

## 6. Application in Everyday Life

The previous explanations are the traditional, orthodox explanations; they are found in the commentaries and have been passed down through the ages. These explanations emphasize the round of rebirth (*saṃsāra-vatṭa*): the passing from one life to another. They demonstrate the connection between three lifetimes: the past, the present, and the future, and they have been developed into a fixed, strictly-defined system.

Some people are not content with these explanations and wish to define Dependent Origination in the context of everyday life. They cite explanations in the Abhidhamma and the commentaries that describe the entire sequence of dependent origination arising in a single moment.<sup>1</sup> They can draw upon the same scriptural passages referred to in the orthodox explanations to support their own interpretation. Moreover, they can find evidence in other texts to substantiate their claims. As will be seen below, this alternate explanation has interesting and distinctive features. [108]

There are many justifications for this alternate explanation. For example, the end of suffering for an arahant occurs in this very life; he or she does not need to die first in order to achieve this state of peace. An arahant is not reborn: there is no aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, etc. in a future life. Even in this life, an arahant experiences no sorrow, lamentation, etc.\* The complete cycle of dependent origination in relation to the arising (or ceasing) of suffering occurs in the present time; one need not trace back to a previous life or wait for a future life. And whenever one understands the presently occurring cycle, one also understands the cycles incorporating the past and future, because these respective cycles are all essentially the same.

\*In the orthodox interpretation of Dependent Origination, birth, aging, death, etc. are associated with a future life.

The following teachings by the Buddha are referred to as corroboration for this alternative interpretation:

*Udāyin, if someone should recollect his manifold past lives ... then either he might ask me a question about the past [pubbanta—past life] or I might ask him a question about the past, and he might satisfy my mind with his answer to my question or I might satisfy his mind with my answer to his question. If someone with the divine eye ... should see beings passing away and reappearing then either he might ask me a question about the future [aparanta—next life] or I might ask him a question about the future, and he might satisfy my mind with his answer to my question or I might satisfy his mind with my answer to his question. But let be the past, Udāyin, let be the future. I shall teach you the Dhamma: when this exists, that comes to be; with the*

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<sup>1</sup> Vbh.: Abhidhamma-bhājanīya: pp. 138-192; Sammohavinodanī: VbhA.: 199-213.

arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.<sup>2</sup>

Bhadraka the headman approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to him: 'It would be good, venerable sir, if the Blessed One would teach me about the origin and the passing away of suffering.'

[The Buddha replied]: 'If, headman, I were to teach you about the origin and the passing away of suffering with reference to the past, saying, 'So it was in the past,' perplexity and uncertainty about that might arise in you. And if I were to teach you about the origin and the passing away of suffering with reference to the future, saying, 'So it will be in the future,' perplexity and uncertainty about that might arise in you. Instead, headman, while I am sitting right here, and you are sitting right there, I will teach you about the origin and the passing away of suffering.'<sup>3</sup>

Some feelings, Sīvaka, arise originating from bile disorders ... originating from phlegm disorders ... originating from wind disorders ... originating from a combination of causes ... produced by a change of climate ... produced by irregular exercise ... caused by assault ... produced as the result of kamma. How feelings arise originating [from the aforementioned causes] one can know for oneself, and that is considered to be true in the world. [109] Now when those ascetics and brahmins hold such a doctrine and view as this, 'Whatever feeling a person experiences, whether it be pleasant or painful, all that is caused by what was done in the past,'<sup>4</sup> they overshoot what one knows by oneself and they overshoot what is considered to be true in the world. Therefore I say that this is wrong on the part of those ascetics and brahmins.<sup>5</sup>

Bhikkhus, what one intends, what one pays attention to, and what one thinks about: this becomes a basis for the maintenance of consciousness. When there is a basis there is a support for the establishing of consciousness. When consciousness is established and come to growth, there is the production of future renewed existence. When there is the production of future renewed existence, future birth, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.<sup>6</sup>

Although the alternative explanation of Dependent Origination has distinctive features, it does not abandon the definitions contained in the standard exposition. Therefore, to understand the alternative explanation it is useful to define the

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<sup>2</sup> M. II. 31-2.

<sup>3</sup> S. IV. 327.

<sup>4</sup> *Pubbekata-hetu*.

<sup>5</sup> S. IV. 230-1.

<sup>6</sup> S. II. 65.

factors of dependent origination in this context in a way that is consistent with the standard exposition:

### A. Factors of Dependent Origination:

1. *Avijjā*: ignorance; lack of knowledge; an absence of wisdom; not seeing the truth; to be misled by conventional reality; ignorance inherent in certain beliefs; non-understanding of causality.

2. *Saṅkhārā*: volitional activities; thoughts, intentions, deliberations, and decisions; to direct one's thoughts and to seek agreeable sense impressions that correspond with one's temperament, proclivity, abilities, beliefs and opinions; the 'fashioning' of the mind, thoughts, and actions by habitual tendencies.

3. *Viññāṇa*: consciousness; the awareness of sense impressions: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and mental objects, and the awareness of one's particular state of mind.

4. *Nāma-rūpa*: mind-and-body;\* the elements of materiality and mentality within the process of cognition; the coordination by all components of the body and mind, conforming to the arisen state of consciousness; the progression and alteration of physical and mental factors in accord with the particular state of mind.

\*The author uses the English translation: 'animated organism.'

5. *Salāyatana*: six sense bases; the functioning of the associated sense bases in accord with the aforementioned situation (of mind-and-body).

6. *Phassa*: contact; cognition of sense objects; the connection between consciousness and the outside world.

7. *Vedanā*: feeling; the sensation of pleasure, pain, or neither-pain-nor-pleasure. [110]

8. *Taṇhā*: craving; desire; a yearning for pleasant sensations and an aversion to painful sensations; the wish to obtain, become, or sustain, or the wish for extinction and annihilation.

9. *Upādāna*: attachment; grasping; clinging to pleasant or unpleasant sensations; engaging with and attaching to things that provide such sensations; this attachment leads to an evaluation of things according to how they support or gratify craving.

10. *Bhava*: process of becoming; the entire range of behaviour in response to craving and grasping (*kamma-bhava*—active process), and the subsequent condition of life (*uppatti-bhava*—passive process) conforming to craving, grasping and behaviour.

