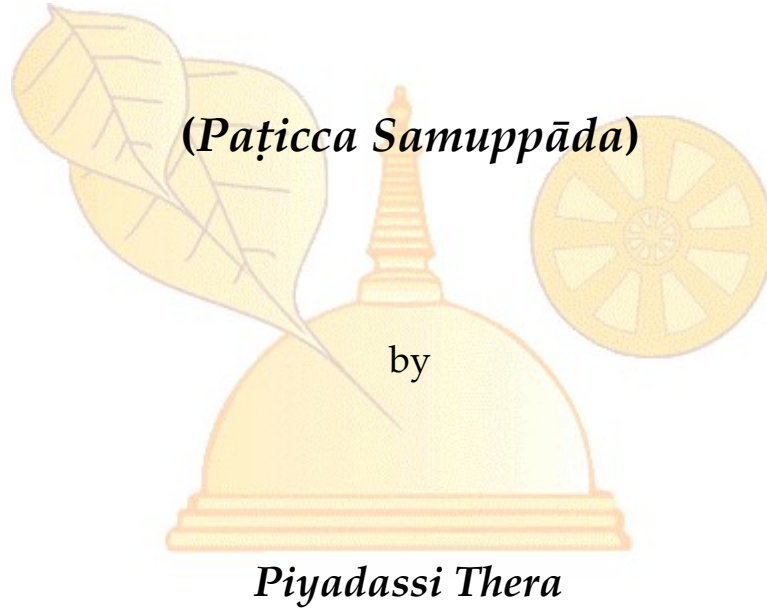


# Dependent Origination



**Buddhist Publication Society**  
**Kandy • Sri Lanka**

**The Wheel Publication No. 15**

BPS Online Edition © (2008)

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# Dependent Origination

## *Paṭicca-samuppāda*

### Introduction

Dependent origination, *paṭicca-samuppāda*, is a basic teaching of Buddhism. The doctrine therein being so deep and profound it is not possible within the limited scope of this essay to make an extensive survey of the subject. Based solely on the teaching of the Buddha an attempt is made here to elucidate this doctrine, leaving aside the complex details.

Scholars and writers have rendered this term into English in various ways: “dependent origination,” “dependent origination,” “conditioned co-production,” “causal conditioning,” “causal genesis,” “conditioned genesis,” “causal dependencies.” Throughout this essay the term dependent origination is used. Dependent origination is not a discourse for the unintelligent and superficial, nor is it a doctrine to be grasped by speculation and mere logic put forward by hair-splitting disputants. Hear these words of the Buddha:

“Deep, indeed, Ānanda, is this *paṭicca-samuppāda*, and deep does it appear. It is through not understanding, through not penetrating this doctrine, that these beings have become entangled like a matted ball of thread, become like *muñja* grass and rushes, unable to pass beyond the woeful states of existence and *saṃsāra*, the cycle of existence.”<sup>1</sup>

Those who fail to understand the real significance of this all-important doctrine mistake it to be a mechanical law of causality, or even a simple simultaneous arising, nay a first beginning of all things, animate and inanimate. Be it remembered that there is no First Cause with a capital ‘F’ and capital ‘C’ in Buddhist thought, and dependent origination does not attempt to dig out or even investigate a first cause. The Buddha emphatically declared that the first beginning of existence is something inconceivable,<sup>2</sup> and that such notions and speculations of a beginning may lead to mental derangement.<sup>3</sup> If one posits a “First Cause” one is justified in asking for the cause of that “First Cause,” for nothing can escape the law of condition and cause which is patent in the world to all but those who will not see.

According to Aldous Huxley:

“Those who make the mistake of thinking in terms of a first cause are fated never to become men of science. But as they do not know what science is, they are not aware that they are losing anything. To refer phenomena back to a first cause has ceased to be fashionable, at any rate in the West. ... We shall never succeed in changing our age of iron into an age of gold until we give up our ambition to find a single cause for all our ills, and admit the existence of many causes acting simultaneously, of intricate correlations and reduplicated actions and reactions.”<sup>4</sup>

A Creator God who rewards and punishes the good deeds and ill deeds of the creatures of his creation has no place in Buddhist thought. A theist, however, who attributes beings and events to an omnipotent Creator God would emphatically say, “It is God’s will; it is sacrilege to question the authority.” This God-idea, however, stifles the human liberty to investigate, to analyse, to scrutinize, to see what is beyond this naked eye, and retards insight.

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<sup>1</sup> Mahānidāna Sutta, DN 15.

<sup>2</sup> Anamatagga Saṃyutta, S II 179.

<sup>3</sup> A IV 77.

<sup>4</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (London, 1945), pp. 14–15.

Let us grant for argument's sake that 'x' is the "first cause." Now does this assumption of ours bring us one bit nearer to our goal, our deliverance? Does it not close the door to it? Buddhism, on the other hand, states that things are neither due to one cause, nor are they causeless (*ahetuka*). The twelve factors of paṭicca-samuppāda and the twenty-four conditioning relations (*paccaya*) shown in the Paṭṭhāna, the seventh and the last book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, clearly demonstrate how things are "multiple-caused" (*aneka-hetuka*); and in stating that things are neither causeless nor due to one single cause, Buddhism antedated modern science by twenty-five centuries.

We see a reign of natural law—beginningless causes and effects and naught else ruling the universe. Every effect becomes in turn a cause and it goes on forever (as long as ignorance and craving are allowed to continue). A coconut, for instance, is the principal cause or near cause of a coconut tree. 'X' has two parents, four grandparents, and thus the law of cause and effect extends unbrokenly like the waves of the sea—*ad infinitum*.

It is just impossible to conceive of a first beginning. None can trace the ultimate origin of anything, not even of a grain of sand, let alone of human beings. It is useless and meaningless to go in search of a beginning in a beginningless past. Life is not an identity, it is a becoming. It is a flux of psychological and physiological changes, a conflux of mind and body (*nāma-rūpa*).

"There is no reason to suppose that the world had a beginning at all. The idea that things must have a beginning is really due to the poverty of our imagination. Therefore, perhaps, I need not waste any more time upon the argument about the first cause."<sup>5</sup>

Instead of a first cause, the Buddha speaks of conditionality. The whole world is subject to the law of cause and effect, in other words, action and reaction. We cannot think of anything in this cosmos that is causeless and unconditioned.

As Viscount Samuel says: "There is no such thing as chance. Every event is the consequence of previous events; everything that happens is the effect of a combination of multitude of prior causes; and like causes always produce like effects. The laws of causality and of the uniformity of nature prevail everywhere and always."<sup>6</sup>

Buddhism teaches that all compounded things come into being, presently exist, and cease (*uppāda, ṭhiti, bhaṅga*) dependent on conditions and causes. Compare the truth of this saying with that oft-quoted verse of the Arahat Thera Assaji, one of the Buddha's first five disciples, who crystallized the entire teaching of the Buddha when answering the question of Upatissa who later became known as Arahat Thera Sāriputta.

Upatissa's question was: "What is your teacher's doctrine? What does he proclaim?"

And this was the answer:

*"Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā—tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha,  
tesaṃ ca yo nirodho—evaṃvōdi mahāsamaṇo."*

"Whatever from a cause proceeds, thereof  
The Tathāgatha has explained the cause,  
Its cessation too he has explained.  
This is the teaching of the Supreme Sage."<sup>7</sup>

Though brief, this expresses in unequivocal words dependent origination or conditionality.

