

# Paṭicca Samuppāda - L'Origination Interdépendante (Belgique Jan 2006)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · International Talks · 58:34

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*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa*

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

I thought this evening I would speak about the wheel of dependent origination, which also allows me to repeat, in a certain way, everything that has been said in previous days and also during the interviews, so that you can understand that the teaching I have given comes from a particular framework.

I have read - I mean, we don't know how true it is from academic study - that nothing like the psychology the Buddha spoke about had already appeared in Indian literature. But now I think you would find the main parts of this teaching probably currently in Hindu philosophy. I was able to observe this when I read Ramana Maharshi, a very famous Indian guru.

Remember that whenever we speak of the Buddha's teaching, it is never about anything other than suffering, alienation, the sense of dis-ease - in other words, all forms of human misery - and the cessation of this misery. So remember that in Theravāda teaching, there will never be any question of anything other than suffering, suffering, *dukkha, dukkha*. But this is only the First Noble Truth.

The First Noble Truth announces that *dukkha* is a reality. No one can deny it. And so this suffering is the illness, if we want to use the ancient formulation from the Buddha's time. The prognosis is magnificent. The prognosis is that there is a possible end to suffering. The Second Noble Truth announces the cause of suffering. The cause of *dukkha* is desire. This desire which of course arises from the illusion of a real self. The Fourth Noble Truth is the noble truth of the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

And so when it comes to the psychological sequence of suffering, which is in fact the Second Noble Truth, it is actually the chain of dependent origination. So we are going to first review the twelve links of this chain and then we will dwell a little on certain aspects.

The first link is this word *avijjā*. *Avijjā* is rather badly translated as ignorance. But it is in fact the first link - what we call in Pali *avijjā* - and we translate *avijjā* quite clumsily with the word ignorance. It would be better to speak of not knowing, because the term ignorance implies an idea of guilt, of stupidity. But this is not the case - it is simply the fact of not knowing.

And because we do not know, we begin to create the illusion of a self. And this self will then give birth to all the conditionings that we experience during meditation, and so these conditionings are called the *saṅk hāras* - what is fabricated. And so these first two links, therefore *avijjā* and *saṅkhāra*, are invisibly present throughout our daily life. Excuse me, they underlie our daily life.

Then we arrive at the link of consciousness, *viññāṇa*. Then there is body and mind, *nāma-rūpa*. Then there are the six senses. So the sixth sense is the mind itself. The sixth sense is the place where the brain and mind meet.

Then there is recognition - this is in fact the place where we recognise objects. Then there is *phassa*, contact - the moment when the object enters into contact with the mind. From contact come sensations, and we immediately recognise these sensations as being either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

Then comes the reaction, and this reaction is *taṇhā*. So this reaction is not wanting what is unpleasant, wanting what is pleasant, and ignoring what is neutral. Then there is identification with this, the appreciation of this as me. And as soon as there is "I want" or "I don't want", the will is going to enter into action. This will that enters into action is *kamma* - a mental, physical or vocal action - and this action creates the conditioning that we call becoming, *bhava*.

And as soon as we are in becoming, there will be the beginning of becoming, the prolongation of becoming and the end of becoming. The beginning is birth - in the context of a human life for example - the continuation, the prolongation, is old age, and the end is death.

And in a shorter time span, the beginning is the decision to eat something. The prolongation is the fact of eating this thing. And the end is the sadness of having finished. Not something - cream cake. A cream cake.

So there are your twelve links. And so we can begin with the central link, where we begin with desire. There is therefore contact. Contact can be of six kinds according to the sense involved. Contact can be internal if it is an emotion or a thought. So at this moment, it would be a contact that comes through one of the six sense doors of the mind.

As soon as something enters into contact through one of the sense doors with consciousness, contact takes place. These three things must therefore be present for us to be able to experience: the object, the sense base, and consciousness. If for example you have lost your sight, the eyes, you have at the same time lost this channel through which contact could be established. And if you find yourself in a room where it is dark, where there is no light, you have also lost the possibility of having contact. And you will see nothing either if you are asleep and therefore the element of consciousness is lacking. Consciousness is still there since if you are cold you will cover yourself. And when you dream, there is visual consciousness.

