlike the physical body, consciousness is not subject to disintegration. It passes on from one body to another and exists forever." However, the Jātakas highlight only the continuity of the relationship concerning the doer of kamma and the bearer of its fruit. They do not imply the transfer of consciousness or any other attribute from one life to another. Everything passes away, but because of the causal connection, we have to assume that the hero of the Jātaka stories finally became Prince Siddhattha. After questioning Bhikkhu Sāti, the Buddha said that consciousness was conditioned, that it could not arise without its relevant cause.

The Buddha compared it to fire, which is designated according to its fuel. Fire that burns wood is called a wood-fire, that which burns grass is called a grass-fire, and so on. Likewise, consciousness is always conditioned by something and is named accordingly. Thus consciousness that arises from the eye and visual form is called visual-consciousness, that arising from the ear and sound is called auditory consciousness. In brief, consciousness is named according to the sense-base that produces it. When the cause of a fire changes, so does its designation. A grass-fire becomes a house-fire when it spreads to a house. In the same way, the identity of consciousness changes according to the sense-faculty on which it depends. With the same sense-object and the same sense-organ, too, it is a new consciousness that occurs at every moment in the mental process. Thus to realise the truth about mental processes is to be free from annihilationism, whereas a wrong view of it leads to eternalism.

## **Distinctive Character of Each Phenomenon**

The second aspect of the doctrine is the distinction between the different phenomena forming the chain of causation. Thus ignorance is a distinct phenomenon that conditions mental formations, mental formations are other distinct phenomena that lead to rebirth and so on. To differentiate these phenomena is to realise their cause-and-effect relationship, and this realisation makes us free from eternalism. It helps us to do away with the illusion of a permanent, unchanging self that survives death and passes on to another existence.

Eternalism and annihilationism stem from the way that people stress either the connection between the two successive lives, or the distinction between them. If we unintelligently identify ourselves with the psychophysical process in the present life and with that in the previous life, we will be inclined to believe in eternalism. On the other hand, if we stress the separateness of phenomena, we are liable to fall into the trap of annihilationism. The right attitude is to recognize the continuous process of cause and effect that produces one life after another. This point of view stresses the individual character of mind and matter and, as such, it clarifies the working out of kamma. It does not, however, imply the transfer of

mind, matter or a self. It means the cessation of the old phenomena and the arising of new phenomena in the present life based on past kamma.

This view is crucial to the practice of insight. To one who contemplates mind and matter at every moment of their arising, these two aspects of the doctrine are clear. One becomes aware of the stream of cause and effect comprising ignorance, craving, attachment, and so forth. One is aware of the continuity, and the uninterrupted flow of the psychophysical process. So one rejects the annihilation view completely. Furthermore, being aware of the new phenomenon that arises whenever one contemplates, one discriminates between the sense-object and consciousness. Contemplation distinguishes feeling, craving, attachment, effort, consciousness, etc., as distinct phases of the mental process. Because one is well aware of the arising of new phenomena, one frees oneself from eternalistic views.

## Absence of Striving

The third aspect of Dependent Origination is the absence of striving (*avyāpāra*). Ignorance causes mental formations without striving, and mental formations do not strive to create rebirth. Knowledge of this fact means insight into the absence of any agent or being (*kāraka-puggala*) who sees, hears, etc., and as such it frees us from ego-belief. However, as the Visuddhimagga says, the misinterpretation of this principle may turn one into a moral sceptic who accepts determinism and denies moral responsibility.

The non-volitional nature of phenomena is apparent to one who contemplates their ceaseless arising and dissolution, for one realises clearly that since they are conditioned, they do not act according to one's wishes.

## Relationship of Cause to Effect

The fourth aspect of Dependent Origination is the one-to-one correspondence between cause and effect (*evam dhammatā*). Every cause leads only to the relevant effect; it has nothing to do with any irrelevant effects. In other words, every cause is the sufficient and necessary condition for the corresponding effect. This leaves no room for chance or moral impotency (*akiriya-ditthi*). However, as the Visuddhimagga says, for those who misunderstand it, it provides the basis for rigid determinism (*niyatavāda*). Meditators clearly see the relationship of each effect to its cause, so they have no doubt about their one-to-one correspondence and the truth of moral responsibility.

I have dwelt at length on the key points of Dependent Origination. These points will be clear to meditators who consider them in the light of their experience, but as the doctrine is profound, they probably cannot grasp those that are beyond their intellectual level. It is, of course, only the Omniscient Buddha who knew everything thoroughly. One should try to understand as fully as possible within the limits of one's intellect. To this end, one should listen to the discourses of bhikkhus, reflect over what one has heard, and enrich one's understanding through the practice of mindfulness. Of the three methods, the practice of mindfulness is the most important, since one who gains insight by this method attains the Path and is thus free from the dangers of the lower realms.

