



I wanted to write this book [*Dependent Origination in Plain English*] to clarify some of the misconceptions, misunderstandings and confusions [about dependent origination]. Dependent origination has been written about by some people—and even I don't understand. Also, they put it into three lives—previous life, this life, and future lives.

In the Buddha's teaching, dependent origination, never have I seen in any place that he has divided dependent origination into three lives. They all happen in one life. And what happens in one life can repeat in the next life. And, therefore, that is the one confusion that I want to clarify. I don't believe in that. That's why I started writing this.

And, in fact, I have given many lectures on dependent origination, every Saturday for several years. And this book is the collection of those talks, edited. And clarifying various things like kamma. Kamma is another name for one factor in the dependent origination. Like volitional formations. Volitional formations is kamma. And therefore these two — kamma and volitional formations — are identical. So, I explain how it happens.

Kamma and Volitional Formations

Because without 'will' we cannot commit kamma. There has to be intention — and put the intentions into action. And find the results because of the combination of these two.

Therefore, Buddha said in one word, one sentence: "Volitional formations, bhikkhus, I call kamma ..." The second factor of dependent origination is volitional formations. And, therefore, kamma is something we do now.

Kamma, normally people think, ordinarily, is what we have done in the past. How I define kamma is: any thoughts, words or deeds committed intentionally by a person whose mind is not free from greed, hatred and delusion is kamma.

If the mind is not free from greed, hatred and delusion, if the person has intention to say, do or think something, then that becomes a kamma.

And therefore we commit kammas anytime we say something, do something, or think something intentionally, so long as we have greed, hatred, and delusion. Greed, hatred and delusion don't have to be active at that time.

At that time, they can be passive or at the back burner, so to say. But when we express our ideas, we can see how much greed is there, how much hatred is there, how much ignorance is there.

The Hindrances

Hindrances are just like little plants in a desert. Underneath these plants, there is a network of roots. And this network — until you eliminate the network of roots, the plants will grow. You may cut the plants and they will grow again. The plants are like hindrances. Greed, anger, sleepiness and drowsiness, restlessness and worry, and doubt. These are the hindrances. They are temporary obstacles to our spiritual progress. No matter how often you cut them, they will grow.

Why do they grow? Because the network of roots are underground. There are ten networks of roots. They are called 'fetters.' They are: (1) notion of personality view, or wrong view, that we have permanent, eternal substance called Self. That is called in Pali *sakkāya-ditthi*. There are twenty ways of thinking that there is a permanent self.

Then, (2) doubt. Doubt about the Buddha, dhamma, sangha, dependent origination, morality, future lives, previous lives, and so forth.

Then, (3) believing in the attainment of liberation by following rules and rituals. Some people dedicate their entire life to practice rituals. From the time of the Buddha, even before that up to now, even today, in this 21st century with all this advanced technology, there are people who believe rituals can liberate themselves from suffering.

(4) Greed and (5) hatred — so five. These five are called [the] five down-to-earth, heavy fetters.

Other fetters are (6) believing in what you call fine material existence, (7) immaterial existence, (8) conceit, (9) restlessness, and (10) ignorance. These are the ten fetters. And as long as these fetters exist, hindrances will exist.

Producing Results, Producing Kamma

The reason the enlightened person doesn't commit kamma is that he doesn't have greed, hatred, and delusion. And, therefore, whatever he does will simply become an action. That's all. It is just like a barren seed that doesn't produce the sprout. Just like that. Their actions, their thoughts, words: they speak, they act, they think, without greed, hatred and delusion. And, therefore, their actions, and their thoughts, and their words don't have [kamma] results.

We ordinary people who have not attained enlightenment have greed, hatred, and delusion. Some people have very oozing, gross greed. Some people, [are] crazy, craving for this, this, this! Lust for this, this, this! Desire for this, this, this.

Some people have less of that. Some people have hatred. So much hatred. It's unimaginable the amount of hatred. Some people have less hatred, and still have hatred.

Some people [are] totally deluded. Some people have less delusion.

As long as they have greed, hatred, and delusion, whatever they say, think, and do produce results. And, therefore, that which produces results is kamma.

Dependent Origination in Plain English

The theme of my writing is always simple or plain English. I wanted to write the book, *Dependent Origination in Plain English*, so that people can understand it. People can relate it to their own life. It is not just mere theory.

It is a real, practical teaching. Pragmatic. Down-to-earth. Every day experience. Therefore, I want to bring it very close to their heart and mind. Dependent origination explains how kamma works. And, therefore, it is actually the very deepest teachings of the Buddha.

When he attained enlightenment, first he had knowledge of his previous lives. And, then, also in the middle of the night, he got another knowledge, called — in Pali — the knowledge of *cutupapāta ñānāya*. That means other beings also are reborn again and again, according to their kammās.

In the last watch of the night, he saw how to end all this. These are the three phases of dependent origination.

In the first phase, he saw his own birth, [his] previous births.

In the second phase, he saw other people's rebirths.

In the third watch, he saw how to end this. And he saw why he was born so many times, why other people were born so many times. And, therefore, he found a way out of it — to get out of it.

This is the law of dependent origination he discovered.

Ignorance and Craving

He saw, first, all this happens because of two factors. One is ignorance. The other is craving. Due to ignorance, all kammās are committed. And that is the thing that people did not know about kamma.

