

A photograph of a beach scene. In the foreground, there is a sandy beach with some driftwood and small green plants. In the middle ground, a small wooden boat is on the water. The background is a hazy horizon line.

PATICCASAMUPPĀDA

PRACTICAL DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

BUDDHADĀSA BHIKKHU



Echoes from the Garden of Liberation #03

PATICCASAMUPPĀDA: PRACTICAL DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Translated from the Thai [คำชี้แจงเกี่ยวกับการศึกษาเรื่องปฏิจจสมุปบาท]

by Steve Schmidt

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« *The gift of Dhamma surpasses all other gifts.* »

Anumodanā

To all Dhamma Comrades, those helping to spread Dhamma:

Break out the funds to spread Dhamma to let Faithful Trust flow,
Broadcast majestic Dhamma to radiate long-living joy.

Release unexcelled Dhamma to tap the spring of Virtue,
Let safely peaceful delight flow like a cool mountain stream.

Dhamma leaves of many years sprouting anew, reaching out,
To unfold and bloom in the Dhamma Centers of all towns.

To spread lustrous Dhamma and in hearts glorified plant it,
Before long, weeds of sorrow, pain, and affliction will flee.

As Virtue revives and resounds throughout Thai society,
All hearts feel certain love toward those born, aging, and dying.

Congratulations and Blessings to all Dhamma Comrades,
You who share Dhamma to widen the people's prosperous joy.

Heartiest appreciation from Buddhadāsa Indapañño,
Buddhist Science ever shines beams of Bodhi long-lasting.

In grateful service, fruits of merit and wholesome successes,
Are all devoted in honor to Lord Father Buddha.

Thus may the Thai people be renowned for their Virtue,
May perfect success through Buddhist Science awaken their hearts.

May the King and His Family live long in triumphant strength,
May joy long endure throughout this our world upon earth.

from

Buddha dāsa Indapañño

Mokkhabalārāma

Chaiya, 2nd November 2530

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Preface

‘Paṭiccasamuppāda is a profound teaching,’ said the Buddha – so profound, in fact, that most people *‘are not able to penetrate the law of dependent origination.’* The Buddha’s words to Ānanda are as true today as they were 2,500 years ago. *Paṭiccasamuppāda*, which is the heart of Buddhism, is difficult to see clearly and, thus, has become the center of grave misunderstandings and distortions. In this book, the Venerable Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu digs up the roots of these misunderstandings and turns them up to the critical light of scrutiny. These roots can be traced back to the early days of Buddhism, but find their first written expression 1,500 years ago in the commentaries of Buddhagosa.

Because much of the Theravadan orthodoxy has been built, so to speak, on the shoulders of Buddhagosa, misunderstanding about *paṭiccasamuppāda* has become the norm and the truth has become obscured. Briefly stated, Buddhagosa explains that dependent origination covers three lifetimes – the past, present and future. Ignorance and volitional activity in a past life give rise to this present life, in which the results of those past deeds are experienced. This process conditions our present life defilements (craving and attachment) which, in their turn, lead to birth and suffering in a future life. The Venerable Buddhādāsa takes a close look at this explanation and raises some important questions: if the

Buddha taught *anattā* (non-selfhood), then what is it that migrates from life to life? And, if the causes of suffering are in one lifetime and the results in another, then how are we to practice in a way that leads to benefits here and now?

Correct understanding of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is important to us because, by showing that the ‘I’ concept arises and passes away dependent on various conditions, it frees us of the wrong view that there is a permanent self. No such self exists, but only the ‘self’ idea, which arises from moment to moment in the mind darkened by ignorance. The ignorant mind is deluded by these momentary arisings and becomes enchanted with the illusion of a permanent self. As the Venerable Buddhādāsa points out, however, the Buddha taught dependent origination to help us see through this illusion. To teach that *paṭiccasamuppāda* covers three lifetimes is to imply the existence of something that passes from one life to the next. This implication is contrary to the Buddha’s teaching and, in fact, undermines it.

The strength of the Venerable Buddhādāsa’s approach to this subject is that he bypasses the commentaries and returns to the original Pāli scriptures as his source, always with an eye to making the teaching practical, here and now, in the lives of people seriously interested in ending suffering. *Paṭiccasamuppāda* is nothing more than a detailed analysis of suffering, its arising, its ceasing and the way leading to its ceasing. By understanding dependent origination, we see clearly how to practice: mindfulness at the moment of sense

contact delivers wisdom and prevents suffering from arising. The causes of the arising and extinguishing of suffering exist in the present moment. When ignorance clouds the mind, suffering arises; when mindfulness and wisdom govern the six sense doors (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind), suffering ceases. This is a *paṭiccasamuppāda* that we can practice, because both the causes and effects exist here and now, where we can get at them. If the cause of suffering is in a past life, however, as Buddhagosa claims, then freedom from suffering in this life is impossible, because its causes are beyond our reach.

This book is essential to all serious students of Buddhism. It clears up deeply entrenched misunderstandings regarding *paṭiccasamuppāda* and brings us back to the Buddha's original teaching, as found in the Pāli scriptures. We offer our thanks to the translator, Steven Schmidt, and the Sublime Life Mission for allowing us to reprint this valuable book. May it help to clear up the confusion that surrounds this important teaching and, by showing clearly the nature of suffering, may it help us all to be free and to discover lasting peace.

The Dhamma Study and Practice Group

Translator's Foreword

The present work is a translation of a talk delivered by the Venerable Buddhadāsa in 1978¹ which was then incorporated as an explanatory study guide to the Venerable Buddhadāsa's massive compilation of the Pāli Tipiṭaka references to *paṭiccasamuppāda*, entitled *Paṭiccasamuppāda in the Words of the Buddha* which was first published in 1979 and re-printed in 1981.

Editing of the original text has been quite minimal, usually eliminating frequent repetitions appearing within a given paragraph which are typical of the oral tradition followed by the Venerable Buddhadāsa.

Since it is expected that the majority of people who will read this translation will be those already familiar with Buddhism, the notes accompanying the translation have been kept to a minimum. This is not to say that someone with no background at all to Buddhism should not attempt to read this work. But the casual reader is advised to reflect upon the Buddha's own assertion that *paṭiccasamuppāda*, or dependent origination, is a terribly complex, intricate and subtle matter. The first twenty-five pages of this translation, in particular, may appear rather daunting to the person with no previous understanding of Buddhist theory and practice.

¹ [A talk given on 12th June 1971, to which the author added a several-page-long written introduction in 1978.] *All notes in square brackets are added by the publisher.*

But since dependent origination is, in fact, the essence of the Buddha's practical teaching, I strongly urge all serious students of self development, all people who are determined to confront and deal with those existential problems of daily life which make life seem not worth living, to take the time and make the effort to study, reflect upon and practice the teaching of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, the Middle Way of Right Living which leads to release and wisdom.

The Venerable Buddhadāsa refers sometimes to the Pāli Scriptures. His own source of reference was the Thai script Pāli language edition published during the reign of the Seventh Monarch of the Chakri Dynasty, the present ruling family of the Kingdom of Thailand. My translations of these texts were done directly from the Venerable Buddhadāsa's Thai translations. [...]

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to all those who helped and encouraged me in this effort. First of all, I thank those innumerable people who offered their support, encouragement and advice who are too many to name individually. A word of special gratitude, of course, must be offered to the Venerable Buddhadāsa for his wise teachings and gentle and kind encouragements. To Ajahn Poh, the Venerable Buddhadhammo, I also offer my special thanks. His constant looking after my material as well as my spiritual needs while staying at Suan Mokkh has been one of the true joys of my life. Last, but not least, I would like to offer my thanks to Khun Manit, my landlord in Bangkok who kindly

donated office space during the last month while I rushed to prepare the final copy for the offset printers.

May all beings come to see the impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless nature of the world and thereby come to know true and lasting Light, Purity and Peace.

Steve Schmidt

Bangkok

April 1986 (2529)

Paṭiccasamuppāda

Practical Dependent Origination

Introduction

It was my original intention to write a detailed explanation for the study of the book *Paṭiccasamuppāda in the Words of the Buddha*.¹ But in the end, for reasons of health as well as other matters, I was not able to do so. As it happened, there was a talk I had given on another occasion² which more or less fit just the purposes I wanted. That talk also appears in another book of this series.³ Yet another book of the present series which I would like to refer you to is the one entitled *Idappaccayatā*⁴ (The Law of Conditionality). It will prove quite useful for those studying *paṭiccasamuppāda*⁵ because, in fact, they are the very same thing. The only difference is that *idappaccayatā* is broader

¹ [ปฏิจจนสมปทาจากพระโอษฐ์ ชุตตรมโฆชน หมายเลข ๔, first published in 1978.]

² [หลักปฏิบัติ ดับทุกข์ โดยอย่าให้กระแสปฏิจจนสมปทาเกิดได้, a talk given in 1971 at Suan Mokkhabalārāma.]

³ [โอसारัตถัพพธรรม ชุตตรมโฆชน หมายเลข ๑๓. ก, first published in 1974.]

⁴ [อัมปิปัจจยตา ชุตตรมโฆชน หมายเลข ๑๒, first published in 1973.]

⁵ [For further study in English, see *Under the Bodhi Tree: Buddha's Original Vision of Dependent Co-arising* by the same author, and its *Companion*.]

in scope. In any case, the student of *paṭiccasamuppāda* should use these explanatory notes as a starting point for his or her study.

The study of the law of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) is important and necessary for followers of the Buddha as is shown in the following passage from the Pāli Scriptures:

There are two doctrines (*dhamma*) well-taught by the Exalted One who knows, the Awakened One who is free from all defilements and perfectly enlightened by Himself. All bhikkhus should study these two doctrines well and there should be no division or contention concerning them. In this way, this holy life (religion)⁶ will long stand firm. Those two doctrines will be for the great benefit of all mankind, for the well-being of the world, and for the advantage of great beings and human beings. What are those two doctrines? They are:

- (1) Skillful understanding concerning the sense bases (*āyatana-kusalatā*), and
- (2) Skillful understanding concerning the law of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda-kusalatā*).⁷

This passage shows us that we should try to help each other to understand correctly dependent origination for our own benefit, for the benefit of the religion and for the well-being of all great beings and humans. Most especially, we must strive for mutual

⁶ The Pāli word is *brahmacariya*, which literally means 'the conduct, behavior, or state of life of a *brahma*.' 'Brahma' is the name of the supreme Vedic deity. Thus it implies the highest and noblest kind of life, the kind of life for which religion, in the best sense of the word, is ideally suited.

⁷ [Saṅgīti Sutta DN 33]

understanding in order to eliminate divisive bickering amongst the followers of the Buddha, which leads to problems in putting dependent origination into practice. We must take advantage of any means which help us to arrive at that mutual understanding. This present exposition is not intended to establish complex argumentative conditions. Rather, this work is offered in the hope of helping to eliminate any contentiousness which may exist among teachers and students of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, as well as for any other groups of people who may be interested in studying this doctrine.

The law of dependent origination is a deeply profound subject. It may properly be called the heart or the essence of Buddhism, so it necessarily gives rise to problems which in turn become a danger to Buddhism insofar as the followers of the Buddha will derive no advantage from this essential teaching. When the Venerable Ānanda said to the Buddha that he, Ānanda, thought that dependent origination was an easy and a shallow matter, the Buddha replied:

Ānanda! Ānanda! Don't say such a thing! Don't ever say such a thing! *Paṭiccasamuppāda* is a profound teaching. Its characteristic feature is that it is profound. The various groups of sentient beings don't understand what we teach about this; they are not able to penetrate the law of dependent origination and so their minds are befuddled just like a ball of twine which becomes all tangled up and knotted; just like a disorderly pile of tangled pieces of short threads; just like an untended thicket of grass or reeds which become all interwoven and entangled – just so are those beings ensnared and

unable to free themselves from the wheel of existence, the conditions of suffering, the states of hell and ruin.⁸

This passage shows us that dependent origination is not a play thing. Rather, we must make a firm resolution and utilize our intellectual faculties to their fullest in the diligent study of *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

The average person, the ordinary householder, believes that he possesses a personal, lasting self. Such people know only the doctrine of eternalism: the doctrine that mind and/or body is eternal (*sassata-ditṭhi*). These people will find the law of dependent origination too profound to understand easily. For such people, *paṭiccasamuppāda* becomes a matter of deeply convoluted philosophy that gets all tangled up like the ball of twine mentioned in the sutta. These people will spend much effort in debate and dispute, just as with the blind men who could come to no agreement concerning what an elephant was like because each had felt only a single different part of the elephant.

For the *arahant*, however, a fully enlightened person, dependent origination becomes like second nature or plain science, similar to something which can be casually examined while resting in the palm of one's hand. This knowledge of the enlightened person does not depend on a knowledge of names or words. What this means is that the *arahant*, or enlightened person, knows things so well that he doesn't grasp at, cling to or become attached to anything

⁸ [Nidāna Sutta SN 12.60]

at all. He has no craving or desire (*taṇhā*), or attachment (*upādāna*), no matter what kind of emotions beset him, because the enlightened person has completely perfected mindfulness. Such a person can completely extinguish suffering by following the order of extinction of dependent origination. But it is not necessary that an enlightened person know the names of the eleven conditions of dependent origination. He may not be able to teach anyone about the law of dependent origination in detail or may not even be able to say anything at all about it.

This is what is meant when it is said that *paṭiccasamuppāda* is a deeply profound matter. Dependent origination is so profound that even the Perfectly Enlightened Buddha had to use his full intellectual faculties to discover it and to set out a teaching suitable to all people. Nonetheless, it is still a difficult matter to understand, which is why the Buddha, just after his enlightenment, was at first inclined not to teach it to anyone at all. This was so because the Buddha saw that it might be a wasted effort – there would be so few capable of understanding such a difficult teaching. But finally, the strength of his compassion compelled the Buddha to bear with the difficult task of teaching this deeply profound doctrine of dependent origination. He felt compassion for those few beings in the world who would be able to understand this teaching. We must appreciate the great problem which faced the Buddha in trying to explain this teaching, which is not easily understood by ordinary people.

One profound fact concerning this matter is that, in the difficult task of making his teaching known, the Buddha had to use two

languages at the same time. He spoke in the language of relative truth in order to teach morals to people still befuddled with the idea of eternalism – those who feel that they are selves, that *they* possess things. Such people feel this way to the point that they habitually cling to these ideas and become attached to them. The Buddha, however, also spoke in the language of ultimate truth in order to teach those who had only a little dust in their eyes so that they could come to an understanding of absolute reality (*paramattha-dhamma*). The teaching of absolute reality was designed to free people from their long-held and cherished theory of eternalism. So it is that there are these two kinds of language.

As far as dependent origination is concerned, it is a matter of ultimate truth and must be spoken of in terms of the language of ultimate truth. It is the complete opposite of morality. How can it be, then, that dependent origination can be spoken about by using the language of relative truth which is used in talking about morality? If the common language is used, then it is not possible to speak about dependent origination, and if the language of ultimate truth is used, listeners who lack right understanding will interpret everything in terms of the language of relative truth and so not understand anything at all, or they will understand incorrectly. They may understand the exact opposite of what is meant. This is the source of the difficulty in teaching about the law of dependent origination, which at first led the Buddha to be disinclined to teach what he had discovered in his enlightenment. Even after the Buddha decided to teach, there was still misunderstanding, as in the case of Bhikkhu

Sāti, the fisherman's son,⁹ and there is still misunderstanding among all of us at present. In teaching, speaking about and discussing *paṭiccasamuppāda*, we tend to do so with misunderstanding. Having been taught, we are not able to put it into practice, or we practice more and more incorrectly as we go along. So it is, that dependent origination is a difficult topic to teach.

When teaching morality, it is necessary to speak as if sentient beings existed, as if persons, selves, and even the Tathāgata,¹⁰ existed. It is even necessary, in teaching morality, to go so far as to teach that people should make merit, so that when they die they will receive the results of that merit. When teaching the ultimate truth, however, the Buddha spoke as if sentient beings, persons, even the Tathāgata himself, did not exist. There are only those interdependent events which arise for a moment and then pass away. Each of those events is called *paṭicca-samuppanna-dhamma* (an event which arises by reason of the law of conditionality) and they are called *paṭicca-samuppāda* when they are connected together in a chain or string of events. There is no way to say 'who' or 'self' in any of those moments, even the present one, so there is no one born and no one to die and receive the results of past deeds (*kamma*¹¹), as in the case of the theory of eternalism. Moreover, it is not a matter of dying and disappearing altogether, as in the theory of annihilationism (*uccheda-diṭṭhi*), because there is no one to be annihilated after this

⁹ [See p. 29.]

¹⁰ 'Tathāgata': lit., 'one who has thus gone.' Used by the Buddha when speaking of himself and hence generally used when referring to the Buddha.

¹¹ [Pāli: *kamma*; Sanskrit: *karma*]

moment. Being here now is dependent origination of the middle way of ultimate truth, and it goes together with the Noble Eightfold Path – the middle way which can be used even in matters of morality.

Usually, ordinary people cling to the way of morality in order to have minds that are peaceful because of the goodness that they do. This state can last for as long as the causes and conditions of their goodness do not change. But when those causes and conditions change, or manifest their uncertainty and selflessness (*anattā*) and become dissatisfactory (*dukkha*), because clinging has arisen, then a knowledge of morality alone will not be able to serve as a refuge, and so it becomes necessary to turn to ultimate truth, such as dependent origination, in order to alleviate the feeling of dissatisfaction which becomes greater and greater. That is, it is necessary to have a mind which is above the idea of having a ‘self’ or of anything ‘belonging to a self,’ a mind which is even above the ideas of good and bad, merit and demerit, pleasure and pain. In this way it is possible to completely eliminate dissatisfaction or suffering. Teaching *paṭiccasamuppāda* in such a way that there is a ‘self’ persisting over a series of lives is contrary to the principle of dependent origination and contrary to the principles of the Buddha’s teaching, which teaches people to eliminate the feeling of ‘self,’ to be completely above the feeling of being a ‘self.’ Therefore dependent origination is in no way concerned with morality, which must depend upon a theory of eternalism, a theory that depends upon the existence of a ‘self.’

In any case, we can say that there may be two kinds of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. The first kind is inflated or incorrectly explained so that it cannot be practiced. Such an incorrectly explained theory has been taught for a thousand years. The second or correctly explained kind of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is explained according to the Buddha's intentions. It can be practiced here and now. Results can be had here and now. This second law of dependent origination teaches us to be careful whenever there is contact between the senses and their objects. Feeling must not be allowed to brew up or give rise to craving. Indeed, such practice is being done in many places without calling it *paṭiccasamuppāda* and the results are always satisfying. People interested in this matter, however, must take care to follow the correct version of the Buddha's dependent origination since there are these two versions mixed up with each other. The real dependent origination of the Buddha is not annihilationism, which, as people who like to argue are quick to point out, leads people to not doing good, not accepting responsibility, or not loving their country. Furthermore, the real dependent origination of the Buddha is not eternalism, which causes people to become obsessed with the 'self' or country or anything which is seen as 'me' or 'mine.'

The law of dependent origination is not simply a matter of inflated study and memorizing as most people tend to say. Rather, it must be a matter of skillful practice: mindfulness must be present to control feelings when sense contact arises. Craving and attachment must not be allowed to arise, and in this practice, it is not necessary

to use the word *paṭiccasamuppāda*, which is merely a very technical term.

One thing that we must help each other to be careful about is not to explain dependent origination, the heart of Buddhism, in terms of animism, which teaches that there is a mind or a spirit or a soul or some such thing which is like a ghost – a ‘self’ that is born or is in the body all the time after birth. In this age of atoms, space exploration, and ping-pong diplomacy, there are university students and educated Westerners who would laugh at such a concept of the ‘ghost in the machine.’ Let us rigorously help Thai Buddhists save face. Don’t take the teaching of morality in the language of relative truth, the language of eternalism, and mix it with the teaching of ultimate truth, dependent origination, which uses the language of the highest right views. The practice of dependent origination is the middle way of ultimate truth. In the Suttas,¹² it is said that the highest right view, supramundane right view, is the view that is neither eternalism nor annihilationism, which can be had by the power of understanding dependent origination. Dependent origination is in the middle between the ideas of having a ‘self’ and the total lack of ‘self.’ It has its own principle: *‘Because there is this, there is that; because this is not, that is not.’* It is this principle which makes Buddhism neither eternalism nor annihilationism. Look carefully. Don’t teach a new Buddhist theory of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Don’t teach Hinduism or Brahmanism. For eternalists there can be no such thing as the law of dependent origination because it is the exact opposite

¹² [See Avijjāpaccaya Sutta SN 12.35.]

of their theory. To teach dependent origination in terms of eternalism is to destroy dependent origination. This is what we must be careful about.

