

Discourse on the Analysis of Dependent Origination

Paṭiccasamuppāda-vibhanga Sutta

Samyutta Nikāya ii.12

The Buddha taught that human personality is a congeries of interdependent causal factors, in the absence of any one of which the thing ceases to exist. As the classical formula has it, “When this is present, that comes to be. / From the arising of this, that arises. / When this is absent, that does not come to be. / From the cessation of this, that ceases.” In short, all phenomena are conditioned, the result of causes, and thus inherently impermanent, making impossible the existence of a permanent substrate—a Self—that persists unchanging from moment to moment, lifetime to lifetime. In order to account for the continuity of human experience without positing a permanent “experiencer,” i.e., an ātman, the Buddha instead describes a causal process elaborated through a series of twelve interconnected links (nidāna), each the precondition for the next. This causal nexus he calls pratītyasamutpāda (Pāli: paṭiccasamuppāda), or “dependent origination.”

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvathī in the Jetavāna Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park. There the Blessed One addressed the *bhikkhus* (monks) thus . . .

"Monks, I will describe and analyze dependent origination (alt. “co-arising”) for you.

"And what is dependent co-arising? From ignorance as a requisite condition come volitional formations (*saṃskāra*). From volitional formations as a requisite condition comes consciousness. From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form (*nāma-rūpa*). From name-and-form as a requisite condition come the six sense bases. From the six sense bases as a requisite condition comes contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging. From clinging as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of suffering.

"Now what is *aging and death*? Whatever aging, decrepitude, brokenness, graying, wrinkling, decline of life-force, weakening of the faculties of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called aging. Whatever deceasing, passing away, breaking up, disappearance, dying, death, completion of time, breakup of the aggregates, casting off of the body, interruption in the life faculty of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called death.

"And what is *birth*? Whatever birth, taking birth, descent, coming-to-be, coming-forth, appearance of aggregates, and acquisition of [sense] bases of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called birth.

"And what is *becoming*? These three are becoming: sensual becoming, form becoming, and formless becoming. This is called becoming.

"And what is *clinging*? These four are clinging: sensuality clinging, view clinging, precept and practice clinging, and doctrine of self clinging. This is called clinging.

"And what is *craving*? These six are classes of craving: craving for forms, craving for sounds, craving for smells, craving for tastes, craving for tactile sensations, craving for mental phenomena. This is called craving.

"And what is *feeling*? These six are classes of feeling: feeling born from eye-contact, feeling born from ear-contact, feeling born from nose-contact, feeling born from tongue-contact, feeling born from body-contact, feeling born from mind-contact. This is called feeling.

"And what is *contact*? These six are classes of contact: eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, mind-contact. This is called contact.

"And what are *the six sense bases*? These six are sense bases: the eye-faculty, the ear-faculty, the nose-faculty, the tongue-faculty, the body-faculty, the mind-faculty. These are called the six sense bases.

"And what is *name-and-form*? Feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention: This is called name. The four great elements and the form dependent on the four great elements: This is called form. This name and this form are called name-and-form.

"And what is *consciousness*? These six are classes of consciousness: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, mind-consciousness. This is called consciousness.

"And what are *volitional formations*? These three are volitional formations: bodily formations, verbal formations, mental formations. These are called volitional formations.

"And what is *ignorance*? Not knowing suffering, not knowing the origination of suffering, not knowing the cessation of suffering, not knowing the way of practice leading to the cessation of suffering: This is called ignorance.

"Now from the remainderless fading and cessation of that very ignorance comes the cessation of volitional formations. From the cessation of volitional formations comes the cessation of consciousness. From the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name-and-form. From the cessation of name-and-form comes the cessation of the six sense bases. From the

cessation of the six sense bases comes the cessation of contact. From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling. From the cessation of feeling comes the cessation of craving. From the cessation of craving comes the cessation of clinging. From the cessation of clinging comes the cessation of becoming. From the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, then aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering."

[Translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu]