

Paṭicca Samuppāda - Originazione Dipendente

Bhante Bodhidhamma · International Talks · 52:42

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsbuddhassa

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

This morning I thought to revisit for those of you who are old hands in Buddhism and to introduce those who are new to the concepts of dependent origination. The phrase "the wheel of dependent origination" or "interdependent origination" was coined by the Tibetans. This expression, the wheel of dependent origination or interdependent origination or conditioned production, was coined by Tibetan Buddhism. I'm sure most of you have seen the figure of the wheel of interdependent origination. In Theravāda it's called dependent origination.

Before beginning, I'd like to mention again, as you remember yesterday, Ānanda became fully enlightened on the path. He was a cousin of the Buddha, and when he asked the Buddha if he could be his personal attendant, he made a condition. When he asked the Buddha to become his personal attendant, he posed a condition. The condition was that he should be present at all the Buddha's discourses, and if instead he had been absent, the Buddha had to repeat them. So it seems he had this incredible memory. He had this very strong, very vivacious intellect and obviously a good mind.

After a couple of years, perhaps ten or fifteen years, he said to the Buddha, "I think I now understand this doctrine of dependent origination." And the Buddha said, "Oh no, Ānanda, this teaching is very subtle, it goes very deep." This was a warning for a very intelligent person like Ānanda, so you too must take this warning, have this attention when you're listening to me.

You've noticed when we recite this in the morning that it begins with ignorance and goes upward through all the various levels of the sad condition of humanity. When this process of purification and awakening begins, we don't go back through that list. We start again from the bottom, but we say because this is not there, that is not there.

The basic position of all sentient beings, but let's speak specifically of human beings, is that we start from a position of not knowing. Sometimes in English they use the term ignorance. Often, sometimes, in English the word ignorance is used. But for me this has a meaning, a somewhat pejorative connotation - it's like saying you are ignorant because you are stupid. But it's not like that; it's simply a not knowing, a not understanding. And it's precisely this not knowing that underlies our entire life.

Our problem is that we think we know, and this is our main illusion. For example, we believe we are human beings. This is a great mistake. So we start with this idea that we don't know, then we enter this life, and in every moment from that position of not knowing. From this position of not knowing, we enter into all aspects of our life, of life.

Consider the foetus in the womb. What does it know? Probably from that position of knowing nothing, it begins to activate the senses - to feel the mother's voice or the heartbeat, the warmth, and then obviously when it's born, the five senses are more developed and more information enters. When it's born, the five senses are more developed and greater information begins to arrive. It has no way to understand these stimuli. It starts from not knowing, and then suddenly there's light, there's hearing, there's touching. And through all these things it begins to create the world.

It begins then to grow, to know at a deeper level the culture, the language, and the beliefs of that culture. There's no other way to judge or criticise or form an opinion other than what is given to it. This poor thing receives not only all the good things from that culture but also all the bad things, and through its life - we should say through its life - also all the illusions in that culture. And through its life it begins to develop what we call its character and its personality.

Now, in Buddhist psychology - and this is why I'm trying to stress for you, to reach all your intentions - all the psychology of creating this "me" or "mine" begins with an intention. In Buddhist psychology, and this is why I put emphasis on intention, according to Buddhist psychology everything is born precisely - that is, the "me," the "I," this concept of me and I is born precisely from putting this intention. When we have an intention, we put energy into that intention, we give it strength through an act of will.

Take for example walking meditation. You can stand there and feel, know the intention to walk. You can continue thinking "intention to walk, intention to walk, intention to walk," but nothing moves. So what takes something from potential into actual? This is what the Buddha was referring to when he spoke of will. When you put will into an intention, it becomes an action. If you continue to repeat the action, it becomes a habit. And when you have a lot of habits, this is what we call a personality.

All this conditioning arises from that starting point of not knowing. The first two stages of this wheel of dependent origination are not knowing and then habituation. There are two types of teaching regarding this dependent origination. The traditional teaching says that this dependent origination extends over the duration of three lives. We enter this form of life with this ignorance, with this not knowing and with the conditions of the previous life. Then, as you see at the end of the wheel of dependent origination, there's growing, becoming old, and dying. And that is the future life.

