



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

Dependent Origination & Emptiness 1 of 4

March 19, 2022

Leigh Brasington:

So the first thing I want to say is that the dāna for today will go to Ukrainian relief. When you give your dāna to sati center, it doesn't come to me. It goes to UK Ukrainian relief organizations. The Buddha said he taught dukkha and the end of dukkha. We could define dukkha today as living in Ukraine. And so I can't take away all their dukkha and you can't take away all their dukkha. But we have the opportunity to help alleviate some of that dukkha. So all of your dāna for today, we'll go to Ukrainian relief.

The second thing this is for people that are listening to this not live the recording, I will be referring to book page numbers, which are page numbers in the PDF of my book "Dependent Origination and Emptiness". To get a copy of that PDF, go to the following website sodapi.leighb.com. Click on download and then click on the first of the PDFs PDF number one and that's the page numbers that I will be referring to.

Okay, so the first page number is page number 13. After his awakening, the Buddha was concerned that people were addicted to their lifestyle. And he thought that people who are addicted to their lifestyle wouldn't be able to understand what he had to say. He says, "I considered this dharma I have attained is profound, hard to see hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle to be experienced by the wise. But this generation delights in attachment takes delight in attachment rejoices in attachment." That sound familiar? "It is hard for such a generation to see this important thing, namely, this that conditionality - dependent origination. And it's hard to see these important things namely, the stilling of all fabrications, the relinquishing of all the accoutrements of one's lifestyle, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbāna."

So this really gives us a hint of what the Buddha thought was important. This was the really important stuff, and it was going to be difficult for people who are addicted to their lifestyle to see in particular, this that conditionality - dependent origination. *Idappaccayatā paṭiccasamuppāda* in Pāli.

So, yeah, what exactly does that mean? And that's what we're going to talk about today.

So, mostly dependent origination is talked about as 12 links, the 12 links of dependent origination. If you turn to page 15 in the book, the links are right there and I will paste them. So page 15 at the top there are the 12 links of dependent origination, which I just put in the chat.

But that's kind of hard to understand. I mean, you've probably seen the list before. But you know, what exactly does all of this mean? And why? Why is birth right at the end? I mean, usually birth comes at the beginning. What's it doing right, right next to last? That's weird. I'm sorry. This is weird. There's no other way. Actually Caroline Rhys Davids, who was one of the



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great translators of Pāli into English, at the beginning of the 20th century, referred to dependent origination as a curious old rune. And yeah, I think that's pretty good. It is, well, kind of strange, difficult to understand. So instead of jumping in at the 12 links, which I suspect are the very last recension of dependent origination. What if we start at the beginning? How would that be? Of course, that only raises the question, well, where's the beginning? There's a sutta in the Sutta Nipata. Perhaps you're familiar with the Sutta Nipata. If not, it's one of the oldest collections, at least that's what the scholars are saying. This material seems to come from a time when basically, the Buddha was a solitary wanderer. We know from the biography that we have of the Buddha. After he had his first 60 disciples, he sent them all out and said, let know to go in the same direction and teach the dharma for the benefit of many. And he went off by himself. And so the person depicted in the Sutta Nipata in book four. Yeah, is a solitary wonder for the most part. So the words you use there seem to indicate that it's early in the sense that you can tell the difference between, say 18th century English and 20th century English. Right. And so the scholars who dug the Pāli can figure out that this is probably early material. It seems to be quite useful teachings. I took a sutta study class with Gil Fronsdal back in 1996. And this is where we started was with the Sutta Nipata and he has a wonderful book on the Sutta Nipata book four and he has a wonderful book on the so called Atthaka Vagga, book four, called the "Buddha before Buddhism". I highly recommend it. Anyhow, there's a sutta in there, but it's well not that well known. It's entitled The Sutta on Quarrels and Disputes - Sutta Nipata 4.11. It starts out with someone asking, why are there quarrels and disputes? And the answer is, people find things endearing. Well, that makes sense. If it's not something you care about, you're not that likely to get involved in a quarrel or dispute, except maybe on Facebook or something. But usually, an in person quarrel or dispute, it's something you really care about, right? We find find whatever it is endearing. Well, then the question arises, why do we find things endearing? Because they're desirable. And that makes sense. Why do we find things desirable? It is said in this world, it is pleasant, it is unpleasant. Where do the pleasant and unpleasant come from? Sense contact. And what does sense contact depend upon? Nāma-rupā. Nāma-rupā is an interesting term literally would be name and form. You could say mentality and materiality and dependent origination is often translated as mind and body.