# A Discourse on Dependent Origination

## Conclusion

**I** WILL CONCLUDE the discourse on Dependent Origination with a commentary on Arahant, the chief attribute of the Buddha. The doctrine of Dependent Origination consists of twelve links beginning with ignorance and ending in aging and death. It has ignorance and craving as two root-causes, and it has two life-cycles. The anterior life-cycle begins with ignorance and ends in feeling, while the posterior life-cycle begins with craving and ends in aging and death. Since anxiety and grief do not occur in the brahmā realm, they do not necessarily stem from birth and, as such, are not counted among the links of Dependent Origination.

Furthermore, the anterior life-cycle explicitly shows only ignorance and mental formations, but ignorance implies craving and attachment, and mental formations imply becoming. So these five links form the past causes, while consciousness, mind and matter, the six sense-bases, contact, and feeling form the present effects. These are the wholesome and unwholesome fruits of kamma that are clearly experienced when seeing, etc. The posterior life-cycle directly concerns craving, attachment, and becoming. However, these three links imply ignorance and mental formations, so ignorance, craving, attachment, mental formations, and becoming are the five present causes that lead to birth, aging, and death in the future. These effects are the same as the present effects, so the future effects are also five in number. So altogether there are four groups of five past causes, five present effects, five present causes, and five effects in the future.

The groups represent three causal relationships: the relationship of past causes to present effects, the relationship of present effects to present causes, and the relationship of present causes to future effects. The conditionality of existence is evident in these groups of cause and effect. These factors may also be grouped as cycles: the cycle of defilements, the cycle of kamma, and the cycle of resultants, which we have already explained.

Those who have done wholesome kammass pass on to human and celestial realms, while those who have done wrong are sure to suffer. Living beings confined to saṃsāra gain the opportunity to do good only when they meet a wise teacher. A wise teacher is hard to find, so most people are liable to do demeritorious deeds. They therefore have to experience the kammic effects as suffering. So it is said that they are overtaken by retribution. Once established on the Noble Path, they cannot go to the lower realms, but even the Buddhas and arahants are not spared kammic retribution.

## Cutting Off the Cycle of Defilements

If we wish to stop the threefold cycle, we must remove its cause — the cycle of defilements. Defilements originate with seeing, hearing, etc., and so we must practise mindfulness to prevent them from arising. The practice of concentration and mindfulness makes one aware of the impermanence and insubstantiality of all phenomena. This means that one has no more illusion and is free from the cycle of defilements, kamma, and resultants. Now, I will show the way to stop the three cycles with reference to the attributes of the Buddha.

## The Attributes of the Buddha

The Buddha's special designation is Arahant, which refers to the following attributes of the Buddha.



1) The Buddha was free from defilements. So were the arahants, but they were not free from the habits that continued to follow them even after the attainment of their spiritual goal. This is evident in the story of Venerable Pilindavaccha. He was an arahant, beloved of the devas and extolled by the Buddha. Yet he was in the habit of addressing his fellow bhikkhus or laymen rudely. Some bhikkhus complained to the Buddha about the elder's rudeness. The Buddha attributed this unpleasant habit to his having spent many lifetimes in brahmin families, but said that since he was an arahant, the elder was kind and pure at heart. From the time of his enlightenment, the Buddha became free from all habits or traces of defilements from past lives. This distinctive mark of the Buddha should be borne in mind when we contemplate the Lord's attributes. The complete extinction of the three cycles means total liberation from defilements, kamma, and kammic results.

2) The Buddha was called Arahant because of his conquest of defilements. People fear only external enemies such as robbers or snakes. They do not bother about the internal enemy, the defilements, which are much more dangerous. People have to suffer only because they have a body and mind, with defilements. Defilements are the root-causes that lead to repeated rebirth and suffering. The defilements are ten in number: craving, hatred, ignorance, pride, illusion, doubt, lassitude, restlessness, shamelessness, and lack of conscience.

3) Because of his perfect morality, concentration, and wisdom, the Buddha was worthy of reverence and offerings. People who revered or made offerings to the Buddha had their wishes fulfilled.

4) Since he had conquered the defilements completely, the Buddha was pure at heart whether in public or private. Many people are hypocritical, posing as pious in public but doing wrong in private. However, one cannot do wrong anywhere with impunity. Even if the wrong-doing is not seen by anyone, one cannot help having qualms of conscience. Conscience is an infallible witness to misdeeds, and forms the basis for deathbed visions that portend the unpleasant life in store. As for the Buddha, having eradicated the defilements, his mind was always pure, so he had absolutely no desire or intention to do wrong either publicly or secretly.

