

Lecture 4: Dependent Arising

(Notes on Bhikkhu Bodhi's introductory lectures, "The Buddha's Teaching as It Is", <http://www.buddhanet.net/audio-lectures.htm>).

Importance of dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*)

The counter-point of anatta/selflessness

The Buddha emphasises the significance of understanding dependent arising for liberation:

- One who sees dependent arising sees the dharma and one who sees the dharma sees dependent arising.
- It is through not understanding dependent arising [...] that all living beings [...] have been unable to pass beyond [...] samsara

Dependent arising as a universal principle

'the most fundamental law underlying every process and event that can occur': whatever arises, arises in dependence on conditions.

Related but not identical to the western idea of cause and effect/ causality:

- The Buddhist view: No phenomenon arises from a single cause, but from a complex interrelated network of conditions. Events are linked together like the ripples of water on a pond or the fibres of a spider's web.
- The western conception: a linear view of single events which occur in succession, each causing the other.
- There is no 'first cause', or original beginning.

Specific application of dependent arising in the context of the cycle of rebirths (the 12 links)

Samsara has no beginning, but it does have a distinct causal structure.

The 12 links as explained in terms of three lifetimes:

Previous life

1. *Ignorance*. Not seeing and *understanding* the four noble truths.
2. *Volitional formations* (saṅkhāra). These are impressions on the mind comparable to a seed which gets deposited in the mind and germinate at some point in the future when the conditions are right.

Present life

3. *Consciousness*. A 're-linking consciousness' at the start of a new life.
4. *Mentality/materiality*. 'Name and form', the psycho-physical organism.
5. *Six sense faculties*
6. *Contact*. Each sense faculty comes together with its respective object (e.g. eye consciousness comes together with forms through the eye faculty).
7. *Feeling*. The 'affective tone' of contact (pleasant, painful or neutral).
8. *Craving*. Feeling in the context of ignorance gives rise to craving or aversion. With craving we start creating new causes for the continuation of samsara.
9. *Clinging*. an intensification of craving. Clinging to sense pleasures, clinging to views, clinging to 'rules and observances', clinging to mind and body as being 'me' and 'mine'. (Craving and clinging also imply presence of ignorance).
10. *Existence*. Accumulation of more volitional formations (really the same as 2nd link)

Future life

11. *Birth*. A new existence brought about by the previous 3 links
12. *Aging and death*.

Three critical links:

2 & 3, 7 & 8, 10 & 11

The link between feeling and craving is not inevitable, and the space between them is the critical battleground for attaining liberation!

Three phases

1. Phase of defilements (ignorance, craving, clinging)
2. Phase of karma (volitional formations, existence)
3. Phase of results (consciousness, mentality/materiality, sense faculties, contact, feeling, birth, aging & death)

How to bring samsara to an end

Ignorance is the underlying root of all of this, and ignorance can be eliminated. Having eliminated ignorance, the actions of a liberated person (arhat) accumulate no 'volitional formations' (2nd link), so there is no 3rd, 4th, 5th link and so on.

We can prevent feeling from leading into craving, through 'mindfulness' and 'clear comprehension'.