

11 Dependent origination (Part 1)

Dhamma talk by Venerable Chanmyay Sayadaw Ashin
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Yesterday we dealt with four noble truths briefly and how a meditator realises the first truth, the truth of suffering through his personal experience or direct experience of *dhamma*. We also continued the topic of suffering. Each and everyone wants to be happy and peaceful. No-one wants to have any kind of suffering.

This suffering, *dukkha*, has three forms: *dukkha dukkha*, *vipariṇāma dukkha* and *saṅkhāra dukkha*. All of these three forms arise from both mental and physical phenomena, *nāma* and *rūpa*, which according to Buddhist philosophy constitutes a so-called person or being. This *nāma* and *rūpa* arises should be analysed.

How then does this person or being come to exist? Because anyone who is attached to existence is subject to rebirth. Because of that attachment for existence, they are reborn. When they take rebirth, that rebirth consists in *nāma* and *rūpa*, mental and physical phenomena. These mental and physical phenomena which is taken to be a person or being or self arises dependent on the attachment.

Then how does attachment arise? The attachment, *taṇhā*, arises dependent upon feeling or sensation, *vedanā*. When there arises an unpleasant sensation in a person, they want to have a pleasant sensation, or they have a desire to feel a pleasant sensation. Because of an unpleasant sensation, there arises a desire for pleasant sensation which leads to some wholesome or unwholesome action. Wholesome action is *kusala kamma*, and unwholesome action is *akusala kamma*. So that wholesome action or unwholesome action is caused by attachment, but this attachment is regarded as grasping. When attachment is weak, it is called *taṇhā*, but when it becomes stronger and stronger, it is called grasping, *upādāna*. Because one grasps, one takes rebirth.

So to have rebirth or to be reborn, a person performs wholesome or unwholesome actions. Unwholesome actions produce rebirth in woeful states of existence, or a miserable life, while wholesome actions produce a good or luxurious life. So

human, *devā* or *brahmā*, celestial realm. Because of unwholesome deeds or actions, a person is reborn in a lower world such as animal life, hell, the realm of hungry ghosts and so on. Both higher or lower existences consist in *nāma* and *rūpa*, mental and physical phenomena. So this *nāma* and *rūpa*, mental and physical phenomena, arises dependent upon wholesome action or unwholesome action, which is called *kamma*.

That *kamma* arises dependent upon grasping, strong attachment or powerful attachment. That grasping or *upādāna* arises dependent upon weak attachment (*taṇhā*), which in turn arises dependent upon feeling or sensation, pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Then that feeling or sensation arises dependent on the contact between the six sense doors and six sense objects. The six sense doors are, as you know, the eye, ear, nose, tongue, touch and mind. The six sense objects are visual and auditory consciousness, smell, odour or scent, taste, tangible things and mind objects. When the eye comes in contact with a visible object there arises eye consciousness. Eye consciousness is a direct translation of a Pali phrase, *cakkhu viññāṇa*. Eye is *cakkhu*, consciousness is *viññāṇa*. Here eye consciousness means consciousness of visible object or seeing. Because there is an eye, there is a visible object. From contact of the visible object and the sense door of the eye there arises the consciousness of seeing the visible object, *cakkhu viññāṇa*, dependent upon the eye.

When the consciousness arises, as I told you in my previous talk, there are some mental concomitants or mental associates, *cetasika*, that arise together with that consciousness, such as feeling, attention, volition, one pointedness. If the visible object is good, if one of the mental factors that judges the effect is good, there arises a pleasant sensation. When that mental factor judges it to be bad, there arises aversion or anger. Because of a pleasant sensation, there arises attachment to the object. Because of the unpleasant sensation, there arises a desire to have a pleasant sensation, the desire also the same as attachment. Then the attachment, *taṇhā*, arises dependent upon pleasant or unpleasant sensation or feeling, *vedanā*, which itself arises dependent on the contact between six sense doors and six types of objects.

How then do the six sense doors arise? They arise dependent upon an incessant process of mental and physical phenomena. We have in us only the process of *nāma* and *rūpa*, there arises in us eye, ear, nose, tongue and so on. Eyes contact the visible object when there is such an object, ear contacts the audible object when there is an audible object and so on. In this way the six sense doors cause the contact to arise, so the six sense doors are the cause of contact. The six sense doors arises dependent upon *nāma* and *rūpa* and mental and physical phenomena, which themselves arise dependent upon first consciousness of existence. We call this *uppatti bhava*, rebirth consciousness.