11. *Jāti*: birth; the arising of self-perception as existing (or not existing) in a particular state of life; to occupy this existence and to adopt the corresponding behaviour (*kamma-bhava*), by acknowledging this existence and behaviour as one's own.

12. *Jarā-maraṇa*: aging-and-death; decay-and-death; the awareness that one will be separated from this state of existence. The feeling of being threatened by the loss and decay of such an existence. As a consequence people experience the entire range of suffering: sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, despair, stress, annoyance, depression, disappointment, anxiety, etc..

## B. Preliminary Explanation of the Relationship between Factors

1. **Ignorance conditions volitional formations**: because of not knowing the truth and not wisely investigating different situations, people create various mental fabrications: they speculate, fantasize, and conceptualize in terms of established beliefs, inhibitions and habits, and they then determine how to speak and act.

2. **Volitional formations condition consciousness**: when there is intention or the determination to engage with something, consciousness arises: to see, to hear, to smell, to taste, to feel, and to think about that thing. In particular, intention induces thinking about the desired object, resulting in an endless stream of mental proliferation. Intention also conditions a person's state of mind, endowing it with particular qualities, as positive or negative, virtuous or defiled.

3. **Consciousness conditions mind-and-body**: consciousness is accompanied by corresponding physical and mental attributes. Consciousness functions in conjunction with physical and mental factors, such as bodily organs, sensation, perception, and volitional formations. [111] Moreover, in whatever way consciousness has been conditioned, the accompanying physical and mental factors function in concert with this consciousness. For example, when consciousness has been conditioned by angry volitional formations, accompanying perceptions are associated with coarse language, insults, and violence. A person's countenance will appear sullen, his muscles will be tense, his pulse will quicken, and he will feel stressed. When consciousness is repeatedly conditioned in a particular way, a person's mental and physical attributes develop into specific personality traits.

4. **Mind-and-body conditions the six sense bases**: when mind-and-body has been activated in a particular configuration or direction, it relies on the support from the sense bases, which supply information or act as channels for behaviour. The sense bases are roused to perform their particular duty.

5. **The six sense bases condition contact**: when the six sense bases exist, contact with and cognition of sense objects is possible. Cognition depends on the individual sense bases.

6. **Contact conditions feeling:** with contact there must be feeling, either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

7. **Feeling conditions craving:** when experiencing a pleasing sense object, a person feels delight; he becomes attached to that object and wants more of it. Consequently, there is craving for sense objects (*kāma-taṇhā*). He wishes to maintain or abide in a state where he can further experience the pleasure from that object: there arises the craving for becoming (*bhava-taṇhā*). When experiencing a painful sense object, a person feels aversion; he wants to escape from or eliminate it. Consequently, there is the craving for extinction (*vibhava-taṇhā*). And when experiencing a neutral object, a person is indifferent, indecisive and deluded. The object is experienced as a mild form of pleasure, leading to attachment and a desire for more pleasant sensations.

8. **Craving conditions grasping:** when desire intensifies, it leads to attachment. The desire is lodged in the heart and a person is unable to let go of it. This gives rise to a particular behaviour in relation to an object. If one likes the object, one binds oneself to it and submits to it; whatever is associated with the object is viewed as good; whatever disturbs it is viewed as disturbing one's self. If a person dislikes an object, he feels as if he is encountering an opponent. He feels repulsed by and in conflict with anything associated with this object. He sees nothing redeeming about the object and feels personally offended by it. His behaviour, both in relation to pleasing and displeasing objects, reinforces and validates the following four things: 1) objects of sensual gratification (*kāma*), which are acquired or lost; 2) views and understanding of things associated with sense objects, including one's views on life and the world (*ditṭhi*); 3) practices, rules and customs (*sīlabbata*) observed for acquiring and avoiding sense objects; and 4) a sense of a 'self' (*attavāda*), which acquires things or is impeded. [112]

9. **Grasping conditions becoming:** when there is grasping and particular ways of behaving towards objects, people, and states of mind, a person generates a corresponding state of existence, both in regards to general behaviour (*kamma-bhava*), beginning with patterns of thought, and in regards to personality, which are the mental and physical traits of that person's life at that time (*uppatti-bhava*). Examples of this are the behaviour and personality of people who seek material wealth, people who seek power, people who seek fame, people who seek physical beauty, and people who are antisocial.

10. **Becoming conditions birth:** with the arising of a personally occupied state of existence, there is a sense of 'self': a distinct awareness of abiding in or embodying this state of existence. A person believes, for example, that he is the owner, the recipient, the agent, the winner, or the loser in this state of existence.

11. **Birth conditions aging-and-death:** with the arising of a 'self' that occupies a state of existence, it is natural to experience both growth and decline within that state, including a sense of weakening and passing away from that state. In particular, there is the threat of perishing and the need to continually watch over

and preserve that state. The decline, loss, and threat of decay causes perpetual grief and suffering.

### C. Expanded Explanation of the Relationship between Factors

1. *Avijjā* → *saṅkhārā*: by not knowing the truth and not seeing clearly, a person creates mental fabrications, speculations, and deliberations. For example, a superstitious person may see the reflection of light from an animal's eyes and believe he is seeing a ghost; he becomes afraid and runs away. In the event that an object is hidden from view, a person may spend time guessing and arguing about the nature of this object. A person who believes that the gods bestow blessings when pleased will offer prayers, entreaties and propitiatory sacrifices to those gods. A person who does not know the true nature of conditioned phenomena, that they are impermanent, inconstant, and formed by causal factors, sees them as lovely and desirable, and strives to acquire and possess them.

2. *Saṅkhārā* → *viññāṇa*: with intention, purpose, and deliberate engagement, a consciousness (say of hearing or seeing) arises. On the other hand, if one does not pay attention to or engage with an object, consciousness does not arise, even if one is within range of the object. A person focused on an activity is not distracted by other things. For example, someone reading a fascinating book is only aware of the book's content; he may not notice loud noises or physical discomfort. When intensely searching for something, one may not pay attention to surrounding people and objects. [113] People will look at an identical object with different intentions and from different perspectives. Take for example an empty plot of land: a child may see it as a playground, a contractor as a building site, a farmer as a plantation, and a manufacturer as a site for a factory. For each of them the land has a different significance. Similarly, a person will see an object from different perspectives depending on his mood. If he is thinking good thoughts, a person notices the positive aspects of an object, whereas bad thoughts will lead a person to notice negative aspects. Imagine several objects lying together, which include a bouquet of flowers and a knife. A person who loves flowers may only notice the flowers, without paying attention to the knife. The stronger the interest is for flowers, the more exclusively the person's attention will dwell on the flowers and the less the person will notice other things. Other people may only notice the knife, and they will associate the knife with different things, according to their thoughts and aims: a thief may see it as a weapon, a cook as a kitchen utensil, and a metal dealer as a source of metal.

