

Introduction

1. General Presentation:

A. When this exists, that comes to be;
With the arising of this, that arises.

B. When this does not exist, that does not come to be;
With the cessation of this, that ceases.¹

The Buddha presented the teaching of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) in two ways: general presentations, which do not specify each factor of the process, and detailed presentations listing each factor in a connected sequence. The first presentation usually occurs preceding the detailed presentation. The detailed presentation is found frequently in the scriptures, usually alone, without the general presentation; it expands on the general presentation, describing and analyzing each factor of dependent origination.

2. Detailed (or ‘Applied’) Presentation:

A. With ignorance as condition, there are volitional formations (*avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā*).

With volitional formations as condition, there is consciousness (*saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇam*).

With consciousness as condition, there is mind-and-body (*viññāṇapaccayā nāmarūpam*).*

**Nāma-rūpa* can be variously translated as ‘mind-and-body,’ ‘mentality-and-materiality,’ or ‘name-and-form.’

With mind-and-body as condition, there are the six sense bases (*nāmarūpapaccayā salāyatanaṁ*).

With the six sense bases as condition, there is contact (*salāyatana-paccayā phasso*).

With contact as condition, there is feeling (*phassapaccayā vedanā*).

¹ E.g.: S. II. 28, 65. (*Imasmīm sati idam hoti, imassuppādā idam uppajjati. Imasmīm asati idam na hoti, imasmīm nirodhā idam nirujjhati.*) VismT.: Paññābhūmi-niddesa-vaññanā, Paṭiccasamuppāda-kathā-vaññanā states that this general presentation is sometimes applied to a single factor of dependent origination (e.g., ‘contact’ at S. II. 96-7); in this case it is called ‘single topic dependent origination’ (*ekaṅga-paticcasamuppāda*). This general presentation corresponds to the term ‘specific conditionality’ (*idappaccayatā*).

With feeling as condition, there is craving (*vedanāpaccayā taṇhā*).

With craving as condition, there is clinging (*taṇhāpaccayā upādānam*). [82]

With clinging as condition, there is becoming (*upādānapaccayā bhavo*).

With becoming as condition, there is birth (*bhavapaccayā jāti*).

With birth as condition, there is aging-and-death (*jātipaccayā jarāmaraṇam*).

Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair thus come to be (*soka-parideva-
dukkha-domanassupāyāsā sambhavanti*).

Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering (*evametassa kevalassa
dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti*).

B. With the remainderless abandonment and cessation of ignorance comes the cessation of volitional formations (*avijjāya tveva asesavirāganirodhā
saṅkhāranirodho*).

With the cessation of volitional formations, cessation of consciousness (*saṅkhāranirodhā viññāṇanirodho*).

With the cessation of consciousness, cessation of mind-and-body (*viññāṇanirodhā nāmarūpanirodho*).

With the cessation of mind-and-body, cessation of the six sense bases (*nāmarūpanirodhā salāyatanañanirodho*).

With the cessation of the six sense bases, cessation of contact (*salāyatanañanirodhā phassanirodho*).

With the cessation of contact, cessation of feeling (*phassanirodhā
vedanānirodho*).

With the cessation of feeling, cessation of craving (*vedanānirodhā taṇhānirodho*).

With the cessation of craving, cessation of clinging (*taṇhānirodhā
upādānanirodho*).

With the cessation of clinging, cessation of becoming (*upādānanirodhā
bhavanirodho*).

With the cessation of becoming, cessation of birth (*bhavanirodhā jātinirodho*).

With the cessation of birth, (cessation of) aging-and-death (*jātinirodhā
jarāmaraṇam*).

Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair cease (*soka-parideva-dukkhadomanassupāyāsā nirujjhanti*).

Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering (*evametassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hoti*).²

Both of these formats can be divided into two parts—the process of origination and the process of cessation. The first sequence, the process of origination, is called the ‘cycle of origination’ (*samudaya-vāra*). It is also known as the ‘forward sequence’ (*anuloma-paṭiccasamuppāda*) and is equivalent to the second noble truth: the ‘origin of suffering’ (*dukkha-samudaya*). The latter sequence is called the ‘cycle of cessation’ (*nirodha-vāra*) or the ‘reverse sequence’ (*paṭiloma-paṭiccasamuppāda*); it corresponds to the third noble truth: the ‘cessation of suffering’ (*dukkha-nirodha*).