As the text says, during the whole of the first week, immediately after his enlightenment, the Buddha sat at the foot of the Bodhi Tree at Gayā experiencing the supreme bliss of emancipation. When the seven days had elapsed, he emerged from that *samādhi*, that state of concentrative thought,

<sup>5</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (London, 1958), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Viscount Samuel, *Belief and Action* (London: Penguin Books, 1939), p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Vin I 40.

and during the first watch of the night thought over the dependent origination, as to how things arise (*anuloma*) thus: “When this is, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises, namely: dependent on ignorance, volitional formations; dependent on formations, consciousness ... and so on ... This is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.”<sup>8</sup>

Then in the middle watch of the night, he pondered over the dependent origination as to how things cease (*paṭiloma*)<sup>9</sup> thus: “When this is not, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases, namely: with the utter cessation of ignorance, the cessation of volitional formations ... and so on ... Thus is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.”

In the last watch of the night, he reflected over the dependent origination, both as to how things arise and cease thus: “When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases, namely: dependent on ignorance, arise volitional formations ... and so on ... Thus is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.”<sup>10</sup>

One may justifiably be inclined to pose the question: Why did the Buddha not set forth the doctrine of dependent origination in his first discourse,<sup>11</sup> the sermon delivered to the five ascetics, his erstwhile companions, at Benares? The answer is this: the main points discussed in that all-important sermon are the Four Noble Truths: suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the way to the cessation of suffering, the Noble Eightfold Path. There is no statement in it about dependent origination; but one who understands the philosophical and doctrinal significance of dependent origination certainly understands that the twelvefold paṭicca-samuppāda, dependent origination, both in its order of arising and ceasing (*anuloma and paṭiloma*), is included in the Four Noble Truths.

The paṭicca-samuppāda in its order of arising manifests the process of becoming (*bhava*), in other words, the appearance of suffering (*dukkha*, the first truth); and how this process of becoming or suffering is conditioned (*dukkha-samudaya*, the second truth). In its order of ceasing the paṭicca-samuppāda makes plain the cessation of this becoming, this suffering (*dukkha-nirodha*, the third truth), and how it ceases (*dukkha-nirodha-gāmini paṭipadā*, the fourth truth). The Buddha-word with regard to this fact appears in the Aṅguttara Nikāya thus:

“And what, monks, is the noble truth of the origination of suffering? Dependent on ignorance arise volitional formations; dependent on volitional formations, consciousness; dependent on consciousness, mentality-materiality (mental and physical combination); dependent on mentality-materiality, the sixfold base (the five physical sense organs and consciousness as the sixth); dependent on the sixfold base, contact; dependent on contact, feeling; dependent on feeling, craving; dependent on craving, clinging; dependent on clinging, the process of becoming (rebirth); dependent on the process of becoming, ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair come to pass. Thus does the whole mass of suffering arise. This, monks, is called the noble truth of the origination of suffering.

“And what, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering? Through the entire cessation of ignorance cease volitional formations; through the cessation of volitional formations, consciousness ... (and so on) ... the cessation of the whole mass of suffering. This, monks, is called the cessation of suffering.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The entire formula consisting of the twelve factors is found at the end of this essay

<sup>9</sup> Generally the two Pali words *anuloma* and *paṭiloma* are translated as “direct order” and “reverse order.” However, it is not quite correct to say “reverse order,” for that means from the end towards the beginning or in the opposite order. Both the arising and the ceasing of the factors of dependent origination are from beginning to end. For instance, with the arising of ignorance arise volitional formations and so on. With the ceasing of ignorance cease volitional formations, and so on.

<sup>10</sup> Ud 2.

<sup>11</sup> Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Vin I10–12; S V 420.

<sup>12</sup> A I 176.

It is now abundantly clear from the foregoing that the paṭicca-samuppāda, with its twelve factors, is the teaching of the Buddha and not, as some are inclined to think, the work of some writers on the Dhamma of later times. It is unreasonable, even dangerous, to rush to conclusions without fully understanding the significance of the paṭicca-samuppāda.

Dependent origination, or the doctrine of conditionality, is often explained in severely practical terms, but it is not a mere pragmatical teaching, though it may appear to be so, owing to such explanation resorted to for brevity's sake. Those conversant with the Tipiṭaka (the Buddhist Pali Canon) know that in the teachings of the paṭicca-samuppāda is found that which brings out the basic principles of knowledge (*ñāṇa*) and wisdom (*paññā*) in the *saddhamma*, the Good Law. In this teaching of the conditionality of everything in the world, that is the five aggregates, can be realized the essence of the Buddha's outlook on life. So if the Enlightened One's explanation of the world is to be rightly understood, it has to be through a full grasp of this central teaching summed up in the dictum: "*ye dhammā hetuppabhavā ...*" referred to above.

The doctrine of paṭicca-samuppāda is not the work of some divine power; it is not a creation. Whether a Buddha arises or not the fact is:

"When this is, that comes to be;  
With the arising of this, that arises.  
When this is not, that does not come to be;  
With the cessation of this, that ceases."<sup>13</sup>

This conditionality goes on forever, uninterrupted and uncontrolled by any external agency or power of any sort. The Buddha discovered this eternal truth, solved the riddle of life, unravelled the mystery of being by comprehending, in all its fullness, the paṭicca-samuppāda with its twelve factors, and expounded it, without keeping back anything essential, to those who yet have sufficient intelligence to wish for light.

## I. Ignorance (*Avijjā*)

Let us now deal with the twelve actors of the paṭicca-samuppāda, one by one, in due order. The first point for discussion is *avijjā* (*Sanskrit, avidyā*), ignorance. *Moha*, delusion and *aññāṇa*, non-knowledge, are synonyms for *avijjā*. What is *avijjā*? It is the non-knowledge of the Supreme Enlightenment. In other words, not knowing the Four Noble Truths. It is also not-knowing dependent origination. Owing to this nescience, the uninstructed worldling entertains wrong views. He regards the impermanent as permanent, the painful as pleasant, the soulless as soul, the godless as god, the impure as pure, and the unreal as real. Further, *avijjā* is the non-perception of the conglomerate nature of the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhā*), or mind and body.

Ignorance or delusion is one of the root causes of all unwholesome actions, all moral defilements (*akusala*). All conceivable wrong notions are the result of ignorance. Independently of this crowning corruption no evil action, whether mental, verbal or physical, could be performed. That is why ignorance is enumerated as the first link of the chain of the twelvefold paṭicca-samuppāda. Nevertheless, ignorance should not be regarded as a *prima causa*, a first beginning, or an ultimate origin of things. It is certainly not the first cause; there is no conception of a first cause in Buddhist thought. The doctrine of paṭicca-samuppāda can be illustrated by a circle, for it is the cycle of existence, *bhavacakka*. In a circle any given point may be taken as the starting point. Each and every factor of the paṭicca-samuppāda can be joined together with another of the series, and therefore no single factor can stand by itself or function independently of the rest. All are interdependent and inseparable. Nothing is independent, or isolated. Dependent origination is an unbroken process. In this process nothing is stable or fixed, but all is in a whirl. It is the arising of ever changing conditions

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<sup>13</sup> MN 79/M II 32.

dependent on similar evanescent conditions. Here there is neither absolute non-existence nor absolute existence, only bare phenomena roll on (*suddhadhammā pavattanti*).

Ignorance, the first factor of the series, therefore, is not the sole condition for volitional formations, the second factor (*saṅkhāra*). A tripod, for instance, is supported by its three legs; it stands upright because of the interdependence of the legs. If one gives way, the other two fall to the ground unsupported. So, too, the factors of this paṭicca-samuppāda support one another in various ways.

## II. Volitional Formations (*Saṅkhāra*)

*Avijjāpaccayā saṅkhāra*, “dependent on ignorance arise rebirth-producing volitional formations.” The term *saṅkhāra* has also another meaning. In the statement, “*sabbe saṅkhāra aniccā*” or “*aniccā vata saṅkhāra*” (all compounded things are impermanent), the term “*saṅkhāra*” applies to all compounded and conditioned things, i.e. all things that come into being as the effect of causes and conditions and which themselves act as causes and conditions in turn to give rise to other effects. In the paṭicca-samuppāda, however, *saṅkhāra* is restricted to mean simply all good and evil actions (*kusala-akusala kamma*), all actions, physical, verbal and mental (*kāya-saṅkhāra*, *vacī-saṅkhāra*, and *citta-saṅkhāra*) which will bring about reactions. It is difficult to give a satisfactory English equivalent to the term *saṅkhāra*. Let us, therefore, understand it in this context as rebirth-producing volitional activities, or volitional formations, or simply as *kamma*.

