

4. Taṇhā Upādāna Bhava — Craving, Grasping, Becoming

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 10:06

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

So just to continue the words that the Buddha used in dependent origination. We went through the first parts which are basically to do with how we enter into every moment with this ignorance, this not knowing, and it creates these *saṅkhāras* which are the conditions that we end up manufacturing through this misunderstanding. And there's the given—there's consciousness which is that point of cognition and the body-mind complex and those two, remember, work on each other. The Buddha said they're like two sheaves of hay leaning against each other; the one can't arise without the other.

And then we have what the body and mind, what the constituents are, the *nāma*, the *saḷāyatana*, the six senses, and with that we make contact. This contact has an object, it has a sense base, and it has that consciousness we're talking about. And then we give it a tone colour, a feeling colour, whether it's pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. So that's what you enter each moment with, as it were. That's your given, that's your *vipāka*, that's the product of past action.

Now, this is where the ignorance now strikes again, as it were, underneath the whole problem and produces a certain relationship to what we find as pleasant and unpleasant, and that's your *taṇhā*. So this *taṇhā* is translated as craving, which is sometimes a little bit too strong for these little desires we have. But we include things like addictions and compulsive behaviours in this *taṇhā*. And some people translate it as lack, a sense of lack, like you've got a big hole, you've got to fill it up. A thirst, another translation you'll come across. But the usual one you get is craving.

And what that is telling us again is just what our relationship to something is. And the relationship, remember, is always based on this wrong understanding of seeking happiness in the wrong place, perfect happiness. So that's your *taṇhā*. And that should become pretty straightforward when you meditate, because when something comes up, you'll see your reaction. And remember, it's not always craving in a sense of wanting something—it's not wanting something, too. So you get resistance and indulgence, resistance and indulgence. So that's your hate-love dichotomy of life.

And it's at this point that the duality begins to hurt. We live in a dual world in the sense that it's a multi-complex world, but as soon as we enter into it with this duality of wanting-not-wanting, then it becomes a very unpleasant place for us. In meditation we're able to see that quite clearly.

But the next step, *upādāna*, is the point where we lose it, where we actually drop into that desire. That's the becoming of a self, that's the self, the I. And the Buddha actually calls the *khandhas*—remember, the five *khandhas* that we talked about, which are the body, perceptions, feelings, these conditional volitions and consciousness—he called them the *upādāna khandhas*, the grasping *khandhas*.

And the thing about this *upādāna* is that once you enter into it, the I, the self becomes, and that's the point of suffering actually. The *taṇhā* in meditation we can see is just a desire in the heart, wanting and not wanting, but so long as it's an object, so long as we're quite distinct from it, it's not actually *dukkha*, it's not suffering. The suffering comes with the self, with the identity with that wanting. It's a very lovely little subtle point to grasp. And once the I has gone in there—I have actually seen it, this sucking into an object—but it's very difficult to stop. Then the impulsion, the pushing into that wanting, a power.

While it's *taṇhā*, while it's just desire, it only remains potential. Nothing's happened. It's just a movement in the mind of resisting or indulging. But nothing's actually happened. But as soon as the I gets in there, then as I say it's very difficult to stop the next one, which is *bhava*, the becoming. It's at this point that the will comes in and that's your *cetanā*. And the Buddha says your *cetanā*, your will which is a power, is your *kamma*, meaning your action—not your *kamma* in the common ordinary sense of that word that's used in English meaning your comeuppance. *Kamma* here is an act. And the act is the becoming of a self again. So *bhava*.

So every time we fall into the I and do something out of the position of an I, we're becoming. And that of course is the world of *saṃsāra*. So these three words the Buddha tries to capture that whole business of how we create suffering and how we continue to create suffering and the process that we go through.

And you'll see that it's the opposite of language. Language normally say, "I want, I scream." But actually, I scream, want, I. And as soon as you get I, get. And that's it. That sequence—to see that sequence is to see more and more clearly where the escape is. If there was no desire before the I, then the escape would be really exceedingly difficult because you'd have to catch this identity extraordinarily quickly. But because between the *vedanā*, what we like and dislike, and the I, there lies this potential that we call *taṇhā*, the craving, the wanting, the not wanting, it gives us that—if we can see that—it gives us that gap in our experience.

And that's really where we can begin to change ourselves, because when we see that *taṇhā*, this craving, call it that, is unwholesome, we can let it pass away, we can let it drop away. And in so doing, remember, it's undermining a habit of craving. And that is what our *saṅkhāras* are, our conditional, volitional conditioning. It's like these huge circles, they're little circles within this greater circle of dependent origination, all bits feeding off each other.

And there are times when we can see that the desires that come up are actually wholesome. They might have a touch of I in it, but the point is that they're wholesome. And by actually putting our will into that, then obviously that's changing our personality.

So those three little links are where the Buddha explains how we carry on creating these *saṅkhāras*, these volitional conditionings based on this ground of not knowing, of ignorance, of delusion. So not only in meditation but in daily life, as soon as you see that "I want" come up, that wanting come up, if we can just stop at that moment and just catch the craving before we do something, that's where we've got the power to change ourselves. Every time we miss it, we're either reinforcing an old conditioning which may be unwholesome, or starting a new one, which may also be unwholesome.

So it's a case of bringing this type of mindfulness into virtually everything we do. And in this way, we slowly change ourselves. And I think one of the things we come across is the power of these old desires. They're very, very strong, much stronger than we think they are.

So, that's it. I hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated from all your *taṇhā*, *upādāna*, and *bhava*, sooner rather than later.

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