So what we've got here is something that makes a lot more sense. You have a mind and body right? I mean, I can tell looking at your video right and you get sense contacts right now you're getting both visual sense contacts and auditory sense contacts. And these contacts generate well what was later called vedanā. Vedanā is your initial categorization of a sensory input either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Right. And, well, we find the pleasant things desirable. And we find in the absence of the unpleasant thing desirable, if something is desirable enough, especially if you actually get hold of it, then it becomes endearing. And then if somebody wants your endearing thing and you don't want to give it up, but it can lead to quarrels and disputes. This makes so much more sense than the 12 links of dependent origination, which are really kind of obscure.

Yeah, you got a mind and body you get sense contacts, it produces pleasant or unpleasant. And yeah, you find the pleasant desirable and you started hanging on to it and get endeared to it and somebody tries to take it away and quarrels and disputes arise. I think this is the original dependent origination teaching. It certainly makes a lot more sense and it certainly fits with what the Buddha's teaching. When someone asked you for, well, a summary of what the Buddha



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taught, you probably would think of the Four Noble Truths. Right? And the first Noble Truth is dukkha happens. Right? They used to put that on bumper stickers course they used a four letter Anglo Saxon word rather than a Pali word, but it's the same thing dukkha happens. First, Noble Truth. Second Noble Truth dukkha arises dependent on craving. That's dependent origination. Right? Dukkha is dependently originated from craving. Right? Quarrels and disputes are dukkha. They're dependently originated from endearing and desirable, but desirable and craving are used synonymously throughout the suttas. So yeah, pretty much the same thing here. And of course, if you want to get out of dukkha, then the third noble truth, don't do the craving bit. Right? This shows that the Buddha was actually talking about necessary conditions. One of the mistakes that people make when trying to understand dependent origination is they look for causes. Dependent origination is not about causes, it's about necessary conditions. Okay, a necessary condition for quarrels and disputes is, well, people cling to something they find endearing. And they don't want to give it up. And so they argue about it, whether it be a material object or idea or anything else. And a necessary condition for finding something endearing for you wanting to cling to it. Is that it's desirable. Right? And the desirable arises because of our pleasant unpleasant experiences, which are just coming every time we get a sense contact. And this sense contacts are part of having a mind and body.

But these are necessary conditions. Having a mind and body doesn't cause quarrels and disputes. Right? Having a mind and body doesn't even call sense contacts, right? You still have a mind and body when you're under anesthesia having surgery, but they're no sense contacts. Right? It's just not happening. But obviously, your mind is still working because your heart keeps beating, and you keep breathing and so forth. And that's controlled by your mind. It's not conscious mind, but it's still there. Right? So this is not about causes. This is about necessary conditions.

The Buddha's genius was he wasn't trying to explain how the world came to be or anything else about causes. He was simply looking for the problem, dukkha and a necessary condition upon which dukkha depends. And if he could turn off the necessary condition, he could turn off the dukkha. Like, a necessary condition for the light to be on is the light switch be turned on. The light switch doesn't cause the light to shine. Right? That's excited electrons in the filament or the gas tube or whatever. Right. But the light switch being on as a necessary condition. You don't have to understand why the light shines what causes it to shine. If you want to turn off the light, you just turn off the light switch, you turn off the necessary condition. And this was the Buddhist genius looking for necessary conditions. In particular, he found one for dukkha, craving. And this gives a little more detail, we could actually generalize quarrels and disputes to dukkha. Right? Dukkha arises on what we're what we're clinging to, we cling to the things that are endearing. Right. And the clinging, well, that arises dependent on craving. Craving is sort of like I want to get it, and clinging is I've got it. Alright, so clinging is you're focused on the possessor of the object and craving, you're focused on getting the object. Right, so craving is about the object and clinging is about the subject me, the one who's clinging to it. And all of this arises dependent on vedanā, pleasant and unpleasant, which is what happens when you have a sense contact. Neuroscientists tell us that within a 10th of a second, you're going to categorize any sense contact is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. And if you're not careful with a pleasant you start craving for it. And if it's unpleasant you crave for its absence. And these are setups for



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dukkha. Sense contacts are just part of having the mind and body and this is basically what we find, in Well, the first part of the discourse on quarrels and disputes at Sutta Nipata 4.11.

And as I say, I think this is the original dependent origination. This is what was there to start with. Now, you might be thinking, Yeah, but most of these words are different. But if you scroll down slightly to the bottom of page 16. I've rearranged the 12 links of dependent origination. So they're in their so called reverse order with each saying it arises dependent on the previous and you scroll down to page 17. You'll see this chart that lines up I think this is going to fit very well in chat, but we'll give it a try and see this chart of correspondence of the 12 links of dependent origination and what we find in Sutta Nipata 4.11.