But for us as meditators, it's much more important to see this happening in the present moment. From the moment we are born, there's this not knowing. At the moment we are born, there's this underlying state of not knowing. What does this not knowing refer to? It refers to not knowing the three characteristics. We don't see, we don't really see that things are impermanent. We can't see that we could never obtain peace

and happiness through the sensual, sensory world. And we can't see that this idea of I, mine, or human personality is only a concept.

This is why I said at the beginning that it's a great mistake to consider ourselves human beings. Obviously I don't say this in a conventional sense - in a conventional sense we are obviously all human beings - but regarding ultimate reality, we are not, simply because we die.

With these two underlying states, not knowing and conditions, we enter this psychophysical organism. From these two underlying states of not knowing and conditions, we enter this psychophysical body. The Pali terms - so those who know them know what I'm referring to - ignorance is *avijjā* and the conditions we call *saṅkhāra*. *Saṅkhāra* are the conditions. This psychophysical organism is *nāma-rūpa*. *Rūpa* refers to this body, and *nāma* refers to what we normally call our thinking, emotional, perceptual life - everything else.

By *nāma* we mean everything else - our perceptual, conceptual world. There are, as you perhaps know, five aggregates, five *khandha*. And this is how the Buddha saw the human being. The first is *rūpa*, the body. Then there are perceptions - the way we perceive colour, form, things like that. Then there are feelings, sensations. Then there are all these *saṅkhāra* - this *saṅkhāra* is what we would call our emotional thought life. And finally, the act of cognition.

The act of cognition - the way the mind and brain can hold something steady for us. For example, if you've seen these diagrams of how people look at a painting, you'll see that the eye doesn't even see the image - the eye takes only small pieces here and there, and this is put together in the brain-mind complex as an image. And that knowing, that way of knowing, is the act of cognition.

You could also say consciousness, but consciousness is a very big, very vast word. The first act of knowing - this doesn't mean, doesn't indicate the second act, which is knowing of knowing. This knowing of knowing, or knowing of awareness, is the *sati* we are developing.

This *nāma-rūpa*, this mind-body complex, has six ways to interact with the world, to know the world. You won't be surprised to know that they are our five senses plus the mind itself. You'll notice that these five senses cannot be confused with one another. The Buddha uses the word *āyatana*, which means a sphere of experience. This means a sphere of experience. The ears can only hear, they cannot see. Each sense has its own way to contact and experience the world, and the mind naturally has its own way.

Through these six senses we contact the world. This contact is the principal thing. For a moment of contact, there needs to be the sense organ, the object, and this act of cognition. For this contact to exist, you need the object, the sense organ, and this cognitive act. Perhaps you've had the experience of wondering where a bruise came from, because your mind was caught up in something else - you didn't notice your elbow hitting against something.

Now, from all these different contacts, we begin to divide the world into something pleasant, unpleasant,

and neutral. Through these contacts we begin to divide the world into pleasant things, unpleasant things, and neutral ones. And we call this *vedanā*. Contact sensations and this *vedanā* are the same thing, except that in *vedanā* there's still this aspect of distinguishing them as pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral.

All this process is automatic. You cannot stop it. You cannot interrupt it. Immediately, as soon as you see something, there will be contact and you will know if you like it, don't like it, or it's neutral. And what we're doing in our meditation is centering on *vedanā*. We're centering on *vedanā* so we can see what happens next.

And what happens next is *taṇhā*. This *taṇhā* is the desire to enjoy, to indulge, or the desire to push away, or the desire to get out. Remember that this word *taṇhā* is specific to this process of desiring that comes from this ignorance. Know that this *taṇhā* is precisely related to the process of desiring that is linked with this ignorance.

There's another word in Pali which is *chanda*, which also refers to desire but is a healthy, wholesome desire that is not caused by ignorance. Remember that after his awakening, in the Buddha was born this desire to preach the Dhamma to others, to teach the Dhamma.

