

12 Links of Dependent Origination

In order to gain the powerful motivation required to follow the path to the end, we need to begin with a clear realization of what's wrong with samsara.

We crave birth in samsara because we do not know what a thoroughly miserable place it is. That is one of the main causes for not being able to gain freedom from it.

Through studying, analyzing, and meditating on the 12 links we can come to understand quite clearly how cyclic existence evolves and this can lead us to a direct and clear understanding of selflessness.

When you replace ignorance, the first link, with wisdom, you naturally bring about a revolution in your actions, your karma... the second link. Up until now, everything we do has been on the samsaric side.. but once you begin acting out of wisdom.. everything turns around completely and whatever you do becomes the practice of purification.. leading to emancipation.

By understanding this causal process, you will come to a firm understanding of selflessness.

The multifarious effects we experience as life in samsara arise from a conjunction of many many different causes and conditions.

What we will be discussing here is primarily the dependent arising of affliction. **This is the way impure, samsaric phenomena arise based on causes and conditions having at their root the obscuring affliction of ignorance** .. you could also talk about the dependent arising of purification in which you look at the causes and conditions that cause liberation.

Ignorance

Ignorance is the root cause of everything in samsaric life.. from rebirth to all the experiences you have in all your lifetimes. All the experiences are the ripening results of karma. Karma depends on afflictions and all the afflictions depend on ignorance.

There are different systems of explaining ignorance

Vasubandhu' system doesn't consider ignorance the mere absence of knowing, but ignorance is something that is contrary to and directly opposed to knowing.

Here knowing is knowing the true nature of the self and the true nature of phenomena. The cause of cyclic existence is *not knowing* the true nature of the self and then grasping at self that is contradictory and opposed

to its true nature. Ignorance is not a mere absence of knowing wisdom, nor something other than that wisdom, -- it involves holding affirmatively to a conception that is contradictory and incompatible with knowing wisdom.

Here, the antidote, knowledge is understanding the truth, meaning the selflessness of the persons. It's opposite is the view of the transitory collections, which grasp at a self of persons.

- Dharmakirti - Commendium of Valid Cognition

The antidote to ignorance is knowledge, which is seeing the truth, understanding the meaning of selflessness. The opposite of that is the view of *the transitory collections* which regards the 5 aggregates and based upon that collection imputes a substantial self, which is then conceived of as real, independent, and substantially existent.

Vasubandhu and his brother Asanga do not agree that ignorance is actually grasping at an incorrect conception of reality. They say that ignorance is mere *not knowing* the true nature of reality.

These are the 2 definitions of ignorance:

1. Wrong understanding of reality - Vasubandhu
2. Mere not knowing the true - Asanga

Regardless of the disagreement, they both agree that the principle antidote of ignorance is the wisdom that realizes selflessness.

According to Asanga's Compendium of Knowledge, there are **2 types of ignorance**:

1. Not knowing about the cause and effect of karma and its results. The ignorance of the consequences of virtuous and non-virtuous actions underlies nonvirtuous action and it is the type of ignorance that gives rise to the lower rebirths.
2. Not knowing the true nature of ultimate reality. It is this type of ignorance that leads you to be born in the higher realms of cyclic existence. To be born in the higher realms you must perform virtuous actions, but those virtuous actions are still motivated by an interest in gratifying a self that does not exist.

The root motivation of samsaric virtuous karma is ignorance of the true nature of the self.

Although each individual act has its own immediate, proximate motivation, the fundamental motivation that underlies them all is this grasping at a false conception of self.

For both these types of ignorance, the antidotes are knowledge, understanding, and realization; and the ultimate antidote to the fundamental misconception of self is wisdom realizing emptiness.

2. Formative Activity

These are the actions that arise because of ignorance, which become the causes and conditions that eventually bring all future results... in short, this refers to karma. Karma is action of body, speech, and mind and there are 2 types, virtuous which produce happy rebirths and nonvirtuous which create lower rebirths. There are 2 types of virtuous karma.. 1) **Meritorious** karma which projects rebirth in the desire realm and 2) **immovable karma** which projects rebirth in the form and formless realms. **For all samsaric karma the underlying cause is ignorance.**

3. Consciousness

In general, the sutras speak of 6 consciousness'. The 5 sense consciousness plus mental consciousness. The 3rd link refers to the mental consciousness.