If we generalize quarrels and disputes to dukkha, then it's the same thing. So the chart basically says quarrels and disputes that's dukkha. We find numerous occasions where the 12 links are given. And the link is not just old age, sickness and death but is actually given as dukkha. And then, birth and becoming no correspondence. Clinging and endearing. Birth and becoming don't show up in what we have from Sutta Nipata 4.11. But birth and becoming don't show up in all of the recensions. That's only in some of the later ones. Clinging and endearing, what we cling to is what we find endearing. Craving and desirable.

These clinging and desire are used interchangeably in a number of suttas, where you would expect to see clinging see craving, you see desirable or weary expect to see desirable you see craving. Vedanā is almost identical to pleasant and unpleasant. Sense contact is exactly the same Pāli word. The six senses get left out of a number of recensions of dependent origination. Name and form, nāma-rupā, is the same in both of these. And consciousness is occasionally left out. Sankhāra and ignorance are frequently left out.

So what we have in Sutta Nipata 4.11 is actually the the heart of dependent origination. You've got a mind and body you're going to get sense contacts, it's going to generate pleasant and unpleasant. How are you going to deal with that? If you're going to do craving you You're setting yourself up for dukkha. Craving doesn't cause dukkha. Sometimes you crave something and get your craving satisfied, and there was no dukkha. But too often, it's a setup for dukkha. Because if you don't get it satisfied, that's dukkha. Or if you do get it satisfied, and then you lose whatever it was, and that's dukkha. And once you get something, then you're clinging to it. And, yeah, if it goes away, that's dukkha. So this is really the heart of dependent origination. It's not really the 12 links, per se, but it's embedded in the 12 links.

Now, if we start looking under all of the suttas on dependent origination, we find, sometimes it's two links, three links, five links, six links, eight links, nine links, 11, links, 12 links. The Buddha, just use the links that he felt were useful at the time. And for whatever he was teaching. What happened though, was the 12 links became the de facto standard. This is this is what everybody thinks of when they think of the 12 links.

But if you want to understand dependent origination, starting with the 12 links is like starting in graduate school, it's probably better if you start in first grade, right and get get the background necessary. I would say that the understanding, I now have the 12 links of dependent origination, which I'm not claiming to be complete, probably took me a quarter of a century to get there was



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just a lot to study there. And it was really only when I came across this particular sutta and recognized, oh, this is an early version, that it really started making sense.

So I'm going to stop here and see if there any questions on this bit in particular. But then I'm going to go on and discuss the 12 links, because that's what you're going to run into.

Questioner:

I just want to say thank you, Leigh for this. You put your finger on things I've been wondering about for a long time. I've heard the 12 links described to me and I couldn't follow all of the links didn't really make sense. I wondered if I was stupid. And then I've been wanting to rearrange it and reword it in my own way. That made sense to me. But I thought I didn't have permission to do so because I'm not a teacher. And now you're showing me, it's okay to do that. So that's all I wanted to say.

Leigh Brasington:

Thank you. Yeah. Yeah, it's not so much rearrange them as basically throw out the stuff that was added later and get to the heart of the matter. Right. Sure.

Questioner:

I echo what William said. Also, thank you for making it more accessible. But I'm just wondering if you can open up for me, I see sometimes that I have all the time to my views and beliefs. But also that the attachment to the views and beliefs that I have based on my own prior conditioning. I also like to think myself as an open minded person. If the other one is presenting something, I have changed my ideas totally. So I'm not sure if I'm really clinging to that. But based on condition form, I mean, my own conditionality, I've come to have certain views. But I'm also I'm not sure how much I'm attached to it. If something else presented that. I like to think I'm open minded, I can change my mind. So I'm not sure how that works. If you can just attachment to views. Thank you.

Leigh Brasington:

Right. Before we started today, Rob was saying, "Well, is there is there something else you might want to write a book on? You know, you got two books out there." I don't even like to write. So, I did this this weekend retreat for Barre Center for Buddhist studies on Right View. And, yeah, it's really important. It comes at the beginning of the Eightfold Path. First thing, right view. And so what is right view mean? Well, if we look at some of the other suttas in book four of the Sutta Nipata, other suttas around this sutra we've been discussing, there's a number of them on Right View. And basically, the idea is, don't get attached to your views. It's not that you shouldn't have views. It's that you should be willing to give them up anytime you get some better information. So now, how do you check that out? Well, let's say you have a view. If one of the famous views in Buddhism is rebirth, right, okay. I have a view that after I die, I'm going to be reborn. All right. Can you give up that view for 24 hours? What does that mean? After I die, I'm not going to be reborn, that this whole rebirth thing was just a joke. It was just something from India 2500 years ago. And it's not true. And it's never been true. And this is all it is. How does it make you feel? Do you want to cling back to your view? Alright, that'll give you some hints on how tightly you're clinging to a view. What's it like to go 24 hours thinking, "Yeah, I'm not going to be reborn." This is this is a mistake that got introduced into Buddhism. And so I'm not saying



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one way or the other. Okay. I'm just saying that's a view that a lot of people are clinging to. And so what's it like to just spend 24 hours thinking about, "what if my view is completely wrong? How am I going to react to that?" This will have a opportunity to see how tightly you're clinging to it. The most important thing to bring on the spiritual path is an open mind. You can't get any place other than where you are, unless you leave where you all right? I mean, you want to go to I don't know, Chicago? Well, if you're in San Francisco, you can't get to Chicago unless you're willing to leave San Francisco. Yeah, you want to get to full awakening. You can't leave, you can't get to full awakening, unless you're willing to let go of the mind state you have now that keep you from being fully awakened. And clinging to views. Yep. That's what gets in the way. So I hope that's helpful.

