Paṭicca Samuppāda Revisited

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 44:26

I'd just like to begin by first of all apologizing to Cassidy.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed noble and fully self-awakened one.

So I thought just to go through dependent origination. I'm presuming that most of you haven't been through it in any detail. If you want, you can use this little booklet here and we'll just go through it. From dependent origination it forks off into all the other teachings of the Buddha. All these little sections fork away into other teachings. So it's a central pillar of the Buddha's dispensation.

We'll come back to the victory verse, but I just want to point you to the last line: *visamkāragataṁ cittaṁ. S amkāra* just means something compounded. *Citta* here is referring to mind, consciousness, and what he's saying is that there is an unconditioned consciousness. And there's nothing in our experience of the world which is not conditioned.

Page six. Everybody on it? We're on the same page. Very good. We'll probably come back to that.

So we start with this word *avijjā. Vijjā* just means knowing. So something's not knowing. It's not ignorance. It's not a pejorative thing. Just don't know. And it's a place where we don't like to be. It creates a little confusion for us. It creates a certain sense of anxiety because we like to know.

I just had an email from Wey who's coming to teach with me at Gaia. She says it's been yonks since I've been to Gaia - where do I park and what do I do? So I wrote back and said, as soon as you come in through the gate, you will see where to park because it's on your left. And then make your way to the office. So now I'm waiting for her to reply and say, where's the office?

So I think we'll all find that whenever you don't know something, there's always that little tremor. Like, don't know what's going to happen. So this place of don't know is a place for us to explore.

So what's happened is that we didn't know and we made a mistake. We presumed. What was the presumption? Well, if we go back to the Buddha's victory verse, he says, I've traveled through rounds of countless births, seeking but not finding the house builder. Who's doing this? Who the hell keeps making me go through life after life?

And then he says, painful is birth over and over and over again. Oh, house builder, I've found you. You've

been caught, I've got you. You won't build another house for me. Your rafters have been broken, your ridge pole demolished. And of course, what he's referring to is this self.

So this self is a relationship. It's not a thing, it's a relationship. Selfing. It's about something in us identifying with something else. And something in us that through that identity possesses things.

So what do we mean by identity? If you catch your finger in the door or you bite your tongue, just for that one moment, you, the tongue and the pain are completely one. That is identity. And then you jump out and you punch yourself on the nose, which means you're stupid. Because you're angry, or you're upset, or whatever. So now you're identifying with emotions. You've separated from the tongue, you can feel the pain, but now you're the one who's angry with it.

So identity is when you actually lose the sense of self. You become what it is that you identify with. So it happens, for instance, when you're watching a video. You turn the video on, two hours pass. Where have you been? Where's the sense of self gone? You've been completely absorbed in the story. Then you come out of it, you suddenly wake up and there you are. You say, that was a good video, wasn't it?

So identity is that point where you actually lose a sense of self. But it's also a complete identity with the self. And when you come out of that identity, you have a different relationship. You own it or you want to disown it. So obviously the pain in the tongue, from biting the tongue, you want to disown it. But if you have a mobile, you definitely want to own it.

And of course, what we discovered is that this self is a false identity. There's something happening there. We'll come back to it. And the sense of possessing something is a delusion. When a thief steals your mobile and you go around saying, somebody's stolen my mobile, he keeps saying, it's my mobile. It's not yours, is it? It's the thief's. It belongs to the thief now, but you insist that it's my mobile.

So what you begin to realize is actually with objects, you can only use them. To possess them is just going to cause problems. So sometimes it's helpful to imagine what would happen if you either lost or your mobile was stolen. So you have at least a strategy to work with such a situation. And it doesn't take you by so much surprise.

The amount of suffering that comes when you lose something is the measure of your attachments. The amount of fear you have towards losing something, your life, is the measure of your identity with this psychophysical organism.

So all these emotional states are actually telling us something about our relationship. And as human beings, that's what we are, isn't it? We are our relationships. So inwardly, it's my relationship to my body, my emotions, et cetera. Outwardly is my relationship to nature, to people, and so on and so forth. So everything is in this process of relationship, relating one to the other, the one affecting the other.

