

# The Wheel of Dependent Origination

Bhante Bodhidhamma · International Talks · 49:22

---

*Namo tassa bhagavato harhato sama sambuddhasa Namō tassa bhagavato harhato sama sambuddhasa  
Namō tassa bhagavato harhato sama sambuddhasa*

Homage to the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

Before I begin the Dharma talk I want to give, which is on the wheel of dependent origination, I'll answer these two questions, which are to do with our meditation. The other questions that were asked are of a more general character. I'll answer them at the end of the course.

What to do with fear? When it appears suddenly and there isn't time to react and prepare for it. Panic. Sometimes fear appears very quickly. When fear appears, our reaction is naturally fear. Fear of fear. And that's what leads to panic. And that's what causes the panic.

So when this happens, it happens. We calm down. And we'll continue meditation. And slowly, over some time, we'll have more experiences of these things. We'll get used to that feeling of fear, so it won't frighten us. And eventually we'll be able to sit calmly with it. As if it were our friend. As if you were sitting with a friend who has great fear. And eventually the fear will leave. Maybe after thirty years.

I should have mentioned to someone in those groups that you can taste or season your practice with loving kindness, with compassion. And that often softens your practice. It's like what I said today, that when we work, we must create care and attention. Just as this morning, when I said that when we work, we must create care and attention. So that attention is the looking. And that care is drawing the heart into it.

Let's say a friend might be sick or have worries, so we come to them and naturally we have a feeling of compassion toward them. And so these qualities we can also direct toward ourselves. And love and compassion are the antidotes to fear and hatred. If there are more questions about this, write them down for me.

The next question is, you mentioned spirituality. What is spirituality? And where and how does spirituality... I hope that today's talk on Buddhist psychology will help you understand this.

When you hear the first books, when you read those early texts and Buddha answers individuals, it seems that he focuses on dissatisfaction. And this central part of the wheel of dependent origination is showing how we make ourselves dependent. And this describes to us how we do things unhelpfully.

It begins with the recognition that whatever arises, arises either in the body or in the psyche. When I speak of psyche, I mean emotional life and mental life. And the way we know what's happening in the body and psyche is through the six senses. We already know five - eyes, nose and so on. And the sixth sense is the mind itself. The mind, which receives, gathers information and presents us with the fact, and creates for us the activity of perception.

So for example we know that the photons that enter our eye are very small. I've seen a program showing that when we look at an image, we actually see only small pieces at any given moment. The eye actually moves across it very quickly. But what we actually see is the whole image. So something must be in the brain that creates the image for us, the things we see. And then the mind actually projects this onto the object. So we actually think we're looking at an image. But at that basic contact level we don't actually see anything.

The same is true with hearing. Only air waves hit the eardrum. There is naturally... like when you feel wind on your faces. But these are transmitted to the brain and there they're transformed into sound. And from there we go into a process that's transformed as sound. And through this we then come to recognize it as a bell.

So apparently, this is our Western science, we simply create this world from these small inputs. And Buddha's teaching is about that point of contact. He says that body and psyche exist. And he also says that these are two different energies. They're not the same. And in one text he says that through certain kinds of meditative practice, you can separate the psychic body from the physical body, like drawing a sword from its sheath, which very much contradicts our materialistic knowledge, which believes that everything is matter.

But from the Buddhist viewpoint, although there are two kinds of energy here, we can't say they're completely different - they're simply on a scale of gross and subtle energy. But from the perspective of our experience and the way our experiences and the way we basically examine ourselves and how body and psyche must work together. He says that body and psyche are like milk and water.

Sometimes during your meditation when you're looking at something like emotions - depression, anxiety, anger, something else - you can see the separation. And you see that the psychic emotion and you see that those mental psychic emotions aren't as painful as the body. The body seems to amplify the feeling of that emotion. So for example anger is an emotion that produces heat. So it affects the body. And we literally sometimes feel completely burning sensations. I've experienced this. And in sluggishness and dullness it affects the body. And the body produces these chemicals that cause us to feel the body heavy.