Motivated by the ignorance of self-grasping you take actions of body, speech, or mind. Each action deposits a seed or impression on the consciousness which carries that seed forward as a potential, and will eventually ripen and yield a result in the form of some type of future life experience.

To make this clear we can divide the consciousness into 2:

1. Casual consciousness - the consciousness that receives the impression deposited by a seeding action and carries it forward until it meets the conditions for that seed to ripen. **In general, it is the causal consciousness that we call the 3rd link.**
2. Resultant Consciousness - The first moment when that consciousness becomes conjoined with the new life right after ripening.

The consciousness that receives and carries forward those karmic seeds is called the **causal consciousness**. The consciousness at the first moment when such a seed ripens as birth in one of the happy migrations is called the **resultant consciousness**.

4. Name and Form

Name refers to the combination of the 4 non-physical aggregates... feelings, discrimination, mental formations, and consciousness.

These nonphysical parts of the mind-body continuum which combine to create the mental life of an individual are what we are really talking about when we talk about a 'person', a 'being', a 'personality, or a life.

Form refers to the physical aggregate that we call the body.

For all beings except the formless realm, the mental aggregates join with the body at the moment of conception.... as the 5 aggregates come together life begins. **That development period is called 'Name and**

Form'.

These 5 aggregates between the period of conception and the stage when the 6 sense organs have developed are given the designation '**Name and Form**'. The body consisting of the combined blood and semen before the 6 consciousness' have formed is called **form**. The four mental aggregates as they exist in this developmental period are designated 'name' because they form a basis or referent for naming.

In brief, the period during which the fetus is developing through these five stages, up until the six sense organs are complete, is designated 'name and form'

5. The 6 Sense Bases

We have the continuation of the mind-body complex that is developing in the 4th link. The 6 sense bases refer to this development phase during which the person develops the **capability** to experience an object through the coming together of sense faculty, object, and object.. although that contact has not yet taken place. With name and form you have an actual body, and with the 6 sense bases the specific physical properties of that embodiment are fully developed, and the sensory faculties thereby become utilizable instruments

6. Contact

Once the sense faculties are formed they begin to operate. Contact is the moment when a faculty, and object of cognition, and a moment of consciousness meet. In dependence on this moment of contact, the object is distinguished as attractive, unattractive, or neutral. There are 6 kinds of contact corresponding to the 6 faculties and 6 consciousness.

7. Feeling

Depending on whether you have contact with an attractive, unattractive, or neutral object, you experience a pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feeling. When contact and feeling are complete, the experience is complete.

This is how you experience life. Sometimes you have pleasant feelings, sometimes you have unpleasant, and sometimes neutral. **Feeling is the experience of the ripening of your karmic seeds.** One feeling after another, that is the way you experience your life. Most of your life is directed at experiencing pleasant feelings.

Each experience of feeling is the ripened fruit of karmic seeds you planted in the past and results of causes you created by your previous actions.

Beings in the form and formless realm experience only pleasant feelings during their whole life, while beings in the hell and lower realms experience suffering. Humans and some other beings in the desire realm experience mixed good and bad. But for all beings in cyclic existence, the feelings they experience are the ripening of the

previous karma.

Contact is the point at which the subjective components of experience--- the faculty and consciousness -- meet and utilize the object; at that point the object role in the experience is complete. From that contact -- feeling -- the subjective react arises; this is the experience of the object as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. This feeling is the ripening of previous karmic seeds, and once that feeling has arisen, the entire experience is complete -- the karmic seeds have yielded their result

8. Craving

Craving is attachment. When an enjoyable feeling arises, you become attached to it. You don't want to separate from it -- on the contrary, you want more and better. Even when pain and discomfort arises there is craving, but in this case, the craving is to be from that unpleasant feeling.

Tsongkhapa says that the phrase 'craving arises out of the result of feeling' needs to be qualified. Feeling itself is not the ultimate cause of craving. Craving is caused when feeling is accompanied by ignorance. When a feeling arises it is rooted in ignorance and is dominated by ignorance.

Therefore when a feeling of pleasure or aversion arises towards an object, that object is being perceived in a distorted way. Because of ignorance the feeling arises based on this mistaken perception; when that feeling is pleasurable you desire the object and want to possess it when unattractive you desire separation. In either case, the feeling gives rise to the craving only because it is dominated by ignorance.