3. *Viññāṇa* → *nāma-rūpa*: consciousness and mind-and-body are mutually dependent in the way described by Venerable Sāriputta:

*Just as two sheaves of reeds might stand leaning against each other, so too, with mind-and-body as condition, consciousness comes to be; with consciousness as*

*condition, mind-and-body comes to be.... If one were to remove one of those sheaves of reeds, the other would fall, and if one were to remove the other sheaf, the first would fall. So too, with the cessation of mind-and-body comes cessation of consciousness; with the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of mind-and-body....*<sup>7</sup>

In this sense, when there is the arising of consciousness there must also be the arising of mind-and-body. When volitional formations condition consciousness, they also condition mind-and-body. But because mind-and-body is an attribute of consciousness, it is said: volitional formations condition consciousness, and consciousness conditions mind-and-body. There are two points concerning the way in which consciousness conditions mind-and-body:

i. In cognizing an object (e.g., a visual form or a sound), a person is in fact experiencing mind-and-body.<sup>8</sup> The presently existing object for him is none other than the presently cognized object, and as such it cannot be separated from mind-and-body experienced in that moment by consciousness. For example, when seeing a rose, the rose that exists in that moment is the rose that is known through the eye or by way of the 'mind-door' in that moment of consciousness.<sup>9</sup> It is inseparable from the mental concept of a 'rose' and from the feeling, perception and other volitional formations present in that moment. [114] Thus, consciousness and mind-and-body exist together and are mutually supportive.

ii. The attributes of mind-and-body, especially the mental factors, correspond to the consciousness on which they depend. When a person's thoughts (*saṅkhārā*) are good, they condition a good consciousness. In that moment the mind is bright and consequent physical conduct is also good. When a person has bad thoughts, he focuses on the negative aspects of things; the mind becomes clouded and subsequent physical conduct is strained. Accompanying mental and physical factors act in unison with the corresponding volitional formations and consciousness. When there is an emotion (*saṅkhāra*) of love, a person is attentive (*viññāṇa*) to the positive side of things; his mind is cheerful (*nāma*), and his complexion is bright and physical conduct is positive (*rūpa*). When a person is angry he focuses on the negative side of things; his mind is clouded, his face is scowling, and his behaviour is stressful; all the factors are primed to follow this negative line of thought. The thoughts and intentions of an athlete at the start of a sporting event are absorbed in that activity. His attention is commensurate

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<sup>7</sup> S. II. 114.

<sup>8</sup> Here, mind-and-body is defined as body, feeling, perception and volitional formations.

<sup>9</sup> ['Known through the eye' here refers to the direct act of seeing. In this case, it refers to seeing the colour, shape, etc. of the rose without interpreting what is seen as a 'rose.' 'By way of the mind-door' refers to the next stage, in which a person cognizes the object. In this case, he recognizes the visual object as a 'rose.']

to his interest in the competition. All aspects of his mind and body participating in this event are prepared to function accordingly. The interrelationship of factors here includes the arising and ceasing of newly formed physical and mental properties, which shape or strengthen the personality in line with the corresponding consciousness and volitional formations (note the relation to ‘becoming’—*bhava*).<sup>10</sup> This process involving the first three links of dependent origination is an important stage concerning kamma and the fruits of kamma (*vipāka*): a small revolution of the cycle is complete (*avijjā = kilesa → saṅkhārā = kamma → viññāṇa & nāma-rūpa = vipāka*), and begins to revolve again from the beginning.\* This stage is pivotal in forming habits, temperament, understanding, skill, and personality.

\*See the illustration in the previous section.

4. *Nāma-rūpa → saḷāyatana*: the factors of mind-and-body rely on a knowledge of the external world to function or else they draw on stored knowledge for deciding what course of action to take. Therefore, the aspects of mind-and-body acting as channels for receiving sense impressions, that is, the relevant sense bases, are in a state of receptivity and act in unison with the preceding factors of dependent origination. For example, the sense organs (e.g., the eye and ear) of a football player during a match are in a heightened state of alertness and are prepared to receive relevant sense impressions. Simultaneously, the functionality of the sense organs unassociated with this activity is reduced and they are not in a state of alertness. [115] While absorbed in playing football a person’s sense of smell or taste, for example, may be dormant.

5. *Saḷāyatana → phassa*: when the sense bases are engaged and there is the conjunction of three things, cognition arises. The three things are: one of the six sense bases (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind), one of the six corresponding sense objects (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or mental objects), and one of the six corresponding kinds of consciousness (by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind).

6. *Phassa → vedanā*: with the arising of contact, there is inevitably one of the three kinds of accompanying feeling: pleasure (*sukha-vedanā*), pain (*dukkha-vedanā*), or a neutral feeling (*upekkhā* or *adukkhamasukha-vedanā*).

The third to the seventh factors of dependent origination (*viññāṇa* to *vedanā*) comprise a section called the ‘fruits of kamma,’ especially factors five, six and seven (*saḷāyatana*, *phassa*, and *vedanā*). In themselves, they are neither good nor bad, neither skilful nor unskilful, but they act as causes for future good and bad results.

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<sup>10</sup> Note the relationship with ‘becoming’ (*bhava*).



7. *Vedanā* → *taṇhā*: when a person experiences a pleasant sensation, he is pleased and delighted; he becomes attached and craves for more. When a person experiences a painful sensation, he is annoyed; he wants the painful object to vanish, he wants to escape from the pain, and he searches for a pleasant substitute. When a person experiences a neutral sensation, there tends to be apathy and complacency. Neutral sensation is a subtle form of pleasure; it can lead to attachment and a yearning for further pleasure.

There are three kinds of craving (*taṇhā*):

1) Craving for sense pleasure (*kāma-taṇhā*): the search for gratification by way of the five senses.