In ordinary life it's very difficult to separate these two. Regarding the psychology around dissatisfaction, it's not necessary to try this too much. When we experience separation of body from psyche, it's more an experience of *anattā*, thus not-self. Before, when we thought there was only body, thus I, now we must decide what I am therefore. Sometimes in near-death experiences the psychic body jumps out.

I had a story about a woman who had a car accident and died. So she was standing inside the woman who had the car accident. She stood beside the car and looked at her body. And when she looked at that row of cars, everyone was swearing at her. But there was one woman who was praying for her. She says she saw that energy swearing at her and then swearing at her. She said she saw energy go up and then return to her head. Then she recovered. So she bought some gifts and flowers and went to visit the woman who had prayed for her, whose license plate she remembered.

And when we leave this aside, we move to the point of ordinary daily experiences. Buddha says that in every single moment there is contact. For this contact to happen, there must be three things: object, ability to perceive, and consciousness. When you lose sight, you see nothing. When you're in complete darkness, you also see nothing. And when you sleep, you also see nothing.

In every moment of our waking lives we have this moment of contact. Regarding this point we feel completely neutral. There's nothing there that we like or dislike. But then, when it becomes interesting, and then when we begin to recognize it, then that perception and quality of feeling arise. So now we know it's a bell and we like it. This is *vedanā*, the point of feeling. So here we have that contact, which is neutral, and feeling, which can already be liking, disliking. And also neutral of course.

And at this point reaction comes. When I like it, I want it, I want it more. And when I don't like it, I don't want it and I never want it again. When I can't remove it, I don't want it, so I'll run away. So here we have in our experience two unwholesome roots, so-called. All things that have to do with wanting, and all those things that have to do with not wanting, fear, hatred. All those things, like hatred, and aversion in Buddhist teaching are grouped under one word. Aversion.

Now at this point there is still no I. No me. But with that wanting then comes the I want. This is called grasping. So there's wanting and I want. And then at this point we create becoming. And at this moment we fuel that wanting, we strengthen it. And what was originally intention suddenly becomes action.

We see a cookie, contact. We have that feeling from that perception very nice. Then we create a relationship. I want. So before we had neutral wanting and then we personalize it I want. And then we grasp it. And this point in the wheel of dependent origination is called becoming. This becoming means that we create conditioning, habit.

And again in Buddhist psychology, everything begins with intention. Intention creates action, deed. Many actions create habit. And many habits create personality. And this personality leads us through our destiny. What our meditation helps us see is how we created these habits, how we create these habits, how we can stop creating these habits, change our personality and move toward a different destiny or possibly so in the future.

And this becoming is the same as karma. And I'll speak more about this tomorrow. So Buddha's teaching about how dissatisfaction arises in us is the teaching of *dukkha*. *Dukkha* means difficult place. The place

where we find ourselves is created by us. We all sit in this room. No one would deny that this room doesn't exist. Is that so? But each of us experiences this room differently. And your experience cannot be mine. So you see that we live in parallel universes. It's amazing how we can communicate. It's amazing how we can communicate together. And actually many people speak other languages.

So from that meditative perspective the point of attention is that result of I like, I don't like, I want, I don't want. When we can hold attention on this, then that wanting, not wanting cannot be grasped. We cannot identify with it. It never becomes that I want or I don't want. And therefore this old habit cannot reproduce, multiply.

When someone has completely uncontrollable desire for cookies, the quickest way to get rid of this habit is to place a few tempting cookies in front of us. And come and look. And look at them. And not eat. Wait until that pain goes away. You can do this with any habit. Many people are... What is it that we have? We have strong habit. Addictive. Many people are addicted, let's say, to television. Especially to one program. Those series, big reality shows. So we sit in front of the television.