5) The Buddha had destroyed the spokes of the wheel with the sword of arahantship. Here, the wheel means the cycle of life as described in the doctrine of Dependent Origination, and the sword means the insight knowledge of arahantship. The hub of the wheel means ignorance, the root-cause. The flange of the wheel means aging and death, while the spokes are the middle links, mental formations, etc. Just as the removal of the spokes makes it impossible for the wheel to turn, the destruction of the middle links in the chain of Dependent Origination means the end of the cycle of existence.

## **The Story of Baka Brahmā**

The first thing to do to end the life-cycle is to remove its root-cause, for ignorance is invariably followed by mental formations, consciousness, etc., up to aging and death. This is true in the sensual realms and in the fine-material realm of brahmās.

Once there was a great brahmā called Baka. He outlived many world-systems, living so long that he forgot his previous existences and became convinced of his immortality. The Buddha went to his realm to remove this illusion. Baka Brahmā welcomed the Lord and bragged about his eternal life. The Buddha said that his ignorance was appalling in that he denied impermanence, aging, and death. He revealed the meritorious deeds that had led to Baka's longevity. It was his fabulous longevity that had made him forget his previous lives and created the illusion of his immortality. On hearing this, Baka Brahmā had second thoughts about his immortality. Still, he was conceited and to show his power, he tried to vanish from the sight of the Buddha and other brahmās. However, because of the Buddha's power, he remained visible. Then the Buddha uttered the following verse:

"I do not extol any existence because I see danger in it. I have renounced the craving for existence because I am aware of its defects."

Baka Brahmā and other brahmās had lived so long that they considered their existence and their realm eternal. Likewise, suffering is not obvious to those who have the blessings of a favourable existence such as health, wealth, prestige, success, and so forth. However, life is subject to suffering on all its three planes: the sensual plane, the fine-material plane, and the immaterial plane. A brahmā or a hermit on the fine-material or immaterial planes of existence may live for aeons but eventually has to die.

## **Sammāsambuddha**

It is insight that leads to the destruction of ignorance, the root-cause of suffering. For the Buddha, this means the attribute of Sammāsambuddha. A Sammāsambuddha is one who knows the Four Noble Truths rightly, thoroughly and independently.

The twelve links of Dependent Origination may be classified in terms of the Four Noble Truths. Thus aging and death means the truth of suffering, and rebirth means the truth about the cause of suffering. The cessation of this cause means the truth of cessation, and knowledge of this cessation means the truth of the Path.

The same may be said of rebirth and becoming, becoming and attachment, attachment and craving, craving and feeling, feeling and contact, contact and the six senses, the six senses and mind and matter, mind and matter and consciousness, consciousness and mental formations, and mental formations and ignorance. In brief, what immediately precedes a link is termed its cause, and what immediately follows is called its effect. We can also regard ignorance, the origin of the life-cycle, as synonymous with the truth of suffering if we take it as an effect of the biases (*āsavas*), namely, attachment to sensuality, becoming, wrong view, and ignorance.

The identification of craving with suffering may not be acceptable to some, but it is reasonable if we remember that all impermanent phenomena, which includes craving, are suffering. The commentary does not describe ignorance as suffering, but we can say that it is suffering arising from the biases (*āsava*). The four biases — sensual craving, attachment to life, wrong view, and ignorance — have their origins in craving. It is a matter of ignorance in the past leading again to ignorance in the present. So, the biases may be regarded as the cause of ignorance.

So, having realised the Four Noble Truths and attained nibbāna, the Buddha earned the unique and glorious title of Sammāsambuddha. He knew that all the phenomena comprised by the doctrine of Dependent Origination are really suffering and the causes of suffering. He was disenchanted, had no attachment and achieved liberation from all fetters. So, according to the Visuddhimagga, he was called Arahant because he managed to destroy completely all the spokes of the wheel of life.