2) Craving for existence (*bhava-taṇhā*): desire for things associated with particular states of existence, or desire for a state of existence (e.g., as a millionaire, a celebrity, or a *deva*\*) that bestows such coveted things. More profoundly, it is a desire to sustain the ‘self’ in a permanent state of existence.

3) Craving for non-existence (*vibhava-taṇhā*): the desire to escape from an undesirable object or state of existence. This craving often manifests as coarse mental states, for example apathy, loneliness, boredom, hopelessness, self-hatred, self-pity, or a wish for self-annihilation.<sup>11</sup> [116]

Craving has these three manifestations: a desire for sensuality, a desire for a pleasant state of existence, and a desire to escape from the unpleasant. When a person’s desires are thwarted there is a feeling of annoyance, aversion and ill-will. When this reaction is expressed externally it leads to thoughts of aggression and violence.

\**Deva* = a god.

8. *Taṇhā* → *upādāna*: when there is desire for an object, a person clings to it. The greater the desire the greater the attachment. When a person experiences pain and wishes to escape the source of that pain, attachment takes the form of hostility. At the same time, there is a corresponding degree of attachment to things that one believes will gratify desire: to favourable states of existence, to a sense of self, to views, opinions and theories that satisfy personal desires, and to customs and practices that answer to personal needs.

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<sup>11</sup> There are two or three conflicting ways of translating these three kinds of craving, especially the second and third kinds (see, e.g.: Vbh. 365; Vism. 567-8). Some scholars associate *bhava-taṇhā* with a life-instinct or life-wish, and associate *vibhava-taṇhā* with a death-instinct or death-wish, corresponding to the psychological terminology of Sigmund Freud (see: M.O’C. Walshe, *Buddhism for Today*, George Allen & Unwin, London, ©1962, pp. 37-40). One very clear definition for *bhava-taṇhā* and *vibhava-taṇhā* is found at It. 43-4. See Appendix 7 for more on this subject.

9. *Upādāna* → *bhava*: grasping is connected to a particular state of existence. Attachment involves a process of binding oneself to or identifying with a state of existence, which either provides desired sense objects or helps to escape from undesirable objects. At the same time, when there is a desired state of existence, there invariably must be undesired states of existence. The state of existence grasped on to is called *uppatti-bhava* ('passive process of becoming').

When there is attachment to a state of existence, a person strives to sustain certain aspects of this state and to escape from other aspects. All of his thoughts and actions, however, are propelled by grasping; they are influenced by established beliefs, opinions, theories, habits, and preferences, and they manifest as behaviour that corresponds to this grasping. Take for example a person who wishes to be reborn as a god: he will attach to certain belief systems, traditions, ceremonies and practices that he believes will lead to heaven. He will think and act according to these beliefs and as a consequence may even develop idiosyncratic behaviour. A person who seeks honour will attach to a set of values he believes to be honourable and to a corresponding standard of behaviour. His thoughts, actions and behaviour will conform to his attachment. A person who covets an object belonging to someone else attaches to the idea of ownership and attempts to acquire the object. By not discerning the harm in wrong conduct, he will think and act out of habit. [117] His initial covetousness may even lead him to steal; his wish to be an 'owner' results in him becoming a 'thief.' Based on correct or false beliefs, a person responds to a situation either skilfully or immorally. The specific pattern of behaviour driven and shaped by grasping is the active process of becoming (*kamma-bhava*). The state of existence resulting from this behaviour, say of being a deva, an honourable person, an owner, or a thief, is the passive process of becoming (*uppatti-bhava*). This state of existence may conform to a person's desires or it may conflict with his desires.

This section of dependent origination is a crucial stage for the creation of kamma, the receiving of the fruits of kamma, and for the development of habits and personality.

10. *Bhava* → *jāti*: at this point there arises a sense of 'self,' the awareness of an 'I,' as existing in a particular way, either conforming to a person's desires or not.<sup>12</sup> A 'self' is born within a state of existence, as in the former example of an 'owner,' a 'thief,' an 'honourable person,' or a 'disgrace.' The birth of a 'self' is seen clearly in times of personal conflict involving strong emotions, for instance in the course of arguments, even apparently rational ones. If a person is governed by mental defilement rather than applies wisdom, a distinct sense of self is created, for example: 'I am in charge,' 'I am respectable,' 'he is unworthy,' 'he is inferior,' 'this is my opinion,' or 'I am being contradicted.' Consequently, the sense of being a certain kind of person may be discredited or lost. The birth of a 'self' is especially distinct at times of aging and death, but as is evident from the next link in the cycle, aging and death are only possible because of birth:

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<sup>12</sup> See Appendix 2: 'Me & Mine.'

11. *Jāti* → *jarāmaraṇa*: when there is a ‘self’ existing in a particular way, then there is a ‘self’ that is separated from particular states of existence, and a ‘self’ that is impeded, agitated, diminished, and unfulfilled. With the birth of a ‘self,’ there is a wish to sustain a desired state of existence: a wish for stability and permanence. But the birth of a self inevitably brings the end of the self. There is a constant threat of weakness and loss, producing a fear of disturbance, conflict, and death, and leading a person to cling more tightly to that state of existence. A fear of death is embedded in people’s subconscious and affects their behaviour. [118] It leads people to grasp after desired states of existence, to be intimidated by discomfort, and to experience pleasure with anxiety, fearing that it will disappear.

When the ‘self’ is born in an undesired state of existence or when it is born in a desired state from which it must pass away, the various forms of suffering arise: sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. People suffering in this way are misguided and blinded. They vainly seek an escape using methods tainted by ignorance, thus continuing the cycle of dependent origination.<sup>13</sup>

In a competitive world, an ordinary person experiences two kinds of ‘success’: there is conventional (*sammāti*) success, with its socially agreed upon definition; and there is the subjective idea of success that is held by grasping—the act of ‘becoming’ (*bhava*). It is often the case for people, especially those who are proud, to have the thought: ‘I am successful’ (i.e.: ‘I am born into the state of being a success’). This is then followed by the thought: ‘But for success to be complete, I deserve prestige, praise, recognition and reward.’ Success is thus linked to praise, to the failure of others, and to a sense of fulfilled ambition. In the moment when the sense of success arises along with its related attributes, there is a feeling of being fulfilled or unfulfilled. With fulfilment comes the feeling of having to firmly attach to success, out of fear that the success will disappear and that the praise and admiration will wane. When others do not express the desired amount of praise, the person feels unhappy, since the sense of being a ‘success’ is affected and threatened. He is threatened by decay (*jarā*) and by the passing away (*marāṇa*) from the cherished state of success (*bhava*) along with its attendant benefits. In this circumstance, the feelings of disappointment, worry, and despondency, which have not been uprooted by mindfulness and clear comprehension, preoccupy and entangle people. They become innate characteristics, shaping personality, affecting behaviour, and continuing the cycle of dependent origination.