Questioner:

Yeah, thank you so much. But at the beginning, perhaps I need to just cling to some Buddhist views is because I don't have any other. And then as I get deeper in this, I can let go of one by one because awakening for each one of us is going to be different. And it's not going to be exactly the same. I'm thinking is our correct?

Leigh Brasington:

Yeah. You said wouldn't use the word cling? You get some provisional views.

Questioner:

I see, provisional views. Interesting.

Leigh Brasington:

Yeah. All views are provisional until you've eliminated dukkha. And then maybe you got it. Right. Okay, but provisional views. Okay, since they're no hands up, I'm going to move on to discuss the 12 links. Alright. This is the last hand, then we'll go on to the 12 links. Ram.

Questioner:

Yes. Hi. Thank you so much for these teachings. Question is, in a broad sense, ignorance is defined as not knowing that I don't know, right. If I know that I don't know. I can figure that out. Right? Is there such a thing called a conditionality, that I'm not aware of deliberately that I'm conditioned.

Leigh Brasington:

Okay, so ignorance is a translation of avijjā. And it's, it's a good translation. We don't understand some of what's going on. There's a sutta, where a Ananda asked the Buddha, what does ignorance arise dependent upon? The Buddha says you've gone too far, Ananda. Ignorance is there from the beginning. Right. So every one of you in this room is ignorant of what's going on at the equator of the nearest inhabited planet, to the star Beetlejuice. You've been ignorant of that your whole life. Right? Okay. So we're, we're ignorant of so much to start out with. Okay? So what the Buddha is saying ... Okay, we got to banish all ignorance. We got to banish ignorance, particularly associated with anicca, dukkha, anattā. Alright, so we are ignoring the fact that everything is changing, things arise, they change, and then they pass away. We're ignoring the fact that nothing's going to give us lasting satisfaction. And we're ignoring the fact that this solidly seeming self is actually just an illusion. And so those are the things that we really



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need to pay attention to. And this is what insight practice is about investigating anicca, dukkha, and anattā. So that's the ignorance that we need to overcome. It's not important that you know what's going on at noon on the equator of the nearest inhabited planet to Beetlejuice. Right. Yeah, but you do need to know about the ...

Questioner:

I appreciate that. I think I was thinking more on the line of if I know that I'm ignorant. There is a process I can pursue. Yeah, right. I don't know I'm ignorant, then I'm in a blind spot.

Leigh Brasington:

Right. And the things we know we're ignorant about, or ignoring are the changing nature, the unsatisfactory nature and the that's, that's the ones we really want to work on.

Questioner:

Thank you so much.

Leigh Brasington:

Okay, on to the 12 links. Alright, so this is Tibetan tangka. And it depicts the 12 links of dependent origination. And the outer rim here, which you can't really see very well, because, yeah, it's real small. In the center, probably can't see this either, there's a rooster, a snake and a pig, each biting the tail of the other. The rooster represents greed, the snake is hatred, and the pig is delusion. In the ring around this are beings coming out of states of woe into heavenly states and falling back into states of woe, this is samsāra. This big ring here is the, well it's the six realms of existence. All the heavenly realms have been folded into this top one. But then at the bottom, we have the hell realms. And that's pictured in way that Dante would be proud of. People being eaten alive, boiled alive, walking through a forest full of swords. We have the Hungry Ghosts realm down here. That's creatures that have very big bellies, and little tiny necks, and they can't get enough, greedy in their previous life. We have the warring gods, the Asuras. They're always fighting. Their headquarters appears to be a large five sided building south of Washington, DC. That's the animal realms. There's the human realm and the heavenly realms. But the important stuff is on the outside here. And as we go along, I can show you what's out there, more or less. Okay, up at the 12 o'clock position, usually what's depicted is an old blind person trying to make their way through a forest. And this is ignorance. Okay. I couldn't find the picture said exactly match what's going on, but I did what I could. And so yeah, ignorance, not really knowing what's going on. The next one is sankhāra.

