

# Paṭicca Samuppāda: Dependent Origination to Saṃsāra

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 9:54

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*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa* — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

We were doing all the words to do with the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, dependent origination. Some people translate that, remember, as interdependent origination. And we've been through the *avijjā*, the words we did was *avijjā*, *saṅkhāra*, *viññāṇa*, *nāmarūpa*, *saḷāyatana*, *phassa*, *vedanā*, *taṇhā*, *upādāna* and *bhava* and they translate or are translated as ignorance, intentional activities or volitional conditionings, consciousness, mind and matter, sixfold sense base, contact, feeling, craving, grasping and becoming.

And then we're going through just the last bit which is *bhavapaccayā jāti*. So there, in a sense, it's a bit of a repetition because the *bhava*, the becoming, is then described as the *jāti*, *jarā* and *maraṇa*, so birth, ageing and death. *Jāti*, birth, *jarā*, ageing, *maraṇa* and death. And the rest of it, *soka*, *parideva*, *dukkha*, *domanassa*, really all the Buddha is saying that this leads to the whole gamut of human suffering. It translates as sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. So people have tried to make some sense out of the order of that, but it's not. I think he's just saying, look, when you behave like this, basically you're creating misery, and that's about it.

Now, what we have to do this evening is just recognise that there are two interpretations to this particular teaching, dependent origination. The traditional one is to do with three lives. So when we are born, we come into this life with the first two parts, the *avijjā*, which is your basic ignorance, your basic delusion, and all the conditioning that you've gained from your previous lives. And remember that, really, that's your *kamma*. So the mental states, the potential mental states that you're born with, the seeds that are already there within consciousness, within the mind, are your *kamma*. That's what you're born with into this present life. This is the three life theory.

And then you pass through this life, turning this wheel. And remember, we're not always turning the wheel. When we're asleep, there's no *paṭiccasamuppāda*. And so it's not as though it's always there. But every time there's an act of volition, which is based on greed, hatred, or this essential delusion, then the wheel turns. And what it's doing is, it's reinforcing conditioning. And you may even be starting some new stuff. Why not? Well, we're at it. If we're going to create misery, we may as well get in there and have a good go.

And this leads us to this *bhava*, which just means this continuous becoming, translated also as *saṃsāra*, the world of ever going on, no end to it. And then when we die, then that process of being born, growing old and dying starts again. So the last bit in a future life is really saying that this wheel of dependent origination is just going to keep going, just going to keep going. So those are your three life theory, which is your traditional one. That's the one you'll get from Buddhaghosa in his book, *The Path of Purification*. And in that particular teaching, the *viññāṇa* that they're talking about right at the beginning there, that consciousness that we were relating to, is the relinking consciousness which moves from one life to the next. So it's an actually specific definition of that *viññāṇa*.

But as we mentioned before, there's also a present moment understanding of this teaching in which the *avijjā-saṅkhāra* is the platform upon which every moment is sitting. It's sitting on the delusion, this misunderstanding, and all the *saṅkhāras*, all these volitional conditionings, as conditionings ready to be activated given the right stimulus. So they're often referred to as those conditionings, the set conditionings they lie there as potential. Then with every moment there arises the potential again of some action.

And if it's arising out of this base, if it's arising out of that base, then you get this turning of dependent origination. In which case, the *jāti jarāmaraṇaṃ* is referring back onto this present moment, that each moment has a beginning to it, it has a process to it, and it has an end to it. So the wheel as it were, these three wheels are turning within themselves. So there's this basic wheel of delusion feeding into the conditioning as a potential, then there's this active feed down into this already present potential conditioning of the actions we are doing, and this produces, in every moment, a beginning, a middle and an end. And that's, in short, the understanding of *paṭiccasamuppāda* as a present moment experience.

So it's up to you, really, which one you put the accent on. In terms of traditional teachings, they would emphasise the three lives. But in terms of our practice, our daily practice, and what we're trying to do is escape this wheel, then I think it makes more sense to see it as a moment-to-moment experience. But that's not to deny the three-life theory, because, of course, when we do die, all those conditionings are carried over onto the next life. And that's really where our *kamma* is.

Often we think of *kamma* as something coming at us from the outside, but actually it's the inner part of ourselves because that's where we experience suffering. Just because somebody shouts at you, you stupid bald-headed monk, heaven forbid, then heaven forgive them. Just because somebody shouts at you doesn't mean that it hurts you, you know, sticks and stones hurt my bones and all that. But how we react to that is our suffering, our *kamma*.

And the whole of the Buddhist teaching, as far as I can see, is about putting an end to this dependent origination. That's your *saṃsāra*. All the teachings are about trying to bring that to an end, undercutting it and remember that the undercutting has these two sides. First of all through action so by constantly noting our intentions, letting go of those that are undermining us, unwholesome, leading to more suffering and reinforcing those that are not, that are actually leading to virtue, there is that active change.

But underneath that there has to be this *vipassanā* which is cutting into the basic delusion which is creating the whole problem. So remember the growth of wisdom and the growth of virtue must run concurrent in the spiritual life. You can't have the one without the other.

And that, I think, brings to an end my small dhamma bites, my little discussions on the dependent origination, *paṭiccasamuppāda*. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated sooner rather than later.

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