The fabricated idea of ‘self’ takes up space in the heart, which leads to a sense of confinement and limitation. This feeling of limitation induces people to separate themselves from others and gives rise to the ideas of ‘me’ and ‘other.’ [119] When the sense of self becomes further inflated, a person wants to acquire, to accomplish, and to impress others. But the sense of self must be checked and suppressed by people themselves. If people are overly egotistical or follow desires without restraint, external conflict arises. Such unrestrained behaviour also leads to a loss

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 3: ‘Birth and Death in the Present Moment.’

of vitality, by increasing the power of desire and a sense of personal inadequacy. Overall conflict is thus augmented and contentment decreases. There is then no satisfaction and each moment is an opportunity for stress to arise.

#### D. Examples from Everyday Life

Tom and Ben are students and intimate friends; everyday at school they greet each other cheerfully. One day Tom sees Ben and greets him in a friendly manner, but Ben frowns and does not reply. As a consequence Tom gets angry and stops speaking with Ben. In this situation the process occurs in this way:

1. **Ignorance:** Tom does not know the reasons behind Ben's bad mood and he does not reflect with wisdom to work out the truth of the situation. Ben may be upset about something or have an unresolved problem.
2. **Volitional formations:** Tom forms various ideas corresponding to his personal habits and opinions. He speculates about what Ben must be thinking or feeling, and mental defilements may make Tom feel confused, angry or offended.
3. **Consciousness:** in his disturbed state, Tom sees those of Ben's actions that fuel and confirm his current prejudices and interprets them accordingly. And the more he does this, the more convinced he is that he is right. Tom finds all of Ben's expressions and actions annoying.
4. **Mind-and-body:** the various aspects of Tom's mind and body—feelings, thoughts, mental states, facial expressions, gestures, etc.—manifest as symptoms of anger and conceit. The physical and mental factors that arise match consciousness.
5. **Six sense bases:** the sense bases involved in this situation are alert and fully primed.
6. **Contact:** there is contact (particularly eye contact or ear contact) with those characteristics and traits of Ben that are particularly pronounced or arresting, for example sullenness, unresponsiveness, and apparent scorn and disrespect.
7. **Feeling:** a feeling of discomfort, stress, pain, or sadness.
8. **Craving:** a desire for the destruction and extinction of the discomforting, oppressive sense impressions. [120]
9. **Grasping:** Tom grasps onto the idea that Ben's behaviour is deliberately aimed at him and that the issue must somehow be sorted out.
10. **Becoming:** Tom's behaviour is conditioned by grasping. His behaviour (*kamma-bhava*) is adversarial; his existence at this moment (*uppatti-bhava*) is as an adversary.

11. **Birth:** Tom embraces this existence as an adversary. He clearly sees himself as Ben's foe. He separates 'me' and 'him,' and identifies himself as one who must confront Ben.

12. **Ageing-and-death:** the 'self' arising in this state of conflict is sustained by various perceptions, for example being a person who is able, skilled, honourable, dignified, or successful. These qualities, however, have opposing qualities, say of inferiority, failure, dishonour, or defeat. As soon as the desired 'self' arises it is threatened by the possibility of turning into its opposite. Tom may not be able to sustain the identity of a skilled and effective adversary; rather he may become weak and unable to defend his honour. Suffering continually assails him. It ranges from the fear that he will not get what he wants, the tension and worry involved in the search for a desired state of being, right up to the disappointment if he is unsuccessful, and even in the case that he is successful, the waning of enjoyment that inevitably follows. This suffering envelops and overshadows the mind, conditioning further ignorance and another turning of the wheel. This suffering is like a festering wound, which steadily releases toxins; it causes problems for the person and for others, affects behaviour, and shapes the entire course of life. In the above example, Tom may be unhappy all day, be unable to concentrate on his studies, act and speak badly towards others, and cause further conflicts.

If Tom were to respond correctly from the beginning, this cycle of problems would not occur. When Ben does not smile or return his greeting Tom would reflect with wisdom that Ben may have encountered some trouble; perhaps he was scolded by one of the teachers, is short of money, or is suffering from some other unresolved issue. Thinking in this way he will not be upset; rather, his heart will remain spacious and full of compassion. He may inquire after the cause, comfort Ben, help him find a solution to the problem, or simply allow Ben to have some quiet time to himself. Even if a negative cycle begins to turn there is an opportunity to make amends. Say the cycle has reached contact (*phassa*), where Tom is aware of Ben's unpleasant behaviour and Tom begins to suffer has a result. Tom can give rise to mindfulness instead of falling victim to ensuing craving for escape (*vibhavataṇhā*). [121] By considering the situation wisdom severs the cycle and Tom experiences Ben's actions in a new way. Tom uses reason to reflect on Ben's actions and on his own appropriate response. Tom's mind will be clear and free from stress, and he will think of ways to help his friend. The arising of wisdom brings freedom to the mind; no 'self' is fabricated that is prone to disturbance. Apart from not creating personal problems, wisdom gives rise to the compassionate wish to reduce others' suffering. This has the opposite effect from ignorance, which leads to the 'wheel of rebirth' (*saṃsāra*), to craving and attachment, and to a restricted sense of 'self,' which is subject to pain and has far-reaching consequences.

At this point let us review some important aspects of Dependent Origination:

- The entire process of dependent origination described above occurs rapidly—it is completed in an instant. For example, a student who has failed his exams,

a person who has lost a loved one, or a person who sees his beloved with another partner may be anguished, frightened, or in shock; he may scream or faint. The stronger the attachment the more intense the reaction.