If we examine the original Pāli scriptures, the teachings as given by the Buddha himself, we will see that they are clearly divided into matters of morality, for those still attached to an eternalist view, and matters of ultimate truth, which are intended to eliminate both the eternalist and the annihilationist points of view. Later on, during the time that the commentaries were being composed, there arose a widespread tendency to explain matters of ultimate truth in terms of the eternalist theory, including such matters as *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Whenever the opportunity arose, explanations were given in terms of the same person who died. Sometimes everything was explained in terms of gross materialism. For example, hell was explained as a place beneath the ground and a place that a person went to only after death. No reference was made to the hell that arises in the flow of dependent origination, a more fearful kind of hell which is present in this life. If any reference was made to hell as arising from feeling according to the law of dependent origination, it was usually located under the earth after death.

In studying dependent origination, it is necessary to take the original Pāli scriptures as a foundation. Don't surrender to the commentaries with your eyes and ears closed. Don't submit yourself one hundred percent to later works, such as the *Visuddhimagga*. Indeed, it is believed that the author of the *Visuddhimagga* is the same person who collected all the commentaries together, so that

total blind acceptance of the commentaries will allow only one voice to be heard, giving rise to an intellectual monopoly. We must guard our rights and use them in a way consistent with the advice given by the Buddha in the *Kālāma Sutta*¹³ and according to the principle of *mahāpadesa* as given in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*.¹⁴ According to this principle of *mahāpadesa*, anything which is not in accord with the major part of the Dhamma-Vinaya (the teaching and the discipline) should be regarded as heard incorrectly, remembered incorrectly, explained incorrectly, or taught incorrectly, as the case may be. In this way, we will be protected against later works which slip into eternalism. With the principle of *mahāpadesa* in hand, we can choose what is correct from the large pile of rubbish which has been smoldering in those works, and we will find a lot that is correct. It's not that there is nothing of value at all in the commentaries, but that we must be rigorous in choosing what to accept, using the Buddha's own guidelines to separate out what is not correct. A recent scholar, Somdet Phra Maha Samana Chao Krom Phraya Vajirañāṇavarorasa, advised that we should investigate carefully, as

¹³ *Kālāma Sutta*, a discourse appearing in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, which the Buddha delivered to the people of the Kālāma clan when they asked him how to distinguish correct teaching from among the mass of various teachings being offered by different monks, ascetics, philosophers, and yogis. The Buddha's answer constitutes a declaration of intellectual independence. Any teaching, he said, should not be accepted as true for any of the following ten reasons: (1) hearsay; (2) tradition; (3) rumor; (4) accepted scriptures; (5) surmise; (6) axiom; (7) logical reasoning; (8) a feeling of affinity for the matter being pondered; (9) the ability or attractiveness of the person offering the teaching; (10) the fact that the person offering the teaching is 'my' teacher. Rather, the Buddha counselled that a teaching should be accepted as true when one knows by direct experience that such is the case. [Kesamutti Sutta AN 3.65]

¹⁴ [Mahāparinibbāna Sutta DN 16]

mentioned above, even the carefully memorized Pāli dissertations. I have been a faithful disciple of his all along. As far as *paṭiccasamuppāda* is concerned, there is weighty evidence to dismiss both the theory of eternalism and the theory of annihilationism. To teach the law of dependent origination with reference to one individual spanning three lives cannot be accepted according to the principle of *mahāpadesa*.

The following principles are concerned with dependent origination:

(1) Every time there is sense contact without wisdom concerning liberation, there will be becoming (*bhava*) and birth (*jāti*). To put it another way: when there is only ignorance present at the point of sense contact, the law of dependent origination is put into motion.

(2) In the language of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, the words ‘individual,’ ‘self,’ ‘we,’ and ‘they’ do not appear. There is no ‘person’ who has suffering or extinguishes suffering or flows about in the whirlpool of rebirth, as Bhikkhu Sāti, the fisherman’s son, held.

(3) In the language of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, the word ‘happiness’ does not appear. Only ‘suffering’ and the ‘complete cessation or extinguishing of suffering’ appear. This is so because the law of dependent origination does not intend to talk about happiness, which is a corner stone of eternalism. In the language of relative truth, however, it can be accepted that the absence of suffering is

happiness. But this is only useful in the teaching of morality, such as when it is said that ‘Nibbāna is the highest happiness.’

(4) The kind of rebirth consciousness (*paṭisandhi-viññāṇa*) which is a ‘self’ does not appear in the language of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Therefore, the word ‘consciousness’ (*viññāṇa*) in dependent origination is taken to refer to the six kinds of consciousness which arise with sense contact. But if you try to pull a fast one and call this sixfold consciousness ‘rebirth consciousness,’ it can also be accepted as part of the sixfold sense base analysis which gives rise to mentality-materiality, the six sense bases, contact, feeling, becoming, and birth on to the end of the process of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. But the Buddha never called anything ‘rebirth consciousness’ and he never explained it as such because it was his intention that we view consciousness in the usual way. The word ‘rebirth consciousness’ only came to be used in later works and it re-introduces the theory of eternalism in an indirect way. This is a corruption of Buddhism which will nibble away at Buddhism until it is gone. We have six kinds of consciousness as usually understood and we have dependent origination for which it is not at all necessary to bring in the word ‘rebirth consciousness.’

(5) In the process of dependent origination there are only *paṭiccasamuppāda-dhamma*, that is, events which depend on other events to arise, and which arise for just a moment in order to condition the arising of a further event. This symptom of conditioning is called dependent origination. Don’t think in terms of ‘self.’ Don’t be an eternalist. And don’t think in terms of the opposite

of 'self' so that there is nothing at all, which is annihilationism. Rather, stay in the middle, the middle way, where there are only events which arise because of previous conditions.

(6) In terms of *kamma*, *paṭiccasamuppāda* seeks to show *kamma* which is neither black nor white, which is neither the *kamma* of evil or good deeds. This is possible because *paṭiccasamuppāda* is the end of both black and white *kamma*. This is done by seeing all three, merit, demerit, and imperturbability (*āneñja*), as being characterized by suffering. It is necessary to be above all three of these in order to completely extinguish suffering. In this way there is no place for attachment to arise in the sense of a 'self' or a theory of eternalism.

(7) A principle of Buddhism is that of *sandittiko*: here and now, the actual present reality. Interpreting *paṭiccasamuppāda* in such a way that one turn of its wheel covers three lives – according to the language of relative truth – is not in keeping with this principle. Each and every one of the eleven links of dependent origination must always be in the present for it to be dependent origination as taught by the Buddha.

(8) The various suttas which discuss *paṭiccasamuppāda* talk about it in many different ways. There is, for example:

- (a) the direct order (*anuloma*) from ignorance to suffering;
- (b) the reverse order (*paṭiloma*) from suffering to ignorance;
- (c) the way of cessation which may be done in both the forward and the reverse orders;

(d) the way starting with sensation and then giving rise to consciousness, contact, and feeling. This is done without mentioning ignorance;

(e) the way starting with feeling and ending with suffering;

(f) finally, there is perhaps the strangest way of mixing the way of arising with the way of cessation at the same time. That is, it is explained that ignorance gives rise to mental formations, consciousness, mentality-materiality, up to craving, and then it changes to the cessation of craving, attachment, up to the cessation of suffering. The implication seems to be that, even if dependent origination has gone up to the point of craving, it is still possible that mindfulness will arise to stop the arising of clinging and, strange to say, ‘flip over’ into the stream of the cessation of suffering.

If we take all the discourses that deal with dependent origination and examine them together, it will be clearly seen that it is not at all necessary for dependent origination to cover three lifetimes (according to the language of relative truth).

(9) *Paṭiccasamuppāda* is a momentary and sudden (*khaṇikā-vāda*) matter, not an eternal matter. Therefore, the word *jāti* (to be born) must refer to the birth in the moment of one revolution of dependent origination in the daily life of ordinary people, which is to say when mindfulness is absent and when there is sense contact as explained in point (1) above. It’s easy to know: when greed, anger, or delusion arise, then the ‘self’ is born in one ‘life’ already. If anyone still likes to talk in terms of ‘this life’ and ‘the next life,’ that’s all right,

if 'life' is understood in this momentary sense. Such language is in accord with reality and the principle of being in the present. Moreover, it is more useful than talking in terms of the language of relative truth (i.e., each birth means issuing forth from the mother's womb) which is not the language of *paṭiccasamuppāda* which reflects the momentary. The word 'birth' as used in the language of relative truth will be an obstacle to understanding. We should preserve that sense of 'next life' which is within our reach and which can be dealt with as we want. Such a 'next life' is better than one which we can't locate or see.

(10) Mere talking about *paṭiccasamuppāda* is philosophy in its worst sense. It is not necessary and it doesn't have a lot of value in itself. True dependent origination is the practice of not allowing suffering to arise by establishing awareness at the six sense doors when there is sense contact. This is done by bringing the faculties of mental development¹⁵ to bear on the six sense doors so that the taints (*āśava*)¹⁶ do not arise. This is dependent origination perfected in the order of cessation. Even if this process were called by a different name, it would still be the same thing. This kind of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is called the right way (*sammā-paṭipadā*).

¹⁵ There are five faculties of mental development: faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

¹⁶ *Āśava* literally means 'that which flows into.' These are deep-seated mental tendencies which, if not eradicated, taint the mind and so allow suffering to arise. These taints are listed as being sensuality, existence, views, and ignorance.

All of the above are principles to use in testing to see what the real dependent origination is. Briefly put, the real *paṭiccasamuppāda* is a practical matter that leads directly to the cessation of suffering. Suffering arises because once there is a defilement (*kilesa*), then there will be one turn of the wheel of dependent origination. It may seem as if there are two rounds of birth because when an outer sense base comes into contact with an inner sense base, then consciousness arises; if, at this moment, ignorance is present, there arises consciousness, mentality-materiality, and the sense bases, which heretofore, it can be said, did not exist because they were asleep. The consciousness at this point is what the eternalists call *paṭisandhi-viññāṇa* (rebirth consciousness). When the power of contact causes feeling to arise, then defilement (*kilesa*) will arise directly. Grasping and attachment will give rise to becoming and birth, which is another birth – the birth of the ‘self’ idea, ‘I’ or ‘mine,’ which will taste the fruit of suffering in the form of problems which arise from birth, old age, death, sadness, lamentation, suffering, grief, tribulation, or, as these are collectively known, the five aggregates of clinging (*pañcupādāna-khandha*)¹⁷ which are suffering. In one turning of the cycle of dependent origination there seems to be two births as explained above, but it is not necessary to die and enter a coffin to die or be born. That kind of death is concerned with the body

¹⁷ *Pañcupādāna-khandha* (the Five Aggregates of Clinging) is an analysis of mind-body into five groups or aggregates of phenomena which, when clung to as ‘me’ or ‘mine,’ give rise to suffering. They are (1) the body group; (2) the feeling group; (3) the perception or recognition group; (4) the mental concocting or thought group; and (5) the consciousness group.

and the language of relative truth, not with *paṭiccasamuppāda* as taught by the Buddha.

Clearly, the benefit from dependent origination intended by the Buddha was to banish the theory of selfhood, or to eliminate the importance of the ‘self.’ Simply analyzing the five aggregates to see that neither this aggregate nor that one is ‘self’ is not sufficient. It is also necessary to show that these aggregates only arise when all eleven conditions of *paṭiccasamuppāda* arise, according to the cause and effect principle: ‘*Because there is this, there is that; because this is not, then that is not.*’ This will enable us to see selflessness more clearly – selflessness in the defilements, in deeds (*kamma*) and in karmic results (*vipāka*); or, to put it another way, selflessness in every cause and effect without any interval. If this is not clear from the elements of dependent origination, simply hearing the five aggregates explained as selfless may lead to a rather ridiculous vacillation by the bhikkhu described in the *Puṇṇama Sutta*,¹⁸ where it is said: ‘*Respected sirs! Have you heard that the five aggregates are selfless? How, then, can all the deeds (kamma) done by the selfless have an effect on the self?*’ This opinion indicates only a partial understanding of selflessness, namely that the five aggregates are selfless. That is easy enough to see. When it comes to karmic actions and results, however, there is a jump in taking those results as belonging to a ‘self,’ be it a result characterized by pleasure (*sukha*) or suffering (*dukkha*). This causes a kind of funny situation to arise.

¹⁸ [Puṇṇama Sutta SN 22.82]

But if there is a clear perception of the matter in terms of the elements of dependent origination, then such a mistake cannot arise.

For people who clearly understand the principle of dependent origination in a momentary sense, there will be nothing to take on the role of a 'self' in the story above. Nonetheless, it is still possible to have this life and the next life; there can be places of suffering such as hell, the animal state, the realms of hungry ghosts and fallen angels, the human state, heaven and the realms of the *brahmas*; even the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. All these can appear in the process of *paṭiccasamuppāda* by means of the constructive power of the volitional formations (*abhisankhāra*) of merit, demerit and imperturbability, which we have already discussed above. If that constructive power is successfully completed when feeling or birth arises, and if the mind is in a state of agitation and anxiety, then a state of being in hell arises.

In the third discourse of the Papāta Vagga, *Sacca Saṃyutta*,¹⁹ the Buddha called it *mahāpariḷāha* (great fever) hell, and in the second discourse of the *Devadaha Vagga*, *Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta*, he called it *chaphassāyatana* hell,²⁰ the hell belonging to the sixfold sense sphere wherein everything perceived through any of the six sense doors is seen as repulsive and a source of misery. These are real hells, more frightful than those hells beneath the ground that eternalists believe in. In the same discourse, further on, the Buddha similarly speaks of a heaven called *chaphassāyatana*, the heaven

¹⁹ [Mahāpariḷāha Sutta SN 56.43]

²⁰ [Khana Sutta SN 35.135]

belonging to the sixfold sense sphere wherein everything perceived through any of the six sense doors was seen as delightful and a source of pleasure. This is a real and true heaven, even more so than those heavens in the sky of the eternalists.

If feeling or suffering is full of fear, then the state of the *asura* (fallen angels) arises. If there is hunger to the point of death, then the state of *peta* (hungry ghosts) arises. If there is stupidity, then the state of being an animal arises; if there is just a modicum of suffering as with humans, then the state of being human arises; if there is sensual pleasure of a variety of kinds and intensities, then one of the heavenly states arises; when there is a sense of being filled with pleasurable feeling or an equanimous feeling as with the various *rūpa-jhānas* (fine-material states of meditative absorption), and *arūpa-jhānas* (immaterial states of meditative absorption), then one of the various *brahma* states arises. All of these states are more real than those talked about which will be experienced after entering the coffin. This misunderstanding has arisen because the meaning of *opapātika*²¹ in Buddhism has been misinterpreted.

In the order of cessation of dependent origination, we can find the real Buddha, the real Dhamma, and the real Sangha. They are *sandiṭṭhiko* (immanent, here and now) and *paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhi* (that which the knower knows for himself through direct experience). These three can be found more truly than in the triple

²¹ *Opapātika* literally means ‘accidental.’ It has been interpreted as meaning ‘spontaneously born,’ that is, not being born of parents. Traditionally, this term is used to refer to beings ‘born’ in heaven or hell.

gem of the eternalists which is absent-mindedly chanted to the point of meaninglessness – mere lip service. This life means the cycle of dependent origination; the next life means the next cycle of dependent origination, and so on. To consider it in this way is still to see this life and the next life in a way that is more real than life as understood by the eternalists, which is defined in terms of a physical birth from the mother's womb and entering the coffin. This definition comes from the language of relative truth, or the language of children still sucking their thumbs; it is not the language of the Buddha's teaching of *paṭīccasamuppāda*. This correct understanding is the best aid in teaching about the Buddha's *paṭīccasamuppāda*, not the *paṭīccasamuppāda* of the eternalist teachers, who made it up themselves in later ages and handed it down to the present.

There are many things which can help us to understand the fact that the language of dependent origination – the language of the highest Dhamma – is not the same as the language of the relative truth, which must always be diluted with a dash of eternalism. An example can be seen in *sammā-diṭṭhi* (right view). Right view which is spoken of in the language of relative truth for ordinary people says that there exists a present world and a future world, fathers and mothers, hell and heaven, deeds and the doers of deeds, this life and the future life. All of this is said according to the idiomatic vernacular, as understood and clung to by ordinary people.

When we come to the middle level of right view, however, as it manifests itself as one part of the Eightfold Path, we find that things are not talked about as on the lower level. There is only talk about

suffering and the complete cessation of suffering. There is no mention of the person who suffers, or of the person who extinguishes suffering, and yet this is also called ‘right view.’ Finally, we come to right view on the highest level – the level of the supramundane, which is the view that sees real dependent origination.²² There is no leaning to the view that there is a ‘self’ (*atthitā*) and there is no leaning to the view that there is no ‘self’ (*natthitā*), because the middle path is clearly seen, which is to say the flow of dependent origination is seen. That flow consists of the conditionality expressed by the phrase: ‘*Because there is this, that exists; because this is not, that does not exist.*’ There is nothing which is the ‘self’ or a ‘person’ in any sense, even if you talk about hell and heaven. This viewpoint is called ‘the real middle way’ because it doesn’t at all lean towards either eternalism or annihilationism.

Please notice that when speaking about ‘right view’ in the language of relative truth, it is said that there is a ‘self,’ but no ‘self’ can be found in the ‘right view’ in the language of ultimate truth or in the language of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, yet both of these are ‘right view’ in Buddhism. The language of relative truth is for the teaching of morality to ordinary people; the language of ultimate truth is for teaching absolute reality to those who have only a little dust in their eyes, so that they may become noble disciples. The Buddha had to speak in two languages like this all the time. *Paṭiccasamuppāda* is a matter of the highest ultimate truth; it is not a matter of morality. There is no ‘self’ travelling from life to life and no need to say that

²² [See Kaccānagotta Sutta SN 12.15.]

one cycle of *paṭiccasamuppāda* must cover three lifetimes, as understood in the language of relative truth.

Finally, we must consider for what purpose *paṭiccasamuppāda* was explained in terms of three lifetimes. It is explicitly understood that the teaching of dependent origination in this manner comes, clearly in parts and not so clearly in parts, from the *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhagosa. This is so because, as far as there is written evidence to judge from, there are no works older than the *Visuddhimagga* which offer such an explanation. My critical review, then, centers in on that work, or on the person believed to be the author of that work. But when stated accurately, my critical review here is not a criticism of Buddhagosa, because *paṭiccasamuppāda* is a part of the Buddhism that we must help each other to study and practice in the correct way – in a way that is useful. We are not satisfied with someone’s explanation which is seen to be inconsistent with the Buddha’s aim. Therefore, critical reviews don’t really criticize anything. They are merely showing the reasons for inviting a renewed examination of the original Pāli scriptures concerning *paṭiccasamuppāda*, so that each individual can know and see for himself how it is without believing me or anyone else, which would be contrary to the spirit of the *Kālāma Sutta*. To blindly accept something, as warned against in the ten headings of the *Kālāma Sutta*, cannot be useful at all. We must use what is called ‘the eye of the norm’ as a tool for making decisions about problems like this.²³

²³ [See Nakhasikhā Sutta SN 13.1.]

Suppose I were really to consider the merits and demerits of Buddhagosa critically. I would criticize the *Visuddhimagga* (The Path of Purity) of Buddhagosa in the sense that it is merely a collection of tales and an analysis of scriptural terms used to cover and enclose the book *Vimuttimaggā* (The Path of Liberation) which had already been written. Such a criticism could get blown up into a large affair, but at this time, all I want to do is to direct the interest of those of us who love the Buddha more than any other particular person back to the explanations of dependent origination given by the Buddha himself in so many places. I want to redirect this interest no matter how difficult it is. It is simply a matter of dedicating and sacrificing oneself in order to make that which the Buddha intended, to benefit all sentient beings, become an actual benefit to all sentient beings, rather than letting it sleep fruitlessly as it is now, good only for useless argumentation.