Then there arises another consciousness, the process of another consciousness, and the process of another physical phenomena. So incessant process of existence, which is rebirth consciousness is called *paṭisandhi viññāṇa*. Then that rebirth consciousness arises dependent upon on a wholesome or unwholesome action, called *saṅkhāra*.

When these actions are not associated with attachment, no person will be reborn because there is no attachment to another existence.

[missing sentences] Sometimes the actions are done together with attachment. Though the actions are done together with attachment, the cause of these actions is grasping, stronger attachment, which is caused by weak attachment. When does this attachment arise? Because the person is ignorant of the suffering in existence. If we have existence, that existence is composed both of mental and physical phenomena. When we have any mental and physical phenomena we are sure to have suffering because neither mental phenomena or physical phenomena are permanent. They arise and then instantly pass away. Thus so-called 'existence' or 'life' means the processes of ever-changing phenomena that last not even a millionth of a second. This is called *saṅkhāra dukkha*, suffering by change or suffering by arising or passing away. But we do not realise that life consists of ever-changing phenomena, so we take this life to be permanent at least until we die. So because we are ignorant of this state of mental and physical phenomena we want to be reborn, we have attachment for rebirth. Because of this ignorance, *avijjā* in Pali, there arises this attachment. So these actions, either wholesome actions or unwholesome actions, are called *saṅkhāra*, so *avijjāpaccayā saṅkhāra*. The meaning is 'wholesome action or unwholesome action arises together, dependent on ignorance together with attachment'.

Then that wholesome action or unwholesome action produces another rebirth, the first consciousness of another existence together with its physical phenomena. So those actions called *saṅkhāra*, and that first rebirth consciousness are called *saṅkhārapaccaya viññāṇa*. Rebirth consciousness arises dependent upon actions done in the previous existence. So the actions which were done in the previous existence are the cause, and the rebirth consciousness in the next existence is the result or effect, *saṅkhārapaccaya viññāṇa*.

When there is a rebirth consciousness, after its passing away naturally, there are the processes of many different consciousnesses arising and passing away and there are physical phenomena too. In this way, there is an incessant process of several consciousnesses and mental phenomena, then there arises eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind, six sense doors and six sense bases. These six sense doors are called in Pali *āyatana*, so *nāmarūpapaccaya āyatana*, the six sense doors arise dependent upon incessant processes of mental and physical phenomena. When we have six sense doors, the eye comes to contact a visible object, the ear contacts audible objects, the tongue contacts taste, the body contacts tangible objects and the mind, mind objects. Then that contact, *phassa* in Pali, arises dependent upon the six sense doors, so its called *āyatanapaccaya phassa*.

The six sense doors cause the contact to arise. When there is contact with the object, there is feeling, pleasant or unpleasant or neutral, that arises dependent upon contact so its called *phassapaccayā vedanā*. Because of the contact there arises the feeling or sensation. When there is feeling, there arises desire, craving, lust, love, attachment towards the visible or audible object, smelled or tasted object, tangible thing or mind object. This is called *vedanāpaccayā taṅhā*. That *taṅhā* or attachment is

conditioned through feeling or sensation. The feeling or sensation causes the desire or attachment to arise. When the desire or attachment grows stronger and stronger, because the meditator does not observe it and does not note it, it doesn't disappear, then that state of attachment is called grasping, *upādāna*, thus *taṇhāpaccayā upādāna*.

Then because of that strong attachment about the visible thing or audible object, or about rebirth or another existence, so to have the object or another existence, then the person performs some wholesome action or unwholesome action. So this action arises dependent upon grasping, *upādāna*, so it is called *upādānapaccayā bhava*. It is called. Then that wholesome action or unwholesome action produces rebirth consciousness in another existence, *kamma bhava* ?.

So wholesome action or unwholesome action in the previous existence is the cause of rebirth consciousness in the next existence. But none of the actions or mental states transmigrate to another existence. Any further action or physical phenomena together with *cetanā* (volition, motive) arise and pass away. But there is karmic force, it means the force of the action remains in the process of consciousness. That force, when it is powerful, produces rebirth consciousness, the first consciousness in the next existence. None of the mental states or physical phenomena is permanent, as they arise and pass instantly away. But there is a force of volition or action and the process of consciousness. So when the last consciousness of the previous existence has disappeared, that karmic force produces rebirth consciousness in another existence. That force produces the rebirth consciousness in the next existence by the power of attachment.

Then there is rebirth consciousness. That rebirth is called *jāti*. That *jāti* is caused by the wholesome or unwholesome actions, *kamma bhava*, in the previous existence. So with this *jāti*, rebirth, there arises incessant processes of consciousness and physical phenomena, and every phenomenon has three states, arising, decay and passing away. So *jāti* causes decay, *jarā*, to arise. Then eventually that *jāti* causes that existence to disappear or cease. Then it is called a person who is reborn and dies.