So although we get the sense of self, which gives us a feel that I'm in charge, that I'm the one who does

this, I'm the one who does that, when we investigate it's always some recognition of something affecting me that I'm actually in some form of relationship, some sort of dance with. Well, if it's happy, some sort of dance with either people, objects and so on and so forth.

So this is what the Buddha found. He found that there was a core mistake being made and it was causing him to be reborn and reborn.

So now this *avijjā*. What it is suggesting is that something must not know. When you can't have not knowing and something that doesn't know, that doesn't actually have the not knowing. Something he knows, knows.

Now it's depending upon that *avijjā*, that not knowing, that we create this wrong relationship that we call a self. So a self is a relationship that's happening between the knowing and what it's actually experiencing. The relationship between the knowing and what it's actually experiencing.

So when you look into a mirror and you see yourself there, there's a relationship with what you're looking at. So this knowing has come into this life form, awakens into it at birth and presumes that this is it, this is what I am.

Now, because of that, it begins to create a delusion and it acts through the delusion. Now, what is the essence of that delusion? What's the essence of that delusion? What is this knowing searching for?

So we go back to the Buddha's verse. I've traveled through rounds of countless births, how painful it is to be born over and over again. So this not knowing, this delusion is seeking happiness. And it's seeking happiness in the world that it finds itself in, which is the world of the mind. So there's another little split, so we've got the mind-body split. Well, we'll come to that in a minute.

So what is done in the past is created a whole set of habits based upon this delusion. So all our habits have running underneath it this delusive understanding.

It's because of this movement in the mind that consciousness arises. So consciousness is dependent on an object, and it's dependent on an object because consciously – the English words, it's very difficult to not think of consciousness as something that thinks or that does something – but consciousness here is just a mirror. It's just a screen upon which information arises.

The information is the *samkhāra*. So the *samkhāra* are your habits. What's a habit? Well, it has a physical component, say like eating. It has an emotional component. There's always a feel to something. And it has an understanding component. So if you look at any habit, you can see there's always those three factors: the body, the heart and the mind. And that's the information that's coming upon this screen and that's the meaning here of *viññāṇa*.

Now it's because of *viññāṇa*, because of that consciousness, that there is a realization, a coming realization that there's the body and the mind. So we know that just in popular culture. So for instance a lot of people

do yoga for the body and they might do meditation for the mind, so the split is there. We can see it. There are sports which are physically based – football, tennis, et cetera – and sports which are mentally based – chess and things like that.

So you've got this *nāmarūpa* split. Now, this *nāmarūpa*, so the Buddha says that mind is foremost, mind is at the base of everything. So what have we got here? We've got a sense base, the retina. And it's sensitive enough to actually feel subatomic particles. I mean, that's incredible, isn't it? I mean, a tiny, tiny, tiniest of all things, a photon. And it actually feels it. It has actually a felt sense to it.

And at that point of touch with the physical base, the mind is already there. The mind is already there. Otherwise, we wouldn't know it. So you know that from sleep, for instance, your eyes are not open, so you don't see anything. So there has to be a consciousness there. It has to be that screen.

And so as that photon hits the eye, it's not just hitting the physical base, which is a medium for that photon. It's hitting the actual mental, the process of mind. And it's the mind that creates out of that photon the color that you're actually seeing.

This is more obvious with hearing. So at the sense base of hearing, all there is, is a touch. There is no sound. There's no sound in the universe. Just a touch. You can actually experience this. It's just a touch. And then suddenly, not suddenly, next what you get is the mind translating that touch into a sound. And then it gives it a name – bell. Then it gives it a meaning – wake up bell. And only then does the idea of me – I've got to get up. That's the process. And you can actually experience that process in meditation.

There's a very good book on the process of seeing by a woman called Cynthia Thatcher. She died very young, unfortunately. But her book, Seeing – I can't remember, I can give you the name of it. It's a really excellent book on the Mahāsi process. And her big insight was on seeing. And what she says is that there's a point where you're so down at that base level before the mind can work on it, that the world splits into a sort of, you know, the pointillist paintings, little dots. That's what you see, just little dots. And it's all put together.