Craving is another word for desire. Not all desire is non-virtuous, like the desire to be a bodhisattva, etc. When a desire that is free from ignorance or other afflictions it does not operate to perpetuate entrapment in cyclic existence.

Once ignorance is cut out, feeling still arises, by craving does not.

ex. arhats experience pleasant feelings, and buddhas experience blissful feelings, but because the feelings are not dominated by ignorance, they will not give rise to craving or attachment.

The nexus between the 7th and 8th link provides a good illustration of how these 12 links operate as a chain of causation.

A feeling is a result of a culmination of a previous set of causes -- ignorance, karma, consciousness, etc. And when that feeling arises that particular sequence of cause and result is complete. But at the same time that feeling is giving rise to a new craving, which may take the form of attachment, aversion, or some other affliction. That new craving will motivate new karma, and a whole new-cause result sequence will be set into motion by the completion of the last one. In this way, the chain of experience within on lifetime, and the chain of lifetimes within cyclic existence, perpetuate themselves. That self-perpetuating process is what the 12 links of dependent origination is really talking about.

These points make it clear that the 8th link of craving, or attachment, plays a central role in perpetuating and structuring samsaric existence.

9. Grasping

In 8 we took a form of desire or attachment and we called it 'craving'. This craving then gives rise to a more intense and powerful form of attachment called 'grasping.' Craving is a general attachment to objects. Grasping augments craving in a way that strengthens and actualizes the ripening of karmic seeds into samsaric rebirth or other experiences.

Grasping is divided into 4 different categories based on the 4 types of objects

1. **Grasping out of Desire** - Attachment to the sensory objects we enjoy in the desire realm -- form, sound, smell, taste, and tangible objects -- which are referred to as the **attributes of the desire realm**'. Here in the desire realm, the mind is dominated by sense consciousness. In this realm beings spend their whole lives chasing after attributes of the desire realm such as attractive forms, delicious tastes, and nice smells. They feel happy when they find such objects and displeasure when they don't. Higher up in the form and formless realms the beings don't use the tongue or nose because they don't even eat or smell. The beings of these upper realms survive on the very subtle food of samadhi, the nourishment of meditative stabilization.
2. **Grasping for Views** - This refers to grasping at any of the various types of wrong view with the exception of the transitory collections. These 4 wrong views relate to certain misguided behaviors and religious practices that are based on mistaken dogmas, philosophies, and beliefs. Grasping for views arises when you have a strong attachment to these kinds of wrong views.
3. **Grasping for mistaken morality and asceticism** Wrong view in which you hold some distorted system of ethics or mode of religious behavior will lead to emancipation, such as sacrificing other beings. Although you are convinced you are on the right path, such perverted ethics and practices lead only to negative karma and future suffering.
4. **Grasping for a self** - This is a strong attachment to the self that comes from holding the mental and physical aggregates to be a real 'I'. This grasps at a false imputation of an absolute inherently existing self, where there is in fact, only a transitory aggregation of elements. This leads you to hold onto this self with pride, egoism, and attachment. This 4th type of grasping is equivalent to the view of the transitory collections. All of the other afflictions -- pride and jealousy come out of this basic misunderstanding -- the wrong view that imputes a self on the perishing aggregates. If you do not make this mistake, then all these other faults and wrong attitudes will not develop.

These are the 4 types of grasping taught in the sutras.

This powerful form of attachment we call grasping acts as moisture that awakens, stimulates, and nourishes the dormant karmic seeds you have deposited on your mental continuum by previous actions. The latent seed

of past actions are always present, but they require the moisture of attachment to ripen and bear fruit. Once the 2 levels of attachment -- craving, and grasping actualize the potentiality of a karmic seed, it ripens quickly into a resultant experience.

Ex. In an arhats mind there are many latent karmic seeds deposited by actions taken in innumerable past lifetimes. But these remain as dry seeds because they will never be nourished and actualized by attachment.

We can see how these 2 levels of attachment -- grasping and craving -- are the critical factors in actualizing and ripening karmic seeds, and thereby bringing about rebirth and all the experiences of cyclic existence.