And then comes recognition, the perception of this sensation as being pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. The Buddha explains to us that this sequence of twelve links, these twelve links succeed each other in all living beings whatever they are, from the largest to the smallest, even insects.

When we are in meditation and we observe the breath, the sensations that manifest are neutral. When you have a pain in the knee, you perceive it as painful. And when you feel calm in the body, it is a sensation that you recognise as being pleasant.

But this recognition of sensations as being pleasant, unpleasant or neutral is in fact a construction of the mind. It is the mind that recognises. This does not belong to the body itself. This is why I asked the meditators, at the time of the interview, to try to enter, to be in contact, to observe very attentively the emotional sensation that they might feel, so as to arrive at contact in its pure state.

For example, when we have a pain in the knee, it is the mind that interprets these sensations as being painful. But if you observe this sensation very attentively in its pure state, you will probably only feel burning or heat. And if we are capable of observing with this quality of attention, the concept of pain will fade away.

But this, of course, does not necessarily have to be done in daily life. Here, in this context, it is a matter of making a very thorough investigation of reality to see how things happen. In daily life, if your body hurts, it is probably because you should see a doctor. But even if it is a real illness that you might have, you can still always observe it as a sensation in its pure state. And if you are capable of doing this, it won't hurt so much.

Because when one perceives something as, let's say, painful, there is this immediate reaction of not wanting it. Now up to the point of *vedanā*, of feeling, there is still no reaction of the mind. Until the moment when *vedanā*, sensation, is going to manifest, there is not yet any reaction of the mind. There is not yet any construction of a self.

The Buddha explained this and experienced it - up to sensation, he was still a human being. But therefore enlightenment is not going to make us lose our capacity to perceive things. You become much more attentive or aware of this sensual base. There is a cleansing of the doors of perception. There will be a cleansing of the doors through which one perceives objects. In traditional language, we speak of the sense doors.

If you have done long retreats you may perhaps be astonished to see how blue the sky is and how green the grass is. This is quite simply because at this moment the conditionings have disappeared and there is a direct perception of reality. And it is the same thing with food - the food will have much more taste. After a retreat, one of the meditators came to find me and thanked me warmly because it was the first time that carrots had a taste for her.

And now there is this reaction of desiring the thing, not desiring it, and ignoring it. During meditation, we must become conscious of this reaction. If we are capable of being conscious of this reaction, the sequence is going to be interrupted at this level. The desire to want, not to want, or to ignore is simply going to die. The desire to possess, the desire not to possess, or the desire to ignore is going to fade away, disappear.

All of this is rooted in ignorance and in the belief in the real existence of the "I". The moment after this is called *upādāna*, or "grasping", and it is the point where the "self" says "I want", "I don't want". The ego desires to possess, I desire to possess. Identification.

So in our language, we would say "I desire the cream cake". But from the psychological point of view, it would rather be "the cream cake wants me". These things happen, of course, in milliseconds. But all of this happens extremely rapidly, in tenths and thousandths of a second.

And from the moment when this identification has taken place, therefore the "I" that wants the object, it becomes practically impossible to prevent the action. It becomes practically impossible to avoid the will from becoming active. To activate the desire - yes, that's it, activate, I think that's it. So you can - your concentration and your energy must be absolutely on this point to stop the will from being activated, and it is virtually impossible in daily life. I think it is absolutely impossible.

So even if one puts all one's energy into it, if one strives to avoid this, it is practically impossible in daily life. We must therefore train ourselves to be attentive and conscious of the moment when we are going to begin to desire or not desire. At this moment, wisdom controls the process. This means that the ego is not going to start living because there is discrimination by wisdom.

At this point we can ask ourselves: is this desire wholesome or not wholesome? And at this point we can then ask ourselves the question of whether this desire is positive or negative - is it beneficial or not beneficial? Is it virtuous or perverse? Because remember that our immoral, negative actions are the measure of our ego and the expression of our ego. As soon as there is greed, anger, it is the expression of the ego.

So if we see that our reaction involves anger, fear or greed, we know that it is negative. So you wait, just as in meditation - this is daily life - you wait until the desire disappears. At this moment, you must behave as in meditation - you simply wait for this desire to fade away.