So here we have that first separation. We've got a couple of separations. We've got the not knowing separating from the habits that the delusive self which has been created has manufactured, and then we've got the split between the habits and how it manifests on the screen of consciousness. And then because of that screen of consciousness we can begin to separate out the body from the mind.

But of course, what we discover is that it's all mind. It's all mind. It's just that mind has a way of contacting matter. But it only contacts matter by way of that gate. It's called a door in Pali. It's a door. And therefore, our experience of the world is entirely dependent upon the sense base.

So obviously, if you're colorblind, you live in a different color world than somebody who has ordinary sight.

Now, it's dependent upon this body-mind split that you have these six sense bases. So again, in the Buddhist teachings, for something to be known, there has to be an object. There has to be a sense base and there has to be that consciousness. There has to be that screen upon which it appears.

And so one way of looking at the human being is that the human being is made up of these six consciousnesses. So there's the five ordinary ones and then the mind. And the mind here is really the mind which is interpreting information. So it's not the higher mind of thought or energetic work. It's just that part of the mind which interprets what's coming in.

So we have two splits. We have the body from the mind and then within that structure of body and mind we have these six sense bases.

Now once the six sense bases are there, once we get there, dependent on all that is the point of contact that we've been talking about, this point of touch. And it's at the point of touch that those three things need to be there, which is the object, the sense base and consciousness, the screen.

Now, once that point is created, the mind begins to separate out what is pleasant and unpleasant. So there's your next split – pleasant and unpleasant. There's a whole bit in the middle, which is neutral. But when you get really close to a neutral feeling, I think you'll see it either shades off into unpleasant or shades off into pleasant. So that's the dual world we live in. We can't go beyond that. Whatever we experience in this world will either be pleasing to us or displeasing. That's a given fact.

Now then we have this self coming in. So now at this point there's a movement towards or away from what we're actually experiencing. And this is that process of desiring. So when something is pleasant, when it's something that we think we're going to enjoy, there's a movement towards grasping it. And when it's something we don't like, we want to push it away, get rid of it.

So there's the beginning of suffering, but it's not actually suffering yet. And this is what we are discovering through this practice, that we can be aware of that process, but that which is aware of the process is not actually suffering. It's standing above it. It's standing apart from it. It's just watching that process.

Now, between those two, the recognition of something pleasant and unpleasant, and this reaction, a learnt reaction, it's coming from the *samkhāra*, the habitual nature, the habits that we have, that's one point of escape. Because by putting our attention there, and allowing this wrong relationship, which manifests as a form of desire, to slowly dissipate, we're undermining that bad habit.

So that's one point of escape from the process of creating suffering for ourselves.

Now, remember, underneath this process now, we've got two things that run underneath. One is the essential delusion. And all the habits are there all the time, just like programs on the computer. They're there all the time. The mind isn't like the computer, by the way, but I'm just... It's running under the mind. It's running underneath every moment of our lives. The habits and the delusion that's creating the habits.

And it's dependent upon what's happening at the sense base, which awakens some form of habit.

So if your eye hits the ice cream button, then this desire for ice cream comes up, which will be based upon seeking happiness in food.

Now, once that desire has come up, we have this word *upādāna*. So desire here is translated, I've translated it as desire. They usually translate it as craving. But I've always thought craving was just over the top, really. I mean, at times we do crave, but even the smallest attraction is also part of *taṇhā*. It's not – it can be the smallest little movement in the mind to an addiction.

And then, because of that, we have this next reaction. So these are all reactions. They're not responses. They're not coming from wisdom. They're just something that happens habitually.

Is this *upādāna*. Now, *upādāna* is a grasping. And what's actually happening there is this process of identity. So now that this self manifests, and at that point, it's extremely difficult to stop the next point.

The next point is, of course, to empower the desire. But once you've identified with the desire, you've got to be right on the ball to stop it moving into an action. I've only ever done it once. I was just aware enough to see the desire, to see the grasping, and then just to pull myself out. And what I experienced was a sort of sucking into the object.

It was like I was being sucked in, like into a whirlpool. And I was able, and I just caught it and I pulled myself out. I've only ever done that once. I think it's extremely rare.