Ignorance, *avijjā*, which has taken root in man is the blindness that prevents a man from seeing his actions as they really are, and so allows craving to drive him on to further actions. If there were no ignorance, there would be no such actions. In the absence of actions conditioned by ignorance, there will be no rebirth, and the whole mass of suffering will cease. In order to exemplify how the twelve factors of the paṭicca-samuppāda act upon a connected sequence of lives, the formula has been conceived as extending over three consecutive existences—past, present and future.

Ignorance and volitional formations belong to the previous birth. Wholesome *saṅkhāras* are capable of bringing about a good rebirth, i.e. birth in a good state of existence. Unwholesome *saṅkhāras* can cause a bad rebirth or birth in an evil state of existence. It must be mentioned that all *saṅkhāras*, all good and evil actions, have ignorance as condition. Here a question may be raised as to how actions conditioned by ignorance could bring about good rebirth.

All attainment of good (*kusala*), from the state of virtuous worldling (*kalyāṇaputhujjana*) and the “lesser stream-winner” (*cūlasotāpanna*) to that of the consummate one (*arahat*), is due to the balance of insight over delusion and of detachment over craving. Good actions are the direct consequence of whatever clear understanding there may be in the doer. It is not because of delusion and craving that a man gives up killing, etc., but because he has the wisdom to see the evil consequences of such actions and also because he is moved by such qualities as compassion and virtue. It is not possible, except for the perfect ones, to act from complete insight or detachment. To the generality of men such knowledge is unthinkable. As Eddington says, “If ‘to know’ means ‘to be quite certain of’ the term is of little use to those who wish to be undogmatic.”<sup>14</sup> And if to be detached means to be neutral always, such detachment is for the imperfect quite impossible and meaningless. But occasional detachment is possible, and a measure of knowledge adequate for understanding the good is available for an intelligent man of virtue, for producing actions that are wise and unsoiled by the yearning for rewards in this life. There is much that is done in the world today with no hope of reward, or recognition, out of compassion or for the furtherance of knowledge and peace. Such actions definitely are based on knowledge and detachment, not perhaps in the dogmatic, scholastic, or merely metaphysical sense, but in the light of sane, undogmatic thought. Good actions may well have ulterior motives, for instance, the yearning for the fruits of the good; but even in such instances, though tainted by greed and to that extent by delusion, there are in such good actions, for instance in liberality, the detachment to let go and the knowledge of seeing the evils of not giving at all, and the

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<sup>14</sup> Eddington, *The Philosophy of Physical Science* (Cambridge University Press, 1939).

advantage of giving. The presence of craving and ignorance in a person does not mean that he can never act with insight and detachment.

Now it must also be understood that although man is capable of performing good actions unsoiled by strong desire for rewards in this life, there may be in him, unconsciously working, a tender longing for good rebirth, or a feeling of desire for rewards in the hereafter. Again, though he may be doing an action out of compassion and without any ulterior motives, he may still be lacking in full awareness of the real nature of life—its being impermanent, sorrow-stricken, and void of an abiding entity or soul. This non-knowledge of the real nature of life, though not so gross and strong as the delusion that induces a heinous act, can yet induce kammically wholesome action leading to a good rebirth. A good rebirth even in the heavens, is, however, temporary, and may be followed immediately by an unhappy rebirth.

Such non-knowledge motivates and colours the good act. If, for instance, the performance of good actions is motivated by the desire for the resultant happiness in a good rebirth in a heavenly realm, or on earth, then that is the ignorance of the impermanence and unsatisfactory nature of all existence, which becomes a condition of good rebirth, i.e. and inducement or support condition (*upanissaya paccaya*). In these, and other ways, ignorance may act as a condition of good rebirth by motivating or colouring good volitional activities (*saṅkhārā*) of a mundane (*lokiya*) nature. Such is the intrinsic nature of ignorance.

Ignorance of the real nature of life is primarily the ignorance of the Four Noble Truths. It is because of this non-knowledge of the truths that beings take birth again and again.

Says the Buddha:

“Monks, it is through not understanding, not penetrating the Four Noble Truths that we have run so long, wandered on so long in this long long way, both you and I ... But when these Four Noble Truths are understood and penetrated, rooted out is the craving for existence, destroyed is that which leads to renewed becoming, and there is no more coming to be.”<sup>15</sup>

Only the actions of one who has entirely eradicated all the latent tendencies (*anusaya*), and all the varied ramifications of sorrow’s cause, are incapable of producing rebirth; for such actions are issueless. He is the *arahat*, Consummate One, whose clarity of vision, whose depth of insight penetrates into the deepest recesses of life, in whom craving has quite ceased through cognizing the true nature that underlies all appearance. He has transcended all appearance. He has transcended all capacity for error through the perfect immunity which penetrative insight, *vipassanā*, alone can give. He is, therefore, released from ignorance (*avijjā*) and his actions no more bring about rebirth.

### III. Consciousness (*Viññāṇa*)

*Saṅkhārapaccayā viññānaṃ*, “dependent on rebirth-producing volitional formations (belonging to the previous birth), arises consciousness (re-linking or rebirth consciousness).” To express it in another way, dependent on the kamma or good and evil actions of the past, is conditioned the conscious life in this present birth. Consciousness, therefore, is the first factor (*nidāna*), or first of the conditioning links belonging to the present existence. Avijjā and saṅkhārā, ignorance and volitional formations belonging to the past, together produce *viññāṇa*, consciousness in this birth. We read in the Mahānidāna Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya, how “once ignorance and craving are destroyed, good and evil actions no more come into being, consequently no more rebirth consciousness will spring up again in a mother’s womb.” Hence it is clear that rebirth is caused by one’s own good and evil actions, and is not work of a supreme being, a Creator God, nor is it due to mere chance.

As this consciousness or viññāṇa is the first in the stream of consciousness (*citta-santati*) belonging to one single existence (*bhava*), it is also known as *paṭisandhi-viññāṇa*, re-linking consciousness. The

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<sup>15</sup> D II 90; S V 430; Vin I 229.



term *paṭisandhi* literally means re-linking, re-uniting, re-joining. It is re-birth, re-entry into the womb. Rebirth is the arising, the coming to be, the being born, in the future (*paṭisandhīti āyatim uppatti*). It is called re-uniting because of its linking back the new existence to the old (*bhavantara paṭisandhānato paṭisandhīti vuccati*). The joining of the new to the old is the function of re-uniting or re-linking. Therefore, it is said, the function of re-uniting is the joining together of (one) existence with (another) existence (*bhavato bhavassa paṭisandhānaṃ paṭisandhi kiccaṃ*). *Paṭisandhi-viññāna* is the kamma resultant consciousness (*vipāka viññāna*) present at rebirth, connecting the new existence with the immediately preceding one, and through that with the entire past of the “being” reborn. This resultant consciousness is due to previous rebirth-producing volitional formations (*saṅkhārā* or *kamma*).

In the Aneñjasappāya Sutta,<sup>16</sup> the *vipāka viññāna* is referred to as *saṃvattanikaṃ viññānaṃ*, the consciousness that links on, that proceeds in one life as *vipāka* from the kamma in the former life.

When it is said, “the consciousness that links on,” it does not mean that this consciousness abides unchanged, continues in the same state without perishing throughout this cycle of existence. Consciousness is also conditioned, and therefore is not permanent. Consciousness also comes into being and passes away yielding place to new consciousness. Thus this perpetual stream of consciousness goes on until existence ceases. Existence in a way is consciousness. In the absence of consciousness no “being” exists in this sentient world.

