

Paticca Samuppada – The Wheel of Life

This doctrine of Dependent Origination is one of the Cardinal discoveries of the Buddha during his enlightenment which forms the central of his teaching. The Buddha has often expressed His experience of Enlightenment in one of the two ways, either in terms of having understood the Four Noble Truths or in terms of having understood the nature of Dependent Origination.

Based on that we can affirm that both of them have in common the principle of Causality – the law of cause and effect, of action and consequence.

It is the fact that defilements are common to all living beings, actions differ from individual to individual. So whereas the defilement accounts for the fact that all of us are prisoners within samsara, yet actions account for the fact that some are born as human beings, others are born as gods or animals.

The process of rebirth has been fully explained by the Buddha in the Paticca Samuppada formula.

Paticca means “because of” or “dependent upon”

Samuppada “arising” or origination”

Although the literal meaning of the term is “arising because of” or dependent arising or origination”, it is applied to the whole causal formula which consists of **twelve interdependent causes and effects**, technically called paccaya and paccayuppanna.

The method of the Paticcasamuppada should be understood as follows:

Because of A arises B

Because of B arises C

When there is no A, there is no B

When there is no B, there is no C

In other words, “this being so, that is; this not being so, that is not”

Paticcasamuppada is the discourse of birth and death, and not a philosophical theory of the evolution of the world. It deals with the cause of rebirth and suffering with a view to help men to get rid of the ills of life.

The twelve bases are:

Dependent on ignorance arises conditioned activities

Dependent on conditioned activities arises relinking consciousness

Dependent on relinking consciousness arises mind and matter

Dependent on mind and matter arises six sphere of senses

Dependent on six sphere of senses arises contact

Dependent on contact arises feeling

Depending on feeling arises craving

Depending on craving arises grasping

Depending on grasping arises becoming

Depending on becoming arises birth

Dependeng on birth, arises decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.

Thus the entire aggregates of suffering arises:

1. Ignorance (avijja)

Ignorance is the chief cause that sets the wheel of life in motion. In other words, it's not knowingness of things as they truly are, or of one really is. It clouds all right understanding. Ignorance of past, future, both past and future, and dependent origination, is also regarded as avijja.

2. Dependent on Ignorance arises Conditioning Activities (samkhara)

Here is signifies immoral; moral; and unshakable volitions which constitutes Kamma that produces rebirth.

- The first embraces all volitions in the 12 types of immoral consciousness.
- The second embraces all the eight types of beautiful moral consciousness and the five types of moral rupajhana consciousness and
- The third; all volitions in the four types of moral arupajhana consciousness.

3. Dependent on Conditional Activities (Samkhara) arises Relinking-Consciousness

It is so called because it links the past with the present, and is the initial consciousness one experiences at the moment of conception.

Vinnana strictly denotes the nineteen types of rebirth-consciousness described in the Abhidhamma. All the thirty-two types of resultant consciousness experienced during a lifetime, are also implied by the term.

The foetus in the mother's womb is form by the combination of this relinking-consciousness with the sperm and ovum cells of the parents. In this consciousness are latent all the past impressions, characteristics and tendencies of that particular individual life-flux.

4. Dependent on Relinking-Consciousness arises Mind & Matter (Rupa)

Nama here means the three aggregates – feeling (vedana); perception (sanna); and mental states (samkhara) that arises simultaneous with the rebirth-consciousness which arise simultaneous with relinking-consciousness.

This compound nama-rupa should be understood as nama (mind), rupa (matter) and nama-rupa. In the Formless Planes there arises only mind; in the Mindless Planes only Matter; in the Sentient Realm and Realm of Form both mind and matter exist.

Rupa means the three decades

a) Kaya (body)

Element of Extension + Cohension + Heat + Motion + Colour + Odour + taste + Nutritive Essence + Vitality + body

b) Bhava (sex)

Based on the first nine + sex

c) Vatthu (seat of consciousness)

Based on the first nine + seats of consciousness

Arise simultaneous with relinking-consciousness, conditioned by past kamma.

5. Dependent on Mind & Matter arises Six Spheres of Senses (Salayantana)

During the embryonic period the six sense-bases gradually evolve from these psycho-physical phenomena in which are latent infinite potentialities.

The insignificant infinitesimally small speck now develops into a complex six – senses machine. The human machine is very simple in its beginning but very complex in its end. Ordinary machines on the other hand are complex in the beginning but very simple in the end. The force of a finger is sufficient to operate even a most gigantic machine.