10. Existence

Generally, refers to the subsequent rebirth brought about by the ripening of the seed planted by the action of the second link. Specifically, the 10th link refers to the moment just before that next life happens, at the point when the karmic seed is fully actualized and ready to yield its fruit. So the name 'existence' is the case of giving the name of the result to the cause. The result is a new existence and that name is given to the moment when the cause of that new existence have all come together and are about to produce that result

There are 3 supportive causes that actualize the main karmic seed. Craving and grasping are the afflictions that act as the moisture awakening and activating the seed, and then a final karma -- which is usually a mental action -- a thought at the time of death acts as a third supportive cause. This final karma will be similar in its ethical tone(virtuous, etc) to the main karmic seed.

If the first 2 factors are like moisture, we can say the 3rd nourishing factor is like warmth.

If the projecting karma is nonvirtuous at the time of death nonvirtuous thoughts -- which are mental karma -- arise and act as this third supportive condition.. the same with virtuous.

In this way, the thought of a person who is approaching death act as an essential condition that nurtures and activates the main projecting karmic seed.

We can say that this tenth link, existence, is actually the potency that was established by the karma of the second link to bring for the next rebirth when it has been fully nourished by craving, grasping, and a final secondary karma. At that point, it is fully empowered to produce the next life, **and it is that fully empowered potential that is called 'existence'**

This is the last link in the previous life, the moment just before rebirth.

The next existence has not yet come into being, but at the stage of the 10th link it is about to do so; that is why the name of that result, existence is given to its full potentiated cause.

11. Birth

The result of that fully potentiated cause is rebirth. The first moment of that new life, when the consciousness enters its new body, is the eleventh link, called birth. Birth can take place by any of the 4 modes -- from womb, egg, heat, and moisture, or miraculous birth. Hell being, intermediate state being, and devas always have miraculous birth. Hungry ghosts usually experience this type of birth as well, but some are said to be womb born. Humans and animals share all four types of birth.

12. Aging and Death

Begins in the second moment after birth. From the moment after a humans mental and physical aggregates conjoin there is called birth, and by the second moment, you have already begun to age. From that moment on aging never stops; you are moving irrevocably towards death.

Aging is the maturation of the aggregates and the unceasing, unstoppable change they undergo in each moment.

Although you are getting older, and the aggregates are different in every moment, there is a continuity and an identifiable similarity that distinguishes one being aggregates from another.

Death is the cessation of the continuum of that seemingly identical set of aggregates. The continuity of the present aggregates comes to an end at the moment of death.

Aging and death are combined into one link, because death can occur without the common signs of aging, such as white hair, bent body, loss of memory, etc. In fact, death can occur immediately after birth so there is barely and aging.

It is traditional to mention, in connection with this link of aging and death, the sorrow, lamentation, and anguish of losing those you love, and the suffering of dying yourself; this is done in order to bring to mind the unsatisfactory nature of cyclic existence.

The previous 11 causes and conditions function in their interdependent fashion to produce and experiencer; a being living a life.

But regardless of the nature of that life, in the end it will undoubtedly culminate in the suffering of death.

Although practitioners who have maintained excellent ethical conduct die with their minds and bodies at ease -- the death process, in general, is one of severe pain and sorrow.

The chain of dependent origination by which beings continue to cycle in samsara inevitably ends with the pain and sorrow of its final link: death

The condensed presentation of the links.

Asangas Compendium of Knowledge says that these 12 links can be subsumed under 4 categories:

1. **Projecting Factors** - Ignorance, Formative Activity, Consciousness
2. **Projected Factors** - Name and Form, 6 Sense Bases, Contact, Feeling
3. **Actualizing Factors** - Craving, Grasping, Existence
4. **Actualized Factors** - Birth, Ageing, and Death

Therefore, for one person's single life, all the causes have carried out their function before birth. First, the projecting cause(Ignorance, formative action, and consciousness), projected name and form, the 6 sense bases, contact, and feeling, then later when these are brought to fruition by the actualizing causes, those very same projected factors become the actualized factors of birth, aging, and death. In short in one life all the causes must operate before the fruition of the actualized effects.

We can see that there are 2 stages of this causal sequence.

The reasons two sets of causality are shown is in order to point out the differences between the effects of projection and the effects of actualization in terms of their suffering natures.

The projected effects actually remain in a state of dormancy, of potentiality, until such time as they meet the conditions to manifest in their actualized state. In other words, at the time they are projected they do not come into existence in their fully actualized nature of suffering. They have that potentiality -- they are suitable to become factors of suffering -- but that will only happen when they meet the actualizing conditions.