Sankhāra is a really important word in Pāli. It literally means making together. It's translated a number of different ways, but I think Thanissaro Bhikkhu translation of fabrications, or Santikaro's translation of concoctions are the best translations. And it's depicted as a potter at a wheel making pots. Some of the pots are very nice, and some are broken or misshapen. What we make together - yeah - we get some good stuff, we get some good stuff. The reason it depends on ignorance is that we're ignoring the empty nature of reality. And we are basically constructing a world out of our conceptualization of what's going on. We are thing-afying the world. This is a useful activity to get enough to eat, buying some clothing, shelter, etc. But we're ignoring the bigger picture.



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Arising dependent on ignorance is consciousness. Consciousness in Buddhism always requires an object. There's no such thing as object bliss consciousness. And so we're conscious of, well, the objects of the world. The things, the things we have thing-afyied the sankhāras.

Consciousness is depicted as a monkey swinging through the trees, grabbing first one branch and then another. When we were meditating at the start of this, perhaps you had that sort of consciousness, your mind jumping from one thing to another.

Rising dependent on consciousness is nāma-rupā. Nāma-rupā is depicted as two people in the boat, usually one is standing up, pulling the boat along, and the other is lying prone to so long for the ride. I couldn't find a picture with that. So here's what we got.

One of these is mind and one of these is body. Now I'll leave it as an exercise for you to figure out which one is mind and which one is body. Clearly the one pulling the boat along is determining where the boat goes. Right so in your mind-body process, what's determining where you go? Right. Now, it may be a little difficult to understand how mind and body depends on consciousness. But remember, consciousness doesn't cause mind and body. Mind and body is dependent on consciousness in the sense that if you're not conscious, your mind and body is going to die unless you regain consciousness soon enough to take care of yourself, eat etc. Right. So a functioning mind and body is dependent on consciousness.

Now what's interesting, the Buddha also points out that consciousness is dependent on mind and body. Consciousness arises because of the interaction of mind and body. They are mutually dependent. It's not about causes, it's about dependencies.

Dependent on mind and body are the six senses, in this is depicted as a house with five windows and a door. Five windows are the five external senses. And the door represents the mind. You don't find senses wandering around unless they're associated with the mind and body.

Arising dependent on senses is contact. And that's a couple embracing. Our contact arises through our senses.

Dependent upon contact is Vedanā. Vedanā is depicted as a man having arrows shot into his eyes. I couldn't find that, but I did find St. Sebastian being shot with an arrow. It's as close as I could get.

Dependent upon Vedanā is craving. And that's shown as a very fat person, sitting at a table, this laden with food.

Arising dependent on craving is clinging. And this is someone picking fruit and putting it in baskets that are so full that the fruit simply rolls out onto the ground.

Arising dependence on clinging is becoming. And that's a pregnant woman.

Arising dependent on becoming his birth. And that's depicted as a mother with an infant.



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And arising dependent upon birth is death. That's a corpse.

So these are the depictions of dependent origination. And they're useful for getting a sense of remembering it. Remember, this comes from a culture where not everybody was literal. So this particular depiction of dependent origination is a graphical one, a pictorial one. So that people could begin to remember it. Whether they understood it or not, that I don't know. It's kind of difficult, as we say, to work with the twelve links.

Oh, and by the way, the whole circle was being held by Yama, the Lord of Death. Right. This is the Tibetan wheel of life. So basically, the twelve links say that there's old age, sickness and death. And it arises dependent on birth. Which makes sense. I mean, if you don't get born, you don't die. If you don't get born, then you don't have any dukkha. Right? The only thing is, it's not really a solution to getting out of dukkha. Because I can tell every one of you already got born. Right? It's a necessary condition, but it's not a manipulatable necessary condition. So the Buddha didn't stop there. He's like, "Well, what is birth dependent upon?" Well, becoming, this urge to become. It's spring now. And the whole of the northern hemisphere of planet Earth is going to burst into becoming birds, becoming bees becoming etc. Flowers sprouting. Mother Nature has this urge to become and that leads to birth, which unfortunately, can lead to death.

Now it says, becoming arises dependent on clinging. And that one's a little hard to see. When I first started teaching dependent origination, I tried to make it work like this building I'm sitting in. What used to be a bunch of pieces, and then they all cling together, and it became this house. Which, okay, but that's kind of weak. Right? And so what I'm going to say is this is one of the weak links. It really doesn't make a lot of sense. I'm just gonna leave it at that.

Clinging arises dependent on craving. Yes. That makes sense. The things that you cling to are the stuff that you really want it. Craving arises dependent on Vedanā? Yeah, it's the Vedanā, the pleasant unpleasant nature of your sensory input that generates craving.

And then Vedanā arises dependent on sensory input. Yep, that makes sense. Right?

And the senses, this sensory input arises dependent on the senses. And the senses are part of having a mind and body. And the mind and body has got to be conscious for it to work. And consciousness arises due to the mutual interaction of mind and body. So there's dependencies there.