- The conditional factors need not follow a set temporal sequence. In a similar manner, a piece of chalk, a blackboard, a clean surface, and the act of writing are all conditions for written words (on the blackboard).
- The teaching of Dependent Origination emphasizes an understanding of a natural law—a process found in nature—for discerning the source of problems and the specific points that require correction. The details of that correction, the methods of practice, are not directly connected to the teaching of Dependent Origination, but are matters related to the ‘Path’ (*magga*) or the ‘Middle Way’ (*majjhimā-paṭipadā*).<sup>14</sup>

Some of the former examples are superficial and lack subtlety, especially those illustrating the link between ignorance and volitional formations, the link between craving and clinging, and the link in which sorrow, lamentation, etc. induce a further rotation of the cycle. Some of the earlier examples describing ignorance are limited to specific circumstances—they are not matters present in each moment of life. This may lead some people to think that ordinary people can live much of their lives without ignorance or that Dependent Origination does not give a true account of daily life. Therefore, it is important to provide a clearer, more detailed explanation of some of the difficult points.

## E. Deeper Explanations

a) **Ignorance** → **volitional formations**: when encountering an object or a situation, people normally interpret it, judge it, and create concepts, establish objectives and perform actions in relation to it, influenced by the following four predispositions or subconscious impulses: [122]

1. *Kāma*: the desire for gratification by way of the five senses.
2. *Bhava*: the desire for or anxiety over self-existence; the desire to be a particular way and to maintain a desired state of existence.
3. *Diṭṭhi*: habitual views, beliefs, doctrines and theories that are attached to and cherished.
4. *Avijjā*: delusion; ignorance; a lack of true awareness and comprehension of causes, effects, meanings, values, and objectives, and of the natural relationship between things or between events; a lack of discernment of causality; the mistaken view that a ‘self’ acts and is acted upon; an understanding of things conditioned by personal conjecture or mental fabrication.

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<sup>14</sup> Discussed in the latter half of *Buddhadhamma*.

These four predispositions, especially items three and four, are connected. When a person does not clearly understand the truth (*avijjā*), he tends to act in accord with habitual views, beliefs, ideas and concepts (*ditṭhi*), many of which he absorbs from society. Items three and four also influence items one and two: ignorance and socially conditioned views determine and control people's thoughts and actions—what they like, what they need, and how they seek satisfaction; they lie buried in a person's subconscious and dictate behaviour without the person being aware of them.

It is a common perception that people act entirely out of free will, but this is a delusion. If one investigates closely and asks what people really want, why they want these things, and why they follow a particular course of action, one sees that there is no real freedom of choice for these people. Their behaviour is conditioned by their upbringing and education, by culture, by religious beliefs, and by social conventions. They choose and act within the confines of these social factors; even if they depart from usual forms of behaviour, they still use these factors as a standard for comparison. Everything that ordinary people identify with lies within the compass of these four predispositions. The things that are identified with, apart from being absent of any 'substance' or 'self,' exert a power that cannot be controlled by people and therefore while under their sway there is no independence.

These four predispositions are called *āsava*, usually translated as 'effluent' or 'outflow'—something that leaks out, or as 'taint'—something that 'festers' and 'ferments' in the heart.<sup>15</sup> These things leak out and stain the mind when a person encounters sense objects. [123] Whenever a person contacts something by way of the senses or thinks of something, these 'āsavas' permeate and contaminate the mind. The mind's experience of sense objects is not guided by wisdom, but is mediated by the taints.\* This state of affairs prevents objective knowing and leads to continual problems.

From this point on I will refer to the *āsavas* as the 'taints.'

These taints lie behind unenlightened people's behaviour. They are the agents for the basic mistake of viewing things as 'me' or 'mine,' which is the most fundamental level of ignorance. They govern people's thoughts and actions without

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<sup>15</sup> The four taints are known as *kāmāsava*, *bhavāsava*, *ditṭhāsava*, and *avijjāsava*, respectively. This group of four taints is found in the Abhidhamma; in the suttas only three are mentioned—*ditṭhāsava* does not appear. *Ditṭhāsava* is an intermediate factor between *avijjāsava* and *bhavāsava*: it relies on ignorance to be established and it expresses itself through the taint of becoming. Three *āsava*: see e.g., D. II. 81; S. IV. 256. Four *āsava*: see e.g., Vbh. 373-4. Alternative English translations for *āsava* are: 'inflowing impulses,' 'influxes,' 'biases,' and 'cankers.' The four taints are sometimes referred to as the taints of sense-gratification, becoming (or 'self-centered pursuits'), views, and ignorance, respectively. MA. I. 67 claims that *ditṭhāsava* is incorporated into *bhavāsava* because the desire for existence or the attachment to *jhāna*, for example, is linked to an eternalist view or to an annihilationist view. See more material at: Nd. II. 7; DA. III. 999; VinT.: Paṭhamo Bhāgo, Verañjakaṇḍa-vaṇṇanā.

people being aware of them. They are the starting point for dependent origination: when there is the arising of the taints, there is the arising of ignorance. Ignorance is then the condition for volitional formations, by which people act with a deluded sense of 'self.' Similarly, one can say that people are not free because their behaviour is ruled by unrecognized volitional impulses.

One definition for ignorance is a lack of discernment of the three universal characteristics, especially the quality of nonself. A person is unaware that the things considered to be a 'being,' a 'person,' a 'self,' 'me,' and 'you,' exist as a stream of myriad physical and mental components that are interrelated and mutually dependent. The continual arising and dissolution of these components causes this stream to perpetually change shape. People exist as a collection of thoughts, desires, habits, inclinations, opinions, values, perceptions, insights, and beliefs (both irrational, erroneous beliefs and well-grounded, correct beliefs). These thoughts, etc. are the result of cultural transmission, education, and ongoing responses both to internal events and to one's environment. [124] When a person is unaware of this fact, moment by moment he identifies with one or other of these components. When a person identifies with these things, they deceive and subjugate the person; they lead him to see things in the context of a 'self' and to believe that he is a free agent behind action.

b) **Craving** → **clinging**: at this point, let us look at another link that is difficult to understand—the link between craving and clinging, which is similarly a stage involving mental impurity.