We can say that when they are projected, the projected factors are made suitable to manifest at some time in the future, when they meet the necessary actualized conditions; at that time they will become factors of suffering. But at the time of projection, this has not yet occurred.

Example:

In some previous lifetime I projected the virtuous karma to be born a human. At that time, those karmic seeds were planted in this mental continuum [1, 2, 3]. What was planted by that action was the seed or potentiality of the projected effects: the factors of resultant consciousness, name and form, the 6 sense basis, contact, and feeling [the resultant aspect of 3, plus links 4-7]. Then at the time of death of my previous life, just before I was born in this life, the actualizing causes [8-10] ripened this potentiality and brought about birth in this life [11-12].

When we say that the seeds were planted -- that the projected effects were projected -- it means that they were rendered suitable to manifest when they meet the necessary actualizing factors. Until they meet those necessary conditions, the projected effects remain dormant, in a state of potentiality -- **This is the meaning of projected effects.** Calling them effects does not mean that these factors are already manifest and fully

functionioning; it does not mean that contact and feeling have already occured.

Example:

It is the same as planting a seed in the garden. You can plant a seed in the fall and it will lie dormant right through the winter. Then in the spring when the ground warms up and it rains, it will sprout. It was rendered suitable to be actualized by being planted(projected) into the ground. If you hadnt put the seed there, then no mattter how much moisture and warmth you put there, you would have no sprout.

****The actualized effects, birth, ageing, and death are factors that have already been actualized -- they are fully manifest, fully functioning, and therefore conditions for suffering in a current lifetime.**

Every causaul relationship has these 2 stages, requiring both a primary **cause** and a secondary actualizing **condition** .. **Causes and Conditions!**

Among the 12 factors, how many are included in the truth of suffering and will become sufferings in the current life? Two: birth and ageing and death. How many are included in the truth of suffering but will only become suffering at a later time? Those that remain in a state of potentia, from resultant consciousness up to feeling.

-Asanga - Levels of Yogic Deeds

These 2 factors come together; they are functioning together at the same time in the same lifetime. For example, the actualizing factor of birth and the projected factor of name and form start at the same time. During the time that the 6 sense basis, contact, and feeling are operating, the actualizing factor of ageing is operating.. in this sense they are intermingled, so why are they shown seperately? It is in order to show the different kinds of causes that bring about the suffering factors of cyclic existance, and in order to help us differentiate these 2 distinct types of causes.

The twelve links as a presentation of 2 lifetimes

So far we have discussed these 2 cause and effect cycles under the assumption that they all occured within one lifetime. However, it becomes evident that these 12 links are presented in a way that seems to fit 2 seperate rounds of dependent origination.

The factors of ignorance up through feeling describe one round of dependent origination; and the factors from craving through ageing and death describe a second round

So, in relation to your current life, there must have been projecting causes that got ripened by actualizing effects in a previous lifetime, that led to your current birth. When looking at your current life, there will be projecting causes that lead to projected effects, and there will be actualizing causes that ripen these effects at

the time of death. But these 3 are not the actualizing causes that led to this present life... **They are not part of the round of dependent origination that I am experiencing now.** What they are actualizing is the next lifetime -- another birth, ageing and death.

The craving, grasping, and existence that occur just before I die cannot be part of the causality of my current life because the causes for this life cannot be happening at the *end* of my life. These actualizing causes are the causes of a subsequent life and so they are apart of a separate round of dependent origination.

As a description of my current life, the 12 links include the projecting causes, but it is necessary to infer that in the previous life there were actualizing causes that brought my birth to fruition. Within that 12 links, we have the actualizing causes, but we must also infer that there were projecting causes created at some other time, which are actualized at the time of death and will bring into being my next life.

Why did the Buddha teach the 12 links in a manner that spreads them over 2 lifetimes? In order to demonstrate how this process is a perpetual chain. In this life, you are experiencing the results of previous ignorance and karma. At the same time, during this very life, you are creating the causes of another rebirth in the future. the 12 links operate as an endless chain.