So sometimes when we start working with multiple links, it begins to make sense in a few places, or many places, but other places are kind of weird.

The thing about the 12 links is, it's the most common way it's depicted. But I don't think it really gives you the depth of what the Buddha was teaching. And to get the depths of what the Buddha's teaching, well, if you're looking at the 12 links, you need to be able to interpret the 12 links. But if it's not making really good sense, kind of hard to figure it out.



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Though, Orthodox interpretation of the 12 links is that the 12 links represent three lifetimes. The first two links, ignorance and sankhāras, are your previous life. And they translate sankhāra as karmic formation, although there's no basis in the suttas for doing that. Right? So, in your previous life, you were ignorant and you acted in ways that produced karmic formations as they call it. And then you died there and your leftover karma determined what kind of consciousness and mind and body you have in this life. And that mind and body has senses, which get sense contacts. And those sense contacts are going to generate Vedanā. And if you're not careful, the Vedanā will generate craving. And if you get what you're craving, then it's going to generate clinging. And then you're going to die here. But you're clinging to being alive, so in your next life you will become. And you'll be born there, but you're going to die there as well.

So this is the Orthodox interpretation of the 12 links of dependent origination. This is what you'll find if you take a look at the the Visuddhimagga. The Visuddhimagga is a really powerful book. If ever you have insomnia, just crack open the Visuddhimagga anywhere and start reading. It will put you right out. But this is this is the orthodox interpretation. It's a three lifetime model.

I give on a scale of one to 100, I give the odds of three lifetime model interpretation of dependent origination being what the Buddha had in mind, exactly a zero. There are no suttas that support the three lifetime model. There is a sutta, number 15 in the Long Discourses, that definitely supports a two lifetime model. But, well, that's an interesting sutta. I suspect it's a later composition. I could go into details about that, it's in the book. Right. I don't think that's what the Buddha was talking about. Especially in light of what we find in Sutta Nupata 4.11 On Quarrels and Disputes. What the Buddha is saying, "Hey, you got a mind and body. You're getting sense contacts. This is going to produce Vedanā. If you're not careful, you're going to fall into craving and clinging. And that's a setup for dukkha.

So it's more an in the moment happening. And that's the usual interpretation of dependent origination you'll find. There's a really great book by Ajahn Buddhadasa called Under the Bodhi Tree. Santikaro took all of Buddhadasa's talks in Thai on dependent origination, translated it in English, and put this book together. It's highly recommended if you want to study the moment to moment interpretation of dependent origination. Briefly, what it says is, well, you've got a mind and body. You get sense contacts. They're going to produce Vedanā. The craving and clinging that sets in is going to, well, cause you to think you have become somebody. You will give birth to a sense of self. And since your sense of self is an illusion, yeah, sometimes it gets bothered, destroyed, whatever. So it's not physical birth is being talked about. It's the birth of a sense of self.

And maybe this will make more sense if I give you a story that illustrates it. Let's say you've never had a mango. And you go to the grocery store and you're in the produce section. And yeah, there's a sign there that says mangoes and you're like, "oh, wow, I've heard about mangoes. They're supposed to be really good. I'm going to get me a mango." So you buy a mango. And you take it home. Hopefully you put away the rest of the groceries and now you attack the mango. You figure out you got to peel it. And you make a big mess because that's what happens the first time you attack a mango. Right now finally, you got a piece of mango in your fingers, your sticky drippy fingers, right. You have a mind and body that's conscious. You got senses. You got sense contact, mango hits the tongue. Pleasant Vedanā. "Oh, this is good.



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I'm going to have some more. And some more. I'm going to get a mango next time I go to the store." Right? You're beginning to crave mangos You're clinging to it. You remember your friends, Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice. They've never had a mango. You're going to turn them on to mangoes. So you go visit your friends and you bring them a mango and they're like, "oh cool, a mango" and they really like it. "Thanks for bringing the mango." So the next time you go you see your friends you bring them another mango. You have become the mango-bringer. Right. And every time you go see your friends, you bring a mango. Until eventually they say "what's with all the mangos?" Death of the mango-bringer. So what you're doing is you're constructing a sense of self out of this. You've taken the pleasant Vedanā of the tastes of the mango. And you've constructed a whole self is the mango-bringer. We do this all the time.

You hear, "oh, Apple has new iPhone out and it's got this wonderful new feature." Right. Now, the sound itself produced a Vedanā, but it's the mental downstream processing of that sound about the new feature. Right? And that produces pleasant. If I had that feature. And so now you're craving that. And you go to the store and you stand in line for four hours. And you get one. And you're clinging to it. And you have become the one with the new iPhone, right? You've given birth to yourself as the possessor of this iPhone. The craving and clinging require somebody to be there to do it. You can't have craving without somebody gonna get it. Right. And you can't have cleaning without somebody who's hanging on to it. So you give birth to a self, if you're not careful.