And you will have won on two fronts: you will have succeeded in avoiding falling into temptation, you will also have succeeded in attenuating the disposition to this habit. This is very important to understand. So it is necessary to understand that it is not only a matter of abstaining from something harmful, but that it is also a matter of diminishing, attenuating the tendencies to this thing in ourselves. What we are trying to do, therefore, is to give ourselves time or give time to our negative habits to fade away.

But it must also be understood that this process of purification can only be done consciously, because as long as these things remain half-conscious in the subconscious, one could say, they remain active forces.

Now I was brought up as a Catholic, and I know that many of you were too, and we had three different domains to go to. We could go to hell, to heaven, or to purgatory. I was raised in the Catholic religion as doubtless many of you were, and we had only three possibilities: paradise, hell, or purgatory.

Hell from the psychological point of view is the place where there is no longer any way to escape. There is no possible escape from hell - despair, panic. Yes, a deep depression. These are states that human beings enter where they see no escape. This is hell.

Now you can suffer as much, but at least you can see that there is an escape. This is purgatory. Most of our meditation, 99.9%, is purgatory, because it is not possible to reach paradise without passing through purgatory. The purification process must be able to take place. And the more we allow it to pass, the more quickly we will be out of this state of purgatory. But here there is also insight.

But in reality, if you are therefore capable of maintaining your attention very firmly on the pain and the suffering that it provokes, in reality you do not suffer. You do not suffer, even if this sensation is painful.

So I spoke to you in previous days about the cone and its circular base. At the base, there is desire - the pleasant sensation, the desire that it never ends, turning and returning. There is also the unpleasant sensation and the desire not to have it, not to experience it. All of this turns infinitely. But as a vipassanā meditator, you have the possibility of finding yourself at the summit of the cone and observing everything.

If you are capable of maintaining yourself there, you do not suffer. And so if for a moment we lose this status of objective witness - in other words, if we fall from the summit of the cone back into the circle below - we are going to be caught again in this kind of infinite repetition of desire. We reinforce the conditioning. This is very important.

Even when we have acted in a habitual manner, even if something happens through habit, we reinforce this habit. It is even worse, of course, if you consciously decide to reinforce this habit, this bad habit.

For example, you can have the habit of eating cream cakes. And you have them all around you, in your house. And when you pass a bowl, even without knowing it, you take it and eat it. And as soon as you pass next to a shelf where there is this cake, without knowing, unconsciously, you take a piece. This was done through habit. But the result is there - you reinforce this habit. But if you stop and deliberately decide to eat 20 cakes all at once, you very powerfully reinforce this habit.

To be more realistic, there is then the problem of sleep - seeking refuge in the bed. Sometimes, if you are lying on your bed, you fall asleep without even realising that perhaps this is not useful. And we feel this in meditation as dullness and lethargy. And this will have the consequence that the need for sleep will be reinforced, and when you go to sit to meditate, you will very quickly be overtaken by drowsiness.

If, for example, you are sitting in a tram or in a bus, it is possible that you fall asleep easily. But if you say to yourself "Oh, I am really tired, I am just going to go sleep now" and you go to sleep - so this is an act of will. And this really develops this habit. So we must be very careful.

We therefore need to become very skilful in the art of observing desire precisely and seeing whether this desire is positive or not. If it is positive, we can fulfil it, but if it is not, we must abstain, even in daily life.

Even in daily life. You cannot stop this work. You cannot go on holiday. Once you stop, it becomes worse. Once you understand what we are talking about, it becomes impossible to stop. Because you know that if you stop, you are moving towards death. Once you understand this, it becomes impossible for you to interrupt your effort because you understand that if you interrupt it even once, you are heading straight towards hell.

We have spoken so far about how we create our own suffering, but we are also going to develop desire that is rooted in wisdom, and in this way we are going to develop positive states of mind. Yes, yes, so we use the same technique to develop loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy. So there is nothing wrong with the technique, but with the attitude.

So it is not the technique that is important, it is the attitude. If our attitude is rooted in negative states of mind like anger, greed, and so on, this will produce negative states of mind. But if our attitude is rooted instead in positive things like compassion, universal loving-kindness, sympathetic joy, we will slowly build states, introduce positive states of mind. This is why we practise *metta*. It is a desire that we express: "May I be happy?" "May you be happy?"