In the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth the third factor required for rebirth, the *gandhabba*, is called “the rebirth consciousness,” which is another term for the *paṭisandhi-viññāna*, relinking consciousness.<sup>17</sup> There is the last moment of consciousness (*cuti citta*) belonging to the immediately previous life. Immediately following the cessation of that consciousness there arises the first moment of consciousness of the present birth, which as stated above, is termed relinking consciousness (*paṭisandhi-viññāna*). Between these two moments of consciousness, however, there is no interval, there is no *antarābhava* or *antarābhava-satta*, which means “either a being in the womb or a being in between the state of death and that of rebirth,” as some of the Mahāyāna schools of thought maintain (*asti antar bhavaḥ*).<sup>18</sup> It should be clearly understood that this relinking consciousness is not a “self” or a “soul” or an ego entity that experiences the fruits (*vipāka*) of good and evil deeds. The Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta records the following incident:

During the time of the Buddha there was a monk called Sāti who held the following view: “In so far as I understand the Dhamma taught by the Buddha, it is the same consciousness that transmigrates and wanders about (in rebirth).”

The monks who heard of this tried to dissuade Sāti, saying, “Do not, brother Sāti, speak thus, do not misrepresent the Lord; neither is misrepresentation of the Lord proper, nor would the Lord speak thus. For, brother Sāti, in many a figure is dependent origination spoken of in connection with consciousness by the Lord, saying: ‘Apart from condition there is no origination of consciousness.’”

But Sāti would not change his view. Thereupon the monks reported the matter to the Buddha, who summoning him, spoke to him thus:

“Is it true, as is said, that a pernicious view like this has arisen in you, Sāti: ‘In so far as I understand the Dhamma taught by the Lord, it is this consciousness itself that runs on, fares on, not another?’”

“Even so do I, Lord, understand the Dhamma taught by the Lord: ‘It is this consciousness itself that runs on, fares on, not another.’”

“What is this consciousness, Sati?”

<sup>16</sup> MN 106.

<sup>17</sup> MN 38/M I 265–66.

<sup>18</sup> Lankāvatāra Sūtra.

“It is that which expresses, which feels (*vado vedeyyo*) and experiences the result of good and evil deeds now here, now there.”

“But to whom, foolish man, have you heard me teaching the Dhamma in this way? Have I not in many ways explained consciousness as arising out of conditions, that apart from conditions there is no arising of consciousness? But now you, foolish man, misrepresent me because of your own wrong grasp.”<sup>19</sup>

The Buddha then explained the different types of consciousness and made clear, by means of examples, how consciousness arises depending on conditions.

In the words of the Buddha, the *paṭicca-samuppāda* is a very deep and intricate doctrine, and in this difficult doctrine the most subtle and deep point, difficult to grasp, is this third link, consciousness, *viññāṇa* or *paṭisandhi-viññāṇa*; for it is this link that explains rebirth.

#### IV. Mentality-Materiality

*Viññāṇapaccayā nāma-rūpaṃ*, “dependent on consciousness arises mentality-materiality.” The term *nāma* here stands for the mental states (*cetasika*), in other words, the three mental groups: namely, feeling (*vedanākkhandha*), perception (*saññākkhandha*), and volitional or mental formations (*saṅkhārakkhandha*).

The so called “being” (*satta*, Skt. *sattva*) is composed of five aggregates or groups (*pañcakkhandha*); namely, physical body, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness (*rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhārā* and *viññāṇa*). If consciousness is taken as the mind, then feeling, perceptions and volitional formations are the concomitants or factors of that mind. Now when we say dependent on consciousness arises *nāma-rūpa*, mentality-materiality, materiality means the physical body, its organs, faculties, and functions. Mentality means the factors of the mind mentioned above. In other words, *viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpaṃ* means dependent on consciousness arise the three mental concomitants (feeling, perception, and volitional formations) that compose mentality, along with the consascent material body in its first embryonic stage.

Consciousness and its factors (*citta-cetasika*) are always interrelated and interdependent. Consciousness cannot arise and function independently of its factors, nor can the factors arise and function without consciousness. They arise simultaneously (*sahajāta-paccaya*) and have no independent existence.

#### V. The Sixfold Base

*Nāma-rūpapaccayā salāyatanaṃ*, “dependent on mentality-materiality arises the sixfold base,” the five physical sense organs—eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body—and the mind base (*manāyatana*). *Manāyatana* is a collective term for the many different classes of consciousness, i.e. for the five kinds of sense-consciousness and the many kinds of mind-consciousness. Hence, five bases are physical phenomena, namely eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body; and the sixth, mind base, is identical with consciousness.<sup>20</sup>

The function of *viññāṇa*, consciousness, is varied. The third factor of the chain is made known to us as *viññāṇa*; now here again we hear of a sixth base, *manāyatana*, which is identical with consciousness. But here by *manāyatana* different types of consciousness are meant. It should be borne in mind that consciousness is not something that is permanent and everlasting. It undergoes change, not remaining the same for two consecutive moments; it comes into being and immediately passes away yielding place to a new consciousness. “These mental phenomena are, as it were, only

<sup>19</sup> MN 38/MN I 258.

<sup>20</sup> Nyanātiloka Thera, *Fundamentals of Buddhism* (Colombo, 1949), p.67.

the different aspects of those units of consciousness which like lightning every moment flash up and immediately thereafter disappear forever.”<sup>21</sup>

If there were no *nāma-rūpa* (mentality-materiality), no *saḷāyatana* (sixfold base) could arise. Because of *rūpa*, the physical sense organs, eye, ear, etc. appear, and because of *manāyatana* (different types of consciousness) the physical sense organs function. Thus *nāma-rūpa* and *saḷāyatana* are inescapably interrelated and interdependent.

## VI. Contact

*Salāyatanaṃ paccayā phasso*, “dependent on the sixfold base arises contact.” In the preceding proposition we saw the sixfold base or *āyatana*s, eye, ear, etc.; they are internal bases (*ajjhattika-āyatana*). External to one’s material body, there are the corresponding five sense objects—form, sound, smell, taste, and tactile objects—and further, the mental objects. These are known as the six external bases (*bāhira-āyatana*). These external bases are food for our internal bases. Hence they are interrelated. Although there is this functional relationship between these six sense organs and their objects, awareness comes with *viññāṇa* or consciousness. Hence it is said, “If consciousness arises because of eye and forms it is termed visual consciousness.”

Now when eye and forms are both present, visual consciousness arises dependent on them. Similarly with ear and sounds, and so on, down to mind and mental objects (ideas). Again, when the three, namely, eye, forms, and eye-consciousness come together, it is their coincidence that is called “contact” (or impression). From contact there arises feeling, and so on.<sup>22</sup>

Thus it is clear that contact (*phassa*) is conditioned by both the internal sixfold base (*ajjhattika-āyatana*) and the external sixfold base (*bāhira-āyatana*).

In brief, “dependent on the sixfold base arises contact or impressions,” means: The visual contact conditioned by the eye; the sound contact conditioned by the ear; the smell contact conditioned by the nose; the taste contact conditioned by the tongue; the bodily contact conditioned by the body; the mental contact conditioned by the mind.

## VII. Feeling (*Vedanā*)

*Phassa paccayā vedanā*, “dependent on contact arises feeling.” Feeling is sixfold: feeling born of visual contact; feeling born of sound contact; feeling born of smell contact; feeling born of taste contact; feeling born of body contact, and feeling born of mental contact.

Feeling may be pleasurable (*sukha*), painful (*dukkha*), or neutral, i.e. neither pleasurable nor painful (*adukkhamasukha = upekkhā*).