So that's why the whole attention of the practice is on the bit that we can grasp quite clearly, which is between feeling, pleasant, unpleasant feeling, and our reaction of desire or aversion. So now here the question arises, well, what is it that is grasping? So remember, although we say the grasping and that's where the me comes in, I, I, what is it that's doing that? So just keep that in the back of your mind.

So now we have, just to repeat that, the self isn't a thing. It's a relationship. It's an identity, it's a relationship that the knowing, some knowing has with what it's actually experiencing. It feels solid, but it isn't.

Now, the next one is dependent upon that, you get this *bhava*, this becoming. And the reason why the Buddha used the word *bhava* there, because he's referring to the self. So the process is not just one self doing things. The process is a continuous selfing. Every time you go through this process, another self is created. And according to the psychology, this can happen quite quickly, even within a minute. You can just be constantly reaffirming your connection to what you want or what you don't want.

But it also includes the becoming, it also includes an action. So whatever that desire was, whatever it attached to, now begins to manifest. And it either manifests as a train of thought or a train of speech or an action. So the becoming is referring back to the self acting out its desires. That's the *bhava*.

Now looking at this more as an immediate process rather than a more traditional way. It's not even traditional now because both ways are taught, but traditionally it was about past lives, this present life and future life. That's why the next one is *jāti* which means birth. But this *jāti* can also be understood as beginning. So as soon as you empower something, there must be a beginning to the action.

And dependent upon that power, you've now got ageing and death of an action. So you've got the beginning of an action, the process of an action, and the completion of the action. So that's seeing this dependent origination as something that's happening now, immediately.

And then, of course, there's this wonderful cascade of horror: death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. So that gets across the message that it's not, we're not having a great time sometimes. The process is not gonna, it's not gonna lead us to the happiness that we seek.

So what is it that doesn't know? What is it that's made the mistake of not knowing? So is it not so that when we are meditating, we're pulling out of what we're experiencing and we're finding this little observation post within ourselves? And in that observation post, we can sense ourselves to be the observer, the feeler, the watcher, the one who knows. And everything is just passing in front of us. Just like a show. Where does that sense of self come from? Because it's even there with the knowing.

So it must be coming because it's a reflection. You're aware of yourself being the observer. You're aware of yourself being the knower. So that must be a reflection. And the only place where you can have a reflection is on that screen of consciousness. So something has pulled itself out of the psychophysical organism, found a place to observe it, and sees itself doing so.

Now, in Buddhist understanding, that can't be happening at the same time. That screen can only flash one sense base. It can only do one at a time. But it's happening so quickly that we get the feeling of continuity and simultaneity. So, for instance, when you're watching a film and chewing your popcorn and you're hearing, there are many senses involved. And to us, it sounds like it's all happening at the same time. But in Buddhist psychology, it's a waterfall of sense bases being awoken one after the other in such a speed that it feels as though it's all at the same time.

And if you think about the old films, the old reel films, which I think is 26 frames per minute or something like that. As you slowed it down, the frames became obvious. So it's the same with us. That's one of the blessings, one of the benefits, shall we say, of the Mahāsi system is that as you slow the whole psychophysical process down, these processes become more and more obvious.

So what is the nature of that awareness? What is the nature of the knowing? So that's what we're chasing. Recognizing that the body and mind are two different things is, should we say, an important understanding because then you might open up the possibility of rebirth. So that allows there to be some sort of karmic justice in the universe. Otherwise it's a bit audible when you think that Stalin died in bed from a heart attack, I think, but he died in bed, nice and warm.

So you can understand that in terms of moral justice, in terms of some sort of justice in the universe, there has to be some movement from one birth to the next where our past behaviours are sorted out. Now, you have to be careful here because it's not at all mechanical. Not at all mechanical. Again it's all about relationship and it's all about how a habit will respond to a particular given situation.