Kamma is committed by any person because of ignorance. He had ignorance in the past, and he worked out to get out of that ignorance. And the way he got out of it was he opened his eyes to see the reality exactly as it is. When you see the reality exactly as it is, your ignorance disappears. Similarly, when other people get rid of their ignorance, their kamma will disappear.

The Law that Explains Kamma

When the cause of kamma disappears, the kamma disappears. And dependent origination is the law that explains the kamma. Pali formula is: *Imasmim sati, idam hoti*. That means when this is, this happens. That means it happens now. This very moment.

Like while we are talking. For instance, while we are talking if I get angry, immediately I know the danger of anger. I feel pain. I feel suffering. I feel disappointment, I feel distracted. My mind will not be clear. I cannot express what I want to say, if I get angry. So the results are right there. This is the nature of dependent origination.

For instance, anger doesn't arise without any cause. Hatred doesn't arise without any cause. Jealousy doesn't arise without any cause. Fear does not arise without any cause. Tension, anxiety, worry, and so forth don't arise without a cause. Each of them has a cause. And when [the] cause arises, [the] result arises — almost simultaneously. One is prominent, [the] other is hidden.

So, for instance, when anger rises, we know only anger. But what happens underneath the anger, we don't see. And, therefore, when the cause of anger disappears, anger disappears.

What is the cause of anger? Ignorance and desire, or ego.

Ego, also, is a result of greed and ignorance. No matter how much we are educated—we may have ten PhDs from the best universities in the world, but, still, we are ignorant.

The Depth of Suffering

What is that ignorance that we cannot eliminate through academic qualification? That ignorance is ignorance of the four noble truths. We are ignorant of our suffering, the depth of our suffering.

We may have a superficial understanding, very shallow understanding of suffering. But the depth of suffering we don't understand. Until we understand suffering exactly as it is, we are ignorant.

Somebody can ask when did ignorance start? It is not the correct question. If you say ignorance started at such and such a time—maybe 10,000 years ago, ignorance started. Then your next question is: before that was there not ignorance? Were we enlightened then?

There is no beginning of ignorance. Similarly, there is no beginning of greed. If you say greed started 20,000 years ago, then you can ask: what was there before greed started? Non-greed? That's not possible.

This is something like chicken-and-egg. You cannot find the beginning of ignorance or craving.

Where is the Beginning of a Circle?

But dependent origination tells us to find it right now. It is just like trying to find the beginning of a circle. When you try to find the beginning of a circle, no matter how much geometry you know — you may know diameter, radius, area, circumference of a circle—but you don't know the beginning of a circle. Because there is no sign.

So, to find the beginning of a circle you've got to draw one line. That is the beginning and end of a circle. Similarly, dependent origination tells us ignorance starts now. Craving starts now. In this very life. We don't have to go to a previous life or future lives. We are ignorant now. If we get rid of ignorance now—no craving, no ignorance.

The Ascending and Descending Order of Dependent Origination

When this is, this is. Meaning, when ignorance is there, volitional formation is there. When volitional formation is there, consciousness is there. When the consciousness is there, mentality and materiality is there. When the mentality and materiality is there, the six senses are there. When the six senses are there, contact is there. When there is contact, feeling is there. When the feeling is there, craving is there. When the craving is there, grabbing, clinging, is there. When the clinging is there, becoming is there. When the becoming is there, birth is there. When the birth is there — old age, sickness, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are there. That is the ascending order of dependent origination.

The descending order is: When ignorance is not there, volitional formation is not there. When the volitional formation is not there, consciousness is not there. When the consciousness is not there, mentality and materiality is not there. When the mentality and materiality are not there, the six senses are not there. When the six senses are not there, contact is not there. When the contact is not there, feeling is not there. When the feeling is not there, craving is not there. When the craving is not there, clinging is not there. When there is no clinging, there is no becoming there. When there is no becoming, no birth, then there is no decay, sickness, death, sorrow and lamentation there. That's the descending order. So, we first see ascending order and the descending order.

Then, ascending and descending combine together. And that means, if ascending factors are not there, do not arise, descending factors also do not arise simultaneously, at the same time. The other two orders—one, when one arises, the other arises—when this combination says that when one disappears, the other disappears simultaneously. The simile the Buddha gave is when the sun rises, simultaneously darkness disappears. Similarly, when ignorance disappears the mind is totally, completely liberated from suffering.

Wholesome Results

When we commit good kamma, wholesome kamma, we have wholesome results. Then, we would like to do more wholesome kamma. Then we have more wholesome results. Then, we do more wholesome kamma, then more wholesome kamma.

The Danger of Pleasure

Desire. There is no end to that. Even today, somebody talking with me, said: 'I'd like to go on appearing in samsara, doing good, experiencing pleasure. All my life. This life, next life, the next life—experiencing pleasure, pleasure, pleasure, pleasure. Now, I never want to end it ...'

You see, that is utter ignorance. Any pleasure has a danger. What is the danger? Pleasure is not permanent! That is the danger. Pleasure is impermanent. Displeasure is impermanent. So, this 'yo-yo practice,' this repetition, must come to an end.

Kamma Destroying Kamma

And that is called kamma destroying kamma. Kamma destroying kamma. Kamma destroying kamma is the dependent origination. The noble eightfold path.

When we practice the noble eightfold path, we don't accumulate kamma. We destroy kamma, one by one.

Otherwise, no matter how long we enjoy pleasure, as a human being or divine being, it doesn't matter, it is not going to be perpetual. It is not going to be permanent.

And therefore, with dependent origination, the number one is understanding.