

An Application Of The Dependent Origination In Insight Meditation Practice¹

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In this paper I am going to briefly focus on how the teaching of the Dependent Origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*) can be applied in meditation practice. The Dependent Origination is mainly studied by theoreticians. Here I wish to draw your attention how this fundamental teaching may be used as a guide in our meditation practice.

In the endeavour to be delivered from suffering, of the sixty two wrong views, the wrong view of self or soul, *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*, along with doubt, *vicikicchā*, is to be dispelled first.

To dispel wrong view of self, and doubt (concerning the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, the *Saṅgha*), the cause and effect of the five aggregates are to be studied.

In the doctrine of the Dependent Origination, knowing that it is *khandha* or the five aggregates arising in the present moment, wrong view perceiving aggregates as man, individuals, or beings, is dispelled. *Khandha* arising in the present period being known to be the result, its cause is looked for.

Looking for the cause of the five aggregates (*khandha*) or mind-matter complex (*nāma-rūpa*) in the present moment, the past is contemplated. In the past there were ignorance and conditional activities that were responsible for the five aggregates taking place in the present.

Knowing the cause in the past to be ignorance and conditional activities, doubt (*vicikicchā*) wondering if beings are created by the eternal God, the Almighty, or by Vishnu or by Allah, is dispelled. Then there will be no need to wonder if one had been a king in the past existence, or a deity, or a man. Be it what is conventionally called a man, or a deity, or a king in the past, it was

¹ Presented at The International Conference of All *Theravāda* Buddhist Universities held at The International *Theravāda* Buddhist Missionary University, Yangon, & at Woodlands Hotel, Popa Mountain Resort, Bagan, Myanmar, 9-12th March 2007.

definitely ignorance and conditional activities that were causes for the five aggregates in the present.

Understanding the cause and result of aggregates, wrong view and doubt are theoretically dispelled.

After this, it is continued to dispel the wrong view of eternalism (*sassata diṭṭhi*) and the wrong view of annihilation (*uccheda diṭṭhi*). Not being mindful of the constant flux of mind and matter, we forgetfully think 'it is the same 'I' that woke up this morning, and it is the same 'I' that came into the hall some moments ago, and think it is the same 'I' that is here at this moment'. Not being mindful of the continuous flux of mind and matter, we forgetfully think 'it is the same 'I' as a young child, and the same 'I' as a teenager, and the same 'I' that is here'. Many Buddhists, with the wrong view of eternalism, do meritorious deeds, thinking 'it will be the same 'I' in future existences that will enjoy the fruits of the good deeds done in this life'.

With the wrong view of annihilation, evil deeds are committed believing no debt needs be paid back in the *samsāra* for the wrong doings committed in this life.

To dispel the wrong view of eternalism and the wrong view of annihilation, the arising and passing away of aggregates (*khandha*) is to be studied.

In the doctrine of the Dependent Origination, ignorance and conditional activities of the past arose in the past, and passed away in the past. Knowing that ignorance and conditional activities arose and passed away in the past, it is understood that they are not permanent; thus wrong view of eternalism is dispelled.

If passing away alone is contemplated, it tends to go toward wrong view of annihilation. Ignorance and conditional activities of the past did not arise and completely cease in the past. Because of the potential of the ignorance and conditional activities of the past, there arises resultant *khandha* in the present. Arising of aggregates in the present is proof that ignorance and conditional activities did not completely cease in the past. Knowing that total cessation did not take place, wrong view of annihilation is dispelled.

Of the sixty two wrong views, it is said that when the major wrong views, that are the wrong views of self, eternalism, annihilation are dispelled, the remaining wrong views are automatically dispelled.

Having theoretically dispelled the wrong views of self, eternalism, annihilation, it is further practised to develop knowledge so that wrong view and doubt are practically dispelled.

Having lived throughout the *samsāra* with the wrong view believing the mind-matter aggregate to be 'I', it cannot be definitely said how long we should practise so that this wrong view is eliminated. Depending on the perfections one

has fulfilled in the long *samsāra*, duration of practice required to gain insight-knowledge may greatly vary. In every existence in the long *samsāra*, beings have lived with this notion of 'I, me, my, mine'; and this wrong view of self is the root of all evil.

The Practice

In actual practice, the five aggregates (*khandha*) that arise due to the contact of sense-base and its corresponding sense-object are to be contemplated. Apart from these six sense-bases and their objects, there is nowhere where insight meditation can be practised.

Of course, it is well understood that there are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind bases.

The impingement of eye-base and visible object gives rise to eye-consciousness. Eye-base and visible object are matter, eye-consciousness is mind.

The impingement of ear-base and sound gives rise to ear-consciousness. Ear-base and sound are matter, ear-consciousness is mind.

The impingement of nose-base and scent gives rise to nose-consciousness. Nose-base and scent are matter, nose-consciousness is mind.

The impingement of tongue-base and six types of taste – sweet, sour, spicy hot, salty, astringent, bitter – gives rise to tongue-consciousness. Tongue-base and six types of taste are matter. Tongue-consciousness is mind.

The impingement of body-base and tangible objects gives rise to body-consciousness. Tangible objects are hardness, softness – earth element; heat, cold – fire element; support, thrusting, motion – air element. Body-base and tangible objects are matter, body-consciousness is mind.