As stated in the preceding clause, sense objects can never be cognized by the particular sensitivity without the appropriate kind of consciousness, but when these three factors come together, there arises contact. With the arising of contact, simultaneously there arises feeling (*vedanā*) and it can never be stopped by any power or force. Such is the nature of contact and feeling. The experiencing of desirable or undesirable kamma-results of good and evil actions performed here or in a previous birth, is one of the prior conditions due to which feeling can arise.

Seeing a form, hearing a sound, smelling an odour, tasting a flavour, touching some tangible thing, cognizing a mental object (idea), we experience feeling; but it cannot be said that all beings experience the same feeling with the same object. An object, for instance, which may be felt agreeable by one, may be felt unpleasant by another, and neutral by still another. Feeling also may differ in accordance with circumstances. A sense object which once evoked unpleasant feelings in us may possibly produce pleasant feelings in us under different circumstances, in a totally different

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>22</sup> Madhupiṇḍika Sutta, MN 18, and Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta, MN 38.

background—geographical condition, climatic conditions, etc. Thus we learn how feeling is conditioned by contact.

### VIII. Craving (*Taṇhā*)

*Vedanāpaccayā taṇhā*, “dependent on feeling arises craving.” Craving has its source, its genesis, its rise in feeling. All forms of appetite are included in *taṇhā*. Greed, thirst, desire, lust, burning, yearning, longing, inclination affection, household love—these are some of the many terms that denote *taṇhā*, which in the words of the Buddha is the leader to becoming (*bhavanetti*). Becoming, which manifests as *dukkha*, as suffering, frustration, painful excitement, is our own experience. The enemy of the whole world is lust or craving through which all evils come to living beings. Through clear understanding of craving, the origin of craving, the cessation of craving, the true way of practice leading to the cessation of craving, one disentangles this tangle.

What then is craving? It is this craving which causes re-becoming, rebirth, accompanied by passionate pleasure, and finding fresh delight now here, now there, namely, craving for sense pleasures (*kāma-taṇhā*), craving for continued existence, for becoming (*bhava-taṇhā*), and craving for non-existence, for self-annihilation (*vibhava-taṇhā*).<sup>23</sup> “Where does craving arise and take root? Where there is the delightful and the pleasurable, there craving arises and takes root. Forms, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily contacts, and ideas are delightful and pleasurable, there craving arises and takes root.”

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Craving, when obstructed by some cause, is transformed into wrath and frustration. “From craving arises grief, from craving arises fear. To one free from craving there is no grief. Whence fear?”<sup>25</sup>

Man is always attracted by the pleasant and the delightful, and in his search for pleasure he ceaselessly runs after the six kinds of sense objects and clings to them. He little realizes that no amount of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and mental objects will ever satisfy the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. In this intense thirst for either possessions or the gratification of desires, he gets bound to the wheel of *samsāra*, is twisted and torn between the spokes of agony, and securely closes the door to final deliverance. The Buddha was most emphatic against this mad rush, and warned:

“Pleasure is a bond, a joy that’s brief,  
Of little taste, leading to drawn-out pain.  
The wise know that the hook is baited.”<sup>26</sup>

All mundane pleasures are fleeting; like sugar-coated pills of poison they deceive us, insidiously working harm. As stated above, whenever craving for these objects is connected with sensual pleasures, it is called “sensuous craving.” When it is associated with the belief in eternal personal existence, then it is called “craving for continued existence.” This is what is known as *sassata-ditṭhi* or eternalism. When craving is associated with the belief in self-annihilation at death, then it is called “craving for self-annihilation” (*vibhava-taṇhā*); this is what is known as *uccheda-ditṭhi* or nihilism.

Craving is conditioned not only by pleasurable and agreeable feelings, but by unhappy and unpleasant feelings, too. A man in distress craves and thirsts to get rid of it, and longs for happiness and release. To express it in another way, the poor and the needy, the sick and the disabled, in brief, all sufferers, crave for happiness, security, and solace. On the other hand, the rich, the healthy, who have not glimpsed the sufferings of the distressed, and who are already experiencing pleasure, also crave. They crave and long for more and more pleasures. Thus craving is insatiable. As cattle go in

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<sup>23</sup> S V 421.

<sup>24</sup> DN 22/D II 308–309.

<sup>25</sup> Dh 216.

<sup>26</sup> Sn 61.

search of fresh pasture so do people go in quest of fleeting pleasures, constantly seeking fuel for this life-flame. Their greed is inordinate.

“All is burning, all is in flames.” And what is the “all” that is in flames, that is burning? The five sense organs and the five sense objects are burning. Mind and thoughts are burning. The five aggregates of grasping (*pañca upādānakkhandha*) are burning. With what are they burning? With the fire of craving, with the fire of hate, with the fire of delusion.”<sup>27</sup>

A fire keeps burning so long as there is fuel. The more fuel we add, the more it burns. It is the same with the fire of life.

Craving is an insatiable fire and no fire is ever contented. Such is the nature of this corruption that spreads right up to the highest plane of existence (*bhavagga*) with respect to spheres, and right up to the *gottabhū citta*, the threshold of sainthood, with respect to mind-flux. Where there is no self-desire, there indeed, is no sense desire either; and where there is no self-desire there all ill dies out like a flame whose fuel is spent.

It is only when suffering comes as its consequence, and not before, that one realizes the viciousness of this poisonous creeper of craving which winds itself round all who are not arahats or perfectly pure ones who have uprooted its tap-root, ignorance. The more we crave, the more we suffer; sorrow is the tribute we have to pay for having craved. Wherefore, know this craving as our foe here, in saṃsāra, that guides us to continued and repeated sentient existence, and so builds the “House of Being.”

The Buddha on attaining full enlightenment spoke these joyful words:

“Repeated births are each a torment,  
Seeking but not finding the ‘House Builder,’  
I wandered through many a saṃsāric birth.  
O House Builder, thou art seen,  
Thou wilt not rebuild the house.  
All thy rafters have been shattered,  
Demolished has thy ridge pole been.  
My mind has now attained the unformed Nibbāna,  
The extinction of craving is achieved.”<sup>28</sup>

## IX. Clinging

*Taṇhāpaccayā upādānaṃ* “dependent on craving arises clinging.” This is the mental state that clings to, or grasps, the object even as a piece of raw meat that sticks to a saucepan. Because of this clinging, which is described as craving in a high degree, man becomes a slave to passion, and falls into the net he himself has made of his passion for pleasure, like the caterpillar that spins itself a tangle in which it lives.

Upādāna, clinging or attachment, is fourfold: (i) attachment to sensuous pleasures or sense desires (*kāma-upādāna*); (ii) attachment to wrong and evil views (*diṭṭhi-upādāna*); (iii) attachment to mere external observances, rites and rituals (*śilabbata-upādāna*); and (iv) attachment to self or a lasting soul-entity (*attavāda-upādāna*).

*Kāma* here means both the craving and the craved object (*kilesa-kāma* and *vatthu-kāma*) and when that craving for such desired objects becomes intensified, it is known as *kāma-upādāna* or clinging. Man entertains thoughts of craving, and in proportion as he fails to ignore them, they grow till they get intensified to the degree of tenacious clinging.

<sup>27</sup> Vin I 34–35. For details see Thera Piyadassi, *The Buddha’s Ancient Path* (BPS, 5th ed., 1987), p. 163.

<sup>28</sup> Dhṃ 153, 154.

All the various wrong views (*diṭṭhi*) that were in existence during the time of the Buddha can be included in annihilationism (*uccheda-diṭṭhi*) and eternalism (*sassata-diṭṭhi*). To some, especially to the intellectuals, at times the giving up of a view that they have cherished is more difficult than giving up objects of sense. Of all wrong views the clinging to a belief in a soul or self or an abiding ego-entity (*attavāda-upādāna*) is the strongest, foremost and most pernicious.