Since Buddhagosa's explanation is not composed of enough reason to withstand the method of proof according to the principles of the Buddha's teaching in many expositions of the Pāli Suttas, then, with the power of the *Kālāma Sutta*, for example, the lever of Buddhādāsa will raise up the log of Buddhagosa according to the power of mindfulness. Whether or not it delights anyone else, I take great delight in knowing that a correct view will come into the realm of study of dependent origination, which is the heart of Buddhism, as described in the *Saṅgīti Sutta*, *Dīgha Nikāya*, which was quoted at the beginning of this introduction.²⁴

²⁴ [See p.2.]

Paṭiccasamuppāda **Dependent Origination**

The word *paṭiccasamuppāda* is probably still a strange and uncommon one, not often heard by most people. But since it is probably not possible to use another word, we will continue using it. It behooves all of you to try to understand the word *paṭiccasamuppāda* to a greater and greater degree until it comes naturally to you. Those people who have become monks and studied Buddhism have heard this word a bit, but most people will be uncertain about it, which will cause them to become uninterested. In this way, they will not come to understand the most important teaching of Buddhism. I think that we should use this word until, finally, it becomes a matter that is understood by most people.

The reason we must talk about dependent origination is that it is the heart of Buddhism. When we talk about ‘the heart of Buddhism’ most people think of the Four Noble Truths. Please understand that *paṭiccasamuppāda* is the fullness of the Noble Truths, it is the full measure of the Noble Truths. So let us call it the ‘Great Noble Truth,’ the heart of Buddhism. Therefore, we must talk about it until it is perfectly understood.

Paṭiccasamuppāda is the same as the Noble Truths. If there is no one who understands the Noble Truths, then the enlightenment of the Buddha is in vain, it is of no use or value. This is even more so for

dependent origination, because it is the fullness of the Noble Truths. For this reason, we must speak about dependent origination, the Great Noble Truth.

Something that should be understood from the start is that dependent origination is inside all of us almost all of the time, yet we don't know about it. We must accept the blame; it is our mistake and not the fault of the Dhamma. Because we are not interested, we do not know about that which is in us almost all the time. A little further on I will explain how it is in us almost all the time.

Paṭiccasamuppāda is a subject matter which, if understood, may be used for the cessation of suffering. In another light, we must see it as our duty to try to understand dependent origination and to help each other to understand also. This is our duty. This is the Buddha's wish. If we can do this, then the Buddha's enlightenment will not have been in vain.

Now I would like to expound upon and clarify these ideas by raising the following topics: What is dependent origination about? Why must there be the subject of dependent origination? What is the purpose of dependent origination? What is the method of dependent origination?

(1) If someone asks, 'What is *paṭiccasamuppāda*?', the answer is: '*Paṭiccasamuppāda* is a detailed demonstration of how suffering arises and how suffering ceases.' It also demonstrates that the arising and ceasing of suffering is a matter of natural interdependence. It is not necessary for angels or holy things or anything else to help

suffering arise or cease. It is a matter of several levels of natural interdependence. When certain factors interdependently arise then suffering arises or ceases. The word *paṭicca* means ‘grounded on, concerning, because’ and the word *samuppāda* means ‘origin, arising, genesis, coming to be, production.’ That which is concerned with interdependent things arising simultaneously is called *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination).

Another aspect of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is that it demonstrates that there are no sentient beings, persons, selves, we’s or they’s here or floating around looking for a next life. Everything is just nature: arising, existing, passing away. If you understand *paṭiccasamuppāda*, you will understand that there are no sentient beings, persons, selves, we’s or they’s which can be called ‘I.’ When someone does not understand this, that person lets himself go according to normal feelings and thoughts which are under the sway of ignorance. Thus, that person feels or thinks that there are beings, persons, selves, we’s and they’s. This is one of the aims of dependent origination: to show how suffering arises and ceases in terms of interdependence, which need not make any reference at all to beings, persons, selves, we’s or they’s.

Furthermore, this interdependent arising and ceasing is explosive like a bolt of lightning – it is exceedingly fast. Let everyone observe carefully how explosively fast our thoughts can arise. Anger for example, arises swiftly and explosively. Such mental behavior is as fast as lightning and causes grief in our daily lives. This is straightforward *paṭiccasamuppāda*. If you can see this, you will

probably feel that it is most frightful and fearful. But if you can't see it, then it's as if there were nothing at all to be concerned with. If you ask, 'What is dependent origination at the most basic level of common language?', you can answer that it is mental behavior which causes suffering. It is violently swift like lightning, and it exists in our daily lives.

(2) The second question is 'Why must there be the subject of dependent origination?'

'The subject of dependent origination is necessary for study and practice.' Nowadays, very few people know about *paṭiccasamuppāda*. In addition, there is wrong view, just like the wrong view of Bhikkhu Sāti, the fisherman's son. This man, even though he was a monk, held the wrong view that there is '*...only this soul which floats along, which travels about – nothing else...*'²⁵ This monk held that the soul was a being or a person which floated around or moved about in the whirlpool of existence, birth and re-birth. This belief, that the soul is a being or a person, the occupier of the body which floats on in the cycle of birth and re-birth, arises because the truth of dependent origination is not known, thereby giving rise to wrong view.

The other monks tried to make Sāti renounce his view. When he would not, they reported to the Buddha who sent for him and asked him if, indeed, he held this view. Bhikkhu Sāti answered that he did, indeed, hold the view that '*...the soul and only the soul moves on....*' The Buddha then asked him what his soul was. He answered: '*Honored*

²⁵ [Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta MN 38]

One, the soul is that which can speak, that which can feel something, and that which tastes the fruit of both wholesome and unwholesome karmic action.'

Such a view is even more of a wrong view – namely, that the soul is that which can speak, which can feel and which, in the future, tastes the fruit of *kamma*.

Ordinary people who don't understand will ask why such a view is wrong, because most people believe that the soul exists just like Sāti believed. Ordinary people speak this way as a matter of habit, not knowing that it is wrong view.

Such talk is wrong view because it asserts that the soul is a definite and lasting thing. People believe that the soul is something that exists independently in itself, not simply a *paṭīccasamuppanna-dhamma* (conditioned event) which arises by reason of the law of conditionally, which is to say that it is merely the result of dependent origination.

In fact, the soul is merely a *paṭīccasamuppanna-dhamma*, which means that there is no 'self.' Rather, it depends on conditions which cause it to arise for just a moment. This is what it means to see the soul as a *paṭīccasamuppanna-dhamma*, which, according to dependent origination, demonstrates that there is no 'self.'

In the passage quoted above, Sāti, the fisherman's son, asserted that there is a 'self,' or that the soul is a 'self,' that it exists here and now and that it moves on to a future state. He said that it was the speaker of words, the feeler of various emotions, and the receiver of

the fruit of both wholesome and unwholesome karmic deeds. In other words, he held that there was a 'self,' which he called 'soul.'

So this is the reason that we must have *paṭiccasamuppāda*: because the majority of people generally hold this wrong view without knowing that it is a wrong view. We must have *paṭiccasamuppāda* in order to know the truth that there is no 'self.' The soul is not the 'self.' If there is a soul, it is merely a series of events (*paṭiccasamuppanna-dhamma*) which arise quickly one after the other and which are dependent on the law of conditionality. There is no 'self' anywhere. For this reason, it is necessary to study about *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

(3) The next question is, 'For what purpose must we know about *paṭiccasamuppāda*?'

The answer is, 'In order to be free from the wrong view that persons exist, that they are born, and that they exist according to *kamma*.' Moreover, we must know about dependent origination in order to completely extinguish suffering and give rise to right view. If you are still deceived into believing that the soul is 'you,' then you have wrong view and will experience suffering and will not be able to extinguish it. Therefore, it is necessary to know what the real dependent origination is all about. The soul is a *paṭiccasamuppanna-dhamma* which arises according to the law of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Suffering can be extinguished and extinguished completely by this right view or correct understanding. This is briefly explained in the Pāli scriptures:

...the soul is a *paṭīccasamuppanna-dhamma*, an event which arises dependent on other things. If these other things are absent, then there can be no arising of the soul...²⁶

This quote demonstrates that if the soul really existed, it would exist by itself, without having to depend on any condition. But it cannot exist by itself. There are only conditions which come together and give rise to it. But it is profoundly subtle, to the point of making us feel that it can think. It seems that this ‘soul’ is what enables this mind-body to do anything, to speak or anything else at all, so we misunderstand, thinking that there is some one thing which is the ‘self’ in our mind-body, which we call the soul. Dependent origination is useful in getting rid of this wrong view and, in so doing, completely extinguishing suffering.

(4) The next question is, ‘In what way can suffering be extinguished?’

The answer is the same as we have already seen in general. Namely, ‘the cessation of suffering can be obtained by correct practice – by correct living or right livelihood.’ Correct living is living in such a way that ignorance can be destroyed by wisdom, living in such a way that stupidity is destroyed by knowledge. Or to put it another way, correct living means having mindfulness all the time, especially when there is contact between the sense bases and sense objects. Please understand that ‘right livelihood’ means living with perfected mindfulness all the time, especially when there is sense

²⁶ Ibid.

contact. When you live in this way, stupidity cannot arise and it will be possible to eliminate ignorance. Only wisdom or knowledge will be left. Living in such a way that suffering cannot arise is right living.

The four main headings of *paṭiccasamuppāda* are:

- (1) When asked what *paṭiccasamuppāda* is, answer that it is a demonstration of suffering which arises as fast as lightning in our minds daily.
- (2) Why must we know about this? Because most people are foolish and don't know about it.
- (3) What is the value of knowing about it? Knowing about it brings correct knowledge and the extinguishing of suffering.
- (4) In what way can suffering be extinguished? By the method of correct practice following the principles of *paṭiccasamuppāda* – by being mindful at all times and not allowing the stream of dependent origination to arise.

All together, the above four connected answers are called dependent origination.

Incorrect Teaching Leads to the Inability to Practice

Now there is even a more serious problem than those mentioned so far, and that is that *paṭīccasamuppāda* is being taught in a way that is not correct according to the original Pāli scriptures (the sayings of the Buddha which appear in the original discourses). The original Pāli says one thing but the current teaching says another. The divergence here is that, in the Pāli, dependent origination is spoken of as a connected chain with eleven events or conditions composing one turn of the wheel of dependent origination. Nowadays, however, it is taught that these eleven events cover three lifetimes: the past life, the present life, and the future life. Dependent origination taught in this way cannot be practiced.

In the original Pāli scriptures, the eleven conditions are connected to form one chain of dependent origination, each time a defilement arises in our minds. Therefore, it is not necessary to cover a period of three lifetimes. It is not even necessary to cover a period of one life, one year, one month, or one day. In the flick of an eyelash, one complete cycle of dependent origination, together with its suffering, can come to pass. When *paṭīccasamuppāda* is incorrectly taught in this way, it becomes a useless thing, good only for amusing argumentation. But if dependent origination is correctly taught, as in the original Pāli scriptures, it can be a most beneficial thing, because

it is directly concerned with the immediate problems of daily life. So please pay attention to what follows.

In order to understand well, it is first necessary to know about the 11 links or steps in the chain of causation. They are:

- (1) With ignorance as a condition, mental concocting arises;
- (2) With mental concocting as a condition, consciousness arises;
- (3) With consciousness as a condition, mentality-materiality arises;
- (4) With mentality-materiality as a condition, the six sense bases arise;
- (5) With the six sense bases as a condition, contact arises;
- (6) With contact as a condition, feeling arises;
- (7) With feeling as a condition, craving arises;
- (8) With craving as a condition, attachment arises;
- (9) With attachment as a condition, becoming arises;
- (10) With becoming as a condition, birth arises;
- (11) With birth as a condition, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and tribulation arise. Thus the mass of suffering arises.

Count and see that it is a series of eleven interconnected events or conditions.

When these eleven conditions are connected, there is one turn or one complete cycle of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. As given in the Pāli

scriptures, you can see that the eleven events are joined and that there is no division or separation. It is not necessary to place the first two parts in a past life, the next eight in the present life, and the remaining link in a future life, so that one turn covers a space of three lifetimes. If it is understood in this way, what can be done? How can the cycle be controlled? How can there be a practice to extinguish suffering when the whole thing is broken apart, with the cause in one life and the result in another? So now, no benefit is derived from dependent origination because it is incorrectly understood and taught, so that one cycle straddles three lifetimes.

If you study the Pāli scriptures, you will see that it's not like that. It is not necessary to wait three lifetimes for one complete cycle of dependent origination. In just one moment, a complete cycle of *paṭiccasamuppāda* can roll on. Or it could roll on in the space of two or three moments, depending on the situation. But it is not necessary to wait for three lifetimes. Just one moment is sufficient.

The Birth of the Flow of Dependent Origination

Example 1

Now I would like to give a few examples from everyday life to show how dependent origination arises. A little child cries loudly because her doll is broken. Think carefully for a moment about this and then I will explain how dependent origination arises.

A little child cries loudly because her doll is broken. When she sees the broken doll, there is contact between the eye and the visual object, in this case, the form – shape and color – of the doll in a broken condition. At that moment, eye consciousness arises and knows that the doll is broken.

As a matter of course, the child is filled with ignorance because she doesn't know anything about Dhamma. When her doll breaks, her mind is filled with ignorance.

Ignorance gives rise to volitional formations, a kind of power that gives rise to an idea or thought, which is consciousness.

That which is called 'consciousness' is seeing the broken doll and knowing that it is a broken doll. This is eye consciousness, because it depends on the eye seeing the broken doll. There is ignorance, or no mindfulness, at that moment because the child has no knowledge of Dhamma. Because of this lack of mindfulness, there

arises the power to give rise to consciousness, which sees form in a way that will be suffering.

The meeting of the eye and the form – the doll – and the consciousness that knows this are all three together called ‘contact.’

Now eye contact arises in that girl, and, if we are to be detailed, that contact gives rise to mentality-materiality: the girl’s body and mind conditioned to experience suffering arise.

Please understand that ordinarily our body and mind are not in a condition to experience suffering. There must be ignorance, or something to condition it to become receptive to the possibility of suffering, so it is said that the mind-body only now arises in this case. It means that ignorance conditions consciousness and this consciousness helps the mind-body change and arise to action and become capable of experiencing suffering.

In this kind of mind-body, at this moment, the sense bases arise which are also primed to experience suffering. They are not asleep, as is usually the case, so there will be perfected contact which is ready for suffering. Then arises *vedanā* (feeling) which is unpleasant. Then this unpleasant feeling gives rise to grasping, the desire to follow the power of that unpleasantness. Next, attachment clings to the feeling as ‘mine.’ This is where the ‘I’ concept arises, which is called ‘becoming.’ When this blossoms fully, it is called ‘birth.’ Then there is suffering in seeing the broken doll – there is crying. That’s what is known as tribulation, which means extreme frustration.

Now about birth (*jāti*): it has a wide range of meaning, which includes such things as old age and death. If there were no ignorance, there would not arise the belief that the doll broke or that the doll died or some such belief. If that were the case, no suffering at all would have arisen. But now suffering has arisen fully because there arose attachment to ‘self – ‘my’ doll. When the doll broke, there was incorrect action because of ignorance, and so the girl cried. Crying is a symptom of completed suffering: the end of dependent origination has been reached.

Here is the point that most people fail to understand. It’s the hidden part of the topic called ‘the language of ultimate truth’ or ‘the language of dependent origination.’ Most people don’t believe that people are born all the time or that mind-body is born or that the sense bases are born. They don’t believe that the normal state is equivalent to not yet being born, in which there has yet been no action according to functions. When any natural event causes these things to function, then we can say that birth has occurred. For example, take our eyeball. We believe that it already exists, that it has already been born. But in the sense of Dhamma, it has not yet been born until that eye sees some form. When it performs its function, the seeing of forms, it can be said that the eye is born and the form is born and then eye consciousness is born. These three help each other to give rise to what is called contact. Contact gives rise to feeling, grasping and all of the other elements, all the way up to the completion of the cycle.

Now, if later on, that young girl goes to bed and thinks about the broken doll, she will cry again. At that time, it is a matter of mind consciousness, not eye consciousness. When she thinks about the broken doll, the thought is the object of perception, and that object contacts the mind, giving rise to mind consciousness. She thinks about the broken doll. This gives rise to the body and mind at that moment and causes them to instantly change into body and mind which are the condition for the sense bases that will experience suffering. Those sense bases will give rise to contact of a kind that will experience suffering. Then feeling arises, followed by grasping, attachment, and finally suffering. At this point, the little girl is crying again, even though the doll broke many days or even many weeks ago. These thoughts, which are concocted one after another, are called *paṭiccasamuppāda* and as a rule, they are in all of us.

Example 2

As another example, let us suppose that there is a young male student who fails his final exam. He may end up fainting or going to bed at night crying. How does this happen? The student goes to where the exam results are posted and either doesn't see his name listed as passing or sees his name listed as failing. He sees the posted results with his eyes. Those posted lists have a meaning – they are not merely form. The lists are meaningful forms which tell him something he wants to know. When his eyes perceive the lists, a kind of eye consciousness arises that gives rise to mind-body. That is, his body and mind which were in a state of normalcy suddenly change

character. They are now primed to give rise to sense bases and contact which can lead to suffering.

The sense bases in their normal condition are not characterized by suffering, but when they are mixed with ignorance, these sense bases will work in a way to help suffering arise. There will be contact, feeling and so on, all the way up to attachment to the 'I' concept: 'I failed!' The student falls down in a faint at the moment the eyes perceive the list. In that brief moment, he faints. This is called 'one complete working of the eleven conditions of dependent origination.' The student has a 'self' that failed, and so this 'self' experiences great suffering, grief and tribulation.

Several hours or even two or three days later, that student thinks about his failing again and he may faint again. The same symptoms arise. It is a manifestation of dependent origination in the same way, but this time it begins with the mind door, or mind consciousness. When consciousness arises, it causes a mentality-materiality of a type that is subject to the arising of suffering. That, in turn, causes suffering-prone sense bases to arise, which cause suffering-prone feeling, grasping and attachment to arise. Each in their order is conditioned by ignorance for suffering. Finally, conditioned birth arises again: 'I have failed my exam!'

Example 3

For our third example, let's suppose that a young lady sees her boyfriend walking along with another woman. She immediately becomes inflamed. Within the space of a brief moment, she becomes

so enraged that it is just as if she had passed through ten hells, so burned up is she! All this just because she saw her boyfriend walking together with another woman.

What has happened is that her eyes have seen the form of her boyfriend with another woman. This causes eye consciousness to arise immediately. Before this moment, this kind of consciousness did not exist. There was only a functionless consciousness, a consciousness without any duty to perform. You could say there was no consciousness. But now, this kind of consciousness arises with that form and these eyes, and together they make contact. Just a moment ago there was no contact; now there is: there is a coming together of the eye, the eye object or form, and eye consciousness.

Contact arises and causes feeling, craving and so on, to arise. Or to put it in more detail, once consciousness arises, it causes a newly conditioned kind of body-mind to arise which, in turn, gives rise to the kind of sense bases, eyes, that can experience suffering. This is followed by a feeling of suffering and a restless craving. Then arises attachment to the 'I' concept: 'I, I, I'm so mad! I could die!' And it all arose by way of the eye.

This is birth (*jāti*). It is a suffering-prone ego. An 'I' that can experience dissatisfaction has arisen and will become subject to suffering. We can simply say that it is an ego so attached to its arising that it suffers. It is the passing away of this ego that is suffering, sorrow and frustration. This is full-blown *paṭiccasamuppāda*, eleven conditions, all within the mind of this young lady. This particular example of *paṭiccasamuppāda* arises by way of the eye.