And this will be reinforced by speaking pleasantly and practising, for example, generosity. As soon as the Buddha was enlightened, his first thought was for others: "Whom can I come to help?" He said: "All that a master, all that a teacher can do to help his students, I have done for you. Out of compassion. All that a teacher can do out of compassion for his students, I have done for you." In Pali, the word means to direct oneself towards the person.

So we are not... The wheel of dependent origination only tells us how we create suffering. So this wheel of conditioned production simply teaches us how we are conditioned. So we have described the central part of the chain, the domain of meditation.

So now, it is this ignorance, this not-knowing. And this not-knowing, its first creation, is "I." I think you have all experienced... I think you must all have already experienced falling asleep in a place you did not know, like a hotel for example, and waking up the next morning wondering where you were. Did you feel the panic? And then, suddenly: "Oh, it's me, I am here." So, the first thing is this "I."

Now, this "I" must believe that it can be happy in this world, because this is the only world that the "I" knows. And when something happens that makes this "I" happy, it will want more. The "I" says to itself: "If I could have this thing all the time, I would be happy all the time." And that is attachment.

And with attachment appears the desire to have more. When you are caught in a process of enrichment, you will never have enough, because you know that a little more money will make you a little happier. On the other hand, everything that makes this "I" unhappy must be annihilated. That is aversion, not wanting. And if this sensation is too strong, there is nothing left but flight.

So on one side there is attachment, the desire to make this thing greater, and on the other side it is trying

to destroy, to get out of everything that causes me problems. So there is your fundamental psychology which is at the base of everything, of all the negative emotions and thoughts that we have created.

And this is really at this precise place that all negative thoughts and states of mind are rooted. The negative states. These two things, wanting and not wanting, slowly destroy the self.

So now, what is this self? What is it? We discover that it is just a concept. But what does this "I," this ego, really consist of? And we will see that it is only a concept.

All day long, we function with concepts. Even when you see a car, it is a concept. It is a concrete concept because you can touch it and feel it, and so on, but you know that it can be cut into pieces and that it does not exist as a car. If you take a concept, even a big concept like democracy and justice, you will see that it is made of small things.

And if you take big concepts like democracy and you break it down into its parts, you will see that it is never anything but small parts. Sometimes these concepts float at an idealistic level and they have no contact with reality. So we know, for example, that even if democracy is probably the best system we have for government, it is not perfect.

We know, for example, that even if democracy is considered the best form of government we can have, it is not perfect. But in our mind, democracy is perfect: governed by the people, for the people, through the people.

And when the Buddha describes how to extract oneself from suffering, he is not going to go back through all these links in reverse. He starts with *avidya*, with ignorance, and he says that when ignorance disappears, everything else will also disappear. So this ignorance, this not-knowing that has created inevitably the notion that this is a human being, that has created the idea that this is a human being. Once he perceives that this is not true, the whole wheel collapses.

When therefore he perceives that all this is false, the whole chain will fall apart. But now, because of all the horrible things we have done during our life, we may feel guilty, ashamed. All of this will completely disappear when the ego disappears.

If these things were to remain when ignorance has disappeared, it would mean that we are fundamentally bad. But all these negative things we have done are rooted in an erroneous vision of reality. And we then discover that in fact we have always been innocent.

We start from a state of not knowing, and during the process of awakening, we arrive at a state of knowledge, of wisdom. And we must pass during the process through illusion, and then delusion. We must pass through the process of ignorance, of not-knowing, and break down this ignorance. Why must this be done? The Buddha said nothing. But this is what we all experience.

At the level of the heart, and from the point of view of the heart, we therefore start from innocence, we

pass through this whole process of breaking down and purification and we arrive at purity. We therefore begin with a state of innocence and not-knowing. We make a mistake. This mistake will send us to hell.

We wake up and wonder how we are going to get out of hell. And we find *vipassanā*. Through *vipassanā*, we are going to pass through purgatory, the process of purification. And we arrive at wisdom and purity of heart. This is what we will go through. This is life.

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