The Projecting Causes and Projected Effects

Tsongkhapa says that projecting causes and projected effects should be understood by way of 4 points:

1. What has been projected? Four and a half factors: resultant consciousness, name and form, the six sense bases, contact, and feeling
2. By what are they projected? They are projected by karma -- formative activity -- which depends on ignorance. Ignorance is the root motivating factor leading to karma, the main projecting activity.
3. How are they projected? By means of instilling in the causal consciousness the subtle propensities or karmic seeds. Ignorance creates the formative activity of good or bad karma. That karma instills in the consciousness a subtle seed or propensity to ripen when it meets the necessary conditions. Before the karma was created, the potential was not there. Karma has left this new potential on the consciousness --
That is how the factors are projected
4. The meaning of 'projected' is that those factors that are projected are rendered suitable to be actualized and to manifest when the actualizing causes are met.

The Actualizing Causes and Actualized Effects

The actualizing causes can be understood by means of three points.

1. What does the actualizing? The main actualizing cause is grasping, which has craving as its own cause. Both of these are types of desire, but grasping is desire that is intensified to the point where it has the

power to bring its result immediately. The craving form of desire arises over and over again, getting stronger and stronger until it turns into grasping, with the power to bring forth the result.

- The actualizing causes are described as three: craving, grasping, existence. Earlier we described existence as a final, actualizing karma. Here, in the context of this explanation, existence is not treated as some new karma. The emphasis here is on the potential of the projected karmic seed. When it meets the warmth of craving and grasping and it becomes ready to bring forth its fruit. That very actualized seed -- that empowered potential ready to ripen into its result is called existence, the 10th factor.
- There are these 2 modes of explaining the 10th factor. It's true that at the time of death a virtuous or non-virtuous action arises that combines with grasping to actualize the seed. In our earlier explanation that karma was referred to as existence. But this explanation only mentions craving and grasping as the actualizing causes, and according to this mode of explanation existence is defined as that fully potentiated seed itself.

2. What is actualized? Birth, ageing, and death.

3. How are they actualized? By means of empowering the subtle karmic propensities that were instilled in the consciousness by the formative activity of karma. The second factor, karma, projected the subtle propensities of the projected factors on the consciousness some time in the past. Now these propensities are empowered to ripen, and bring forth their result by these actualizing causes.**This is what 'actualize' means -- to render the potentiality of the seed powerful enough to bring its result immediately.**

Vasubandhu wrote that the only actualized factor is birth itself, while aging and death demonstrate the faults of birth.

Example of low birth:

Ignorance of cause and effect of karma is the first cause. Motivated by that ignorance, non-virtuous karma deposits on the consciousness the subtle propensity or seed of an unpleasant rebirth. This potentiates the 4 and half projected factors from resultant consciousness to feeling - and makes them suitable to ripen in one of the 3 lower realms when the necessary conditions are met. These dormant karmic propensities are revitalized repeatedly nourished by craving. And with the complete nourishment of grasping, these seeds become empowered to manifest and ripen into rebirth in the lower realms where aging and various sufferings of bad rebirths with ensue.

Example of high birth:

Motivated by the ignorance of the meaning of selflessness, karma deposits on the consciousness the subtle propensity of pleasant rebirth. The good karma to be born in the higher rebirths in the desire realm is called 'meritorious karma', and consists of virtuous behaviours such as maintain ethical conduct. The good karma to be reborn in the form and formless realms is 'immoveable karma' and includes such

practices as cultivating single-pointed concentration. Depositing these karmic propensities on the consciousness renders the projected factors -- from resultant consciousness to feeling, suitable to be actualized and to ripen into the experience of either the higher rebirths of the desire realm or rebirth among the devas in the upper realms. Subsequently craving and grasping revitalize those formant seeds and repeatedly nourish them, and this empowers them to ripen into birth in those higher realms and the experiences that ensue.

For ordinary individuals, until they reach the arya stage where they directly realize the emptiness of self -- all actions whether virtuous or non virtuous have as their most fundamental motivation the ignorance that does not know the true meaning of self. This ignorance does not only not know the true meaning, it holds on to a view of self that is utterly mistaken. For all rounds of dependent origination, first there is the 'I', this deep misunderstanding and misperception of the nature of self.

Holding that I to be the center of the world can motivate both virtuous and unvirtuous actions -- both resulting in further rebirth into samsara.

Until you reach the arya stage, you will almost never perform any action -- virtuous or non virtuous -- without the egoist motivation.

If you achieve a high level of concentration as a human you deposit the propensity to be born in one of the higher form and formless realms in a future rebirth.