Incidentally, you will hear or read that some say the Buddha had the choice not to teach. This is because when he looked around and saw to whom, or thought about who should receive these teachings, he understood that there was no one who was ready to receive them. It's only because the great God, the Deity Brahmā Sahampati, came and said to him, "No, please, teach the Dhamma. Some people have only a little dust in their eyes."

This Brahmā Sahampati naturally represents the Buddha's wisdom. And although there was this doubt regarding whether people were ready to receive the teachings, according to the Venerable there was no doubt in his mind about the fact that they should be taught and that the Dhamma should be transmitted.

The reason I say this is for the Noble Eightfold Path. Because you cannot have wisdom without virtue. You cannot have wisdom without virtue. So that was a small aside.

Here now we have this problem of *taṇhā*. This is the first movement of the mind that approaches the object to do something with it. It wants to create this inner paradise, indulging in food. Or it wants to eliminate the neighbor because of all the noise he's making. Often we're not even aware of these neutral sensations. In fact, an exercise of watching the breath puts us in contact with neutral sensations, sometimes for the first time in our lives. This exercise of coming into contact with our breath makes us have experience, come into contact with these neutral states for the first time.

The next step, which is automatic, is the point where we lose control. And this is called *upādāna*. This means grasping. And this is where ego enters. Immediately after, there's the empowerment of will and action. This action becomes part of that internal conditioning of the person. And so this person is as if recreated. And this is becoming.

So the connections - first there's contact. There's the perception of being pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. There's the desire for what is pleasant or pushing away what is unpleasant. There's identification with that desire. There's empowerment, and so we continue to become and become and become.

In English, "I like cake" - in English it's a transitive verb: "I love," let's say "I love pleasant food, likeable cake." From the psychological point of view, instead, it's "cake likeable, want I." This is the order in which they arise. I eat. And then I eat. This is the little leap into doing.

Now we begin to understand how we create this conditioning within ourselves. You see how important it is to catch these intentions, because all our conditioning depends on this intention. When we manage to perceive that intention clearly, it's precisely here that we have the power to change our conditioning. If I see a desire that is unwholesome, then I don't have to energise it. If I see a desire that is not healthy, then I don't necessarily have to give it energy. And in this way that old conditioning will slowly die.

Naturally this seems very easy, but you all know from your meditation that it's not so easy. The difficulty lies precisely in staying still together with that desire, that craving. These unwholesome conditionings can only be exhausted within awareness.

I've already used this computer metaphor - these conditionings remain within us as potentialities. It's only when you press the button or there's a key that this conditioning arises. The Buddha had the word *anusaya* for this. The Buddha used the word *anusaya* - latent tendencies. We don't know at all what our conditioning is unless the conditions arise for us to press that button.

Here we see, in this small section of the chain of Dependent Origination, the relationship between sensation and *taṇhā*, and desire. And we see it's right there that problems are created. If we see this wrong desire and the intention - the intention is right there - if we manage to see this desire that arises and we manage to see the intention linked to the desire, we manage to stay with it and not give it energy, then this desire is like an animal - not giving it energy, then we'll see that it slowly goes away.

You can understand, for example, how in the ancient Christian church the mystics looked at these desires as devils. You can understand how Christian mystics saw these desires as the devil. And to do this they had to see them as something separate from themselves, as a conditioned power that wasn't theirs, that wasn't themselves. Then, obviously, people began to believe they existed. Later people began to believe they actually existed. That doesn't mean there aren't evil beings, but confusing them with our inner devils is a great mistake.

With this becoming, we must then complete the cycle. Once we begin this act, then it will go through a process and arrive at the end. Or from the position of three lives - at the end of our life we will have created all those conditions that in some way will push us into a new life, a new existence.

Now, I remind you that to renounce this process, we begin again with this ignorance. I want to remind you that to undo all this process we must begin again from ignorance. It's a bit like a house of cards - if you

remove the card that's at the base, the whole castle falls down.