Now let us suppose that this young lady was fooled by one of her friends. In fact, her boyfriend is not going with any other woman, but someone decides to play a trick on her and tells her that her boyfriend was seen going with some other woman and she believes it. Now there is ear contact; sound comes in by way of the ear and ear consciousness, accompanied by ignorance, is present. Because there is no mindfulness, this ear consciousness gives rise to mentality-materiality, i.e., her body and mind are newly primed to give rise to the sense bases which will function in a way that leads to suffering, as in this example. Once the sense bases have arisen, there is complete contact and then the feeling appropriate to the situation, namely, an unpleasant feeling, arises. Restless craving then arises, which gives rise to attachment. Then there is the full-blown becoming of the 'I & mine' concept. It is the birth of the 'I' which has suffering, grief and lamentation. Suffering has arisen in accordance with the law of dependent origination by way of the ear.

Again, several hours or days later, this young lady may simply begin to doubt the sincerity of her boyfriend. No one has said anything to her, and she hasn't seen anything, but in her own mind she begins to doubt whether or not her boyfriend has been going with another woman. She begins to make assumptions and so dependent origination begins to operate by way of the mind door: a mental object comes into contact with the mind and mind consciousness arises. This mind consciousness conditions a new mentality-materiality to arise: what was an inert body-mind, not conditioned to experience suffering, is now the mentality-materiality

that conditions sense bases capable of experiencing suffering to arise. The sense bases condition suffering-prone contact to arise. Contact conditions feeling conducive to the arising of suffering. Then follows restless craving and clinging attachment and the same kind of suffering arises again. This is a case of dependent origination becoming active in that young lady by way of mind consciousness.

In the three cases of this young lady, we can see that when she saw forms with her eyes, dependent origination became active in her by way of eye consciousness; when she heard her friend telling her a lie, dependent origination was activated by ear consciousness; and, finally, when she began to doubt, all on her own, dependent origination became functional by way of mind consciousness. This shows that dependent origination can arise dependent on different sense bases, and suffering will be the result in each case.

Please observe that in just a very short time the complete course of dependent origination leading to suffering can arise. It is the complete chain of all eleven conditions. In the brief moment that a daughter-in-law sees her mother-in-law's face, suppressed restlessness and uneasiness arise. In that brief moment, dependent origination manifests itself with all its eleven conditions. She sees a form with her eyes. That gives rise to the kind of eye consciousness that conditions a change in mentality-materiality to a mentality-materiality ready for suffering-prone sense bases, which condition contact conducive to suffering. The feeling that then arises is unpleasant. The resultant craving is restless because she does not like her mother-in-law's face. There then arises attachment,

becoming and the birth of the 'I' concept which hates the mother-in-law's face and, so, suffering finally arises.

Example 4

For my last example, I don't want to talk about a particular case or individual, but I would like to talk about people in general when they are chewing some very tasty food. Most people become unmindful when they are eating delicious food. They are forgetful and ignorance is in control. Let this be a given: when eating something delicious, mindfulness is absent because of the delicious taste, and so ignorance is present.

The thoughts of the person experiencing something very delicious in this way are a complete manifestation of *paṭīccasamuppāda* already, in the same sort of way as in the previous examples. When the tongue and one of its objects, in this case, taste, come into contact, tongue consciousness arises which creates a new mentality-materiality, in the sense of changing ordinary mentality-materiality into that kind of mentality-materiality capable of experiencing suffering. There then arises the sense bases capable of having contact and feeling which can experience unpleasantness or pleasantness from the present situation.

If the experience is one of good taste, then the average run-of-the-mill person calls it a pleasurable feeling. But as soon as the good taste is clung to, there is attachment which then transforms the feeling into one prone to suffering because of the tendency to want to sustain that good taste and make it last. People cling to and grasp

after it, and begin to worry and become anxious about it. They become attached to it, and so in this way the good taste or pleasant feeling instantly becomes a manifestation of suffering. ‘This is delicious! I am happy! I’m really happy!’ But the mind is a slave of pleasure because it is aflame with attachment to the pleasure.

This is a trick of dependent origination that shows its depth and profundity. If the average person were to give an opinion, he or she would say that there was pleasure. If dependent origination speaks, that pleasure becomes unsatisfactory. When anyone thinks ‘delicious,’ dependent origination has already arisen in its entirety.

Now there is more to all this. When someone thinks ‘This is so delicious that I think I’ll go steal some more tomorrow so I can have some more to eat,’ that person is born as a thief at that moment. Whenever a person thinks he will steal something or has a thief-like thought, that person has become a thief. So someone goes and steals some fruit from a neighboring farm and, having eaten it and found it to his/her delight, thinks to go and steal another one the next day. The thought of being a thief or of becoming a thief is the arising of one *bhava* (state of becoming). Similarly, if someone eats some meat and thinks that he will go hunting the next day for some more, that person has been born a hunter. Even if it’s simply a matter of getting lost in the great taste of some food, such a one is born into heavenly realms of good taste. Or if it’s a matter of something tasting so good that that person can’t eat fast enough, that person is born a *peta* (hungry ghost) who can never get enough to eat fast enough to satisfy his great hunger.

Take a look at all this and you will see that in just the space of chewing some delicious food, many kinds of dependent origination may arise. So please observe carefully that dependent origination is concerned with the cycle of suffering. *Paṭiccasamuppāda* is a teaching about suffering which arises in its fullness because of attachment. There must be attachment in order for suffering to arise according to dependent origination. If there is no attachment, then even if suffering arises, it is not the *dukkha* of *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

Suffering in Dependent Origination Must Always Depend on Attachment

Suffering in the operation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* must always depend on attachment. Take a farmer who works out in the open, exposed to wind and sun, transplanting the young rice plants: he thinks ‘Oh! I’m so hot!’ If no clinging arises in the sense of ‘I’m so hot!’ there is merely suffering of a natural kind and not of the kind associated with dependent origination. Suffering according to the law of *paṭiccasamuppāda* must have clinging to the point of agitation about the ‘I’ concept. So it happens that the farmer becomes irritated and dissatisfied with being born a farmer. He thinks it’s his fate, his *kamma*, that he must bathe in his own sweat. When one thinks this way, suffering according to the law of dependent origination arises.

If one is hot and has a backache but nothing more, if one simply feels and knows that he is hot without any clinging to the ‘I’ concept as above, then the suffering of dependent origination has not arisen. Please observe this carefully and make clear the distinction between these two kinds of suffering. If there is clinging, it is suffering according to dependent origination. Suppose you cut your hand with a sharp knife or razor blade and the blood gushes out. If you simply feel the pain but don’t cling to anything, then your suffering is natural and not according to dependent origination.

Don't confuse the two. Suffering according to dependent origination must always follow upon ignorance, formations, consciousness, mentality-materiality, sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, attachment, becoming and birth. It must be complete this way in order to be called 'dependently originated suffering.'

Now we can put the whole matter briefly. Someone who has studied the Dhamma may understand that the internal sense base – e.g., the eye – comes into contact with the external sense base – e.g., the form – which has a value or meaning and which then becomes the base of ignorance. For example, take your eye. Look about you. You see a variety of things: trees, stones, or whatever. But there is not any suffering because nothing of what you see has any value or meaning for you. But if you see a tiger or a woman, or something that has meaning, it's not the same. One kind of sight has meaning and another kind has no meaning. If, for example, a dog sees a pretty woman, it means nothing to the dog. But if a young man sees a lovely woman, it has a lot of meaning. Seeing a pretty woman has meaning for a man. The dog's seeing is not a matter of dependent origination. The young man's vision is a matter of dependent origination.

We are speaking about people: people in the act of seeing. Whenever we look about we naturally see whatever is there and, if there is no meaning, it has nothing to do with *paṭiccasamuppāda*. We see, perhaps, trees, grass, and stones, none of which, normally, have meaning. But maybe there's a diamond or a sacred stone or a tree that will have meaning; there will be mental events occurring and dependent origination will become operative. And so it is that we

distinguish the internal sense bases – eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind – from the external sense bases – form, sound, smell, taste, tactile sensation, and mental objects – and these latter must be meaningful things. In this way, they become the base for ignorance or stupidity or delusion. At this point of contact between the internal and external sense bases, sense consciousness arises. The consciousness arises instantaneously and gives rise to mental concocting a kind of power to cause further compounding or brewing up. That is, it brews up mentality-materiality, body and mind of the sort that is crazily stupid because it is prone to suffering.

When the body-mind changes, it means that the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind also change. They become ‘crazy’ sense spheres. The contact, feeling, craving and attachment that arise are also ‘crazy’ to the point of suffering. It all culminates in birth (*jāti*), the full-blown birth of the ‘I’ concept. Old age, sickness, death or any other kind of suffering will then all immediately arise and take on meaning because of clinging to the ‘I’ and the ‘my’ concept.

All of the above is concerned with dependent origination in daily life. I think it should be enough for you to see that *paṭiccasamuppāda* is something that arises in a flash, complete with all eleven conditions. In one day, I don’t know how many hundreds of times it can arise. No! It’s not the case that one turn of the cycle of dependent origination must be spread over three lifetimes, the past, the present and the future. It is not like that at all.

I have observed that there is general misunderstanding concerning this, so we must believe that *paṭiccasamuppāda* is being

incorrectly taught nowadays – it is not being taught according to the original Pāli scriptures. I will show my reasons for this later. For now, let me summarize by saying that *paṭiccasamuppāda*, as I have explained it, is something which arises quick as lightning, ends in suffering, and is a phenomenon of our daily lives.

The Origins of *Paṭiccasamuppāda*

Now I'd like to talk about the origins of dependent origination. How did dependent origination come to be formulated? How did it originate? We hold that the Buddha is the source of dependent origination. In the tenth sutta of the *Buddha Suttas*, *Nidāna Saṃyutta*, the Buddha told of his own life as an ascetic monk, how one day he discovered what we now call *paṭiccasamuppāda*. And now I will quote the Pāli scriptures for the Buddha's own story of this discovery:

Bhikkhus! Before I became enlightened, when I was still a *Bodhisatta*, I had this feeling: all beings, without exception, in this world suffer. They are born, get old and die, and are born again. When the beings of this world don't know the method to free themselves from suffering, that is, from old age and death, how will they be able to escape that suffering?

Bhikkhus! I wondered what is it that must be present for old age and death to arise. What is the condition of old age and death? Bhikkhus! This supremely clear-sighted and wise knowledge arose in me by means of my wise mental training:

Because birth is, old age and death are; old age and death have birth as a condition;

Because becoming is, birth is; birth has becoming as a condition;

Because attachment is, becoming is; becoming has attachment as a condition;

Because craving is, attachment is; attachment has craving as a condition;

Because feeling is, craving is; craving has feeling as a condition;

Because contact is, feeling is; feeling has contact as a condition;

Because the sense bases are, contact is; contact has the sense bases as a condition;

Because mentality-materiality is, the sense bases are; the sense bases have mentality-materiality as a condition;

Because consciousness is, mentality-materiality is; mentality-materiality has consciousness as a condition;

Because mental concocting is, consciousness is; consciousness has mental concocting as a condition;

Because ignorance is, mental concocting is; mental concocting has ignorance as a condition.

Then the Buddha reviews what he said in another way:

Because ignorance is a condition, the mental concocting arises;

Because mental concocting is a condition, consciousness arises;

Because consciousness is a condition, mentality-materiality arises;

Because mentality-materiality is a condition, the sense bases arise;

Because the sense bases are a condition, contact arises;

Because contact is a condition, feeling arises;

Because feeling is a condition, craving arises;

Because craving is a condition, attachment arises;

Because attachment is a condition, becoming arises;

Because becoming is a condition, birth arises;

Because birth is a condition, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and tribulation arise. The whole mass of suffering arises in this way.

Bhikkhus! Insight, meditative knowledge, wisdom, knowledge, light concerning that which was never heard before arose in me, namely, that this is the arising of the whole mass of suffering.²⁷

This is the discovery of *paṭiccasamuppāda* by the Buddha before his enlightenment. We can call it the discovery of the links of the chain of suffering. It was discovered that suffering arises by means of these eleven conditions or stages. When there is sense contact and ignorance is dominant – when mindfulness is not present – then consciousness arises immediately. Don't misunderstand that this consciousness is a permanent 'self' or anything like that. It only arises with sense contact. Having arisen, consciousness immediately gives rise to mental concocting or the power to brew up a new mind-body. This is a mentality-materiality which may experience suffering. Then arise sense bases and contact prone to suffering, and feeling which is conducive to suffering in just this case. Then craving, attachment, becoming, and the birth of the 'I' concept follow in order. Now suffering is complete.

Before this, no one had ever discovered this thing. The Buddha was the first person in the history of Buddhism and, as far as we know, the first person in history to discover *paṭiccasamuppāda*, after

²⁷ [Gotama Sutta SN 12.10]

which he became enlightened. So we call this the origin of dependent origination.

Now we come to a rather difficult matter for the ordinary person, but it is necessary to mention it if we are to be complete. This difficult matter is that the eleven conditions of *paṭiccasamuppāda* are given in many forms in the various suttas related after the Buddha's enlightenment.

Form 1: The Regular or Forward Order

On some occasions, the Buddha talked about *paṭiccasamuppāda* in the regular or common way, from the beginning to the end, covering all eleven conditions. This is the way that is often memorized and chanted regularly. It goes:

Ignorance gives rise to mental concocting;
Mental concocting gives rise to consciousness;
Consciousness gives rise to mentality-materiality;
Mentality-materiality gives rise to the sense bases;
The sense bases give rise to contact;
Contact gives rise to feeling;
Feeling gives rise to craving;
Craving gives rise to attachment;
Attachment gives rise to becoming;
Becoming gives rise to birth;
Birth gives rise to old age and death.

This is called ‘one turning of the chain or wheel of dependent origination, from beginning to end.’ This is the most commonly heard form and it appears in many tens, many hundreds of suttas in the Tipiṭaka.

Form 2: Reverse Order

Sometimes dependent origination is given in the reverse order. Instead of starting with ignorance, mental concocting and contact, and going on to suffering, it starts with suffering and works its way back:

Suffering arises because of birth;
Birth arises because of becoming;
Becoming arises because of attachment;
Attachment arises because of craving;
Craving arises because of feeling;
Feeling arises because of contact;
Contact arises because of the sense bases;
The sense bases arise because of mentality-materiality;
Mentality-materiality arises because of consciousness;
Consciousness arises because of mental concocting;
Mental concocting arises because of ignorance.

This form includes all the elements but in the reverse order and is called *paṭiloma* (reversed). If it goes from ignorance to suffering it is called *anuloma* (direct). These two forms are easily recited and memorized.

Form 3: From Middle Back to the Beginning

The third form does not give the whole eleven conditions. Rather, it begins in the middle with the four kinds of nutriment, for example, *kavaḷiṇkārāhāra* (bodily nutriment).

Bodily nutriment arises because of craving;

Craving arises because of feeling;

Feeling arises because of contact;

Contact arises because of the sense bases;

The sense bases arise because of mentality-materiality;

Mentality-materiality arises because of consciousness;

Consciousness arises because of mental concocting.

This form starts in the middle of the chain and works its way back to ignorance at the beginning. This form appears, for example, in the *Mahātaṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*.²⁸

Form 4: From the Middle to the End

The next form of *paṭiccasamuppāda* starts in the middle again, but goes on to the end and not back to the beginning. The starting point is feeling which is pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Feeling is the first condition, then craving arises, attachment arises, becoming arises, birth arises, and suffering arises at the end of the series. Even this one half of the chain is called *paṭiccasamuppāda*, because it still proves to be of benefit. That is, it

²⁸ [MN 38]

shows how suffering arises, just as do the other forms. The determining factor of the appropriate form used was the needs, as perceived by the Buddha, of the people listening to him.

The *Visuddhimagga* has a very good simile to explain why there are different forms of dependent origination. Suppose there are four people, each wanting a creeper or climbing vine for different purposes. The first person might cut the creeper at its base and pull the whole thing away to use as he needs it. Another person may grab the tip and pull the whole thing out and away to use as he needs it. Yet another person may come along and cut the creeper in the middle and pull it out from its base. Still another will cut the middle and pull only the half from where he cut it to the tip for his needs. Cutting creepers for various uses depends on the individual's needs. Each may cut the creeper in a different way, but each gets the use he needs of it. This is a simile used by Buddhagosa to explain the four different forms of *paṭiccasamuppāda* as described above.

Form 5: Extinction in the Middle

There is, however, another form which is very strange and appears in only a few suttas. This form starts in order of the causation of suffering for one half of the series. When it comes to craving, it switches over to the order of cessation; cessation of craving, attachment, becoming, birth. This is very strange, and I don't know why Buddhagosa didn't mention it. This form is rather confusing. It starts by saying:

Ignorance gives rise to mental concocting;

Mental concocting gives rise to consciousness;
Consciousness gives rise to mentality-materiality;
Mentality-materiality gives rise to the sense bases;
The sense bases give rise to contact;
Contact gives rise to feeling;
Feeling gives rise to craving.

As soon as it comes to craving it stops abruptly and reverses itself:

Because of the extinguishing of craving, attachment is extinguished;
Because of the extinguishing of attachment, becoming is extinguished;
Because of the extinguishing of becoming, birth is extinguished;
Because of the extinguishing of birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, etc. are extinguished.

This form shows an about-face in the middle. It's as if mindfulness has arisen instead of mindlessly going on to the end of the chain. In the middle of the search we catch ourselves and so we don't allow the flow of dependent origination to complete itself. What was a matter of conditioned arising turns into a matter of cessation in the middle. Craving is extinguished and so suffering does not arise at the end of the chain of dependent origination.

How shall we compare this form to someone cutting a creeper? We could say that grabbing the creeper by the middle, he pulls the whole creeper out, including its base and its tip.

These are the various forms of dependent origination taught by the Buddha.

The Details of Dependent Origination

Now I'm going to talk about the details of *paṭiccasamuppāda* so that you will better understand them. For some, it will be easy, but for others, it will be difficult. Each will benefit according to his or her own capacity. I will cover all twelve factors of dependent origination starting with ignorance.

What is ignorance? Ignorance is not-knowing about suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the way to bring about the cessation of suffering. Not-knowing these four things is called ignorance. And ignorance gives rise to mental concocting.

What is mental concocting? The Buddha said:

Monks, there are these three kinds of mental concocting: bodily formation, verbal formation, and mental formation.

The sayings of the Buddha in the Pāli scriptures explain *saṅkhāra* as that which brews up or gives rise to the bodily functions, that which brews up verbal functions, and that which brews up mental functions.

However, people who study in Dhamma schools don't explain *saṅkhāra* this way. They usually are taught according to the *Visuddhimagga* – that the three *saṅkhāras* are meritorious *kamma* functions (*puññ-ābhisāṅkhāra*), demeritorious *kamma* functions (*apuññ-ābhisāṅkhāra*), and imperturbable *kamma* functions (*āneñj-*

ābhisankhāra). They are different but overlapping matters needing detailed explanation.

For now, you should know that those who like to explain dependent origination in terms of three lifetimes always like to explain *saṅkhāra* as meritorious, demeritorious, and imperturbable *kamma* formations. But in the Pāli scriptures, the real words of the Buddha explain *saṅkhāra* as bodily, verbal, and mental functions. Mental concocting gives rise to consciousness.

What is consciousness? The Buddha said:

Monks, there are six kinds of consciousness: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind consciousness.

Those who explain *paṭiccasamuppāda* as covering several lifetimes, including the *Visuddhimagga*, explain consciousness as rebirth consciousness (*paṭisandhi-viññāṇa*). In all of the later textbooks, consciousness is so explained because they don't understand how to explain *paṭiccasamuppāda* in terms of the sixfold kinds of consciousness. This is so because they believe in 'rebirth' and so they must interpret consciousness as rebirth consciousness. The whole thing becomes, then, something completely different.

The words of the Buddha himself tell us that there are six kinds of consciousness as mentioned above. But we ourselves have explained it in terms of rebirth consciousness. Consciousness gives rise to mentality-materiality.

What is mentality-materiality? In the scriptures, the Buddha said that feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention were

mentality. The four great elements and the secondary derived phenomena²⁹ were materiality. This is not a matter of dispute. Everyone teaches that flesh, muscle, blood and winds comprise the four great physical elements. Various conditions and phenomena dependent on the four elements, such as beauty, ugliness, femininity, virility and so on, are derived materiality. Both together are called ‘materiality.’ Mentality-materiality gives rise to the six sense bases.