It is not without good reason that the Buddha rejected the notion of a self or soul (*attā*). In this conflux of mind and body which undergoes change without remaining the same for two consecutive moments, the Buddha could not see a lasting, indestructible soul. In other words, he could locate no abiding soul in this ever-changing “being.” The Master, therefore, emphatically denied an *attā* either in the five aggregates (material form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, consciousness) or elsewhere. “All this,” he said, “is void of an *attā* or anything of the nature of an *attā* (*suññam idaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā*).”<sup>29</sup> If this wrong notion is got rid of, all the existing wrong and pernicious views automatically cease.

The Master’s clear injunction to Mogharāja is:

*Suññato lokaṃ avekkhassu—mogharāja sadā sato  
attānudiṭṭhiṃ ūhacca—evaṃ maccu taro siyā*

“O Mogharāja, ever mindful,  
See the world as void.  
Having eradicated the view of a self  
One may overcome death.” (Sn 1119)

The doctrine of *anattā* (*anātmā*) is exclusively Buddhistic and is distinguishable from every other religion and philosophy. It is the heart and core of the Buddha’s teaching. It was the recognition that this self (*attā*) is an illusion, a mirage, that made the Buddha’s doctrine so singular and so revolutionary.

All the existing religions do believe in a soul or self and they claim it to be all-powerful, all-pervading, indestructible and permanent. To the believers in a soul, soul is a permanent entity that has taken root in all beings.

Some say that this *ātmā* spreads throughout the length and breadth of the body like oil in a sesame seed; others say that it surrounds the body in the form of an imperceptible light, which light one perceives when cleansed of all impurities. Still others profess that it is within us, like a gem twinkling in a casket. Still others say it is consciousness, or perception, or sensation, or volition and some conclude that this *ātmā* consists of both mind and body—*nāma* and *rūpa*.

Buddhism advocates no such unchanging entity or soul or *ātmā*. In conventional usage we speak of a “being,” “I,” etc., but in the highest sense there exists no “being”; there is no “I” personality. Each one of us is the manifestation of his or her kammic-force, and a composition of nothing but an ever-changing conflux of mind and body. This mind and body separated from each other lose something of their potency and cannot function alone indefinitely. But as a boat and a boatman together cross the stream, and as a lame man mounted on the shoulders of a blind man reach their destination, so mind and body when wedded together function best.

Unceasingly does the mind and its factors change; and just as unceasingly, though at a slower rate, the body alters from moment to moment. The conflux of mind and body goes on as incessantly as the waves of the sea, or as the Buddhist say *nadī soto viya*, like a flowing stream. Thus the “being” or mind and body, *saṃsāra* or the procession of events, is utterly free from the notion of a *jīvatma* or *paramātmā*, microcosmic soul or macrocosmic soul.

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<sup>29</sup> MN 22/M I 138.

## X. Becoming

*Upādānapaccayā bhavo*, “dependent on clinging arises becoming.” Becoming is twofold, and should be understood as two processes: kamma-process (*kamma-bhava*) and kamma-resultant process (*upapatti-bhava*). *Kamma-bhava* is the accumulated good and evil actions, the “kammically active side of life.” *Upapatti-bhava* is “the kammically passive and morally neutral side of life,” and signifies the kamma-resultant rebirth-process in the next life. The next life may be in any sphere or plane—that of sensuous existence (*kāma-bhava*), that of form (*rūpa-bhava*), or that of formless existence (*arūpa-bhava*).

In the first clause (*avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā*), *saṅkhārā* is explained as good and evil actions (kamma); if that is so, is it not repetitive to say that *kamma-bhava*, mentioned here, also means good and evil actions? The *paṭicca-samuppāda*, we must know, is concerned not only with the present life but with all the three lives—past, present, and future. Kamma, or the good and evil actions mentioned in the first clause, belong to the past—and on those past actions the present life depends. The kamma that is referred to here in this clause, *upādānapaccayā bhavo*, belongs to the present life and that in turn causes future life. *Upādānapaccayā bhavo* meaning clinging (*upādāna*) is the condition of the kamma-process, or actions, and of the kamma-resultant rebirth process.

## XI. Birth (*Jāti*)

*Bhavapaccayā jāti*, “dependent on becoming arises birth.” Here birth means not the actual childbirth, but the appearance of the five aggregates (material form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness) in the mother’s womb. This process is conditioned by *kamma-bhava*.

The present birth is brought about by the craving and clinging kamma—volitions (*taṇhā-upādāna*) of the past birth, and the craving and clinging acts of will of the present birth bring about future rebirth. According to the teaching of the Buddha, it is this kamma-volition that divides beings into high and low.

“Beings are heirs of their deeds; bearers of their deeds, and their deeds are the womb out of which they spring,”<sup>30</sup> and through their deeds alone they must change for the better, remake themselves, and win liberation from ill.

We are reaping what we have sown in the past; some of our reapings, we know, we have even sown in this life. In the same way, our actions here mould the hereafter, and thus we begin to understand our position in this mysterious universe. If we, through our ignorance, craving, and clinging in the long night of *saṃsāric* wandering, have not shaped ourselves as we are, how could there be such difference and dissimilarity between living beings as we see in the world today? Can we conceive of a mind, a single mind, vast and confused enough to plan out such a motley sentient world as surrounds us?

Thus kamma is the corollary of rebirth, and rebirth, on the one hand, is the corollary of kamma. Here it may be asked: If kamma is the cause of rebirth and if Buddhism emphatically denies a soul or a transcendental ego, how does this kammic process bring about rebirth?

Well, “No force is ever lost, and there is no reason to think that the force manifest in each being as mind and body is ever lost. It ever undergoes transformations. It is changing now, every moment of our lives. Nor is it lost at death. The vitalizing mind flux is merely reset. It resets in conditions harmonizing with itself, even as broadcast sounds reset in a receiver tuned to the particular wavelength. It is the resetting of this vital flux, in fresh conditions, that is called rebirth. Each reborn being starts with a unique set of latent possibilities, the accumulated experiences of the past. That is why character differs, why each endows himself with what theists call ‘gifts,’ and infinite possibilities.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> MN 135/M III 203.

<sup>31</sup> Dr. Cassius A. Pereira (later Kassapa Thera), “What I Believe?” *Ceylon Observer*, October 1937.

There is nothing that passes or transmigrates from one life to another. Is it not possible to light one lamp from another and in this process does any flame pass from one to the other? Do you not see the continuity of the flame? It is neither the same flame nor a totally different one.

The kammic process (*kamma-bhava*), therefore, is the force in virtue of which reaction follows actions; it is the energy that, out of a present life, conditions a future life in unending sequence.

“Desire gives rise to deed; deed gives rise to result; result exhibits itself as new corporeality endowed with new desire. Deed is as inevitably followed by result as the body by its shadow. This is merely the universal natural law of conservation of energy extended to the moral domain. As in the universe no energy can ever be lost, so also in the individual nothing can be lost of the resilient force accumulated by desire. This resilient energy is always transmuted into fresh life and we live eternally through our lust to live. The medium, however, that makes all existence possible is kamma.”<sup>32</sup>

## XII. Ageing and Death (*Jarāmaraṇa*)

Jātipaccayā jarāmarāṇaṃ, “dependent on birth arise ageing and death,” and with them naturally come sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. Birth is inevitably followed by ageing and death; in the absence of birth there will be no ageing and death. Thus this whole mass of suffering arises dependent on the twelfefold dependent origination. Ageing and death are followed by birth, and birth, on the other hand, is followed by ageing and death. The pair thus accompany each other in bewildering succession. Nothing mundane is still; it is all in flux. People build up wishful hopes and plans for the morrow, but one day, sudden perhaps and unexpected, there comes the inevitable hour when death puts an end to this brief span of life, and brings our hopes to naught. So long as man is attached to existence through his ignorance, craving, and clinging, for him death is not the final end. He will continue his career of whirling along with the wheel of existence, and will be twisted and torn between the spokes of agony. Thus, looking around us in the world at the different types of men and women, and at the differences in their varying fortunes, we know that these cannot be due to mere chance.