## **The Fame of the Buddha**

The fame of the Buddha pervaded the whole universe. It was spread throughout the universe by the inhabitants of celestial realms who came to hear the Buddha's discourses, by the teachings that the Buddha gave in those realms, or via the former disciples who attained higher realms after hearing his discourses. We need not dwell on the first way in which this fame of the Buddha spread. As for the other two ways, during his long wanderings in samsāra, the bodhisatta had been reborn in all the realms except the five Suddhāvāsa realms. These realms are exclusively for non-returners. The bodhisatta attains all the four stages on the Path only in his last existence, so the Buddha had never been to the Suddhāvāsa realm before. Once he paid a visit by means of his psychic powers. On arriving there, he received the homage of millions of brahmās, who told him about the former Buddhas, and of their reaching the Suddhāvāsa realm because of attaining the non-

returner stage. Among these brahmās, some had practised the Dhamma as disciples of Gotama Buddha. The Buddha visited all the five Suddhāvāsa realms. Seeing how he became famous in the realms attained by his former disciples is easy. However, the question may arise how his fame spread to the immaterial realms (arūpaloka). It was not possible for the formless brahmās to come to the Buddha or for the Buddha to go to them. Those who practised the Buddhaddhamma in the sensual or the fine-material realm, on attaining the first three stages of the Path and dying with immaterial jhāna, might attain the immaterial realms if they so wished. These noble ones knew the sublime attributes of the Buddha and the way of attaining insight by developing mindfulness. So through mindfulness of all mental events, they finally became arahants and passed away in the realm of infinite consciousness (*viññāṇaṇcāyatana*), the realm of nothingness (*ākāśaññāyatana*), or the highest realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*). In this way, the fame of the Buddha spread throughout the universe.

## The Four Noble Truths in Brief

We have dealt with the Buddha's knowledge of the Four Noble Truths regarding his attribute of Sammāsambuddha. According to the scriptures, all the psychophysical phenomena in the sensual, fine-material, and immaterial realms, besides craving, are suffering. This is the first truth. Craving as the cause of suffering is the second truth. Nibbāna as the cessation of suffering is the third truth, and the Noble Eightfold Path as the way to cessation is the fourth truth. These Four Noble Truths are realised empirically through the insight meditation. From experience one knows that whatever arises and passes away is suffering, and that attachment to these phenomena is the cause of suffering. One knows that cessation of both suffering and its cause is nibbāna, and that its attainment comes about by the Path.

## Sammāsambuddha and Buddhahood

These terms both mean omniscience, or full comprehension of all dhammas. This raises the question of how to make a distinction between the two attributes. By the attribute of Sammāsambuddha, we should understand that the bodhisatta attained Buddhahood based on independent reflection and effort, and the realisation of the Four Noble Truths through insight on the Path of arahantship. Buddhahood means the thorough and exhaustive knowledge of all the conditioned and unconditioned dhammas based on the unique attributes possessed by the Buddha such as omniscience (*sabbaññuta-ñāna*), etc. These unique attributes of the Buddha consist in knowledge of the Four Noble Truths, four kinds of analytical knowledge (*patisambhidā-ñāna*), and six kinds of special knowledge (*asādhāraṇa-ñāna*) that are not found among disciples. The six asādhāraṇa-ñāna are:

1. Knowledge of the different moral and spiritual maturity of living beings.
2. Knowledge of the desires, inclinations, and latent tendencies of living beings.
3. Power to perform the Twin Miracle (*yamaka-pātihāriya-ñāna*).
4. Infinite compassion for all living beings.
5. Omniscience.
6. Unobstructed knowledge of anything he wants to know merely by adverting to it.

Now just a few words about conditioned and unconditioned phenomena. Conditioned phenomena are mental and physical phenomena that arise with the conjunction of the relevant factors. In other words, they are the natural results of their own causes. Thus sound is produced when two hard objects such as sticks or iron bars collide. Here sound is a conditioned phenomenon. Unconditioned phenomena have no causes. The only ultimate reality in the category of unconditioned phenomena is nibbāna. The various names of things are also unconditioned phenomena. However, they are not ultimate realities.

The Buddha's omniscience is so called because it encompasses both conditioned and unconditioned phenomena. It is also described as the five neyyadhamma, i.e. conditioned phenomena, the distinctive qualities of certain material phenomena (*nippahanna*), the conditioned characteristics of mind and matter, nibbāna, and concepts.

The first two special knowledges are together called "the Buddha-eye". With this all-seeing eye, the Buddha discovered those who were ready to be enlightened and gave them appropriate teaching at the right moment.

I concluded the discourse on Dependent Origination with a commentary on the attributes of the Buddha because I wish to inspire the readers with faith in the Blessed One. I hope that they will find the inspiration too, in the arahants who also possess the attribute of Arahant. Arahants are wholly free from defilements since they have destroyed the basis of existence. They do no wrong, even in secret, so they are worthy of honour. These are the fundamental qualities of the Arahant attribute although it does not include all the superlative attributes of the Buddha.

So you should try to overcome defilements through mindfulness of the psychophysical processes arising at the six sense-doors. In this way you can destroy the spokes of the wheel of life and keep your mind always pure. Eventually you may become arahants and earn the glorious title of Arahant.