The closing statements of the detailed presentation indicate that Dependent Origination deals with the origin and cessation of suffering. Most of the scriptural references to dependent origination end with these statements. There are, however, passages that end with the origin and cessation of the ‘world’: *This, bhikkhus, is the origin of the world; this, bhikkhus, is the passing away of the world;*³ *In such a way the world originates, in such a way the world ceases.*⁴ [83] Here the words ‘suffering’ and the ‘world’ are interchangeable, which will explained below.

The detailed presentation of Dependent Origination contains twelve factors, which are part of an interconnected cycle, without a beginning or an end. There is no ‘first cause’ (*mūla-kāraṇa*). For convenience of exposition, the Buddha chose ignorance (*avijjā*) as the most suitable candidate to place at the start of the list of factors, but this is not intended to imply that ignorance is the first cause. Occasionally, to prevent the misunderstanding that ignorance is the ‘first cause,’ he inserted the following statement: *With the arising of the taints, ignorance arises; with the cessation of the taints, ignorance ceases.*⁵

The twelve factors of dependent origination, beginning with ignorance and ending with aging-and-death, are as follows:

Avijjā (ignorance) → *saṅkhārā* (volitional formations) → *viññāṇa* (consciousness) → *nāma-rūpa* (mind-and-body) → *saḷāyatana* (six sense bases) → *phassa* (contact) → *vedanā* (feeling) → *taṇhā* (craving) → *upādāna* (clinging) → *bhava* (becoming) → *jāti* (birth) → *jarāmarana* (aging-and-death).

Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are results of the cycle of dependent origination, arising in the minds of those who have mental impurities

² E.g.: Vin. I. 1-2; S. II. 1-2, 65.

³ S. II. 73. (*Ayam kho bhikkhave lokassa samudayo; ayam kho bhikkhave lokassa atthaṅgamo.*)

⁴ S. II. 78. (*Evamayam loko samudayati; evamayam loko nirujjhati.*)

⁵ M. I. 55. (*Āsava samudayā avijjā samudayo, āsava nirodhā avijjā nirodho.*)

(*āsava* & *kilesa*) when they are faced with aging and death. These results, however, take an active role by leading to a further increase of mental taints (*āsava*), which are in turn the conditions for ignorance and a continued rotation of the cycle.

In general, when presenting this detailed or ‘applied’ format of dependent origination (comprising the entire twelve factors), the Buddha mentioned the forward sequence only as an introduction. When he wished to emphasize the direct human experience of suffering, he most often presented dependent origination in the reverse sequence:

*Jarāmarana ← jāti ← bhava ← upādāna ← tanhā ← vedanā ← phassa ← salāyatana ← nāma-rūpa ← viññāna ← saṅkhārā ← avijjā.*⁶

On some occasions, when he wished to highlight a particular factor, the Buddha began the detailed presentation with one of the intermediate factors. The presentation may begin with birth (*jāti*),⁷ feeling (*vedanā*),⁸ or consciousness (*viññāna*),⁹ and then be linked with the subsequent factors until the process reaches aging-and-death (for the forward sequence), or traced back to ignorance (for the reverse sequence). [84] Occasionally, the process begins with a factor or problem not included in the group of twelve, and is then connected to the process of dependent origination.¹⁰ In summary, the presentation of dependent origination is not fixed and does not have to mention all twelve factors.

Although the twelve factors are said to be interdependent and act as conditions for one another, this is not the same as saying they are ‘causes’ for one another. As a comparison, there are more conditions other than the seed itself that permit a plant to grow: soil, water, fertilizer, weather, and temperature all play a part. And these interrelated conditions do not need to follow a set temporal sequence. Similarly, a floor acts as a condition for the stability or positioning of a table.¹¹

⁶ See, e.g.: S. II. 5-11, 81.

⁷ E.g.: S. II. 52.

⁸ E.g.: M. I. 266-7.

⁹ E.g.: S. II. 77-8.

¹⁰ E.g.: S. II. 11, 101.

¹¹ The Abhidhamma mentions twenty-four modes of conditionality; see the Paṭṭhāna.