So it might be for instance that somebody dies with a great feeling of generosity in their heart. So that's the main force that's within the next rebirth. So when they're reborn you might say that that's the habit which is uppermost. But they enter into a situation which undermines that quality of generosity, living amongst selfish people, cruel people, etc. And so that begins to undermine that generosity. On the other hand, they could be born into a situation where they are supported in that generosity and they grow more and more in generosity. So it's not a simple case of a direct connection. It's all to do with this relationship. And it's all to do with the being, whatever they are, recognizing where the suffering is and slowly purifying their own hearts.

So eventually, it's just us purifying ourselves of all this negative stuff. And as we were saying this morning, the transition, the movement towards what is beautiful just happens naturally. So putting our concentration upon what is unwholesome, the wholesomeness arises naturally. And that's what they say in Zen. With wisdom, compassion arises naturally. It's just a natural process.

So our spiritual aim is to find out what the nature of that awareness is. What is the nature of that awareness? And we're in a double bind here because the awareness cannot see itself. Just like the eye can't see itself. The tongue cannot taste itself. It doesn't have a taste. If your tongue had a basic taste of curry, how could you ever enjoy ice cream? It's because the tongue is empty of taste that it can have all these different tastes. It's because the eye does not have any sense of light within it that it can receive the light.

So this awareness has nothing in it and that's the meaning of emptiness. That's the meaning of *śūnyatā* that you'll come across which is pushed a great deal in the Mahāyāna tradition because they extend it to everything. Like everything is empty, but it's there in the Theravāda scriptures. The Buddha uses both the words *anattā* not-self referring to the idea of a soul which is permanent and has personality, but he also uses the word *śūnya* which means empty.

So here we have a rather unfortunate situation where we find ourselves in this position of an observer. We're slowly pulling away from everything that we thought was me because you're pointing at it. You're pointing at your body with its pains and its pleasures. You're pointing at the emotions and moods which you thought was really you, which you felt was you. And you're looking at thoughts and images, especially images that come across the mind. Beginning to realize that this awareness which is pulling itself out isn't actually them. It's not, it's of another order. But in so doing, it creates this sense of self. Now there's your double bind. How are you going to get out of that sense of self in order to experience the true nature of awareness?

And of course, this true nature of awareness is exactly what the Buddha found. So Buddha means the one who knows. That's all it means, the one who knows. So here in his victory verse, the Buddha is talking about something which is being manufactured. That he's found it, he's destroyed it, he's destroyed the process of manufacturing through the delusive self. But he himself, of course, continues.

So once he was liberated, he didn't sit there like a blob and hope the world would come to an end very quickly. He got up and he began to teach. So everything that was already there, all his understanding, the intellect, his imagination, he loves to explain something intellectually and then he loves to give a metaphor. There are hundreds of metaphors in the discourses. And he likes to walk. He walks all over the place. I mean, I know he must have travelled thousands of miles right across that North Indian plain.

So it's not as though he was somebody different. And he also had the same personality. It's not as though his personality changed. It just became purer. He didn't have the nastiness of anger and resentment. And he didn't have the nastiness of indulgence and greed. But it was still, when he appeared to his disciple, they didn't say, have you had a psychotic breakdown or something? Because you're completely different. They immediately recognized him.

And as he's talking to them, this isn't in the scriptures, it's in the Vinaya, in the discourses about the monastic order. He approaches them and he starts talking about the Four Noble Truths. And he interrupts himself by saying, have you ever heard me talk like this before? Have you ever heard me say anything like this before? And very slowly, these five disciples, who had rejected him because he'd gone soft, he'd given up on the mortifications, for heaven's sake, began to open up to him. And one of them actually made it. One of them had the eye of the Dhamma, the Dhammacakkha, opened. And the Buddha rejoices. And he actually calls him, oh dear, what's the word? It'll come to me, it'll come to me, it's gone. Aiyo... So annoying. You get to an age when words disappear. Very annoying. Koṇḍañña. Koṇḍañña knows. He's the one who knows. Koṇḍañña, Koṇḍañña. That's what he called him. Koṇḍañña the one who knows and that was the name he gave him.

So he used to give titles to people. So to Sāriputta who was a person who knew the Dharma perhaps as well as the Buddha, he used to call him the general of the Dharma, the Dhamma Senapatī. And then when he comes back, they've gone under arms round, I don't know how long that took, but when they came back the next talk he gives about not-self. And they all become fully liberated. That's how powerful it is.