So this moment to moment interpretation of dependent origination is really the most useful way to look at the 12 links. And as I said, Buddhadasa's book Under the Bodhi Tree, is a really excellent book on this. And someone stuck it in the chat. So you have a reference for it.

So we've been at this for a while, I'm going to stop and see if there any questions. And after the questions that I'd have, we're going to take a short break. And another meditation and then I'll talk about some more dependent origination. So are there questions?

I saw a question in the chat.

"On the other hand, the boat rower is the one doing the physical work, maybe the woman in red is telling him where to go. He's rolling backwards. He can't see himself." So your body makes all the decisions? I guess that's what you're saying. Right? So, wherever you go, your body just tells you where to go. Right? The guy laying down in the boat in the original is laying there, he can't see anything.

Questioner:

Hi, thank you, Leigh. Hi, everybody. I'm hoping. I have two questions. I'm hoping I can restate them because I didn't write them down. First, if I remember correctly, you referred to, does having a desire or clinging based on the Vedanā. And I was thinking about how I have in my mettā practice, let's say, even outside of practice, but I have a desire for all beings to be happy. Now, does that mean that it's based on some Vedanā that I have of unpleasant, that I have somewhere in the back of my mind an unpleasant idea that all beings aren't happy?

Leigh Brasington:



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It's probably based on multiple ideas. One idea is if beings are happy, this is a good thing. It produces pleasant *Vedanā* when beings are happy. And some beings aren't happy. And it's not pleasant that these aren't happy. So taking the two together. Yeah, it's really wonderful if all beings be happy. May all beings be happy. So you have a wholesome desire at this point. When I was at Buddhadasa's monastery back in 1988, they talked about wise wishes and foolish desires. So it's a wise wish to wish all beings be happy. It's basically going to put you in a positive mind state. It's going to have an effect on your mental development. And who knows, you know, you go out into the world and you encounter a being who's not happy and you do what you can to make them happy. So you're trying to help all beings be happy. But if you're craving that all beings be happy, and you wake up in the morning and this bad news, then you're going to experience *dukkha*.

Questioner:

So if my broad desire that all beings be happy doesn't result in something where I'm feeling a clinging, right. Or some pushing, right. Then would keep me in that wholesome place. Right? Just better than not. If I'm gonna cling, it might as well be wholesome. I guess maybe it's not clinging. Then I just forgot my second one, it just a second.

Leigh Brasington:

I'll say something else. We'll hopefully come back. So this the simile of the raft. And the Buddha says that you're on the near shore where it's dangerous. And on the far shore, it's safe. And so you have a desire to get to the far shore. So you build a raft. And you use your hands and feet to propel yourself across the river. It's too wide to swim, etc. And you get to the far shore and you leave the raft behind. And that's the same with the teachings, right? We're stuck on the near shore where there's all this *dukkha* and we have a desire to get to liberation. Well, it's a wholesome desire, right? And so we use the teachings to get us to the far shore. But we don't want to cling to the teachings even. It would be like getting to the far shore and refusing to get off the raft because you cling to the raft. Right? In the end, but only in the end, you have to let go the teachings as well. If you let go the teachings too soon, well, you just fell in the river and drown.

Questioner:

Yeah, okay. Yeah, that reminds me of one of Jack Kornfield books and things like that letting go and you're letting go of all these things and includes the teachings. Includes the Buddha. Okay, if I do remember, I do remember my second question, is there a time for that? I'm going to hog all the space. Okay. It was on the more recent conversation you were having about identity, right? And you use the mango giver? Yeah, I create this this identity of a mango giver. And I was thinking this because I guess is related to what I was just talking about. So if I have. My experience is that over the years, people have told me and I think I feel it is true, that I have a general sense of compassion. And then because people have said it to me, and I identify with it as well. Then I've created this character that's compassionate. And again, hopefully wholesome. But I don't run around all day thinking about it. Right. So I'm not I don't feel like I'm clinging to this idea that I am this. It's all just creating the sense of "I" though regardless, right?

Leigh Brasington:



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Yeah. But if somebody were to say, look what you just did, you are the most uncompassionate person I've ever met in my entire life. How would it make you feel?

Questioner:

Oh, you're absolutely yeah, you're right. That happens, right? Yeah. Yeah.