Other ways to categorize the 12 links

Nagarjuna says that these 12 links can be subsumed under 3 categories

1, 8, and 9 are afflictions
2 and 10 are karma
remaining 7 are suffering

-Nagarjuna

Nagarjuna calls these paths.. so he is saying that ignorance, craving, and grasping are the path of afflictions. Karma and existence are the path of karma, and the rest are the path of suffering.

How many lifetimes are required to complete the cycle.

Many aeons can intervene between the projecting factors of ignorance and karma, and the projected factors of name and form down to feeling. On the other hand its also possible the the projected factors will be actualized in the very next lifetime from when they are projected, with no interweaving lifetimes between.

When it comes to the actualized factors of craving, grasping, and existence, there is never an intervening life before they yield the actualized factors of birth, aging, and death; these actualized factors always arise in the very next lifetime.

Intermediate state is not counted as a separate life. The intermediate state is considered part of the life it precedes, because both of them are projected by the same karma

Given that the projecting factors *can* ripen in the very next lifetime and actualized factors *always* ripen in the very next lifetime, the minimum number of lifetimes in which you can complete one round of 12 links is 2.

Remember that the projected and actualized effects are intermingled - they come together in the same lifetime, functioning at the same time. They were taught separately in order to clarify and help identify the 2 different types of causes that bring about suffering in cyclic existence.

What is the maximum lives it takes to complete the 12 links? 3.

The life in which the projecting causes were planted, the life in which the actualizing causes occur, and the very next life in which the effects of all these causes ripen. Even though there may be many lifetimes intervening between the lives in which the projecting and actualizing causes occur, these intervening lifetimes are not part of this particular sequence of dependent origination.

The 12 factors that create and constitute this current life of mine took place over a maximum of three lives

How Dependent Origination Illuminates the Emptiness of Self.

When you look at this process of cause and effect and how it gives rise to all experience of cyclic existence, you can see how there is no absolute self who is the creator of karma, and no absolute self who is experiencing the result of karma. When we look for this self, we only find the numerous ever changing factors of mind-body and five impermanent aggregates. **Upon these aggregates we impute a self, an 'I', and independent person.** That imputes self is what we hold to be the creator of karma and the experiencer of the results of karma. But in reality there is no such independent or absolute self. This is merely an imputation of such a self upon a collection of impermanent phenomena.

The causal factors-- projecting and actualizing causes are themselves merely impermanent phenomena. The resultant factors - all projected and actualized effects -- are nothing more than impermanent phenomena that arise from causal factors. **There is no independent, absolute creator of karma or experiencer of their results.** There is merely the imputation of such a self upon transitory phenomena having nothing more than a relative, nominal existence.

Once again we see how the 2 karmic factors, karma and existance, arise from the 3 afflictions (ignorance, craving, and grasping), and in turn give rise to the seven factors of suffering (consciousness, name and form, 6 sense bases, contact, feeling, aging, and death). As you experience the pleasure and discomfort of those resultant factors, other afflictions such as attachment and hostility, emerge in response. They in turn set in motion another round of actions -- one set of results instigates yet another set of causes. Here again we see how the cause of all cyclic existance is karma and the afflictions. Again we see how the cycle -- affliction causing karma, causing experience, causing affliction, perpetuates itself; cause and effect drives the wheel of life, turning it round and round in perpetual motion

From the three arise the two, (ignorance, craving, grasping => karma, existance)

From the two, seven arise, (karma, existance => all else)

And from the seven three arise --(all else => ignorance, craving, grasping)

That is the wheel of life, going around, and around, and around

-Nagarjuna 'Heart of Dependent Arising'

If you carefully contemplate how all sentient being, including yourself, are helplessly wandering up and down through the miseries and dissappointments of cyclic existance as a result of this very process of cause and effect, that will be the best means for you to recognize the faults of samsara and generate disenchantment with it. This is very important because to the extent that you realize just how unsatisfactory cyclic existance is, to that extent your mental life will turn to renunciation. If you fail to see the faults thoroughly and deeply you will never become disenchanted with its attractions. You will continue to seek out samsaric pleasures, and this will only cause you to continue your helpless wandering through the sufferings of cyclic existance.

You have been reborn in samsara in different forms for countless aeons, and in each life you have done uncountable karmic actions, some virtuous and some none.. you do thousands of actions a day. So, you have created countless karmas since beginningless time. You have accumulated vast amounts of virtuous and non virtuous projecting karma that has not yet yielded its results. If these seeds are not destroyed by the antidotes they will remain dormant in your mental continuum, ready at any time to be reawakened and nourished by the actualizing factors of craving and grasping, then they will yield their results leading to further wandering and suffering.