The three kinds of craving mentioned earlier are all expressions of a single form of craving, which all unawakened people possess. This craving is evident when one investigates the deeper workings of the mind, beginning with its lack of recognition of the interdependent relationship of things. This misunderstanding produces the distorted sense of 'self,' which in turn generates an underlying desire for existence—the desire for this illusory 'self' to exist forever.<sup>16</sup> The desire for existence is not abstract, but is connected to the desire for sense objects: a person desires existence in order to experience desirable objects and to gratify sense desire. A person wants to 'be' because he wants to 'get.' The desire for sense objects intensifies the desire for existence. When the desire for existence is strong but a person does not acquire desirable sense objects, however, the reaction is a state of existence (*bhava*) that is unsatisfactory, objectionable, and unendurable. The person then wants this state of existence to end. But as soon as there is a desire for extinction the desire for acquisition resurfaces, since there is the fear that with extinction one may not experience desired pleasure; the desire for existence thus follows in its wake.

The same process occurs when a person acquires an object of desire but not to a satisfactory degree or on acquiring an object starts to desire something else. The

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<sup>16</sup> Here, *kāma-taṇhā* is translated as the 'desire for acquisition (of sense objects),' *bhava-taṇhā* as the 'desire for existence,' and *vibhava-taṇhā* as the 'desire for extinction.'



most basic and all-encompassing desire is the desire for more. One finds that human beings are perpetually searching for a happiness that surpasses the happiness they are currently experiencing. Unawakened beings constantly miss or forsake the present moment. People find the present moment hard to endure; they want to escape from it and seek a more gratifying state of existence. The desire to get, the desire to be, and the desire to cease existing thus continually spin in a circle in the lives of ordinary people. Because this cycle is subtle and occurs in every moment, people are not aware that they are constantly struggling to escape from the previous moment and to seek gratification from each subsequent moment. [125]

Craving results from ignorance: because we do not understand the interdependent nature of things, there occurs a fundamental error. We see things either as substantial, as possessing a stable and permanent core or self,<sup>17</sup> or see things as existing for a period of time in a stable, substantial way and then dissolving.<sup>18</sup> All unawakened people hold these two views in subtle ways, and hence the three kinds of craving. Because of the deluded and deep-seated view that things possess a permanent, solid 'self,' there arises the craving for existence. And because of ignorance and doubt, there arises the competing view that things possess a solid substance, but that this substance or 'self' perishes and disappears; consequently there arises the craving for extinction. These two wrong views give the opportunity for craving to arise. If a person understands the fluid, interdependent nature of things, there can be no permanent, solid 'self,' nor can there be a real, objective 'self' that dissolves and disappears. Craving has no foundation. Craving for sense pleasure also results from these two wrong views: fearing that the 'self' or the pleasure may disappear a person anxiously searches for personal gratification. And because he sees things as permanent and solid, he grabs onto things in order to reinforce a sense of stability.

On a coarse level craving manifests as the search for sensual pleasure, as the search for situations providing such pleasure, and as boredom with pleasures already achieved. A person who has no inner independence feels tedium and agitation when he is unable to experience gratifying sense objects. He constantly searches around for new forms of pleasure to escape his disquiet and discomfort. When he does not get what he wants he feels disappointment, discouragement and self-loathing. Happiness and unhappiness thus are entirely dependent on external conditions. Time without stimulation or activity then becomes a punishment or a misfortune. Boredom, depression, loneliness and discontentment increase both for the individual and in society, even though there is an increase in stimulating objects, and the search for stimulation becomes more crude and passionate. [126] A deeper inspection reveals that problems like drug abuse and teenage delinquency

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<sup>17</sup> An 'eternalist' view (*sassata-dit̐thi*).

<sup>18</sup> An 'annihilationist' view (*uccheda-dit̐thi*). Both of these are mistaken views of 'self' but in different forms. The first is obvious, but the second is described as follows: a person believes that an object has a distinct core or self and believes that this essence or 'self' is cut short and perishes. See the following section on Dependent Origination and the Middle Way.

stem from a lack of patience, boredom and the wish to escape from the state of existence a person is born into in that moment.

The mental impurity resulting from craving is grasping (*upādāna*), of which there are four kinds:

1. *Kāmupādāna*: grasping onto sensuality;<sup>19</sup> as a consequence of craving, the mind firmly attaches to desired objects. When a person acquires a desired object, he attaches to it because he wishes for further gratification and because he fears separation. Attachment arises when a person experiences a moment of gratification and then wishes to repeat the experience, or else when desired objects do not provide gratification. Loss or disappointment may then lead to greater fixation and longing. Although objects of desire do not truly belong to the person, he tries to persuade himself that in some way he does possess them. The minds of ordinary people are therefore constantly tangled up with desirable objects and it is difficult for them to reach objectivity, security and freedom.

2. *Diṭṭhupādāna*: grasping onto views; the desire for something to exist or to be eradicated produces biased views and beliefs, which correspond to a person's desires. The search for gratification leads a person to grasp onto teachings, theories, philosophical doctrines, etc. that serve and minister to his desire. When a person attaches to a view then he appropriates it and identifies with it. Apart from thinking and acting in accord with such a view, he feels personally threatened whenever he encounters an opposing view. He feels this opposing view may diminish, weaken or destroy his 'self' in some way, and he therefore feels the need to defend his cherished view to maintain his dignity. This reaction produces external conflict, narrow-mindedness, and obstructed wisdom. He is unable to truly benefit from new ideas and teachings, and he is unable to advance his knowledge in an optimal way.<sup>20</sup> [127]

3. *Sīlabbatupādāna*: grasping onto moral precepts and religious observances. The desire for acquisition and existence, the ungrounded fear of the dissolution of the 'self,' and the attachment to views and doctrines leads to correspondingly superstitious behaviour in the face of those things considered sacred and promising fulfilment, even when a person cannot rationally understand the link between these things and desired results. The firm belief in a 'self' manifests externally as an unyielding attachment to behaviour, rules, practices, customs, traditions, religious ceremonies and established institutions, without an awareness of their meaning, objectives and value. As a consequence, human beings create such rules, customs, etc. to limit and confine themselves. They end up becoming narrow-minded and obstinate, and they find it difficult to improve themselves and truly take advantage of what they experience.

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<sup>19</sup> *Kāma*: objects that gratify desire by way of the five senses and the desire for these objects.

<sup>20</sup> The most basic views conforming to craving are the two views of eternalism and annihilationism, along with views directly related to these two.

