

# The Wisdom of Uncertainty

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

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Idappaccayatā is a long Pali word which translates as the Law of This and That or Specific Conditionality. In this very simple verse, lies the understanding as to why we live in an uncertain world: When this is, that is. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. When this isn't, that isn't. From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that. There are two lines of events that converge on the ever-present moment which is the event we experience all the time – just this moment. Are you talking about inner conditioning meeting external circumstances? All events originate in the past. A linear cause and effect process. They can be both caused by us or by anything else. If we play the lottery every week, we have just that less to spend. That's a direct cause by an action we made. But one week we win a shed load of money. That is because a computer picked the numbers we needed. That is not because we bought a ticket. To think we somehow deserved the money is superstition. And, of course, if we resist the temptation to play the lottery none of this would happen! However, in each moment, various lines of past events converge. This is true of every moment of our lives. There was an event reported in the newspapers of a man who was drunk. He stepped outside the pub to take a breath of fresh air and managed to fall down a bank which boarded a road. Just as that moment a car came to that very spot. Two lines of past actions collided and the poor man was killed. That he ended up rolling down a bank and landing in the middle of the road is his own doing, but the collision was caused because someone else decided to drive along that road at that time. To think they are in some way connected save by happenstance or to think he deserved to be killed, is superstition. If he hadn't have got drunk, none of this would have happened! There are two contemplations that arise out of this understanding. The first is that we don't know the consequences of our actions. Just because we do something wholesome, doesn't mean that something beneficial will come out of it. Since we don't know the matrix into which we are making an input, we could very well be doing the wrong thing! Secondly, the effect inwardly, of course, is beneficial. Our inner moral life grows with every virtuous action. And again because we don't know the matrix of our own heartmind, talking a homeless person, making contact in a way we haven't before with homelessness, may lead us to join a charity or even start a charity! And secondly, we don't know what is going to happen because someone else has made decisions or because nature produces its own events. A lot of our time is fairly predictable. We live in a fairly ordered society. Events that happen contrary to what we presume will happen are rare enough to cause us to be surprised or shocked. But this would not be true in a war zone. So we tend to feel safe. But this feeling of security can easily be shattered. An obvious case is a sudden death. If every morning we spend a moment contemplating the unknowability of what will happen in the day before us, we will fortify ourselves against shock. Nor will we become over-excited by surprises. Because we are not so bound by 'what will happen', such contemplations open the day to possibilities. It undermines anxiety and makes us

more flexible. We can adapt more easily to unforeseeable events. Herein lies a lesson from uncertainty?

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