

Explaining Life through Paṭiccasamuppāda

* The Doctrine of Paṭiccasamuppada shows the conditionality and dependent nature of the uninterrupted flux of all the physical and mental phenomena which make up individual existences.

* The twelve factors in Paṭiccasamuppada: **Avijjā, Sankhāra, Vinnana, Nāmarūpa, Salāyatana, Phassa, Vedanā, Tanhā, Upadāna, Bhava, Jāti** and **Jarāmarana**.

* The cycle of Dependent Origination can be viewed as consisting of four groups viz. Past Causes, Present Resultants, Present Causes and Future Resultants.

Group One: Past Causes

Avijja
Sankhara

Group Two: Present Resultants

Vinnana
Nama-rupa
Salayatana
Phassa
Vedana

Group Three: Present Causes

Tanha
Upadana
Bhava

Group Four: Future Resultants

Jati
Jara-marana

Group One: Past Causes

* Avijja is delusion regarding Truth and Reality of existence. Because of avijja, we are constantly engaged in Sankharas (Kamma-formations/volitional actions) which are wholesome or unwholesome deeds of body, speech and mind.

* What then is “Life” or “Existence”?

From this group, we can say that life or existence for most people is “delusion and kamma-formations or delusion and activities, which is with delusion”. Our delusions keep us always active, always generating new kamma.

Group Two: Present Resultants

* What then is “Life” or “Existence”?

From the time we wake up until we fall asleep again at night, because of the Six Sense Bases, we spend our time looking listening, smelling, tasting, feeling or lost in thoughts and fantasies. There is no rest at all from these activities.

“Life” or “Existence” is therefore nothing but the Six Sense Bases, which lead us into all kinds of physical, verbal and mental activities, wholesome or unwholesome, useful or not useful to us.

Group Three: Present Causes

* What then is “Life” or “Existence”?

This group tells us that “Life” is nothing but our likes and dislikes and resulting smiles or frown. In other words, “Life” is nothing but our reactions to external stimuli. When we like something, we react in one way and when we dislike something, we react in another way. This is Kammabhava.

Group Four: Future Resultants

* What then is “Life” or “Existence”?

This group tells us that “Life” is to be born and then to die.

Law of Dependent Origination can be viewed in the following ways too:

* **3 Periods**

According to the tri temporal interpretation of the 12 fold division of the *Paṭiccasamuppāda*, the factors are divided into 3 types: past, present and future. The first 2 factors that are *avijjā* and *saṅkhāra* belong to the past life. The last 2 factors that are *jāti* and *jarāmarana* belong to future life. The rest that are the factors from *viññāna* to *bhava* belongs to the present life. Therefore this is called the 3 life interpretation of the *Paṭiccasamuppāda*.

* **2 Roots**

Two original causes are *avijja* and *tanha*. They are the causes of why an individual life comes into being. By getting rid of *avijja* and *tanha*, one can bring the cycle of existence to an end.

* **3 Rounds**

Kilesa vatta: *avijja*, *tanha* and *upadana*

Kamma vatta: *sankhara* and *kamma-bhava*

Vipaka vatta: *Vinnana*, *namarupa*, *salayatana*, *phassa*, *Vedana*, *jati*, *upapatti-bhava* and *jara-marana*

The causal *kilesa vatta* and *kamma vatta* give rise to resultant *vipaka vattas*. Using the *vipaka* components, we create more causal *kilesa vatta* and *kamma vatta*.

* **4 Divisions**

The past cause gave rise to the present effect; similarly, the present cause will give rise to future effect. *Buddhaghosa* described in *Visuddhimagga* that the present and future effects are **Vinnana, Nāmarupa, Salāyatana, Phassa** and **Vedanā**. The past and present causes have five factors altogether, **Avijja, sankhara, tanha, upadana** and **bhava**. In fact, they are the same in member and number.

* **3 Connections**

There are four layers due to three junctions among the 12 factors. The first is between *saṅkhāra* and *viññāna*. The second is between *vedanā* and *taṇhā*. The third is between *bhava* and *jāti*. The first sandhi or junction connects the last life and the present life together. The second sandhi points out the primary psychological portion that comes into effect in the present life. The third sandhi (junction) connects this life and future life together.

* The difference between *puthujjana* and *Asekkha* is also given in the 12 fold *Paṭiccasamuppāda*. All 12 factors are effective in the *puthujjana*. Since the Arahant has removed all *Āsavas*, he does not have *Avijjā*. However, the factors from *Saṅkhāra* to *Vedanā* are equally effective in the Arahant. What is absent in the *Arahant* are the factors from *taṇha* to *jarāmarana*.

Comparison to Western Logic

Causality and the Necessary and Sufficient Conditions

How does *Idappaccayata* relate to what in Western logic known as a ‘necessary condition’ and a ‘sufficient condition’?