The impingement of mind-base and mind-object gives rise to mind-consciousness called thought. Mind-base and mind-object are matter; upon mental-objects, thinking as man, individuals, beings, is mind.

If at the six sense-doors there only arise mind and matter or the five aggregates, why is it called man, deities, *brahma*, beings?

From the beginning of the *samsāra*, unless a Buddha appears in the world after an interval of innumerable aeons, the arising of consciousness at the contact of sense-door and sense-object is never heard of. The *nāma-rūpa* that really exists is not cognized, but instead man, deities, beings that do not actually exist are believed to exist, because from the very beginning it has been taught through innumerable generations that these are man, deities, beings.

As these are so taught, it is wrongly remembered that these are only man, women, animals, possessions. This is *saññāvippallāsa* or remembering wrongly.

Saññāvippāḷāsa

For example, take a group of siblings into a jungle where they do not see any other human being except themselves. There in this isolated jungle, bring them up.

Every time they are given a piece of lime, say it is sugar.

Every time they taste sour taste, say it is sweet.

Every time they see a man, say it is a cow.

Repeatedly this is done and their *saññā* 'peception' will start to work and remember things wrongly.

Then take these children, who have been brought up in isolation, back to the civilized world. When they see what is conventionally called a man, ask them; and they may answer it is a cow.

Give them what is conventionally called lime; ask them, and they may say it is sugar.

Likewise, *saññā* has made an impression upon beings that they wrongly remember things that do not exist in reality, such as man, woman, sons, daughters, riches, individuals, beings, etc.

The mind-matter aggregate that really exists is never cognized.

Mind-matter aggregate or *khandha* is the absolute truth (*paramattha sacca*) that really exists. Man, woman, individuals, beings, sons, daughters, riches, are conventional truth *sammuti sacca*.

The Absolute Truth

For example, put onto the tongue of a six-month-old baby a teaspoonful of pure concentrated lime juice. The baby will grimace its little face. Ask him why and he will not be able to say it in words that it is sour. Though there may be no words to describe it, the truth or the essence is evident in the way the baby grimaces its little face. In the absolute truth there are no words to say, there are no words to describe it, only its essence or nature is there.

But for the sake of communication and description, names and concepts are used, but these names do not exist at all. What exists is only the absolute truth – *paramattha*.

Here sour taste and tongue-base are matter, tongue-consciousness is mind. Mind and matter arises.

Mind-matter is the absolute truth - *paramattha*. Lime is conventional truth, it is a name concept - *paññatti*.

Tongue-consciousness is the absolute truth - *paramattha*. Baby is conventional truth, a name concept - *paññatti*.

That which cognizes sour taste is tongue-consciousness (*jivhāviññāṇa*), that which thinks of the object as lime is mind-consciousness (*manoviññāṇa*).

Discerning mind and matter is *nāmarūpaparicchedaṇṇa*.

Tongue-base and sour taste are causes. The contact of tongue-base and sour taste gives rise to tongue-consciousness. Tongue-consciousness is the result. Discerning cause and result is *paccayapariggahaṇṇa*.

After some time, put some drops of sugar juice onto the baby's tongue, and the baby will no more grimace its little face. The baby will be seen contentedly enjoying the sweet taste.

Mind-matter that cognized sour taste has arisen and has passed away. It is replaced by mind-matter that cognizes sweet taste. Therefore the absolute truth exists in the form of impermanence, this impermanence is suffering, this suffering will not follow any one's liking – this is non-self.

That which cognizes sweet taste is tongue-consciousness. That which thinks of the object as sugar is mind-consciousness (*manoviññāṇa*).

Mind-matter is the absolute truth - *paramattha*. Sugar is conventional truth; it is a name-concept - *paññatti*.

Why is it called the absolute truth?

It is so called because it is unchangeably true. How is it unchangeably true?

Call it sugar, call it lime. But *nāmarūpa* remains *nāmarūpa* only, it does not become lime, nor does it become sugar.

Call it man, call it woman, but it remains *nāmarūpa*. Just by giving it names, it cannot be made to become man, or woman, or beings.

The absolute truth exists in the form of impermanence, suffering, non-self. Discerning impermanence, suffering, non-self is *yathābhūtaṇṇa*. It is also understanding rightfully, and is therefore also called *saccānulomikaṇṇa*.

Mind-matter is *paramattha*, man, woman, sons, daughters, beings, are *paññatti*.

Pariññā

Differentiating between mind-matter and man, beings, concepts, names is *ñāta pariññā*.

Eye-consciousness, after seeing, passes away.

Ear-consciousness, after hearing, passes away.

The characteristics of mind-matter, or the five aggregates, is impermanence, suffering, non-self. Discerning this is *tiraṇapariññā*.

Getting to know the impermanent nature of all phenomena, there is boredom with this state of continuous arising and passing away. This is *nibbindañāṇa*.

Mind and matter arises and passes away, to be replaced by another, which in turn passes away. This state of arising and passing away of mind and matter, the replacement by the next, which again passes away, goes on continuously. As this is observed, at one time there is no more arising and passing away of aggregates. There is cessation of mind and matter, this is *pahānapariññā*.

When there is no arising of aggregates, there will be no arising and passing away. When there is no arising and passing away, there will be cessation of suffering. Realizing it is *magga ñāṇa* – the path wisdom.

End