The following passage from the late Venerable Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu\* may clarify this attachment to rules and observances:

\*Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1906-1993; one of the most influential Buddhist thinkers in contemporary Thailand.

*When a person upholds a moral precept or follows a teaching without applying reasoned awareness, he simply assumes that this action possesses some kind of sacred power, which will naturally produce positive results. Such a person acts merely by following forms, customs, conventions and scriptures passed down by society, without understanding their true meaning. Because he repeats these actions until they become a habit, attachment becomes more pronounced. This form of grasping varies from the second form, which is a grasping onto mistaken views and opinions. This third form is very hard to rectify—it is a grasping onto spiritual practices and their external manifestations.<sup>21</sup>*

4. *Attavādupādāna*: grasping onto the concept of self. The mistaken belief in a true, substantial self is native to the unawakened mind. This belief is reinforced by linguistic conventions, which lead people to see things as distinct, solid entities. This belief in self, however, becomes a form of grasping when craving acts as a condition: with a desire for acquisition a person attaches to the idea of a self who will experience or own the desired object; with a desire for a state of existence there is grasping onto a ‘self’ that dwells in that state; with a desire for non-existence there is grasping onto a ‘self’ that perishes. Fear of extinction leads a person to struggle to consolidate the sense of self. These forms of desire are linked to the idea of possession or control: a person believes that there is a ‘self’ manipulating events in accord with desire. And because events occasionally do occur in accord with desire, he believes that he has mastery over things. [128] But such control is limited and temporary. The various factors attached to as comprising the ‘self’ are merely isolated conditions in a larger causal process. Indeed, there is no factor in this process that can be truly or permanently controlled. People, however, interpret this experience of partial control as proof of a permanent ‘self.’ When a person grasps onto the idea of self he is unable to deal with things in harmony with conditional factors. Instead, he is deluded into trying to make things comply with his desires. If a person does not act in line with causality and things do not proceed as wished, then he feels oppressed by inadequacy and loss. The grasping onto an idea of self is central and acts as a basis for all other forms of grasping.

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<sup>21</sup> Venerable Buddhādāsa (Ariyanandamunī); ‘The Teachings of Buddhism’; Suvijāna Press, 1955; p. 60.

These four forms of grasping are connected: an encounter with a pleasurable object gives rise to craving and covetousness. This is followed by grasping onto sensuality: the person attaches to the desired object, thinking he must acquire, experience, or possess it. Grasping onto views then follows: he thinks, ‘This is good,’ ‘This will provide happiness,’ ‘Life will be meaningful when I get this object’ or, ‘Any teaching that promotes the acquisition of this object must be correct.’ Similarly, there arises the grasping onto rules and observances: a person upholds rules, traditions, moral codes, etc. as a means to acquire the desired object. Furthermore, there arises the grasping onto a ‘self,’ as that which experiences or controls the object.

Clinging prevents mental freedom and clarity. People subject to clinging are unable to think reasonably, accurately interpret events, make wise decisions, or act responsibly in relation to the law of cause and effect. Instead, they experience continual prejudice, limitation, conflict and stress because they hold firmly to such ideas as ‘me’ and ‘mine.’ Clinging to such ideas demands that things accord with desire, even though things must exist in line with causes and conditions and are not subject to a person’s will. Whenever things deviate from a desired outcome, a person feels oppressed. When a cherished object is adversely affected by something, the one who grasps onto it is similarly affected. The degree of impact or disturbance is proportional to the degree of attachment and identification. Suffering is not the sole consequence of this attachment: a person’s entire life and scope of activity is ruled by desire and grasping, rather than by wisdom.<sup>22</sup> [129]

Following on from grasping, the dependent origination sequence proceeds to becoming, birth, aging-and-death, and sorrow, lamentation, etc., as described above. When a person experiences sorrow, etc. he seeks to escape. His thoughts, choices and actions, rather than being based on a discernment of the truth of things, are based on accumulated habits, prejudices, perceptions and opinions. The cycle thus resumes at ignorance and rotates further.

Although ignorance is a fundamental defilement of the mind and engenders other mental impurities, craving tends to be the catalyst and plays the more dominant role in external behaviour. For this reason, in teachings such as the Four Noble Truths, the source of suffering is defined as craving (*taṇhā*).

When ignorance is unchecked—when the mind is in a state of blindness and confusion—then craving is unconstrained and a person’s intentional actions (*kamma*) are more likely to be bad than good. But if a person receives spiritual training and develops confidence in a correct path, craving can be used to a

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<sup>22</sup> The four forms of grasping are found at e.g.: D. III. 229; Vbh. 375. Grasping onto the idea of ‘self’ (*attavādupādāna*), in particular, is an attachment to one or several of the five aggregates, as confirmed by the Pali Canon: *An untaught, ordinary person ... regards material form as self, or self as possessed of material form, or material form as in self, or self as in material form. He regards feeling as self... He regards perception as self... He regards volitional formations as self... He regards consciousness as self ... or self as in consciousness* (M. I. 300).

person's advantage. When ignorance is corrected by wholesome beliefs, right thoughts, and reasoned understanding, then craving is 'deflected' to a virtuous goal; it is disciplined and purposeful, and can lead to wholesome actions and beneficial results. With proper encouragement, craving may be a support for efforts to eliminate ignorance and craving. In such cases a person strives to be a good person, makes good use of idle time, applies effort to achieve longterm goals, and tries to gain social standing or go to heaven. A good person and a bad person are both subject to suffering, but only the method of transforming ignorance and overcoming craving leads to freedom and true happiness.

The following passage demonstrates how craving can be used to a person's advantage for the highest goal:

*Sister, a monk hears it said: 'They say that a monk of such and such a name, by the destruction of the taints, in this very life enters and dwells in the taintless liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom'.... Then he thinks: 'Oh, when shall I too realize the taintless liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom?' Then, some time later, based on that craving, he abandons craving. It is on account of this that it was said: 'This body has come into being through craving; yet based on craving, craving can be abandoned.'<sup>23</sup>*

If there is no alternative but to choose between two forms of craving, one should choose a craving that leads to the good and acts as an impetus for constructive action. But if possible, one should refrain from both advantageous and destructive craving, and choose the way of wisdom, which is pure, unfettered, and free from suffering.

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<sup>23</sup> A. II. 145-6.