That death is *marāṇa*. So decay and death are caused by birth, *jātipaccayā marāṇam*. A person will not die unless they are reborn, and because they are born, they are subject to death. One is born, so eventually one has to die. Before dying, a person's mental and physical phenomena decay, so this decay, *jarā* and death, *marāṇa*, is caused by *jāti*, so *jātipaccayā marāṇam*. Then before he dies, he is beset by many varieties of suffering. *Soka*, he feels worried, and he has sorrow and lamentation, *parideva*, and *dukkha*, pain, physical pain, because of disease or illness or weather or food, or for any other reason. Then *domanassa*, grief or sadness, arises dependent on many events in his life. Then *upāyāsa*, desperation, because one can't cope with existence. These states, sorrow, worry, pain, grief and lamentation, sadness, desperation, all arise dependent on rebirth. Because a person was born they have these innumerable kinds of *dukkha*. If they are not reborn, they won't have any of this suffering, these *dukkhas*.

So it is in the Pali words:

jātipaccayā jarāmarañam

`Rebirth is the cause, decay and death are the effect `.

Sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsa sambhavanti

`Worry, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, desperation are also caused by rebirth `.

Then the Buddha continued to say:

Evametassa sakevalessa dukkhakhandhassa samudayo hoti

`In this way, a great heap of suffering arises in life `. So life means the train of suffering, but we are ignorant of it, we delude ourselves that life is permanent, when no mental and physical phenomenon is permanent. Then we take this everlasting person or self or soul to be permanent, everlasting, because we don `t understand the instantaneous and constant arising and passing away of mental and physical phenomena that constitute the so-called existence. So we are attached to the existence, and that attachment causes existence. From the very first consciousness of the existence until the last consciousness of that existence we are continually suffering both mentally and physically.

I think you have grasped this summary of the law of causal relations called `dependent origination `, *paṭicca samuppāda*. In the end the Buddha said, `a great heap of suffering arises in this way as cause and effect, according to the law of conditioned or causal relations `.

All of these sufferings are summarised by the Buddha in three types or groups. The first is *dukkha dukkha*, the second, *vipariṇāma dukkha* and the third, *saṅkhāra dukkha*. *Dukkha dukkha* means `suffering of suffering ` or `common suffering ` because it is easily perceived by sentient beings as mental and physical suffering. Mental suffering, or sadness, worry, sorrow, anxiety, depression, dejection, disappointment and so on, and physical suffering such as pain, stiffening, itching, numbness, any kind of physical disease, any accident or hurt or harm to physical phenomena, are very evident to any living being.

Then the second type is *vipariṇāma dukkha*, suffering produced by change. It refers to so-called happiness, *sukhā*. Happiness is regarded as *sukhā*, not *dukkha*, but actually that happiness does not last long. It arises and passes away and changes into suffering in a short time, so it is called suffering produced by change.

The third suffering is *saṅkhāra dukkha*, the constant arising and passing away of phenomena. Whatever phenomenon, mental and physical process arises, instantly passes away, it doesn `t last even a millionth of a second. When a meditator with his sharp insight penetrates into the constant arising and passing away of either mental states or physical processes, he takes it to be bad, *dukkha*, suffering. He doesn `t take it to be good, because he sees it ever-changing, constantly arising and passing away.

Sometimes the meditator experiences a happy emotional state because his concentration is good, the insight arises very clearly. He notes `happy, happy,

realise the happiness doesn't last long. Happiness arises, he notes it, then it passes away. In this way, with every noting, the happiness passes away, then he comes to realise this is *dukkha*, suffering, incessant and constant arising and passing away of the phenomenon. Then he comes to realise that any mental state or physical process is not permanent. They are transient, so they are suffering.

Meditators must realise this *saṅkhāra dukkha*, not only *dukkha dukkha* and *vipariṇāma dukkha*. That's why the commentary explained the word *dukkha* in this way: 'It is said that *dukkha* here means the nature of being oppressed by incessant constant arising and passing away'.

This is *dukkha*, one of the three characteristics that covers all the three types of suffering. It is only when the meditator penetrates into *saṅkhāra dukkha*, the incessant arising and passing away of phenomena, that he will destroy any idea of I or me or mine, a person, a being or a self. Then he does not find any person, nor any being, nor any everlasting self or soul, and he comes to realise *anattā*, impersonality. Only then will he not be attached to any mental states or physical states that constitute a so-called person or being.

May all of you rightly understand the chain of existence and stream of suffering and do your best to get rid of it.