Now you might think, what? He gives about a half an hour talk on not-self and they all become liberated. But then you have to understand that we have to accept that these people have been practising like mad for so many years with the Buddha. So they're on the edge of enlightenment. All they needed was some sort of guidance. And it was this guidance that liberated them.

So we're coming to the end, so just very quickly just looking down the order of ceasing. So we note here that undermining that delusive self cuts the whole thing. The whole thing collapses like a pack of cards. The entire cessation of this ignorance and all the evil stuff that we've created just simply collapses. That's

how important it is. And we're undermining the self every time we renounce that desire to indulge. Because that's how the self manifests, remember. It manifests in indulging. Indulging in what we like and indulging in rejecting what we don't like.

So that greed and aversion is a manifestation of this delusion. And every time we undercut that, we're cutting deep down at the beginning, the root of all our problems. And that's where it begins. So with the entire cessation of this ignorance, all those unwholesome habits disappear. It's as simple as that. It's going to happen this evening.

And then, of course, because of that, everything else starts to disappear. This consciousness disappears. Now, it's not consciousness disappears, it's the consciousness of what is unwholesomeness disappears. If consciousness disappears, then the Buddha would have ended up being a blob, sat on a stone, waiting for the world to come to an end. So you have to read this in a careful way, or else you think, oh my goodness, Nirvāṇa is some sort of blackout, some sort of complete, total annihilation.

And really that's what happened when the Christian missionaries went out in all their forms to places like Burma, Sri Lanka and whatnot. They just couldn't get it. They just thought well this is just annihilation and they thought of Buddhism as being world negative.

There's a book by Schweitzer, Dr. Schweitzer, who was a great philanthropist of last century. And he trained himself to be a doctor and worked out in Africa. And he wrote this book, Buddhism and Christianity. And it was the first book that I read on Buddhism and Christianity. And it was quite clear. Buddhism was life negative and Christianity was life positive. That was the book. I don't know why they didn't convince me to become a Christian, but it failed. But isn't the same one who was the musician, the organist? No. Oh, right. No, I think he's a philosopher. Dr Schweitzer.

So then everything else begins to collapse, but only collapse in the sense of supporting the delusion, of supporting those habits which are unwholesome. And as we pointed out, the other escape is between the *vedanā*, the feeling, and the reaction of *taṇhā*. So that's when we are renouncing. So the whole of the spiritual life is a process of renunciation. Let go, let go.

Now, at first, when you begin to renounce something, you might feel you've lost something. I mean, have you noticed that? If you don't react to the greed while you're eating, you can try this when, for instance, you prepare yourself something that you really like. And you're maintaining a distance and you're just tasting pleasant sensations. Now, because you're not indulging, there's a level of excitement disappears. And you're not enjoying the food as much as you did before. And you think, oh, there's something wrong with this. I've got to get back to stuffing myself.

But I'm hoping that the talk you heard this morning has convinced you that there's a penalty to pay for that excitement, which is, of course, the frustration, the anger, the anxiety, etc. So you have to let go of something in order to begin to experience pure enjoyment without the suffering. And that's what's so

difficult because we just love to indulge. It gives us that little buzz.

And of course, the whole consumer society is based upon that. It's not based upon you being pleasantly happy. It's based upon you being excited. That's why these products change. Even if they only change the look of a mobile, they'll change in order to make you excited. So that, oh yeah, I've got to get that one. So the whole consumer process is driven by that desire for excitement, not happiness. Because when happiness comes, there also comes contentment. You are contented. So you're not chasing things at all. And that happiness is coming from within you, not because of an object.

Now that's a hard thing for us to move towards because it does feel you're losing something in not allowing yourself to indulge. And yes, just the final thing, every time, remember, you renounce that indulgence, even if it's only a little bit, even if it's just, you normally have three or four biscuits and you just say, well, I'm only going to have two. See, even a little renunciation is undercutting that sense of self.

Because it's that delusive self that's creating this wrong desire.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused even greater confusion, and that by your devotion to the practice you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.