What are the six sense bases? The Buddha said that they are the sense bases of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The six sense bases give rise to contact.

What is contact? The Buddha said that there are six kinds of contact, named after the six sense bases. Contact gives rise to feeling.

What is feeling? There are six types of feeling: feeling arising from contact by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Feeling gives rise to craving.

What is craving? Again there are six types of craving: craving for forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and mental objects. Craving conditions the arising of attachment.

What is attachment? The Buddha said that there are four kinds of attachment: sensuous attachment (*kāmuṇā*), attachment to

²⁹ The four great elements are earth (solidity), water (cohesion), fire (heat) and air (motion). There are twenty-four secondary phenomena derived from the four great elements: (1) eye; (2) ear; (3) nose; (4) tongue; (5) body; (6) form; (7) sound; (8) odor; (9) taste; (10) femininity; (11) masculinity; (12) the physical base of mind; (13) bodily expression; (14) verbal expression; (15) physical life; (16) space; (17) physical agility; (18) physical elasticity; (19) physical adaptability; (20) physical growth; (21) physical continuity; (22) decay; (23) impermanence; (24) nutriment.

views (*diṭṭhupādāna*), attachment to rules and rituals (*sīlabbatupādāna*), and attachment to the ‘I’ concept (*attavādupādāna*), which are well known to all of us. Attachment conditions the arising of becoming.

What is becoming? There are three kinds of becoming: sensuous becoming, fine-material becoming, and immaterial becoming.³⁰ Becoming conditions the arising of birth.

What is birth? It is being born, arising, coming to be among the various groups of sentient beings, the appearance of the various aggregates, the arising of a particular sense door. This is birth. Birth conditions the arising of old age and death.

What are old age and death? Old age is the greying of the hair, the breaking of the teeth, and anything else associated with becoming old, such as the failing of the sense faculties. Death is the end, the breaking up, the destruction, the running out of time, the dispersal of the aggregates, the casting off of the corpse, the disappearance of life and the sense faculties. This is death.

Now there is a problem which makes all of this difficult to understand. The problem is in the use of the word ‘to be born,’ which is a common everyday word with an uncommon meaning. It means

³⁰ These three kinds of becoming reflect the levels of attachment to the physical body and its sensations, attachment to the fine-material states of meditative absorption and attachment to the immaterial states of meditative absorption. These last two are respectively called the *rūpa-jhāna* and *arūpa-jhāna* states; they are highly developed states of mental concentration.

the birth of the 'I' concept which is only a feeling and not the physical birth from a mother's womb.

As far as birth from a mother's womb is concerned, we are born only once and that's the end of it. After that, there are many, many more births; many births in one day, even. This means being born because of attachment – the feeling that 'I am something or other.' This is called 'one birth.' Having been born in this way, we cling to the idea that the birth from a mother's womb or a normal birth is suffering because there is fear and anxiety in that kind of birth.

When we are born in this way, fear and anxiety spread over everything connected with pain and illness or death, which will come in the future. In fact the pain, illness and death have yet to appear, but we suffer because we always see them as 'my' pain, 'my' old age, and 'my' death. We especially suffer when it appears before us. We are afraid of death all the time without knowing it. We hate old age because we think it will come to 'me.'

If only you don't have the 'I' concept, then old age, death and so on will have no meaning. Therefore, one round of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is nothing more than a manifestation of stupidity which allows one kind of suffering to arise once: suffering because something satisfies, or does not satisfy, or we don't know if it satisfies or not. When there is attachment, there is suffering.

The Meanings of the Words in Dependent Origination

Now we come to the most important matter: the meanings of the words in *paṭīccasamuppāda*.

The meanings of these words are meanings from the language of ultimate truth, the language of those who know the Dhamma and not according to the meanings of the language of relative truth – the language of ordinary people who don't know the Dhamma. I've already noted these two types of language: the language of relative truth which refers to the everyday language of people who don't know the Dhamma and the language of *paṭīccasamuppāda* which is Dhammic language.

If we interpret *paṭīccasamuppāda* according to the common language, there will arise confusion and lack of understanding. For example: the Buddha became enlightened at the base of the Bodhi tree. His enlightenment was the destruction of ignorance – ignorance was extinguished. Because ignorance was extinguished, mental concocting was extinguished; because mental concocting was extinguished, consciousness was extinguished; because consciousness was extinguished, mentality-materiality was extinguished. Why, then, didn't the Buddha die? Think about the extinguishing of ignorance at the time of the enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. With the extinguishing of ignorance, *saṅkhāras* were

extinguished, that is, the power of brewing up consciousness and mentality-materiality. Why didn't the Buddha die at the base of the Bodhi tree at that moment? Because the words relating to dependent origination are in the language of ultimate truth. The word 'extinguish' is used in the sense of the language of ultimate truth. It does not mean the birth or death of the flesh.

When this is incorrectly understood, one turn of *paṭiccasamuppāda* will be thought to involve two births: one when mentality-materiality arise and another in some other future life. When there are two births, then *paṭiccasamuppāda* is made to cover three lifetimes – past, present, and future, and the whole thing falls messily apart. What is funny is that, although it is said that there are two births, it is not said that there are two deaths, because it is not known how you can die twice.

The words *bhava* and *jāti*, which mean 'becoming' and 'birth,' in the case of dependent origination do not mean 'birth from a mother's womb.' Rather, they mean a non-material kind of birth, a birth from attachment which brews up the feeling of being an 'I.' That's what is born. There is clear scriptural evidence for this in the *Mahātaṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta*,³¹ where the Buddha says: '*Any delight (nandi) in any feeling is attachment.*' This means that when there is sense contact and feeling arises, be it pleasurable, unpleasurable, or neither pleasurable nor unpleasurable feeling, then there is amusement or delight in that feeling. We delight in the pleasurable feeling in the form of lust; we delight in the unpleasurable feeling in

³¹ [MN 38]

the form of anger or hate; we delight in the neither pleasurable nor unpleasurable feeling in the form of delusion. This indeed is attachment. Delight is attachment because this very delight is the base of clinging; if there is delight, then there must be clinging.

‘Amusement’ means ‘being delighted in,’ ‘being satisfied with.’ *Nandi* itself is the kind of attachment referred to by the Buddha. When we are satisfied with something, it means that we cling to that thing. Therefore, *nandi* equals attachment and it is something that must exist in feeling. Whenever there is feeling, there is *nandi* and there is attachment; *‘because there is attachment, there is becoming; because there is becoming, there is birth; because there is birth, there is old age and death which is suffering.’*

This shows that becoming and birth arise from feeling, craving, and attachment. It is not necessary to die and be born again for becoming and birth to arise. Becoming and birth arise here and now. In a given day, they may arise any number of times: each time there is feeling which is beclouded with ignorance, it then becomes amused enjoyment of one kind or another, which is attachment, and that gives rise to becoming and birth.

The words ‘becoming’ and ‘birth’ must be understood in terms of the language of ultimate truth of those who understand the Dhamma and not the language of relative truth, the language of ordinary people. In the language of ordinary people, one must await death in order to be reborn – in order to have becoming and birth. According to the language of relative truth, we are born once of the body and then we die and go into the coffin before being reborn. But

in the language of ultimate truth, one may be born many times in one day. Each time the 'I' concept arises, it is called 'one set of becoming and birth.' In a month, there may be many hundreds of births; in a year, many thousands; in one physical lifetime, there may be many tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of becomings and births.

We can immediately see that *paṭiccasamuppāda* is concerned with the 'here and now' and not with waiting for the death of three physical lives for the turning of one cycle. In fact, in one day, it will operate many times; whenever there is feeling, craving, and attachment, then there is also a turn of the wheel of dependent origination, including becoming and birth. Dependent origination operates in the daily life of all people. It is as in the example given above of the student who failed, or the young lady who was upset because of her boyfriend. These are common examples from everyday life.

The only problem left is to show how ignorance, mental concocting, consciousness, mentality-materiality, sense bases, and contact must all be present first before feeling can arise. This is not so difficult. The ringleader, the troublemaker, is feeling. And we all already know well what feeling is – it arises constantly. But if you want to know it in greater detail, just go back along the series of dependent origination. Feeling arises from contact, contact arises from the sense bases, which were specially concocted for the occasion. The sense bases arise from mentality-materiality, which arises from a specially prepared consciousness. Consciousness arises from specially brewed mental concocting, and mental

concocting arises from ignorance, the start of the series. Eliminate ignorance and none of the rest will arise. There will be no suffering-prone mentality-materiality, no sense bases conducive to suffering, no contact that is suffering. Other things will arise instead, namely the same things, only without suffering. It is ignorance that conditions mentality-materiality, body-mind, sense bases, contact, and feeling of a kind that will experience suffering.

Let me stress again and warn you to understand well the difference between ordinary language and the language of ultimate truth. The word ‘birth’ in the language of relative truth means birth from a mother’s womb. The word ‘birth’ in the language of ultimate truth means something arising that functions in a way conducive to suffering, which is to say, arising with ignorance as a basic cause. At this moment, mentality-materiality has not arisen because it is not functioning as ‘I’ or ‘mine.’ Though you are sitting reading this text with attention, there is no craving or attachment. Your sitting and reading with attention are material phenomena, but there is no dependent origination yet.

All of what has been said so far is so that you will understand in advance that the language of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is the language of ultimate truth, which has special meanings. Don’t bring in the language of relative truth, or you will misunderstand it, especially the word ‘birth.’

Another important point that I would like you to know is that *paṭiccasamuppāda* is a detailed version of the Four Noble Truths. Dependent origination in the order of arising is equal to the Noble

Truths of suffering and its cause. Dependent origination in the order of cessation is equal to the Noble Truths of the end of suffering and the way to end suffering.

Suffering is dealt with in the same way as in other places. The way of extinguishing suffering is also the same, namely, the Eightfold Path. *Paṭiccasamuppāda* is simply the Four Noble Truths given in detail. Instead of starting with the bare brevity that craving causes suffering, it analyzes suffering into eleven stages or conditions. And the same goes for the extinction of suffering. So *paṭiccasamuppāda* is the Four Noble Truths.

On the Explanation of *Paṭiccasamuppāda* Which Is Inaccurate

Now we will look at inaccurate explanations of *paṭiccasamuppāda*; they are not Buddhist and are of no benefit. Indeed, they cause grief.

To explain *paṭiccasamuppāda* in a way that it covers three lifetimes is wrong. It is not according to the principles of the Pāli scriptures. It is wrong both according to the letter and the spirit of the scriptures.

According to the letter of the scriptures, in the passage quoted above regarding the Buddha's discovery of *paṭiccasamuppāda* just before his enlightenment, the Buddha spoke of dependent origination without sticking anything in or adding anything in between, as you have read. Dependent origination starts with ignorance and goes on to suffering with nothing indiscriminately mixed in. To add anything is to make it contrary to the letter of the principle.

If we look at it in light of the spirit of the teaching, we will easily see that the teaching under consideration is wrong. The Buddha delivered his teaching on dependent origination in order to destroy wrong views and in order to destroy attachment to the 'self,' beings, and persons. So it is that there is a continuous series of eleven conditions wherein no 'self,' no 'I' can be found.

Now there are some people who explain it anew by saying *paṭiccasamuppāda* covers three lifetimes – births – connected by the same person. A person's defilements in a past birth cause karmic results to arise in this birth at some point. There are karmic results in this life which cause new defilements in this birth and give rise to karmic results in a future life.

When *paṭiccasamuppāda* is taught in that way, it becomes a teaching of a 'self,' soul, being, or person which whirls about in the maelstrom of existence, just as in the wrong view of Bhikkhu Sāti, the fisherman's son. But the Buddha clearly taught about the absence of 'self' by means of *paṭiccasamuppāda*; to teach that *paṭiccasamuppāda* covers three lives is to undo the Buddha's teaching and teach that there is a 'self.'

For this point, we take as our standard the principle of *mahāpadesa*, the principle of references or great authorities. This principle tells us that to explain *paṭiccasamuppāda* in terms of 'self' is wrong, because Buddhism teaches that there is no 'self.' If you hold that *paṭiccasamuppāda* leaves no room for a 'self,' your understanding is correct. But if you hold that there is a 'self' that spans three births, your understanding is incorrect. The correct point of view is a continuous flow of conditions from beginning to end, with no 'self.'

When Did the Incorrect Explanation Arise?

Now I'd like to talk about something more substantially certain – namely, why did such an incorrect explanation arise and when did it arise.

Nowadays, in Thailand, Burma, and Sri Lanka, *paṭiccasamuppāda* is taught according to the way it is explained in the *Visuddhimagga*. The explanation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* that one turn of its wheel spans three births has even been accepted by Western scholars lock, stock, and barrel. To put it simply, everywhere there are Buddhists, dependent origination is understood to span three births. What I am saying now may cause a reaction from all over the world because I am trying to point out that there is no way for dependent origination to span three births. How, then, are we to explain the arising of this mistaken teaching? When did it begin?

It is hard to say when this incorrect explanation first arose. But the fact that it is incorrect is easy to show because it is contrary to the original Pāli scriptures. It is contrary to the purpose of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, which is to destroy the 'I' concept. Somdet Phra Saṅgharāja Chao Krommaluang Vajirañāṇavaṃsa of Wat Bowonniwet was of the opinion that the incorrect explanation began 1,000 years ago. He didn't accept that version of dependent origination that spans three births and he taught that it spans only

one birth, but he was not sure and so did not go into details, and it was left at that. He did assert, however, that it was his understanding that dependent origination had been incorrectly explained for the past 1,000 years. I agree with him on this point. But I would like to add that the misunderstanding goes back even further, to 1,500 years ago, when the *Visuddhimagga* was first written.

The *Visuddhimagga* explains *paṭiccasamuppāda* in terms of three births. And Buddhagosa writes in the *Visuddhimagga* that he is offering an explanation accepted before he wrote his own book. I will quote Buddhagosa below. If Buddhagosa wrote 1,500 years ago, it must mean that the incorrect explanation which he passed on was prevalent more than 1,500 years ago. I am of the opinion that the incorrect explanation began sometime after the Third General Council held in B.E. 300. Therefore, we can say that *paṭiccasamuppāda* has been incorrectly explained for the past 2,200 years, not 1,000 years as Somdet Phra Saṅgharāja Chao taught.

If you want an exact date, you will have to do some archeological research and that would be difficult. But now we must ask why it was that an incorrect explanation arose. Why, if the Buddha taught in a way that was not necessary to span three births, did the teaching change to explain dependent origination in terms of a 'self' spanning three births?

I hypothesize that such a misunderstanding may have arisen unconsciously. Because of ignorance or misunderstanding, people began to guess and speculate about the doctrine without intending any misrepresentation. As we have seen, even the Buddha said that

dependent origination was one of the most profound and difficult of doctrines. So, around B.E. 300 to 400, people did not understand the original teaching and their thinking began to diverge until the teaching was the complete opposite of the original doctrine. In this way, we see how ignorance and not intention may have led to an incorrect understanding.

Now let's look at it another way. Is it possible that there was a worm nibbling at the innards of Buddhism? Were there Buddhists who consciously turned against the original teaching and who only pretended to be explaining dependent origination, a basic principle of Buddhism? Were these people, in fact, explaining it incorrectly in terms of Hinduistic eternalism, or Brahmanism? There is no way that Buddhists can have a 'self' or a soul or *ātman* or any other such thing. If anyone consciously attempts to explain dependent origination, the heart of Buddhism, in terms of three births, that person would be effectively destroying Buddhism.

If there was such an evilly-intentioned person or group of people as was just speculated about, it means that someone pretended to be explaining *paṭiccasamuppāda*, but in such a way as to create a niche for the soul concept in Buddhism. In this way, then, Brahmanism could indirectly swallow Buddhism in a flash. I'm only speculating here in a negative way.

Another explanation could be that someone was rash or foolish and attempted to explain what he did not understand in terms of his own limited knowledge. Whether this is what happened and whether there was intention or not, the results are the same.

Do you know why Buddhism disappeared from India? Different people say for this, that, or the other reason: for example, because foreign enemies came in and oppressed the religion. I don't think that is the case. I think that Buddhism disappeared from India because the followers of Buddhism began to interpret the principles of Buddhism incorrectly, explaining *paṭiccasamuppāda*, the heart of Buddhism, as a form of having a 'self.' This is, I believe, the *de facto* reason for Buddhism's disappearing from India. Buddhism became simply an appendage of Hinduism.

The incorrect explanation must have begun with some such event, and whether that event was intentional or not is most difficult to know. It is a fact that Brahmanism was an enemy of Buddhism and wanted to swallow Buddhism, and so it is quite possible that there were people who tried to destroy it. This is clearly a possibility and I don't say it to malign Brahmanism. Buddhism is not eternalism – it does not mention beings, individuals, or 'self.' There is no person who spins around in the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Buddhism has no being or person, yet it turns out that in the form of *paṭiccasamuppāda* which covers a span of three births, there is a being, a person who is caught up in the spin. This is, indeed, the dissolution of Buddhism.

There is no written evidence before the time of the *Visuddhimagga* of *paṭiccasamuppāda* being explained in terms of three births with rebirth consciousness. Rebirth consciousness is the beginning, leading to a new becoming with results (*vipāka*). And then

there are defilements which lead to a future becoming. There is clear written evidence dating from 1,500 years ago.

If you want evidence prior to the time of the *Visuddhimagga*, you should go to the Third General Council when certain monks, who were determined to be ‘false’ monks, were ordered to leave the community of monks. But monks who were seen to be genuine did not have to leave. In the screening process, the monks were asked to explain their views of the Buddha-Dhamma. If any monk did not answer by analyzing life into *paṭiccasamuppāna-dhammas*, aggregates, elements, and sense bases, and if he said that there was a ‘self’ that spun around in the cycle of birth and death and rebirth, as in the case of Bhikkhu Sāti, the fisherman’s son, he was held to be holding wrong views in the sense of eternalism and was made to leave the order.

What this means is that at the time of the Third Council, those monks who held that there was a ‘self’ or an ego were made to leave the monkhood. Only the monks who did not hold that there were ‘selves’ or egos remained. So we can see that the primary cause of the eternalist theory had its beginning at the time of the Third Council, 2,200 years ago, at which time it was admitted that there were many monks who were spuriously ordained as Buddhist monks and who held that there is an individual, a ‘self.’ This fact is itself sufficient to be seen as a primary condition giving rise, within the Buddhist order, to the explanation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* of the kind that holds there is a ‘self.’ Even though those monks were made to leave the order, it

is likely that there were still some, both inside and outside the order, who believed in ‘selves’ and taught such.

In summary, it is hard to say whether or not the basis of the Dhamma was still pure before the Third Council in B.E. 300. After that, it became sullied through the acceptance of a ‘self.’ An incorrect Dhamma began from that time. As you can see, Buddhism disappeared from India. But why didn’t the Jain religion, the religion of the naked ascetics – more properly called Jainism – disappear from India? Because it hasn’t yet changed any of its principles from the original teachings.

Buddhism’s basic principles changed from positing no ‘self’ to positing ‘self’ and it disappeared. It automatically disappeared at that very time; as soon as the ‘self’ concept entered Buddhism, it disappeared from India. This is the phenomenon of *paṭiccasamuppāda* being incorrectly explained. The written evidence begins with the *Visuddhimagga*. For now, I merely wanted to talk about when *paṭiccasamuppāda* began to be explained in a way contrary to the Buddha’s intent.

The Reason for the Incorrect Explanation

The non-malicious reason for the beginning of the incorrect explanation of dependent origination does not refer to someone pretending to be a worm nibbling away at the innards of Buddhism, but rather refers to an incorrect explanation arising of itself because of an ignorant lack of knowledge. This incorrect explanation arose because the language of ultimate truth was not understood. What had been correctly understood in terms of the language of ultimate truth gave way to an incorrect understanding in terms of relative truth. When the language of relative truth was used as a means of explanation, eternalism cropped up. Therefore, we must understand those things which are most important, both in terms of the language of ultimate truth and the language of relative truth. In this double sense, we must understand such words as 'person' and 'mentality-materiality.'

If we speak in the language of relative truth, the language of ordinary people, each of us calls ourself a 'person.' If we speak in the language of ultimate truth, we don't say 'person' but we say 'mentality-materiality,' or 'mind-body.' Whether you call it person or mentality-materiality makes no real difference. The problem still remains of how often does it arise? How does it arise, this person or mentality-materiality?