Nevertheless even though you have mountains of karmic seeds, if they are not nourished by the afflictions they will never be able to yield their results. Arhats for example have accumulated masses of projecting karma, but because they destroyed their afflictions they will never again be born in cyclic existance as the result of karma. For their accumulated projecting karma to produce another rebirth it must be nourished by the afflictions, and since arhats are free of afflictions, they are liberated from cyclic existance.

Once you have a firm understanding of all this, you will regard the obscuring afflictions as your enemy. You will see that the true enemy is not outside, but is inside, and is the afflictions that produce all your

unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and suffering. As Shantideva says, if you are able to destroy this one enemy, you will destroy all enemies.

If you destroy the inner enemy of ignorance and the other afflictions from the root, then you will no longer be forced to wander in cyclic existence, because although you may possess the projecting karma, without the afflictions to nourish them they will never ripen.

Geshe Puchungwa spent his whole life practicing the meditation of the three spiritual individuals by rolling that system of teaching into his method of meditating on the 12 links of dependent origination.

Meditation on the 12 links as they apply to birth in the lower realms constitutes the training of small scope. At this stage, the focus of the practice is to recognize how the 10 non virtuous actions leads to lower rebirths. You realize the best protection is to take refuge in the three jewels and then adhere to ethical conduct. By meditating on how engagement in the 12 links leads to lower rebirth, and how disengagement with the cycle frees you from them, all practices of the being of small scope are integrated into the contemplation of the 12 links.

Cyclic existence is brought into being by the 12 links of dependent origination, and the root of that chain of causality is ignorance. Ignorance is the root of samsara. Therefore, the being of intermediate scope must ask, 'How do I get rid of ignorance?' The answer is to meditate on the 4 noble truths, culminating in a direct realization of emptiness.

How to Summarize Their Significance.

Among the 4 noble truths, this is the truth of the cause of suffering; how karma and afflictions together produce samsaric life.

Once you gain clear comprehension how the wheel of samsara turns by means of the 12 links, and how this chain of causality compels you to wander perpetually around the wheel of unhappy existence --- you must accustom your mind to the reality by meditating on it until it is completely integrated with your view of the world. Doing that will destroy the dark ignorance lying at the root of all misfortune.

It will clear away all the wrong view about the way experience arises, including the view that our inner and outer world arises without a cause. or the view that it can arise from a completely incompatible cause.

What is an 'incompatible cause'? In reality, all the causes that give rise to cyclic existence are *within* the individual; this is the very point that the 12 links bring to mind.

The realization of the true nature of samsara, exactly as it is, leads to a powerful thought of renunciation, which will arouse and encourage you to pursue the path leading to liberation.

We all have the capacity to realize emptiness. Learning about the 12 links of dependent origination, understanding them clearly, then meditation on them until your mind is completely familiar with them, is the best method to awaken your potential for direct realization of truth. Seeing things as they truly are you are able to steer your behaviour and your practice onto the path that leads to emancipation.

Understanding dependent origination is the antidote to ignorance because ignorance lies at its root; when you fully comprehend the 12 links and how they operate, ignorance no longer has the power to delude your mind.

This teaching of dependent origination is the profound prize
In the treasury of the Buddhas instructions.

-Nagarjuna 'Friendly Letter'

Nagarjuna opened his fundamental treatise with the following dedications:

I prostrate to the perfect Buddha,
The best of teachers, who taught that
Whatever is dependently arisen
Is unceasing, unborn,
No annihilated, not permanent,
Not coming, not going,
Not diverse, not unitary,
And free from conceptual elaborations

We are talking here about building the most foundation of all future progress on the path -- the thought of renunciation. This thought grows naturally out of seeing the faults of cyclic existence from many different points of view.

The thought of renunciation is the foundation of all further progress on the path, and understanding dependent origination is the methods to produce that thought.

Among teachers, the teacher of dependent origination,
Among wisdoms, that which realizes dependent origination --
These are like the foremost conquerors of the world;
There are no others who can match your glorious insight

Whatever you have taught
Is penetrated by dependent origination,
And since that leads to nirvana,
There is nothing that you do that does not produce peace.