An external power or agency that punishes the ill deeds and rewards the good deeds of beings has no place in Buddhist thought. Buddhists do not resort to any especially graced person or pray to any imperceptible individual to grant them deliverance. Not even the supreme Buddha could redeem them from saṃsāra’s bond. In ourselves lies the power to mould our lives. Buddhists are *kammavādins*, believers in the efficacy of actions, good and evil.

According to the teachings of the Buddha, the direct cause of the distinctions and inequalities of birth in this life is the good and evil actions of each individual in past lives. In other words, each person is reaping what he has sowed in the past. In the same way, his actions here mould his hereafter.

In all actions, good and evil, mind is the most important factor. “All mental states have mind as their forerunner; mind dominates, everything is mind-made. If one speaks or acts with a polluted mind, pain follows him in consequence as the cartwheel follows the foot of the beast of burden.” In like manner, “in consequence of mentations made, words spoken and deeds done with a pure and placid mind, happiness follows him even like the inseparable shadow.”<sup>33</sup>

Man is always changing either for good or for evil. This changing is unavoidable and depends entirely on our own actions and environment.

The world seems to be imperfect and ill-balanced. We are too often confronted with many a difficulty and shortcoming. People differ from one another in many ways and aspects. Among us human beings, let alone the animal kingdom, we see some born as miserable wretches, sunk in deep distress and supremely unhappy; others born into a state of abundance and happiness enjoying a life

<sup>32</sup> Paul Dahlke, *Buddhist Essays* (London, 1908), p. 115.

<sup>33</sup> 33. Dhṃ 1, 2.



of luxury and knowing nothing of the world's woe. Again, a chosen few are gifted with keen intellect and great mental capacity while many are wrapped in ignorance. How is it that some of us are blessed with health, beauty, sincere friends, and amiable relatives while others are despicable weaklings, destitute and lonely? How is it that some are born to enjoy long life while others pass away in the full bloom of youth? Why are some blessed with affluence, fame, and recognition? Why are some chosen few given in full measure all the things which human beings deserve while others are utterly neglected? These are intricate problems that demand a solution.

If we but pause for a moment and impartially investigate and intelligently inquire into things, we will find that these wide differences are not the work of an external agency or a superhuman being. We will find that we ourselves are responsible for our deeds whether good or ill and that we ourselves are the makers of our own kamma.

Says the Buddha:

“According to the seed that is sown,  
So is the fruit ye reap therefrom.  
The doer of good (will gather) good,  
The doer of evil, evil (reaps).  
Sown is the seed and planted well;  
Thou shalt enjoy the fruit thereof.”<sup>34</sup>

It is impossible to conceive of an external agency or some all-powerful being who distributes his gifts to different persons in diverse measures, and who at times showers all his gifts on the same individual. Is it not more rational to say that:

“Who toiled a slave may come anew a prince,  
For gentle worthiness and merit won.  
Who ruled a king may wander earth in rags  
For things done and undone.”

*Light of Asia*

Buddhists do not blame the Buddha or a superhuman being or a deva or an especially graced person for the ills of humanity or praise them for the happiness people experience.

It is knowledge of kamma and kamma-vipāka, the law of cause and effect, or moral causation, that urges a true Buddhist to refrain from evil and do good. He who understands cause and effect knows well that it is his own actions and nothing else that make his life miserable or otherwise. He knows that the direct cause of the distinctions and inequalities of birth in this life is the good and evil actions of each individual in past lives and in this life.

Man today is the result of millions of repetitions of thought and action. He is not ready-made; he becomes, and is still becoming. His character is predetermined by his own choice. The thought, the act which he chooses, that by habit he becomes.

It should, however, be remembered that according to Buddhism not everything that occurs is due to past actions. During the time of the Buddha, sectarians like Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, Makkhali Gosala, and others, held the view that whatever the individual experiences, be it pleasant or unpleasant or neither, all come from former actions or past kamma.<sup>35</sup> The Buddha, however, rejected this theory of an exclusive determination by the past (*pubbekatahetu*) as unreasonable. Many things are the result of our own deeds done in this present life, and of external causes. Hence it is not true to say that all things that occur are due to past kamma or actions.

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<sup>34</sup> S I 227; *The Kindred Sayings*, I. p. 293.

<sup>35</sup> MN 101; DN 2. This view is examined at A I 137.

Is it not absurd for a student who fails in his examination due to sheer laxity on his part, to attribute the failure to his past kamma? Is it not equally ridiculous for a person to rush about carelessly, bang himself against a stone or some similar thing, and ascribe the mishap to his past kamma? One can multiply such instances to show that not everything is due to actions performed in the past.

But when the causes and conditions of things are destroyed, automatically the effects also cease to be. Sorrow will disappear if the varied rootlets of sorrow's cause are eliminated. A man, for instance, who burns to ashes a mango seed, puts an end to its germinating power and that seed will never produce a mango plant. It is the same with all compounded things (*saṅkhārā*), animate or inanimate. As kamma is our own manufacture we have the power to break this endless chain, this Wheel of Existence (*bhavacakka*). Referring to those enlightened ones who have conquered themselves through the uprooting of the defilements, the Buddha says in the Ratana Sutta:

“Their past (kamma) is spent, their new (kamma) no more arises, their mind to future becoming is unattached. The germ (of rebirth-consciousness) has died, they have no more desire for re-living. Those wise ones fade out (of existence) like the flame of this lamp.”<sup>36</sup>

It is said that as the Buddha spoke these words he saw the flame of a lamp go out.

The paṭicca-samuppāda, with its twelve links starting with ignorance and ending in ageing and death, shows how man, being fettered, wanders in saṃsāra birth after birth. But by getting rid of these twelve factors man can liberate himself from suffering and rebirth. The Buddha has taught us the way to put an end to this repeated wandering. It is by endeavouring to halt this Wheel of Existence that we may find the way out of this tangle. The Buddha-word which speaks of this cessation of suffering is stated thus:

“Through the entire cessation of ignorance cease volitional formations;  
Through the cessation of volitional formations, consciousness ceases;  
Through the cessation of consciousness, mentality-materiality ceases;  
Through the cessation of mentality-materiality, the sixfold base ceases;  
Through the cessation of the sixfold base, contact ceases;  
Through the cessation of contact, feeling ceases;  
Through the cessation of feeling, craving ceases;  
Through the cessation of craving, clinging ceases;  
Through the cessation of clinging, becoming ceases;  
Through the cessation of becoming, birth ceases;  
Through the cessation of birth, cease ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. Thus does this whole mass of suffering cease.”<sup>37</sup>

Though in Buddhism time is considered as a mere concept (*paññatti*), in the language of the apparent truth (*sammuti-sacca*) we speak of three periods of time, namely, the past, the present and the future and the paṭicca-samuppāda formula can be taken as representing them. The two factors ignorance and volitional formations (*avijjā and saṅkhārā*) belong to the past; the next eight, beginning with consciousness (*viññāṇa*) belong to the present; and the last pair, birth and ageing and death, belong to the future.

In this Wheel of Existence there are then three connecting links (*sandhi*). Between volitional formations (*saṅkhārā*), the last factor of the past, and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), the first factor of the present, there is one link consisting of past cause and present fruit (*hetu-phala*). Consciousness, mentality-materiality, the sixfold base, contact, and feeling are effects in the present life caused by ignorance and volitional formations of the past. Because of these five factors there come into being three other factors, namely, craving, clinging, and becoming, which will cause birth in the future.

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<sup>36</sup> Sn 235.

<sup>37</sup> A I 176.

Therefore, between feeling and craving there is another link consisting of present fruit and present cause (*phala-hetu*). Because of craving, clinging, and becoming of the present, there come into being birth, ageing, and death in the future. Therefore, between becoming and birth there is another link. These three links consist of four sections: (i) ignorance, volitional formations; (ii) consciousness, mentality-materiality, the sixfold base, contact, feeling; (iii) craving, clinging, becoming; (iv) birth and ageing and death.