If you ask this question, there are three different levels of answer:

(1) Mentality-materiality arises and passes away every thought moment. This is a level of explanation few people know about or want to know about and it is not necessary to know about it. Our mentality-materiality, mind-body, arises and passes away each thought moment. This is the language of Abhidhamma. Desire arises because mind arises, is sustained and passes away in the space of what is called *bhavaṅga-citta*.³² One cycle of arising, persisting, and passing away is called ‘one thought moment.’ It is faster than the flick of an eye. So, according to this meaning, it is held that ‘mentality-materiality’ or ‘person’ arises, exists, and passes away each thought moment, so fast as to be beyond counting.

Mentality-materiality, or this person, arising and passing away each thought moment, is one meaning. It’s similar to the rapid frequency of an electric current. When electric current flows in one uninterrupted circuit, there is an impulse of electricity. And these impulses may number a thousand a minute, so rapid as to become indistinguishable. But they occur in such rapid succession that the

³² Concerning the ‘thought-process,’ we find the following explanation in *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, Narada Maha Tera’s English translation of Anuruddha’s *Abhidhammattha Sangaha* (written between the 5th and 11th centuries A.D.): ‘According to Abhidhamma, ordinarily there is no moment when we do not experience a particular kind of consciousness, hanging on to some object – whether physical or mental. The time limit of such a consciousness is termed one thought moment. The rapidity of the succession of such thought moments is hardly conceivable by the ken of human knowledge. Books state that within the brief duration of a flash of lightning, or in the twinkling of an eye billions of thought moments may arise and perish.’ (p. 21 of the 1975 Edition, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka.)

bulb burns brightly without flickering. One thought moment is similarly fast and, when they occur in rapid and close succession, we don't sense the arising and passing away. We must depend upon careful psychological study to realize that the mentality-materiality or person arises and passes away with rapid and close succession, each thought moment faster, indeed, than the frequency of an electrical current. But this kind of arising and passing away is not the same type as in *paṭiccasamuppāda*. *Paṭiccasamuppāda* doesn't refer to this kind of arising and passing away.

This arising and passing away of each thought moment is purely a mental mechanism. It is superfluous, inflated Abhidhammic knowledge which is not concerned with dependent origination. The word used here to mean 'to be born' is not *jāti*, but *uppāda*, which means 'genesis' or 'coming into existence.' The formula goes '*uppāda, ṭhiti, bhaṅga*' – genesis, stasis, cessation; or arising, existing, passing away. *Uppāda* means 'arising,' which is similar to, but not the same as 'birth' (*jāti*).

This is one sense of 'mentality-materiality,' or 'person': arising, existing, passing away, in such rapidly close succession that we can't distinguish these elements.

(2) The normal, everyday meaning is that mentality-materiality arises with the issuing forth from the mother's womb and passes away into a coffin. The state of existence may last as long as eighty or one hundred years. In these eighty or one hundred years, there is only one arising, or birth, and only one passing away, or death. The words 'to be born' and 'pass away' refer to events that occur only

once in the space of eighty or one hundred years according to this second meaning of ‘arising’ and ‘passing away.’ In this language of relative truth, mentality-materiality, or person, exists for eighty or one hundred years between being born and passing away. In the inflated language of Abhidhamma, a person is born and passes away with such great rapidity that it can’t be counted. But in the language of the everyday world, it is so much slower that arising and passing away are easily counted. Both the language of the Abhidhamma and the language of relative truth reflect extremes.

(3) Now, there is a middle sense to all of this and that is given in the language of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, which we are presently concerned with. Being born and passing away in the language of *paṭiccasamuppāda* means the arising of a particular kind of feeling, and then the arising of craving, grasping, becoming, and birth. This kind of arising and passing away can be counted and observed. When, in our minds, there arises the ‘I’ concept, then there is one becoming, one birth, and it may be counted. If one is diligent, one may observe and note, in a given day, how many times the ‘I’ concept arises. The same can be done the next day and the next day after that. The arising and passing away in this sense is not so rapidly successive as to prevent counting and it doesn’t simply mean birth from the mother’s womb and passing away into the coffin. It means the being born and passing away of mentality-materiality, person, in the sense of ‘me’ and ‘mine,’ which is conditioned by ignorance each time.

This kind of mentality-materiality is composed of ignorance, which brews up attachment to ‘me’ and ‘mine’ in order that suffering

may arise once. This is called one birth, or arising, and one passing away. We see this all around us, as in the examples given above. In this sense, there may be many births and many passings away in one day. So please understand that the words ‘birth’ and ‘pass away’ in the language of dependent origination have a specific meaning – the arising and passing away of the ‘I’ concept only. Don’t confuse this meaning with the inflated sense of the language of Abhidhamma, or the everyday language of ordinary people, where ‘being born’ means issuing forth from a mother’s womb and ‘passing away’ means entering a coffin. If these three languages are confused, then there will be no understanding of dependent origination for sure. Dependent origination only refers to the middle of the road sense. It is not so rapid and close that it can’t be counted and not so separated that one life has only one arising and one passing away. Dependent origination refers to the arising and passing away of attachment to the ‘I’ concept any one time. Moreover, it means understanding the arising and passing away in terms of *paṭiccasamuppanna-dhammas* – merely interdependent natural phenomena arising and passing away. Dependent on something, something arises. Dependent on something, something passes away.

Any given person is merely a *paṭiccasamuppanna-dhamma* of one moment in one situation. Don’t allow it to become an ego, a ‘self,’ an *ātman* or any such thing. It is only something naturally dependent on something, which arises and then passes away. If you want to call it a ‘person,’ that’s all right. Or you can call it ‘mentality-materiality,’ ‘mind-body,’ which concurrently arise together. It’s merely a

paṭiccasamuppanna-dhamma. This can become a ‘person’ because ignorance, craving, and attachment give rise to the ‘I’ concept. We must kill this kind of ‘person.’ The killing of this kind of person is the end of suffering. The Buddha taught dependent origination in order to protect us from the arising of this kind of person and suffering. This is what is called being born and passing away in the language of dependent origination.

There is another sense of being born and passing away, the sense of pure matter which we don’t believe as having thought or feeling, such as the arising and passing away of grass. This kind of arising and passing away is another matter. Don’t confuse it with dependent origination. It is not concerned with ignorance or attachment. Grass is alive, it arises and passes away but it is not concerned with ignorance, craving, or grasping at all. Don’t confuse these different senses. The arising and passing away of grass is another kind of birth and passing away. If we know about the arising and passing away of a person – mentality-materiality in the sense of dependent origination – that is good enough. We learn about all these different meanings in order to be able to distinguish them. But be assured that dependent origination in the original Pāli scriptures of the Buddha is not divided into three lives. It is a matter of daily life and it may arise many times in one day.

It is impossible to say just who the first person was to explain dependent origination in a way that spans three births, or when this explanation was first set forth. It first appears in written form in the *Visuddhimagga*, but the primary cause is sure to precede that book.

If you want to know the details of this teaching, you can study the books used in those Dhamma schools which teach this tradition, as well as the *Visuddhimagga* itself. You will find that dependent origination is explained in a way that spans three lives. In general, it is taught that ignorance and mental concocting are the past cause, the cause in the past life. Consciousness, mentality-materiality, sense bases, contact, and feeling are results in the present life. Craving, grasping, and that part of becoming which is karmically active are present causes in the present life, and finally, that part of becoming which is genesis (*uppāda*) and birth, old age and death are the future results in the next life. In this way, three lives are spanned.

In review we see the eleven conditions divided up as follows: the first two are placed in the past life, the eight conditions in the middle are assigned to the present life, and the last two conditions are put in the future life as results, spanning three births altogether. Also, there are three points of connection, or links, called *sandhi* (union): one between the past and the present births; another in the middle of the present birth, between those conditions which are causes and those which are results; and finally another link between the present and future births. And, strange to say, this teaching uses the word *addhā*, which means ‘distant time,’ in conjunction with the three lives. So we find ‘distant past time,’ ‘distant present time,’ and ‘distant future time.’ All of this is not in accord with the Pāli scriptures, which never spoke of a present *addhā*. In the Pāli scriptures, there are references made only to the past and future *addhā*, the distant past and the distant future. The present was not called distant. Nowadays,

they translate *addhā* as ‘time’ and apply it to the three times of the past, present, and future.

The eleven conditions are distinguished in terms of defilements (*kilesa*), deeds (*kamma*), and results (*vipāka*). Ignorance is past *kilesa*, and mental concocting is past *kamma*. Consciousness, mentality-materiality, the sense bases, contact, and feeling are all present *vipāka*. Craving and attachment are present life *kilesa*. That part of becoming which is *kamma* is present birth *kamma*, which brews up the future. That part of becoming which is genesis and birth and old age are future birth results. In this way, the past, present, and future births are accounted for. This is an explanation of dependent origination that covers three births in one revolution. Think about it.

Concerning this, Somdet Phra Saṅgharāja Chao Krommaluang Vajirañāṇavaṃsa believed that such an explanation was incorrectly taught for 1,000 years. But he was not sure how it should be correctly explained. He speculated that it should, perhaps, cover only about one birth. I’m still a stubborn child, I guess, because I push to hold to the Pāli, where it says one cycle of mental activity in dependent origination is like a flash of lightning. When it arises because of the brewing power of ignorance, it is called one cycle or chain. Therefore, in one day, dependent origination may arise many, many times.

Explaining dependent origination as spanning three births is wrong because it is not in accord with the original Pāli of the Buddha’s sayings and the Suttas, because it introduces the incorrect notion of ‘self’ or *ātman*, which is eternalism, and because, most harmfully, it is of no benefit or use to anyone.

Explaining dependent origination as spanning three births is of no use at all because it cannot be practiced when the cause is in that birth and the result is in this birth. How can the situation be corrected? When the cause in this birth gives forth a result in a future birth, how can it be of any use to anyone, except those who are eternalists who can only dream about practice? Moreover, the three births explanation is not something that can be seen by oneself, is not without delay, and is not something that can be directly experienced by oneself, and so it must be taken to be incorrect. It is of no use at all – it can't be practiced because it introduces the eternalist concepts of a soul or a 'self' – so let's be finished with such an explanation. Let's return to the original Pāli, which is correct in letter and spirit.

Buddhagosa

Now I'd like to talk about Buddhagosa, as I said I would. Almost every Buddhist believes that Buddhagosa was an *arahant*. In this regard I have no beliefs at all. I only look at what he did and what he said. That which is of benefit I hold as being correct. That which is of no benefit I hold as being incorrect. For the most part you will see that Buddhagosa is a man of very great knowledge and of very great benefit. He explained many tens and many hundreds of things to the great benefit of all. But I don't at all agree with him regarding dependent origination, because he spoke of it in terms of a soul and so it became Brahmanical.

I don't respect or believe Buddhagosa entirely, because there are some matters that I don't agree with. I hold him in respect for about ninety to ninety-five percent of what he wrote – in a hundred matters I may agree with ninety-five. But four or five I don't agree with, *paṭiccasamuppāda* for example. And if we speak in terms of the significance of various matters, you will see that dependent origination is only one matter, but it outweighs all the rest in significance.

Dependent origination is a difficult matter. It is difficult, abstract, and deeply profound for whatever the reason may be. Yet everyone agrees that it is difficult, abstract, and deeply profound, including Buddhagosa, who, when explaining dependent origination, was

humble and disclaimed responsibility in a most unusual manner! If he wrote on matters other than *paṭiccasamuppāda*, it was like a lion's roar, a brave lion of a man! Whenever Buddhagosa explained anything, wrote any book or began any exposition or anything else, he was always the brave one, a lion of a man. But when it came to dependent origination, he didn't charge forward but seemed to reverse and became humble, and in becoming humble, showed his own doubt. He refused to accept full responsibility so that no blame would fall on his head. His self-humbling words are floridly written and very pretty. I will quote what he wrote regarding his explanation of *paṭiccasamuppāda*:

Explaining the meaning (essence) of dependent origination is a very difficult matter, appropriate to the saying of the ancient teachers to the effect that there were four Dhammas: truth, being, rebirth, and conditionality or dependent origination. These are difficult things to comprehend, speak about, or show to others. I have considered the matter and in terms of weightiness, dependent origination is not an easy thing to explain, except for someone well versed in scriptures and practice. Today I have determined to explain the conditionality of dependent origination, but I am not sure that I will reach the wholeness of its essence because it is like fathoming the ocean. But this holy life (religion) has meanings which may be explained in many ways and from many different angles, including the explanations of the early teachers which have not disappeared. For these two reasons, I intend this explanation to be broad so please pay attention.

This is the fine-sounding disclaimer of Buddhagosa when he comes to explain dependent origination. If he explains something else, he is brave like a lion of a man and he doesn't waive responsibility or ask for leave. But with regard to dependent origination, he says that it is a difficult subject, yet he will dare to attempt an explanation because he holds that Buddhism can be explained in many ways, from different angles and, therefore, he must at least offer one point of view as an explanation. Another point is that previous teachers had already offered explanations of dependent origination and so we can hold to those explanations. But even so, he is still doubtful concerning his present attempt. He is not able to sound the bottom of the ocean. Just like a great ocean, *paṭiccasamuppāda* is so deep that we can't send the sounding cord to the bottom. Therefore, even though he gave a voluminous and finely detailed explanation, there is no guarantee that it reaches the bottom of the ocean.

We can see that he admitted that *paṭiccasamuppāda* was a most difficult subject and he himself was not sure if he could sound out the bottom, or get to the heart of the matter. There were several old explanations available to him and he may have explained one sense or point of view that pleased him. His explanation took on the appearance of spanning three births because of the rebirth consciousness from the past coming into the present birth and, from the present, going over into the future birth. This beginning of an explanation of dependent origination covering three lifetimes has

been strengthened, clarified, and emphasized by those of us who have followed Buddhagosa.

This kind of explanation gives rise to a problem: when defilements (*kilesa*) and *kamma* (e.g., ignorance and mental concocting) in this life give rise to results in some far off future life, it is as if there are no karmic results (*vipāka*) at all which we will receive in this birth in which the deed was done. That means that we have no chance to see the results of our *kamma* in this life at all. The person with defilements or the doer of *kamma* will not receive the effects of his *kamma* in the present life in time for him to see it. He must wait for some future life.

If Buddhagosa used that word *jāti* as understood in the language of ultimate truth, as I have done above, results immediately visible would arise every day – it would be timeless, not delayed, and seen for oneself. To insist that defilements and *kamma* from a past life become effective in this, a later life, is impossible. And when it is said that the same person exists in the past, present, and future lives, it becomes eternalism, an extremist view (*antaḡāhika-diṭṭhi*). This is contrary to *paṭiccasamuppāda* as taught by the Buddha in order to eliminate eternalism and the extremist view.

The most serious loss is that there is no freedom to control defilements or *kamma* because they are in different births than we are in. This life is a result, we are results, we sit here as results. And the cause of the result, the *kamma* and defilements, are in another life, the last life. The defilements and *kamma* in this life will become results in some distant future life. We derive no benefit, then, from

our actions. This is called the lack of freedom in receiving immediately visible results to our deeds. When *paṭiccasamuppāda* is explained in this way, it means that we cannot do anything and receive satisfactory results in this life.

Kamma performed in this life must await results in the next life. Where can there be satisfaction in this? This explanation is contrary to the principle of *svākkhāta-dhamma* – ‘*svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo*’ (the Dhamma well expounded by the Perfect One) – which is: *sandiṭṭhiko* (giving results), *akāliko* (not delayed), *ehi-passiko* (inviting inspection), *paccattam veditabbo* (directly experienceable by each wise person for him/herself). It is wrong on all counts. It is wrong because it wrongly explains the word *jāti* to mean that birth spans three lifetimes in one turn of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Don’t forget this point! The misuse of language here can cause great confusion!

Personal Matters Regarding Buddhagosa

Now I want to critique some personal matters concerning Buddhagosa.

No, I am not going to insult or defame or vilify Buddhagosa. I just want to examine his personal history and offer it as a rational basis for some observations concerning his explanation of dependent origination. I only want to make some observations. Buddhagosa was born a brahmin. His lineage and background was brahmin, and he completed a study of the three Vedas like any other brahmin. His spirit was that of a brahmin. Later on, he was ordained as a Buddhist monk. For the past 1,000 years, many have believed him to be an *arahant*. Archeologists believe that he was born in the south of India and not in Magadha, the Middle Country (where the Buddha lived and taught). Some people think he was a Mon, which is not the same as in the commentaries, which claim him to be a person from the Middle Country. Ethnically he was a brahmin and then he became a Buddhist *arahant*. If he later came to explain the Buddhist theory of dependent origination as a form of Brahmanism, it is most reasonable to suspect that he was careless and forgetful so that he cannot be considered an *arahant*. All I can say is that I offer this point for intelligent people to consider.

There are other rather strange matters appearing in Buddhagosa's *Visuddhimagga*, as I explained above. There is, of course, the view of dependent origination which covers three births and which we all understand well enough by now. But there are some other elements of Buddhism which, in his hands, became Brahmanism. One such matter concerns the world and his explanation of the Buddha's virtue of being a knower of worlds: *lokavidū*.

When Buddhagosa describes the Buddha's virtue of being a knower of worlds, he explains it following the brahmin manner as described before his own time. He does not explain the world as the Buddha did. The Buddha described the world as follows:

The world; the cause of the world; the cessation of the world; and the way to the cessation of the world have all been declared by the Tathāgata as appearing within the six-foot-long living body with perception and mind.

This means that in the six-foot-long body appears the world, its cause, its cessation, and the means for its cessation. That is, the holy life in its entirety is in the six-foot body, a living body, not a dead one. All of these things appear in a living, feeling body. The Buddha is the 'knower of worlds' because he knows this world, which is equivalent to the Four Noble Truths: the world; its cause; its cessation; and the means to its cessation.

In explaining the Buddha's virtue of being a knower of worlds, Buddhagosa did not explain it in this way. I think that his explanation is not Buddhist. He explained the world of location (space) just as we

have heard it passed down in the story of *The Three Worlds of King Ruang*.³³ His explanation comes from beliefs passed on from the brahmins concerning the circumference of the world; its width; its length; the size of the universe; the thickness of earth, water, and air; the height of Mount Sumeru and its encircling mountain ranges; the size of the Himavanta Forest; the size of the Jambu Tree; the characteristics of the Seven World Trees; the size of the sun and the moon and the other Three Continents and so on and so on. This is not at all Buddhism. To describe the world of location in this way as an explanation of the Buddha's virtue of world knower – to say that the Buddha knew all those facts and figures and so on – is something I don't believe at all. Just think about it. Such an explanation of the world of location is Brahminism. It comes from the Hindus, even before the time of the Buddha.

When he explains beings of the world, Buddhagosa explains that beings have differing faculties. Some have little and some have much dust in their eyes. Some have sharp faculties and others weak. Some know easily and others with difficulty. Some are of good behavior and others are not. No mention is made of the world of the Four Noble Truths.

When he explains the world of formations (*saṅkhāra*), he says that the Buddha knew about mentality-materiality, feeling, nutriment, attachment, sense bases, the states of consciousness, the

³³ *The Three Worlds of King Ruang* is a famous work in Thai literature, set in the period when Sukhothai was the center of Thai power. The worldview described by Buddhagosa is taken for granted in this story, as well as in many other works of Asian literature.

eight worldly conditions, the nine abodes of beings, the ten sense bases, the twelve sense bases, and the eighteen elements. Again, there is no explanation of the Four Noble Truths, which are a complete explanation of the world.

It is for these reasons that I hold Buddhagosa's explanation of the Buddha's virtue of *lokavidū* to be just lofty Brahminism. What is explained in a Buddhist sense is diluted and not in accord with the fourfold sense of the world as spoken of by the Buddha: the world, the cause of the world, the cessation of the world, and the means to the cessation of the world, all of which may be found in this six-foot-long living body with perception and mind, as the Buddha mentioned again and again. The heart of the matter is that, when Buddhagosa explains it in his way, it is not Buddhism.