A necessary condition is a cause without which there would be no effect. For eg, fuel is a necessary condition for a fire. Without fuel there can be no fire.

The necessary condition is expressed by the 2nd half of *Idappaccayata*:

“When this does not exist that does not exist (*imasmim asati idam na hoti*)
With the cessation of this that ceases to be (*imassa nirodha idam nirujjhati*)”

A sufficient condition is a cause that must always produce the effect. For eg, a fire is a sufficient condition for heat. A fire must cause heat. The sufficient condition is expressed by the 1st half of *Iddappaccayata*:

“When this exists that exists (*imasmim sati idam hoti*)
With the arising of this that arises (*imassa uppada idam uppajjati*)”

Difference between these two types of causes.



How can this samsaric process be ended?

Through a shift in perception, caused by the way one attends to feelings, using the categories of appropriate attention [see MN 2]. As the Buddha states in DN 21, rather than viewing a feeling as an appealing or unappealing thing, one should look at it as part of a causal process: when a particular feeling is pursued, do skilful or unskilful qualities increase in the mind? If skilful qualities increase, the feeling may be pursued. If unskilful qualities increase, it shouldn't. When comparing feelings that lead to skilful qualities, notice which are more refined: those accompanied with thinking (directed thought) and evaluation, or those free of thinking and evaluation, as in the higher stages of mental absorption, or jhana. When seeing this, there is a tendency to opt for the more refined feelings, and this cuts through the act of thinking that, according to MN 18, provides the basis for papañca.

In following this program, the notion of agent and victim is avoided, as is self-reflexive thinking in general. There is simply the analysis of cause-effect processes. One is still making use of dualities — distinguishing between unskilful and skilful (and affliction/lack of affliction, the results of unskilful and skilful qualities) — but the distinction is between processes, not things. Thus one's analysis avoids the type of thinking that, according to DN 21, depends on the perceptions and categories of papañca, and in this way the vicious cycle by which thinking and papañca keep feeding each other is cut.

Ultimately, by following this program to greater and greater levels of refinement through the higher levels of mental absorption, one finds less and less to relish and enjoy in the six senses and the mental processes based on them. With this sense of disenchantment, the processes of feeling and thought are stilled, and there is a breakthrough to the cessation of the six sense spheres. When these spheres cease, is there anything else left? Ven. Sariputta, in AN 4.174, warns us not to ask, for to ask if there is, isn't, both-is-and-isn't, neither-is-nor-isn't anything left

in that dimension is to papañcize what is free from papañca. However, this dimension is not a total annihilation of experience. It's a type of experience that [DN 11](#) calls consciousness without feature, luminous all around, where water, earth, fire, & wind have no footing, where long/short, coarse/fine, fair/foul, name/form are all brought to an end. This is the fruit of the path of arahantship — a path that makes use of dualities but leads to a fruit beyond them.

It may come as cold comfort to realize that conflict can be totally overcome only with the realization of arahantship, but it's important to note that by following the path recommended in [DN 21](#) — learning to avoid references to any notion of "self" and learning to view feelings not as things but as parts of a causal process affecting the qualities in the mind — the basis for papañca is gradually undercut, and there are fewer and fewer occasions for conflict. In following this path, one reaps its increasing benefits all along the way.

Dependent Origination as an universal principle

There has been allegation that Patīccasamuppāda has no validity as a universal principle, because it deals with only the problem of suffering.

These two statements would lead one to think that the Patīccasamuppāda confines to the problems of suffering:

- 1) The arising formula of the Patīccasamuppāda ends with “*evame tassa dukkhakandassa samuddayo*” -- This is the arising of the aggregates of suffering.
- 2) The cessation formula of the Patīccasamuppāda ends with “*evame tassa dukkhakandassa nirodho*” -- This is the cessation of the aggregate of suffering.

It is unreasonable to state that Buddhist’s teaching of Patīccasamuppāda deals only with the problem of suffering. The teachings of Kamma and Rebirth are embedded in the Patīccasamuppāda. Furthermore it shows that there is no permanent entity either within the individual or outside as most of the religions believe.

The universal application of the Buddhist theory of causality is well manifested when we examine the principle of causality which runs as when A exists B also exists. When A does not exist B also does not exist. When A comes into being, B also comes into being. When A ceases, B also ceases. This principle is applied to explain various inter-conditional positions in the discourses.

Some of the examples are given below:-

1. In the Madhupindika Sutta, MN 18, the sense perception is explained in the light of this principle. Accordingly dependent on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as condition, there is feeling. What one feels that one perceives. What one perceives, that one thinks about. What one thinks about, that one mentally proliferates. With what one has mentally proliferated as the source, perceptions and notions (born of) mental proliferation beset a man with respect to past, future, and present forms cognizable through the eye.

What are these perceptions & categories that assail the person who papañcizes?