“There were five causes in the past,  
And now there is a fivefold fruit,  
There are five causes now as well,  
And in the future fivefold fruit.”<sup>38</sup>

The text mentions ignorance and volitional formations as past causes. “But one who is ignorant, hankers, and hankering, clings, and with his clinging as condition there is becoming; therefore craving, clinging, and becoming are included as well. Hence it is said: ‘In the previous kamma-process becoming, there is delusion, which is ignorance; there is accumulation, which is formations; there is attachment, which is craving; there is embracing, which is clinging; there is volition, which is becoming; thus these five things in the previous kamma-process becoming are conditions for rebirth-linking here (in the present becoming).’”<sup>39</sup>

Now the fivefold fruit in the present life as given in the text is represented by five factors: consciousness, mentality-materiality, the sixfold base, contact, feeling.

There are five causes we now produce, of which the text gives only craving, clinging, and becoming. “But when becoming is included, the formations that precede it or that are associated with it are included too. And by including craving and clinging, the ignorance associated with them, deluded by which a man performs kamma, is included too. So they are five.”

The fivefold fruit we reap in the future. This is represented by consciousness, mentality-materiality, the sixfold base, contact, feeling. The text gives also birth and ageing and death as the future fivefold fruit. Birth really is represented by these five beginning with consciousness and ending in feeling. Ageing and death is the ageing and death of these five.

On close analysis, it becomes clear that in this dependent origination, *paṭicca-samuppāda*, in this repeated process of rebirth, in this cycle of existence, there is nothing permanent, no enduring soul-entity that passes from one birth to the next. All *dhammas* are causally dependent, they are conditioned (*sabbe dhammā paṭiccasamuppānā*), and this process of events is utterly free from the notion of a permanent soul or self.

The Buddha declares: “To believe the doer of the deed will be the same as the one who experiences its results (in the next life), this is the one extreme. To believe that the doer of the deed and the one who experiences its results are two different persons, this is the other extreme. Both these extremes the Tathāgata, the Perfect One, has avoided and taught the truth that lies in the middle of both, namely: “Through ignorance conditioned are the kamma formations and so on (see formula). Thus arises this whole mass of suffering.”

Hence the ancients said:

“There is no doer of a deed  
Or one who reaps the deed’s result;  
Phenomena alone flow on—  
No other view than this is right.

For here there is no Brahma God,  
Creator of the round of births;

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<sup>38</sup> *The Path of Purification*, trans. by Ñāṇamoli (Kandy: BPS, 1997), p.597.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

Phenomena alone flow on—  
Cause and component their condition.”<sup>40</sup>

In concluding this essay on dependent origination, a confusion that may arise in the reader’s mind should be forestalled. If according to dependent origination things are determined by conditions, one may be inclined to think that the Buddha encouraged fatalism or determinism, and that human freedom and free will are put aside.

But what is fatalism? According to the *Dictionary of Philosophy*, “Fatalism is determinism, especially in its theological form which asserts that all human activities are predetermined by God.” Determinism, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is “the philosophical doctrine that human action is not free but necessarily determined by motives, which are regarded as external forces acting upon the will.” The doctrine of kamma refutes that. A clear understanding of Buddhism shows that the Buddha never subscribed to the theory that all things are unalterably fixed, that all things happen by inevitable necessity—that is strict determinism (*niyativāda*), nor did he uphold the theory of complete indeterminism (*adhicca-samuppanna*). Everywhere we see certain laws and conditions functioning, and one of these is *cetanā* or volition, which is kamma. There is no law giver, no external agency to interfere with the mental and material happenings. Through causes and conditions things come to be.

Thus is this endless play of action and reaction kept in perpetual motion by kamma, concealed by ignorance, and propelled by craving. In no way does this affect the freedom of the will and the responsibility of man for his acts (his kamma).

Lastly a word about “free will”: will is not something static. It is not a positive entity, or a self-existent thing. Will is quite momentary like any other mental state; there is, therefore, no “will” as a “thing” to be either free or not free. The truth is that “will” is conditioned and a passing phenomenon.

To the genuine Buddhist the primary concern of life is not mere speculation, or vain voyages into the imaginary regions of high fantasy, but the gaining of true happiness and freedom from all suffering. Paṭicca-samuppāda, which speaks of suffering (*dukkha*), and the cessation of suffering, is the central concept of Buddhism, and represents the finest flower of Indian thought.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. pp. 622-23

## Paṭicca-Samuppāda Text and Translation

### *Paṭicca-Samuppāda (anuloma)*

#### Dependent Origination (in direct order; the arising)

- i-ii      *Avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā*  
Dependent on ignorance arise volitional or mental formations.
- ii-iii     *Saṅkhārāpaccayā viññānaṃ*  
Dependent on volitional formations arises relinking or rebirth consciousness.
- iii-iv.    *Viññānapaccayā nāma-rūpaṃ*  
Dependent on consciousness arise mentality-materiality.
- iv-v.      *Nāma-rūpapaccayā saḷāyatanaṃ*  
Dependent on mentality-materiality arises the sixfold base.
- v-vi       *Saḷāyatanaṃpaccayā phasso*  
Dependent on the sixfold base arises contact.
- vi-vii.    *Phassapaccayā vedanā*  
Dependent on contact arises feeling.
- vii-viii.   *Vedanāpaccayā taṇhā*  
Dependent on feeling arises craving.
- viii-ix.   *Taṇhāpaccayā upādānaṃ*  
Dependent on craving arises clinging.
- ix-x.      *Upādānapaccayā bhavo*  
Dependent on clinging arises becoming.
- x-xi.      *Bhavaṃpaccayā jāti*  
Dependent on becoming arises birth.
- xi-xii.    *Jātipaccayā jarā-maraṇaṃ soka-parideva-dukkha-domanassupāyasā sambhavanti.*  
*Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti.*  
Dependent on birth arises ageing and death, and sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. Thus there is the origination of this whole mass of suffering.

## *Paṭicca-Samuppāda (paṭiloma)*

### **Dependent Origination (the ceasing)**

- i-ii      *Avijjāya toeva asesavirāgaṇirodhā saṅkhāraṇirodho*  
Through the entire cessation of this ignorance, volitional formations cease.
- ii-iii     *Saṅkhāraṇirodhā viññāṇaṇirodho*  
Through the cessation of volitional formations, rebirth consciousness ceases.
- iii-iv.    *Viññāṇaṇirodhā nāma-rūpaṇirodho*  
Through the cessation of rebirth consciousness, mentality-materiality ceases.
- iv-v.      *Nāma-rūpaṇirodhā saḷāyatanaṇirodho*  
Through the cessation of mentality-materiality, the sixfold base ceases.
- v-vi      *Saḷāyatanaṇirodhā phassaṇirodho*  
i-ii.      Through the cessation of the sixfold base, contact ceases.
- vi-vii.    *Phassaṇirodhā vedanāṇirodho*  
Through the cessation of contact, feeling ceases.
- vii-viii. *Vedanāṇirodhā taṇhāṇirodho*  
Through the cessation of feeling, craving ceases.
- viii-ix.   *Taṇhāṇirodhā upādānaṇirodho*  
Through the cessation of craving, clinging ceases.
- ix-x.     *Upādānaṇirodhā bhavaṇirodho*  
Through the cessation of clinging, becoming, ceases.
- x-xi.     *Bhavaṇirodhā jātiṇirodho*  
Through the cessation of becoming, birth ceases.
- xi-xii.    *Jātiṇirodhā jarā-maraṇaṃ soka-parideva-dukkha-domanassupāyāsā nirujjhanti.*  
*Evaṃ etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hoti.*  
Through the cessation of birth, ageing and death cease, and sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. Thus there is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.  
(Saṃyutta Nikāya, II, 1)

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