In fact, it is dependent origination itself that explains the world, its cause, its cessation, and the means to its cessation, and it is in this six-foot body. This means that dependent origination, in the order of arising and in the order of cessation, is in each person who is still alive in this very body. Someone who is still alive and not dead, with a body, has in him both the arising and the cessation of dependent origination. There is no way that there can be a soul, a 'self,' a being, or an individual at all.

There are still some other matters that have caused confusion: for example, the four kinds of morality consisting of purification (*catu-pārisuddhisīla*). These four kinds of morality are found nowhere other than in the *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhagosa. He made restraint of the senses a precept of morality and, in so doing, has

caused a difficulty for students. He also made purification of livelihood a precept to add to the problem. Then he made the four requisites – robes, almsfood, shelter, and medicine – another precept of morality. All of this has made a mass of confusion with regards to morality. It is a problem for any rational study of the matter. This definition of morality is found nowhere in the Pāli scriptures. It appears only in the *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhagosa.

Another matter is the two kinds of Nibbāna. Buddhagosa explains that when an *arahant* dies it is called *an-upādisesa-nibbāna* (the full extinction of the groups of existence). An *arahant* who is still alive is called *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna* (the full extinction of defilements). These two kinds of Nibbāna are talked about a lot in the *Visuddhimagga*, but they are not in accordance with the Pāli Tipiṭaka – for example, the *Itivuttaka* in the *Khuddaka Nikāya*.³⁴

There are many things about which I don't agree with Buddhagosa. I don't agree one hundred percent with him because there are some things I don't yet understand or to which I cannot adjust. I have said much and I may be criticized by those who hold that Buddhagosa is fully an *arahant*. But we can whisper to our friends: 'Go ahead and take a critical look at it. It is not necessary to believe me.'

Next, I want to talk about the reasons that dependent origination does not span three births. Those reasons are many.

³⁴ [See Nibbānadhātu Sutta Iti 44.]

(1) The first reason is concerned with the language of relative truth and the language of ultimate truth. Dependent origination is definitely not of the language of the common folk. I've already written about this above. If dependent origination is in the language of relative truth, then it would follow that when the Buddha became enlightened, he would have to have died right there under the Bodhi tree. When ignorance ceased, so would mental concocting, consciousness, and mentality-materiality. This would have been to die. This shows that dependent origination is not spoken of in the language of relative truth. Ignorance was extinguished, mental concocting was extinguished, consciousness and mentality-materiality were extinguished, but the Buddha did not die there and then. He lived forty-five more years to teach us. This shows that dependent origination is not spoken of in the language of relative truth.

Even in the order of arising, it is the same. Ignorance gives rise to mental concocting, which give rise to consciousness, which gives rise to mentality-materiality. It is not a birth of mentality-materiality as in the language of relative truth, because the Buddha asserted that when feeling arose as delight, then there would arise craving, attachment, becoming, and birth. No one dies bodily and no one is born bodily. One is still as one was, but in one's mind there is arising and ceasing: the arising of the 'I' concept and the ceasing of the 'I' concept.

The term 'mentality-materiality' in this case is used in terms of the language of ultimate truth. In the common language, mentality-

materiality is the mind-body combination that we have all the time. It can be said that, after birth, it exists all the time. This is really speaking in the language of relative truth: having been born, it – mentality-materiality – exists all the time. The inflated language of ‘absolute reality,’ that of the Abhidhamma, would say that there are many successive births every thought moment. But the language of the Buddha, which is the real language of ultimate truth, says of this matter that there is birth every time there is ignorant sense contact, followed by a passing away each time. If you use the language of relative truth for the entire series of dependent origination, then one cycle of dependent origination must include two births and so it becomes incomprehensible. This very point is what made it necessary to explain it in terms of two becomings and three lives, making it a kind of eternalism. This is the difference between the language of relative truth and the language of ultimate truth.

Now I would like to give the last example, which unquestionably shows the difference between the language of relative truth and the language of ultimate truth. I am referring to the word *sambhavesī*. When we do the water pouring ceremony to pay respect to the dead, we say a chant which, when translated, implies that there are two kinds of beings: *bhūta* (‘produced beings,’ beings already born) and *sambhavesī* (beings not yet born). Generally, in Thailand and everywhere else, people explain these two words by saying there are these two types of beings: those already born and still living, like you and I – these are called *bhūta* – and those which are called

sambhavesī, who are pure spirits without bodies, floating about in location (space) looking around for a place to be born.

The above explanation is strictly in terms of the language of relative truth and it is also another religion, because it is not Buddhism. It is not Buddhism because Buddhism does not assert that there is a spirit or a 'self' which can float around, an inherent individual looking for a birthplace. Such an idea appears only in eternalism, not in Buddhism. That which is called *viññāṇa* (consciousness) must always be a *paṭiccasamuppanna-dhamma*. It always arises and passes away according to the immediate prevailing conditions. There is no inherent spiritual individual floating around in space. Therefore the *sambhavesī* of the language of relative truth is not the *sambhavesī* of Buddhism. This is my opinion! The Buddhist *sambhavesī* must be understood in terms of the language of ultimate truth and it is not at all the same as the *sambhavesī* of the language of relative truth. *Sambhavesī* (the unborn) means the mind of an ordinary person at those times when there is no craving, attachment, or clinging to a concept of 'self.'

If you cannot understand this point, please attend carefully. In any given day, it is the normal thing for most of us that sometimes we have craving, attachment, and clinging to an 'I' concept. 'I am this' or 'this is mine.' Most of the time, however, it is not like that. There is a passive, non-grasping state. For example, as you sit and read this, you have no 'I' concept because you have no craving or attachment. You are empty of the 'I' delusion; you are just sitting and reading. But sometimes craving and grasping, which are so hot as to cause

suffering, arise in you. So there are these two states. When there is craving and attachment to the 'I' concept, which is violently hot, that is *bhūta* (having been born). Then there is the more normal state of *sambhavesī* (awaiting to lie born, ready for birth). These are the two kinds of beings which the water pouring ceremony prays for: the foolish who are already born and those who are free from illusion and not yet born.

If we speak in the language of Abhidhamma for a moment, we can say that the mind that is not in a state of rest or sleep (*bhavaṅga*), but, rather, awakened from *bhavaṅga*, has the quality of alertness (*āvajjana*) and has not yet arrived at the point of creating the illusions of 'me' or 'mine.' It is a mind in its natural state, free from the flow of dependent origination, the naturally void mind. This is the state of *sambhavesī* for ordinary people. What this means is that when a thought process begins to evolve naturally, there is, actually, no defilement or craving to be a 'self' or to consider something as 'mine.' Such a state is *sambhavesī*. Anyone who is in this state of *sambhavesī* may be said to be awaiting the birth of the delusions of 'me' and 'mine.' It is a pitiable kind of *sambhavesī*, because it is primed for the birth of the 'I & mine' delusion at any moment.

Now, when an object enters the consciousness that is not mindful and is beclouded by ignorance, then the 'I & mine' delusion arises, which is *bhūta* (birth), a most pitiful condition. One should have love and compassion for such a born person. The water pouring ceremony is performed in memory of both those born and those awaiting birth. But once the 'I & mine' delusion has arisen, its power

will last only momentarily. Such a *bhūta* will occur when there is anger or love, but in less than an hour, the power of that anger or love will pass away and the born being will die and become *sambhavesī* again. The being awaiting birth will wait like that and, momentarily, there will be production of the ‘I & mine’ delusion again by means of lust, or anger, or hate, or fear, or whatever else it is that sets the cycle of dependent origination into motion for one revolution. That is one *bhūta* and, in a moment, the conditions of that *bhūta* will dissolve and pass away, and the being returns to a state of *sambhavesī*.

I assert that this kind of *sambhavesī* can be used to one’s advantage; it can become a practice; it is something that allows a measure of control. It is very different from the kind of *sambhavesī* that floats around looking for a new place to be born after one dies and is put in a coffin. I don’t believe that this is *sambhavesī*. Moreover, it is of no interest because it can’t be used to any advantage. It can’t be observed or understood and so it becomes a mere belief in what others say, and to top it all off, it is a kind of *sambhavesī* with eternalism mixed in as well.

There is a Pāli text that is supportive to the unconventional interpretation that I have taken here. It is concerned with the four nutriments and appears in the third and fourth suttas of the *Mahā Vagga, Nidāna Saṃyutta*.³⁵ The Buddha talked about the four nutriments: material food (*kavaḷiṅkārāhāra*), sense and mental impressions (*phassāhāra*), mental volition (*mano-sañcetanāhāra*),

³⁵ [Puttamamṣa Sutta SN 12.63 and Atthirāga Sutta SN 12.64]

and consciousness (*viññāṇāhāra*). The Buddha said that these four are for the setting up (existence) of beings already born (*bhūta*) and for the support of beings that are still *sambhavesī*.

These four kinds of nutriment were explained by the Buddha with similes, showing that they are concerned with the daily lives of people here and now. On any given day, we are those two kinds of beings. The four kinds of nutriment merely have the function of giving assistance to the establishment of a receptacle for *bhūta* beings, those beings already born.

I brought this example up to let you understand that even the words *sambhavesī* and *bhūta* have two meanings depending on whether one is using the language of relative truth or ultimate truth. Moreover, I want you to see which kind can be of benefit in the study and practice of Dhamma and which is in our power to control. That kind is the language of ultimate truth. It seems sort of surprising that everyone who is usually still without defilements is *sambhavesī*. But when defilements arise, there is craving and attachment and they become *bhūta* beings. Therefore, any individual who has not yet died is first *sambhavesī*, then *bhūta*, then *sambhavesī*, then *bhūta*, and so on.

Now we want to restrain completely both *bhūta* and *sambhavesī* beings. For this we must rely on the correct practice according to dependent origination. Don't allow the 'self' to arise. Don't allow the 'I' concept to fully blossom or even partially blossom, in the sense of waiting for a time of birth as *sambhavesī* or *bhūta* beings, so that the four kinds of nutriment can be eliminated completely. Don't allow

the four kinds of nutriment to become meaningful or allow them to brew up the ‘I’ concept. This is a beneficial knowledge of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. This is how to understand *sambhavesī* in terms of both the language of relative truth and the language of ultimate truth.

Now I’d like to consider another example: suffering. There are many levels of the meaning of suffering. On the highest level of the language of ultimate truth, there is the suffering as explained in *paṭiccasamuppāda*. In the Pāli scriptures concerned with dependent origination, the word ‘suffering’ appears: it arises – dependent origination in the order of arising – and it passes away – dependent origination in the order of cessation. The word ‘suffering’ here is not the same as elsewhere: it has a special meaning when it appears as a part of dependent origination. In the arising of suffering, ignorance gives rise to *saṅkhāra* and *saṅkhāra* gives rise to consciousness, all the way up to suffering. This is the dependent origination of the arising of suffering.

This entire series of dependent origination in the order of arising has been called the wrong way of practice. You can see it for yourself in the third sutta of the *Buddha Suttas*, *Nidāna Saṃyutta*.³⁶ What is the wrong way? The wrong way is the wheel of existence giving rise to suffering. And what is the right way? The correct way is the wheel of existence leading to the cessation of suffering.

³⁶ [Paṭipadā Sutta SN 12.3]

The word ‘suffering’ in the order of arising refers to the genesis of suffering; and in the order of cessation it refers to its extinction. This use of the word is not the same as elsewhere, because it only refers to suffering which depends on attachment and grasping. Therefore, merit is suffering; demerit is suffering; imperturbability is suffering.

The word *saṅkhāra* in dependent origination is merely ‘the foundation of suffering.’ *Saṅkhāra* refers to the condition which will lead to suffering. *Puññ-ābhisaṅkhāra* leads to suffering. But most people don’t understand it in this way. They think that making merit must lead to happiness. Rather, *puññ-ābhisaṅkhāra* brews up merit, it gives rise to merit. *Apuññ-ābhisaṅkhāra* brews up demerit, it gives rise to demerit. *Āneñj-ābhisaṅkhāra* brews up imperturbability or steadfastness, it gives rise to steadfastness. All three are still suffering because they are the foundations for attachment: the attachment to merit, demerit, and imperturbability. Therefore, the word ‘suffering’ as used in *paṭiccasamuppāda* is not the same as the word as used elsewhere.

That demerit is a state of wrongness is easy to see. But merit and imperturbability are also suffering and, as such, states of wrongness. Even though there is merit and imperturbability, they are still wrong because they are foundations of attachment. In fact, imperturbability tends towards merit, but it is not called ‘merit.’ It is called ‘steadfastness,’ not stirring after either merit or demerit. But it still has the ‘I’ delusion.

Those who are imperturbable are what we like to call *brahmas* or ‘great beings’. These beings still have a sense of the ‘I’ delusion. They are not attached to merit or demerit, but they have the ‘I’ delusion. Even though they are steadfast, their minds are steadfast in *jhāna* and meditative achievements, which are foundations for attachment because they have the ‘I’ delusion – ‘this is my imperturbability’ – and so it is suffering. Please understand that merit and suffering are all intermingled with each other.

Most people say ‘merit’ and they want happiness or goodness. But in the language of dependent origination both are the same: both are suffering. Merit is suffering; goodness is suffering; wholesomeness is suffering because they are all *paṭiccasamuppanna-dhammas* and will lead to suffering. If you can see this and accept that the language of relative and ultimate truth are different from and opposed to each other and, if you choose to use the language of ultimate truth when talking about dependent origination, you will understand it more easily.

(2) Now we come to a somewhat more difficult matter to understand. It is that dependent origination is defined only within the boundaries set by grasping. It doesn’t refer to simply being alive and having thoughts or feelings. Therefore, the law of dependent origination does not affect a child in the womb.

In order to more easily remember this, let us put it this way: the principles of dependent origination are not used with children in the womb because fetuses in the womb do not yet have clear enough feelings to have ignorance, craving, and attachment. The

*Mahātaṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta*³⁷ talks about the birth of a child and the arising of dependent origination. In this sutta the Buddha clearly describes how a person's life begins.

The Buddha said that when a man and a woman come together in sexual intercourse, and if it is the time of the woman's period, and if the sperm unites with the egg, then a human being will be born. If the man and the woman don't come together, there is no chance for birth. If the man and the woman have intercourse but it is not the time of the woman's period, there will be no birth. Or if the man and the woman come together and the woman is fertile but the sperm does not fertilize the egg, there will be no birth. There must be three conditions present for birth to take place: sexual intercourse, the fertility of the woman, and the fertilization of the egg by the sperm.

After nine or ten months, the baby will be born. While still a baby, the child will play as a baby, with toys, sand, dirt, or anything at all. When the baby gets older and all the while his parents have tried to please him by way of sight, sound, smell, taste, and tactile sensation, the child will begin to experience satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This is the beginning of dependent origination.

Dependent origination doesn't arise for the foetus in the womb or the very young child. Dependent origination begins to take effect only when the child begins to feel and know grasping and clinging. As the Buddha says clearly in the scriptures:

³⁷ [MN 38]

The young child will be aroused to love the thing he sees when sense consciousness arises. He will be displeased with the unpleasant sight. He will live with his body without mindfulness. His mind will not be heavy (without knowledge or wisdom, without being full of unwholesomeness). He will not know the deliverance of the mind or the deliverance through wisdom which is real and of the kind that, when known, will cause all demerit and unwholesomeness to pass away completely.

Pay attention and I will review that: a foetus in the womb is, in time, born as a baby. While still small, the baby plays in the dirt and sand as it will until there comes a time when the child becomes concerned with the five sense satisfactions of sight, smell, sound, taste, and tactile sensation. The child sees something lovely and loves it or is aroused by it. The child sees something unpleasant and it is disturbed and dissatisfied. The child lives in a state without mindfulness, which means that the child does not know how to establish mindfulness. There is only ignorance, a mind that is lightweight, that floats about and is buffeted by sense impressions.

What is strange is that the child does not know about the deliverance of the mind or deliverance through wisdom as it really is, the kind of deliverance that leads to the complete extinction of demerit and unwholesomeness. It is rather funny, but it is also most real. The young child does not know about deliverance of the mind or the way to make the mind free of defilements and emotions through wisdom. The child doesn't know about deliverance and has no mindfulness.

That child lives wrapped up in satisfaction and dissatisfaction, back and forth, back and forth. He tastes the fruits of feelings. Some are pleasurable, some unpleasurable, and some are neutral. The child is pleased to sing the praises of the pleasant feelings and become all wrapped up in them. When pleasure arises, then arises attachment, becoming, birth, old age and death.

We are talking about the young child who, upon birth, has no knowledge of anything at all. Dependent origination does not become operative until the child becomes concerned with the five sense pleasures and knows satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The child has no wisdom or knowledge of the deliverance that is liberation from suffering; the child is unable to establish mindfulness because of ignorance.

When the child tastes feelings from the five sense satisfactions, of which some are pleasant, some unpleasant, and some neutral, he becomes very pleased so that he loudly sings their praises: 'Oh! this is good! Oh! this is delicious!' This is singing the praises of pleasure. Then the child becomes beclouded, befuddled, and all wrapped up in the flavors of those feelings, and delight arises in the mind of the child. When the child sees a desirable form, he is aroused and excited by it. When he sees an ugly form, he rebels and averts from it. This is the birth of delight, which is attachment. This, then, is the arising of dependent origination. A child must be old enough to understand the meaning of the five sense gratifications for dependent origination to become operative. The child's mind must also be beclouded with ignorance – there must be a lack of the knowledge of deliverance.

In order for dependent origination to become operative, the following factors are necessary: the child must be old enough to know about the five sense pleasures. The child must not have knowledge of Dhamma or wisdom. When the child has experienced a feeling, there must be great enjoyment and praise and the child must become lost or bound up in that feeling. This last point refers to *nandi* (delight), which is attachment. This is how dependent origination becomes operative. When the child is grown up, even if not yet to the age of marriage, the child can have these symptoms. When the child begins to know about the five sense pleasures, then dependent origination can become operative in that child.

We have had a great deal of misunderstanding and confusion about this matter. Now we have seen that the Buddha's own words clearly show that it is as I have related above. Such a child may have existence and be born. A little child may exist and be born anew and not the kind of existence or birth from a mother's womb. This child may have many existences and births every time he has an emotion resulting from one of the five sense pleasures. As already explained, every day, month, and year, there may be many, many existences and births – too many to count. It is not necessary to die and enter the coffin to have a new existence and birth every day. This is the flow of dependent origination in a recently born child.

In brief, dependent origination becomes operative when satisfaction or dissatisfaction arises without mindfulness, because it is not known how to establish mindfulness and because that which extinguishes suffering, deliverance, is not known either. The mind

must have these factors for dependent origination to become operative. It becomes operative in this life, here and now. To explain dependent origination as covering three lives is definitely wrong.

(3) Now, most importantly, we come to the point that the entire series of dependent origination operates so quickly that it is beyond catching. It may be called a lightning flash. Lightning is extremely fast. In a flash it disappears. And in that brief space, the eleven elements or twelve conditions of dependent origination may all arise, exercise their function, and pass away, so fast that we are completely unaware of it. When we are angry, we suffer. In a flash, we are angry and experience suffering – one complete operation of dependent origination. We don't realize that, in that brief moment, the eleven elements arose and passed away, each in its order, from ignorance to mental concocting to consciousness to mentality-materiality to sense bases to contact to feeling to craving to attachment to becoming to birth. All eleven in their order in the briefest of moments. So, for example, we see something with the eye and immediately there is desire or aversion, complete and whole. This is a lightning flash. But that brief time can be analyzed into eleven elements which, taken together, are called dependent origination.

In the *Loka Sutta*³⁸ the Buddha describes the world, its cause, its cessation, and the way to its cessation by referring to dependent origination in the following way:

³⁸ [Loka Sutta SN 12.44. See also Lokasamudaya Sutta SN 35.107]

Bhikkhus! What is the arising of the world like? Conditioned by the eye and form, eye consciousness arises. These three coming together are contact. With contact as a condition, feeling arises. With feeling as a condition, craving arises. With craving as a condition, attachment arises. With attachment as a condition, existence arises. With existence as a condition, birth arises. With birth as a condition, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and tribulation arise. Bhikkhus! This is the arising of the world.

The arising of dependent origination as generally related is what the Buddha said is ‘the birth of the world.’ The arising of suffering is the arising of the world, and it arises only when the internal and external sense bases come in contact and consciousness arises.