The six-sense human machine now operates almost mechanically with any agent like a soul to act as an operator. All these six senses, namely; eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind have their respective objects and functions.

6. Dependent on Six Spheres of Senses arise Contact (Phassa)

The conjunction of the sense-bases, sense-objects and the resultant consciousness is contact (phassa) which is purely subjective and impersonal.

It should not be understood that mere collision is contact.

7. Dependent of Contact arises Feeling (Vedana)

It is this feeling that experiences the desirable and undesirable fruits of our action done in this or in a previous life. Feeling namely;

Feeling is threefold or fivefold;

1. Pleasurable (somanassa)
2. Unpleasurable (domanassa)
3. Neutral (Upekkha)
4. Physical Happiness (sukha)
5. Physical pain (dukkha)

Accordingly to Abhidhamma, there is one type of consciousness accompanied by pain. Similarly there is only accompanied by happiness. Two connected with unpleasurable and the remaining 85 are found either in pleasurable or neutral feeling.

8. Dependent on Feeling arises Craving (Tanha)

Craving is threefold namely:

- Craving for sensual pleasures (kamatanha)
- Craving for becoming (bhavatanha)
- Craving for annihilation (vibhavatanha)

9. Dependent on Craving arises Grasping (upadana)

This grasping is intense craving. Tanha is like groping in the dark to steal an object. Upadana corresponds to the actual stealing of the object. Grasping is caused by both attachment and error. It gives rise to the false notions of "I" and "mine".

Grasping is fourfold namely:

- Sensuality
- Falseviews
- Adherence to rites and ceremonies
- The theory of a soul.

10. Dependent on Grasping arises Becoming/Action (Bhava)

Both the Moral and Immoral actions which constitute Kamma:

- the active process of becoming
- and the different planes of existence
- passive process of becoming.

Sankhara pertains to the past and Kamabhava pertains to the present life. These are the Kammic activities and it is only the kamabhava that conditions the future birth.

11. Dependent on Becoming arises Birth (jati)

12. Dependent on Birth arises: Decay, Death: Sorrow: Lamentation: Pain: Grief and Despair.

Birth, strictly speaking, is the arising of the psycho-physical phenomena. Decay and death is its inevitably results.

These are the entire aggregate of suffering. The most powerful factors in the wheel of life are ignorance and craving, the two main causes that conditions the present; and craving, the present cause the conditions the future.

1. The Complete Cessation of ignorance leads to the cessation of conditioning activities.
2. The cessation of conditioning activities leads to the cessation of Relinking-Consciousness.
3. The cessation of Relinking-Consciousness leads to the cessation of Mind and Matter.
4. The cessation of Mind and Matter leads to the cessation of Six Spheres of Senses
5. The cessation of Six Spheres of Senses leads to the cessation of Contact
6. The cessation of Contact leads to the cessation of feeling
7. The cessation of feeling leads to the cessation of craving
8. The cessation of craving leads to the cessation of grasping
9. The cessation of grasping leads to the cessation of actions
10. The cessation of actions leads to the cessation of birth
11. The cessation of birth leads to the cessation of decay
12. The cessation of decay leaders to cessation death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair

Thus the cessation of the entire aggregate of suffering results

The first two of these two factors pertain to the past, the middle eight to the present and the last two to the future.

Of them:

- Moral and immoral activities and actions are regarded as Kamma
- Ignorance; craving and grasping are regarded as passion or defilement
- The rest are regarded as effects.

Thus ignorance, activities, craving, grasping and kamma are the five causes of the past that conditioned the present five effects namely, relinking-consciousness; mind and matter; sphere of six senses; contact; feeling.

In the same way craving; grasping; kamma; ignorance and activities of the present, condition the five effects of the future.

This process of cause and effect continues ad infinitum. A beginning of this process cannot be determined as it is impossible to conceive of a time when this life-flux was not encompassed by ignorance. But when ignorance is replaced by wisdom and the life-flux realizes the Nibbana Dhatu, then only does the rebirth process terminate.

This is also why the Buddha had said that he who see dependent origination sees the Dhamma and he who sees the Dhamma sees the Buddha. This is why it is important for one to understand the function of Dependent Origination which is the key to liberation, one then can set about to break this vicious circle by removing impurities of the mind – ignorance, craving & grasping. Once these impurities are eliminated, actions will not be performed and habit energy will not be produced. Once actions cease, rebirth and suffering also cease.

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