Do you have a cup of good tea or coffee? No, cookies. And you simply don't turn it on. And you'll look at that screen before that program ends. You must do this until you no longer have desire to watch that program. Then you can watch it again, but you must be careful about that growing attachment.

And this was also the reason for the old Christian fasting. For a certain part of the year you gave up something you liked to do or eat. So that you let those strong desires go away. Now people have diets. Diet isn't for any spiritual reasons. It's only so you can eat again exactly the same way you ate before. So here we fall into that vicious circle of eating and not eating. And that's what Buddha meant by karma and *dukkha*.

The wheel of dependent origination can be understood in two ways. Something that happens over several moments. Or something that happens over three lifetimes. Maybe we can talk about that theory of three lifetimes tomorrow. For us it's much more important to understand how it works now. What I've described is the middle part of that wheel.

The word begins with the word *avidyā*. *Avidyā* means simply not knowing. It doesn't mean ignorance in some stupid way. When you take a freshly born baby, what does it know? It knows very little, rather nothing. Then it begins to experience life and quite understandably assumes that it is what it experiences. I am that pain, I am that hunger. So right from the beginning we made some small mistakes. We became, in Buddha's words, blinded.

We think we are human beings. Big mistake. And from this ignorance we have a relationship to the world. A blinded relationship. I believe that I am this body and this psyche. And my desire is that I be happy and escape pain. So you can notice that when I learn how to become happy, I want to become even more happy.

I start by getting money for what I do and I like it. So immediately I have big ideas that I can do other things. That means more money. And so I decide to become rich. And I think I won't be happy until I become a billionaire. Because I compare my happiness with my wealth. Or we can do this now with fame, wanting to be famous. To be loved, to be known. When people don't like me, I feel terrible. Or also with power. I want power. If I could rule the world, I would be very happy. Or I can collect as many pleasures as I can. Sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. This makes me happy.

Everything comes from identification with this form. When I'll be happy, I must feel happy. When I'll be happy, I want to feel happy. My body must be okay. I measure my happiness by my physical being. And pleasant feelings that I can feel. Exciting thoughts and thinking.

And this kind of attitude brings me into conflict with the world. Because I will want more from the world than it wants from me. You see, this is the basic psychology of capitalism. And it never ends. And on the other hand there are things that I don't want, that make me unhappy. It can be music from the neighbor. Politics. Anything that makes me unhappy, I want to push away. So all those feelings about anger and hatred remain. And again I find myself in conflict.

And again, when the opposition is very big, I start to feel heavy, and so on. And when that opposition is too big, then naturally I feel anxious. And all this arises because there is sensory blindness.

So part of our meditation is to break down the human being and find a completely different relationship to it. And when we find that completely different relationship, we no longer want more that the world can give us, and conflict when the world turns against us. So Buddha said that the world was arguing with him, and not he with the world. And when he spoke about how someone experiences the world when they don't have this blindness, he said they were content and happy. So that's where we want to get.

And what meditation does is that it undermines the blindness that creates suffering. So if I were to summarize, to shorten the whole Buddhist teaching concerning suffering: All psychological pain we cause ourselves. First it's disappointing. Because until now I could blame my mother, or father, and my society, and the world, and God. But now I must take all responsibility for my mental states. And here arises our truth, and in that lies our real hope.

And because just as we created this psychological circle, when we created this psychological pain, we can cancel it. And moreover, in the process of canceling that psychological pain, nothing is lost. Everything is transformed. And this is expressed in the second point of the eightfold path. Right attitude. All selfishness is transformed into generosity. All hatred is transformed into love. All cruelty is transformed into compassion.

You can take any negative quality and it transforms into its opposite. For example in our meditation we talked about boredom. Welcome. The energy of boredom transforms mutually. So this is the path we're on, which concerns the characteristics that are called *dukkha*.

So if you have any questions that relate to this, put them there in the glass.

---

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