So there is clinging there, but it's not. You can cling to stuff and not have any dukkha until it's snatched away from you. Even if it's not true, right? You might still have the thing. It's not that the mango-bringer was only the mango-bringer. Right? That mango-bringer had lots of other ways that they had created themselves. And we do this all the time. I mean, right now I'm pretending to be a dharma teacher. Before I was pretending to be a computer programmer. And when I was out hiking, I was pretending to be a hiker. And we have all these personas. We just walk the trail between them all the time. But if I go to my favorite hiking place, and it's closed, oh, I'm upset because that was clinging to being a hiker. And it's closed and I can't. Yeah. So often we get away with our cling to our identity. But anytime is threatened. Yeah, it's dukkha.

Questioner:

Okay, I get that completely. 100. Thank you. Thank you,

Leigh Brasington:

Any other questions at this point? Diane?

Questioner:

What does a student do when they discover that a favorite teacher believes in the three lives explanation of dependent origination? But having read Buddhadasa's treatment of it and listening to you, which makes a heck of a lot of sense to me. So what is this poor student to do when they've been following a favorite teacher? I mean, help. Yes.

Leigh Brasington:

Okay. So unless you're absolutely certain your teacher is fully awakened, then you got to realize they don't know everything. But the only way you're going to know for certain your teacher is fully awakened, is if you're fully awakened. In other words, it takes one to know one. Alright, so take everything any teacher says, including this one, and decide for yourself. Is this helpful? Is this useful? Does this accord with the dhamma as I understand the dhamma? Could I improve my understanding of the dhamma to see? There are teachers that I greatly admire and have learned a lot from that I don't fully agree with, including the three lifetime model, okay. But most everybody's got something useful to present. So take what you find useful and use that. And the stuff you don't find useful, maybe you can discuss it with the teacher. I mean, there were things that I don't agree with Ayya Khema on. Now Ayya Khema's been dead for a long time, but I'm sure even now today if I had a conversation with her about some of the stuff that we would disagree on. So it may not be appropriate to say something to that teacher. But there may be many important things that this teacher has taught you that are very valuable. Just realize that unless your teacher is fully awakened, and you can't tell that until you're fully awakened, there's probably going to be some flaws in what any teacher teaches. Present company not excepted.

Questioner:



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It's okay to let go of your teacher's views?

Leigh Brasington:

Oh, definitely. I would say don't cling to any views, no matter where they come from. In the very first real meditation Buddhist experience I had was a 10 day retreat with Ayya Khema. And I went on that retreat because I was curious about meditation. But I was really skeptical of this religion thing. I mean, my father was a Presbyterian preacher and he was a literalist. You know, Noah and the Ark, and yeah, they're all literally happened. And then I discovered, you know, eventually, it was like, "No, this is just more Easter Bunny and Santa Claus". And I wasn't going to have anything to do with religion. And I go on this retreat to learn about meditation. And Ayya Khema says "you don't have to believe anything, the Buddha said Ehipassiko, come and see for yourself. And so take everything that any teacher says and check it out for yourself. The Buddha says, check the suttas, check the dhamma and the Vinaya, to see what he had to say. But then, of course, that's difficult, because you probably don't read Pāli. And the suttas are difficult to read even in the translation. And then you're dependent on the translation being accurate. So test it out with your own experience as well. But don't cling to any view until you've completely eliminated dukkha.

Questioner:

Thank you. All right.

Leigh Brasington:

As a quote here, don't cling to anything, even the truth. Each moment new. Yes.

Back to your story about the raft, what does one need to let go of the raft of the Buddha's teachings to reach liberation. You got to be right on the verge of liberation, you got to get to the far shore. You're going to have to be willing to let go of everything. Everything, including yourself. Your being, your everything to such an extent that you actually do let go. The desire for the deepest experience of the truth possible, is probably what's going to be necessary. But in order to get to that, you're going to need a lot of insight into the nature of reality. And to get that insight, well meditation is a really good way to do that. Insight meditation. And of course, if you do it with a concentrated mind, that'll work a lot better. And of course, if you want to concentrated mind, you're going to have to keep precepts. So it all comes back to Sīla, Samādhi, Paññā; morality, concentration, wisdom.

So Jeff.

Questioner:

Thank you for just a wonderful Saturday morning. This is a great use of time. Just going back really quickly to sankhāras and there's quite a lot there packed into that word. But every time I hear that and I hear rebirth, the thing that comes to mind is Trungpa Rinpoche one time was asked, "well, what gets reincarnated? What actually happens here?" And in his inimitable style, he came back and said, "your neuroses." So that always clings to me and obviously I'm sure much more to it than that, but that helps me quite a lot. So

Leigh Brasington:



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Yeah, no, that's brilliant. I heard it as your bad habits, which is the same as your neuroses. So it's a brilliant teaching. Yeah. Okay, so no hands are up. We're going to take a short break, bio break if you need it, and then we'll come back and do another meditation. It's 11:04. So we're going to meditate till 11:20 And then I'm going to give you another look at different links of dependent origination that you probably never realized were links of dependent origination.