Tuvataka Sutta Sn 4.14 states that the root of the categories of papañca is the perception, "I am the thinker." From this self-reflexive thought — in which one conceives a "self," a thing corresponding to the concept of "I" — a number of categories can be derived: being/not-being, me/not-me, mine/not-mine, doer/done-to, signifier/signified. Once one's self becomes a thing under the rubric of these categories, it's impossible not to be assailed by the perceptions & categories derived from these basic distinctions. Through the process of papañca, the agent then becomes a victim of his/her own patterns of thinking.

When there's the sense of identification with something that experiences, then based on the feelings arising from sensory contact, some feelings will seem appealing — worth getting for the self — and others will seem unappealing — worth pushing away. From this there grows desire, which comes into conflict with the desires of others who are also engaging in papañca. This is how inner objectifications breed external contention.

This discourse plays a central role in the early Buddhist analysis of conflict. As might be expected, the blame for conflict lies within, in the unskilful habits of the mind. They give a clear analysis of how papañca arises, how it leads to conflict, and how it can be ended.

Three passages in the discourses —Sakkapanha Sutta DN 21, Madhupindika Sutta MN 18, and Kalahavivada Sutta Sn 4.11 — map the causal processes that give rise to papañca and lead from papañca to conflict.

In DN 21, the map reads like this:

the perceptions & categories of papañca > thinking > desire > dear-&-not-dear > envy & stinginess > rivalry & hostility

In Sn 4.11, the map is like this:

perception > name & form > contact > appealing & unappealing > desire > dear-&-not-dear > stinginess/divisiveness/quarrels/disputes

In MN 18, the map is like this:

contact > feeling > perception > thinking > the perceptions & categories of papañca

2. In the *Aggañña Sutta*, DN 27, how the society or world evolves is explained. During this evolution, systems of common property are replaced by the private property. Under private property either each individual or family inherited a plot of land. There were some who rob the harvest of the plot of land belonging to the others while looking after their own plot. This is how stealing come to being. According to the Sutta, stealing gives rise to various other social vices like killing, censuring and punishment. Each of the social vices slips into the society as a result of another social vice as when A exists, B also exists.

3. In the *Cakkavattisihanada Sutta*, DN 26, the Buddha explains how the result of the mild distribution of wealth affected the society. Mild distribution of wealth gives rise to poverty. When poverty becomes rampant, stealing becomes widespread. When stealing becomes widespread, the use of weapons increased. As a result, killing and harming others became widespread. The end result of all these were the shortening of life span and the darkening of complexion. According to the Sutta, one antisocial activity came after one another, degraded to such an extent that the people felt that there should be a change of the system of governor.

There again, the way to eradicate social suffering is also explained. When basic requisites are equally distributed, there will be no poverty and thus, no social ills.

4. In the Samyutta Nikaya, the Buddha explains how a seed changes into a plant. Three conditions are needed for this. They are (1) a good seed which is not damaged; (2) it should be planted well; (3) water and various other ingredients supply to plant regularly. The 1st and 3rd or 2nd and 3rd alone would not change the seed to a plant. All the 3 factors are equally necessary.

5. In the Mahatanhasankhaya Sutta, MN 38, the Buddha explains how conception comes about. 3 conditions should come together. (1) union of parents; (2) it is the mother's season; (3) the present of a gandhabha.

6. In the Sattasuriya Sutta, AN 7.62, the Buddha explains how the world comes to its end, its cause and effect.

The above examples would show us that the principle of Paticcasamuppada is applied in the context of psychology, sociology, cosmology and biology in the Buddhist discourses.

Theories REJECTED by Patīccasamuppāda:

@ Sabbam pubbekatahetuvāda

➔ Kammic Determinism: ‘all our present acts and experiences are entirely due to our past actions’.

@ Issaranimmanavāda

➔ Monotheism or Theory of Creation: all our experiences are ‘due to the creation of God’. If that’s the case, God will be ultimately responsible for the (good and) evil that human beings do.

@ Svabhāvavāda

➔ Theory of Inherent Nature: our experiences or (the good or) evil we do is ‘due to our (hereditary) physiological constitution’ (abhijati hetu).

@ Adhiccasamuppānavāda

➔ Accidentalism; total indeterminism: deny any causal correlations in nature altogether.

eg Purāna Kassapa

@ Niyativāda

➔ Fatalism, Determinism

eg Makkhali Gosala

@ Satvāda

➔ Monism: everything came into existence due to a principal (neutral)

@ Ucchedavāda

@ Sassatavāda

Four Noble Truths in relation to Patīccasamuppāda

The Four Noble Truths are based on the theory of Patīccasamuppāda. Since the 1st truth indicates the problem while the 2nd indicates its cause, the theory of causality runs through the teaching of Four Noble Truths as a thread. Furthermore the Buddha informs us in the Samyutta Nikaya that he realized the Four Noble Truths working on the 12 folds division of the theory of Patīccasamuppāda. The same message is conveyed in the *Ariyāpariyesana* in MN 26.