Remember that this not knowing, this ignorance, is the not knowing of the three characteristics. So every time we see one of these characteristics it's like removing a card from this entire edifice of the self. So when we see this reaction between sensation *vedanā* and craving we are understanding this characteristic of suffering. Therefore we are comprehending this characteristic of suffering. So we are uprooting ignorance and another little card gets pulled out. And this is how this wheel of dependent origination works as a whole.

Now, there's something else I want to say that connects this dependent origination with virtue. When you hear, especially in Theravada Buddhism, the teaching of dependent origination, it tends to be a bit heavy. When you hear these teachings on dependent origination in the Theravada tradition they tend to all be a bit cerebral and we forget that actually it also includes and encompasses the life of the heart. So when we say *avijjā*, not knowing, this concerns understanding. From the heart's point of view it's a position of innocence.

We start with this not knowing, then unfortunately we make a mistake. So starting from this ignorance we unfortunately make an error. So one shouldn't feel guilty about this mistake. It's just a mistake. So underneath our mistake, which of course causes me a lot of suffering, there is this platform of not meaning to do harm. So underneath this error for which one is not responsible in some way there is still this idea of not wanting to cause harm, so not knowing and not wanting to harm go together.

So then we pass through this process of conditioning which causes me suffering and helps other people to suffer too. So we enter into this process in which we create suffering for ourselves and it's a kind of help or stimulus to the suffering of others, it provokes the suffering of others. Remember that no one can cause you psychological suffering. Remember that there is no one who can cause you psychological suffering - it's all self-produced. So even though you can be hurt physically, our inner suffering is self-created and is due to the reaction to what others do or say. This is why the Buddha says "the world wants to quarrel with me, I do not quarrel with the world" - he is at peace with the world.

So now through this process of meditation and virtuous living we begin to change this entire conditioning. So through this process of meditation, of virtuous life, we begin to change all this inner conditioning. And together there also comes a growth of wisdom. So in our virtuous life and in our meditation practice, all this brings us towards right view or right opinion, the way of seeing things. So this discipline also changes everything that's in our heart from negative and unwholesome states into positive and wholesome ones. For example hatred transforms into love.

And at the end the final process also involves a purification, so there is enlightenment and purification. This purification is complete, entire. It means that this innocence now arises as purity. So what was innocence, not knowing, becomes immaculate wisdom.

So this is the process through which all our sufferings and all our discomforts come to an end. And it's for this reason that in Buddhist understanding the state of heaven, which is a beautiful state, or of heaven, can never be permanent. And it's for this reason that, according to Buddhist conception, the state of paradise or hell can never be permanent. Because these are created things.

So when we speak of *Nibbāna*, we speak of something else. Something that goes beyond this wheel of dependent origination. This is why we say every morning that those who are mindful are in the vicinity of or in the presence of *Nibbāna*. So when we practice meditation we are observing this wheel of dependent origination. So we have already transcended that process. Unfortunately we can't maintain that position. Why? Because this chain, this wheel continues to suck us back into *samsāra*.

So our practice is to become stronger and more stable in this awareness. This position of pure awareness. And this is the process of awakening, awakening from this dream. There.

So... Well, so you can ring the bell perhaps at 5:08. Oh sorry, I keep forgetting, yes. 5:08 Piero, something like that. And then there will be the bell. Yes, and in the next half hour or so, take time just to feel relaxed. If you want to continue walking meditation as insight meditation, please do so.

So for the next half hour take a relaxed walk, but if you want to do walking as insight meditation, feel free to do so. But if you just want to take a quiet and relaxed walk to relax the mind, to bring that relaxed mind then into your sitting meditation, do that. If there are questions that arise, questions about the *Dhamma*, put them here in the basket. Rather than thinking about them, have patience, everything will be revealed to you on Sunday.

Let us stop for a moment and let any thought that needs to arise, arise. I hope that my words have been of some use to you and I sincerely hope that you will be liberated sooner rather than later. Thank you.

So perhaps I'll thank you again at 8 o'clock.

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