Now it is a difficult matter, from ignorance giving rise to mental concocting, consciousness, mentality-materiality, and sense bases, to distinguish all these separate factors because they are faster than lightning. The first thing we know is that we have feeling, either pleasant or unpleasant, comfortable or uncomfortable. As for the cessation of the world, it is the same. It can be extinguished at ignorance, mental concocting, consciousness, etc., and that, also, is the cessation of suffering. The arising and passing away of the world was explained in this way. But just as its arising is faster than lightning, so is its cessation. Therefore, if one is not especially interested in the fine details of it, one will not be able to understand that dependent origination is as fast as lightning and has eleven elements to it.

(4) Now I'd like to clarify existence and birth some more. It's not a matter of dying and entering the coffin but, rather, one becomes and is born many times a day.

While chewing just one mouthful of food in your mouth and not yet having swallowed it, it is possible that many existences and many births may come to pass. Suppose, for example, that it takes you two minutes or even just one minute to chew your food before swallowing it. In those sixty seconds, your thoughts may lead you back and forth concerning the good or bad taste of the food, or you may become entranced with a host of other thoughts in relation to the food's taste. In just this brief time, the 'I' delusion and the 'mine' delusion may arise in this way and that way until you swallow your food and take another mouthful. Before you finish your meal, you may have countless existences and births. If you are a great thinker or feeler or, if the environment is filled with distractions, then before you can eat your fill at one sitting, you may have many existences and many births.

Concerning this the Buddha said:

Bhikkhus! If there is really lust, *nandi*, and craving in material food, then the consciousness is established therein and fully blossoms in that food. And wherever the consciousness is established and blossoms, there also will be the development of mind-body.³⁹

³⁹ [Atthirāga Sutta SN 12.64]

Do you understand that correctly? Maybe it's too deep to understand correctly, so re-read it until you are sure you understand it.

While chewing a mouthful of food, if you think that it tastes good and you have intense delight, satisfaction, and craving for that good taste, then at that moment consciousness is established and fully blossoms. This means that before you can fully chew and swallow your food, there are many opportunities for consciousness to arise: 'Oh! This is good! Yummy! I gotta have some more! Umm, umm good!!' Each time you react in that way, a consciousness arises, and each time consciousness arises, it conditions the arising of mentality-materiality.

Feelings are established in the mind, first in this way and then in that way, depending on the power of consciousness. It is there that the mind-body which changes and performs its functions arises. Before this moment, the mind-body wasn't performing and functioning. Now it arises to perform its function conditioned by consciousness. Consciousness may arise many times. Mentality-materiality arises and passes away many times also, in response to the condition of consciousness, all in the space of chewing a mouthful of rice. So it is that the Buddha said that wherever consciousness arises, meaning in this example, the mouthful of food, there it is established and blossoms. The arising of mentality-materiality will also be there in that mouthful of food. The consciousness for each swallowed mouthful is not the same consciousness in each case. There are many kinds of feeling arising which may all be associated

with good taste and so there are many kinds of mentality-materiality arising before one mouthful of food can be chewed and swallowed.

There is still another complex matter in the scriptures:

Wherever mentality-materiality arises [e.g., in whatever mouthful of food], the perfection of mental concocting will be there too.

The arising of mentality-materiality allows the brewing power of mental concocting to arise again and again, with greater and greater strength, until it becomes a strong mental activity.

The scriptures go on:

Whenever mental concocting is perfected, there also will be the arising of a new existence.

While sitting and eating some food, mental concocting is at work right there, and there will be a new existence arising right there also. Before you can get up from the table, a new existence has arisen in that place. The scriptures continue:

Wherever a new existence has arisen, there also will arise birth, old age and death.

If this point is explained in terms of the language of relative truth, it must become a matter of future birth. But the Pāli scriptures of the Buddha's sayings don't allow such an interpretation. It says that if satisfaction, lust, and craving arise while just chewing some food, then there will be a new existence. It doesn't say anything more than that.

That takes care of material food.

The other three kinds of nutriments – the nutriments of contact, mental volition, and consciousness – are dealt with in the same way. This allows us to see more clearly that the function of material food is just as described above. The non-material nutriments are even faster. The non-material nutriments which come from the mind alone give rise to new existences and births in an even faster fashion. This is a fact which you must see concerning this sutta.

The principle we are concerned with here is that lust or satisfaction, or excited arousal and pleasure in good taste, arises only when there is a tasting of food. When there is no chewing, no eating, no such activity, then such emotions cannot arise. Therefore, any of those things that we have been talking about can arise only when there is a sensation of good taste at the tongue, while chewing food. Tongue consciousness is established in that food and fully arises there. The longer this happens, the more consciousness arises and blossoms.

This is consciousness according to *paṭiccasamuppāda*. When it is said that mental concocting gives rise to consciousness, it does not mean ‘rebirth consciousness.’ But it has been made into a matter of rebirth consciousness by those who only know the language of relative truth and who have ‘selves’ that span existences and births. Once again, I must repeat that whatever consciousness that carries out its function and gives rise to attachment, existence, and birth in the cycle of dependent origination, does so as I have described above. It may be called ‘linking consciousness’ only in the sense that it links a series of ‘I’ delusions together.

I want all of you to know that this kind of consciousness which arises and blossoms due to intense delight and satisfaction while chewing food is just ordinary consciousness. It is not the linking consciousness of the uninformed. It is the ordinary consciousness of dependent origination which gives rise to existence and birth in the real sense of dependent origination: here and now and in great numbers. When it is said that ‘mentality-materiality makes a sounding,’⁴⁰ it means that it simply perceives or feels the food’s good taste that is presently being chewed in the mouth. Just at this moment, mind-body performs its full function. It is not the case that mentality-materiality, mind-body, are born, die and enter a coffin in order to be reborn.

That which is called ‘the perfection of mental concocting’ means mental concocting in dependent origination: that which brews up body, speech, and mind to function with greater and greater vigor, being, robustness, and breadth. In the Pāli, it says ‘the perfection of mental concocting,’ and it is very fast at the moment of chewing good-tasting food. It can give rise to new existence and new birth – a new ‘I’ delusion, and yet again another ‘I’ delusion, and yet again and again and again; ‘I,’ ‘I,’ ‘I’... all strung together on top of one another in a big broad mass. This is called the perfection of mental concocting.

⁴⁰ A Thai idiom. ‘Sounding’ is a literal translation of the phrase used by sailors in determining the water’s depth. When used with the Thai word for mind or heart (*chai*), it simply means ‘to think’ or ‘to feel.’ The Thai idiom, however, graphically depicts the way that many people think about the mind and its operations: the mind is like an object that is sent out to test the depth of the present experience, which in turn reflects a bias towards the eternalist extreme.

The problems concerned with the 'I' delusion, be they problems of birth, old age, sickness, death, or whatever, are many, and suffering is much. And so the Buddha continued:

Bhikkhus! Hereafter, wherever birth, old age and death are, we call that thing filled with grief, with dust, and with tribulation.

Difficult, mind-disturbing problems about birth, old age and death are disturbing because of attachment to the 'I' delusion, which sees those things as belonging to the 'self,' to 'me.'

The problems of birth, old age and death may appear anywhere or in anything at all. The Buddha said that such things were filled with sadness, dust, and tribulation. That means that any new existence of the 'I' delusion is full of sadness, defilements, and frustration. There can be innumerable new existences or births in the brief time of chewing delicious food where there is intense delight, craving, and satisfaction. This also gives rise to mental concocting. It is complete and it equals one turn of the wheel of dependent origination.

The Foundation of Practice or The Radiant Wheel of Dependent Origination

The foundation of practice based on the accompanying illustration is rather strange. I call it ‘the radiant wheel of dependent origination.’ It begins with arising and goes onto extinction, and the amusing thing is that it shows the ‘blessing of suffering.’

The Buddha’s words concerning this speak about an order of extinguishing suffering which is rather strange. The Buddha said:

For the person who knows and who sees, I will talk; for the person who does not know or does not see, I will not talk concerning the end of the *āsava*.

The end of the *āsava*⁴¹ will come when one sees the nature of the arising and passing away of the aggregates. Concerning the ending of the *āsava*, the Buddha said that it was possible that they would end when one knew about and saw the arising and the nature of the arising and passing away of the five aggregates of clinging, namely, body, feeling, recognition, mental formations, and consciousness. When one really knows the nature of these and the nature of their arising and passing away, that will mean the end of the *āsava*. The end of the *āsava* will come because of this knowledge. The Buddha said that he could speak of these things because he knew them and

⁴¹ See note 16, p. 17.

saw them. If he didn't know and didn't see these things, he would not have spoken.

If the end of the *āsava* occurs, there will be consciousness of its end. This knowledge of the end of *āsava* will arise when there is deliverance; deliverance or liberation will arise because of fading away or detachment; fading away or detachment will arise with aversion or disgust; aversion or disgust will arise with absolute knowledge, or knowledge of how things really are; absolute knowledge will arise with concentration; concentration will arise with happiness; happiness will arise with tranquility or quietude; tranquility will arise with rapture; rapture will arise with joy; joy will arise with faith; and faith will arise with suffering as a condition.

The Twenty-Four Elements of Dependent Origination

*		*	
-- Ignorance			Nibbāna --
Mental concocting			Knowledge of the deliverance
Consciousness			Deliverance
Mind-body			Fading away
Sense bases			Disgust
Contact			Knowledge of how things are
Feeling			Concentration
Craving			Happiness
Attachment			Tranquility
Becoming			Rapture
Birth			Joy
Old Age, Death	-----	Suffering	----- Faith

*

Now the matter turns to dependent origination: suffering is based on birth; birth on becoming; becoming on attachment; attachment on craving; craving on feeling; feeling on contact; contact on sense bases; sense bases on mentality-materiality; mentality-materiality on consciousness; consciousness on mental concocting; mental concocting on ignorance.

This means that the end of *āsava* depends on all the various conditions, in the order mentioned, until one comes down to faith. If we have confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, if we have confidence that the practice will end suffering, this is called ‘the beginning of faith.’ Now let’s trace all the conditions back:

with faith arises joy;
with joy arises rapture;
with rapture arises tranquility;
with tranquility arises happiness;
with happiness arises concentration;
with concentration arises absolute knowledge;
with absolute knowledge arises disgust;
with disgust arises fading away;
with fading away arises deliverance;

and then knowledge of deliverance has been obtained, so there is the end of the *āsava*, and the beginning in faith.

Faith depends on suffering. This is strange. I would guess that not too many people have ever heard it put this way. The faith we have, we have because of suffering. If suffering did not oppress us,

we would not run to the Buddha for refuge. Isn't that so? We run to the Buddha as a refuge. We have a firm and strict faith in the Buddha because we have been oppressed by suffering. So in our life, suffering becomes the condition of faith and so suffering becomes a good thing, just like a jewel in the forehead of the toad, which is really an ugly thing. In suffering, there appears a gem – that which drives us to run to the Buddha and have faith.

The Buddha's saying that suffering – which comes from ignorance, mental concocting, mentality-materiality, etc. – is the foundation for faith, shows us not to be sorry, not to be afraid, not to feel slighted. If we use dependent origination well, suffering will become the base of faith and faith will allow the Dhamma to blossom to the ending of the *āśava*. Seeing suffering in this way is like finding a diamond in the forehead of an ugly toad. But, usually, people hate and fear such things as toads, mice, millipedes, and worms. People fear all sorts of things. But if they know that suffering is the condition of faith, that it is the foundation for the blossoming of faith, then suffering becomes something that is useful.

We have covered quite a lot of material. I'm sure that it will not be easy to remember it all unless you review and study it well. In any case, I will now offer a brief summary.

Conclusion

In conclusion, concerning dependent origination it can be said:

(1) The world, its cause, its cessation, and the way to its cessation all arise when there is sense contact, in the arising or the extinguishing cycle of dependent origination, and all of this is in the six-foot body that is alive and not dead.

(2) There is no way for the series of dependent origination conditions to span three existences or three births, or to span any existence or birth as is said in the language of relative truth. There is no reason to think so even when taking the literal interpretation of the word *paṭicca*.

The word *paṭicca* means ‘to depend upon,’ but it is the kind of dependence which does not admit of any gaps. There are a series of dependent connections. As the simile goes: because of the sun, the world exists; because of the world, there is water in the world; because of water in the world, there is evaporation; because of evaporation, there are rain clouds; because of rain clouds, there is rain; because of rain, there is rainfall; because of rainfall, there are wet roads; because of wet roads, Mr. A slips; because Mr. A. slips, he cracks his head; because he cracks his head, he goes to the doctor; because he goes to the doctor, he is better.

Can you interrupt the series anywhere? No. Each step must be connected immediately, without any intervening spaces or things.

That is the meaning of *paṭicca*. Dependent origination means to be dependently connected in order to arise, so it can't be divided into three existences and births.

There is no reason to divide the conditions up because, in fact, dependent origination is concerned with the Four Truths. It's a matter of the Four Noble Truths in daily life. If it's a matter of dependent origination over three births, then it can't be of any advantage to us and it will not be seen by oneself, without delay, and directly experienced by oneself. And if you hold that dependent origination spans three births, then you become a holder of the wrong view of eternalism like Bhikkhu Sāti, the fisherman's son.

If someone divides it into three lifetimes or births, it's like playful and fun-filled study without any truth – fun-filled study and debate concerning dependent origination. The more profound it is, the more fun it is, but it is of no value at all because it can't be practiced. It must be correct dependent origination according to the original Pāli scriptures to be practical, to allow some measure of control, here, within one's grasp. That means that we may use it in a practical way. It is subject to our management. The kind of dependent origination which depends on a three-birth span is like a kind of tumor or cancer which can't be cured.

(3) The heart of the matter is that dependent origination becomes operative each time there is sense contact with a person who is old enough – not a foetus in the womb and not a small baby with no knowledge of anything at all. The person must be old enough to know something and the sense contact must arise without

mindfulness or wisdom, but only with ignorance. The external and internal sense bases help give rise to consciousness, which gives rise to mentality-materiality immediately, which immediately gives rise to the sense bases, which become mind-body immediately or which become new sense bases in order to act upon the initial ignorance. All of this happens in a flash, like lightning. If it is very intense, it may even be startling.

Remember that if it is very intense, there is a sense of being startled. When we glance at something, or hear something, or see some event and feel startled, or feel the hair rise on our bodies, it is because the contact is a very great one. In the case of the mental concocting giving rise to a consciousness accompanied by startlement, in the brief moment of feeling startled, many of the conditions of dependent origination are established. Ignorance to mental concocting to consciousness to mentality-materiality to sense bases, and the contact is strong enough to cause startlement. If it is strong enough to make us feel startled, everything must occur in its order according to dependent origination.

(4) Dependent origination demonstrates the fact of suffering, its arising and its passing away. It does not demonstrate the owner of suffering, who carries suffering across existences and births. There is no owner of suffering. Suffering arises without an owner. Please see that dependent origination shows the arising and passing away of suffering and not the owner of the suffering which arises and passes away. It also shows the principles of the causes and

conditions in detail, so it is practical and unlike anything else in the world.

Now I'd like to make a confession: I studied dependent origination that was not according to the Buddha's intention. I couldn't help it because I was a Dhamma student. And for one year after that, I also taught dependent origination in the incorrect way that spans three births. Therefore, I'd like to confess and ask forgiveness now, and let me affirm that I have tried all these tens of years to discover dependent origination that is within our means to control and that can be practiced; that, with mindfulness, can be used to protect one as soon as contact arises. This is the only beneficial kind of *paṭiccasamuppāda* that can be practiced.

If you ask, 'How can it can be practiced?,' the only answer is to have mindfulness when there is sense contact. Don't let your mindfulness become forgetful. Don't allow ignorance to brew up consciousness, mentality-materiality, and sense bases of the sort that will experience suffering. See that you remain in your original state. To be *sambhavesī*, not born, is better because there is then no suffering.

May you all have correct understanding from now on. May you understand *paṭiccasamuppāda* correctly. Even in the kitchen while eating good-tasting food, dependent origination may arise many, many times.

This exposition of dependent origination is likely to lead to my being loudly criticized around the world and not just in Thailand,

because wherever dependent origination is taught, it is taught as spanning existences and births. While I merely talk about *suññatā* (voidness) and Abhidhamma, I'm loudly criticized in Thailand. But in talking about dependent origination, I am sure that it will cause a more widespread reaction. But since I am a 'servant of the Buddha,' I must do what I do. I must fight and work against whatever I know to be to the detriment of the Buddha. Therefore, I am not afraid that anyone will criticize me, even if it is throughout the universe, let alone the world.

So this is the exposition of dependent origination that doesn't span existences and births, and of dependent origination that does span existences and births. These differ as I have shown. The kind that spans existences and births is useless and can't be practiced. Leave it for the loud conversations of the philosophers who don't have any self-knowledge. As for the practical kind of dependent origination, it was taught by the Buddha himself. If we accept that kind, we will be able to extinguish suffering and won't become associated with eternalists or extremists; it is completely perfect and practical.

All of this is advice that I offer to those interested in study, so that they can study in the greatest detail.

Buddhadāsa Indapaṇṇo

Mokkhabalārāma

Vesak 2521/1978



About the Author

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was born in 1906, the son of a southern Thai mother and an ethnic Chinese father. He followed Thai custom by entering a local monastery in 1926, studied for a couple years in Bangkok, and then founded his own refuge for study and practice in 1932. Since then, he has had a profound influence on not only Thai Buddhism but other religions in Siam and Buddhism in the West. Among his more important accomplishments, he:

- Challenged the hegemony of later commentarial texts with the primacy of the Buddha's original discourses.
- Integrated serious Dhamma study, intellectual creativity, and rigorous practice.
- Explained Buddha-Dhamma with an emphasis on this life, including the possibility of experiencing Nibbāna ourselves.
- Softened the dichotomy between householder and monastic practice, stressing that noble eightfold path is available to everyone.
- Offered doctrinal support for addressing social and environmental issues, helping to foster socially engaged Buddhism in Siam.

- Shaped his forest monastery as an innovative teaching environment and Garden of Liberation (Suan Mokkh).

After a series of illnesses, including strokes, he died in 1993. He was cremated without the usual pomp and expense.

About the Translator

A former Catholic seminarian, Steve served with the U.S. Peace Corps in the late 1970s and then continued living in Thailand and working with non-government development agencies, such as in Thung Song, Nakhorn Srithammarat. He was a frequent visitor at Suan Mokkh, keen student of Tan Ajahn's approach to Buddha-Dhamma, and also helped with some of the early meditation retreats organized by Ajahn Poh. Steve returned to the USA around 1987.

Echoes from the Garden of Liberation **Series**

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#02 *The Meditative Development of Mindfulness of Breathing*

#03 *Paṭiccasamuppāda: Practical Dependent Origination*

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* forthcoming

Recommended Reading (Books)

- *Buddha-Dhamma for Inquiring Minds*
- *Christianity and Buddhism*
- *The First Ten Years of Suan Mokkh*
- *Handbook for Mankind*
- *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree*
- *Keys to Natural Truth*
- *Living in the Present without Past without Future*
- *Mindfulness with Breathing: A Manual for Serious Beginners*
- *Natural Cure for Spiritual Disease: A Guide into Buddhist Science*
- *Nibbāna for Everyone*
- *No Religion*
- *Paticcasamuppada: Practical Dependent Origination*
- *The Prison of Life*
- *A Single Bowl of Sauce: Teachings beyond Good and Evil*
- *Under the Bodhi Tree: Buddha's Original Vision of Dependent Co-Arising*

Online Resources

- www.bia.or.th
- www.suanmokkh.org
- www.soundcloud.com/buddhadasa
- www.facebook.com/suanmokkhbangkok

Buddhadāsa Foundation

Established in 1994, the Buddhadāsa Foundation aims to promote the study and practice of Buddha-Dhamma according to Ven. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's teachings. It encourages compilation and translation of his works from Thai into foreign languages, as well as supports publication of translated teachings for free distribution.



Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives

Established in 2010, the Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives collect, maintain, and present the original works of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu. Also known as Suan Mokkh Bangkok, it is an innovative place for fostering mutual understanding between traditions, studying and practicing Dhamma.

