

12

(Avijjā) Paccaya Sutta

The Discourse on Conditions (Ignorance) | S 12.27/2:42 f

Theme: Specific conditionality and ignorance as the root of dependent arising

Translated by Piya Tan ©2012

Introduction

The dependent arising passage of the (Avijjā) Paccaya Sutta is found, fully or partly identical, in the following texts, in different contexts:

Bhikkhu Sutta	one who understand dependent arising is at nirvana's door	S 12.28/2:13-15
Ñāṇa,vatthu Sutta 1	the 44 cases of knowledge and standing at nirvana's door	S 12.33/2:56-59
Cetanā Sutta 2	how to remove the support for consciousness	S 12.39/2:66
Ariya,sāvaka Sutta 1	the true knowledge of the ending of suffering	S 12.49/77-79
Ariya,sāvaka Sutta 2	(same as previous with a minor variation)	S 12.50/2:79 f

While the **(Jāti) Paccaya Sutta** (S 12.20) presents the dependent arising formula end-first, that is, beginning with “birth” (*jāti*),¹ the **(Avijjā) Paccaya Sutta** (S 12.27), gives the traditional formula, that is, the “direct order” (*anuloma*) dependent arising, beginning with “ignorance” (*avijjā*).² This latter Sutta, as such, starts with the unknown, yet an innate and universal truth: the fact that we *do not really know* why we are what we are. From this basic fact of *ignorance*, dependent arising traces how our thinking and actions develop into virtual realities culminating in full blown suffering and rebirth.

The (Avijjā) Paccaya Sutta is interesting in that it applies the model of “specific conditionality” (*idap,paccayatā*)³ to eleven pairs of proximate links, that is,

- (1) birth and decay-and-death,
- (2) existence and birth,
- (3) clinging and existence,
- (4) craving and clinging,
- (5) feeling and craving,
- (6) contact and feeling,
- (7) the six sense-bases and contact,
- (8) name-and-form and the six sense-bases,
- (9) consciousness and name-and-form,
- (10) volitional activities and consciousness, and
- (11) ignorance and volitional activities.

The pattern is that of “when A is, B is,” and conversely, “when A is not, B is not.” This means, theoretically at least, that the chain of dependent arising can be broken at any link. Breaking it at any of the link means that the whole chain is effectively broken, but this is not easy to do, because the chains are, so to speak, very strong.

However, in practical meditation, when we are distracted, we are often advised merely to note its impermanence or “rise and fall,” and not to get caught up in its “details.”⁴ Technically, this means that we only observe the “feeling” aspect of a mental event and *stop* there, that is, not going on into the “craving” stage.⁵ In this way, the mental hindrance is overcome. However, only with the uprooting of ignorance, that is, the attaining of true knowledge (that of fully understanding the four noble truths), are we really awakened and liberated.⁶

¹ S 12.20/2:25-27 & SD 39.5 (2.1).

² S 12.27/2:421 = SD 39.12

³ S 12.20 @ SD 39.5 (1.1.2.4).

⁴ See *Nimitta & vyañjana* = SD 19.14.

⁵ See **(Samuday'atthaṅgama) Loka S** (S 12.44/2:71-73) = SD 7.5 & **Dependent arising** = SD 5.16 (18).

⁶ See **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana** @ SD 1.1 (6).

The Discourse on Conditions (Ignorance)

S 12.27/2:42 f

1 (The Blessed One was) staying at Sāvātṭhī.

The 12-link dependent arising (direct order)

- 2 Bhikshus,
- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) with <u>ignorance</u> as condition, | there are formations; |
| (2) with <u>formations</u> as condition, | there is consciousness; |
| (3) with <u>consciousness</u> as condition, | there is name-and-form; |
| (4) with <u>name-and-form</u> as condition, | there are the six sense-bases; |
| (5) with <u>the six sense-bases</u> as condition, | there is contact; |
| (6) with <u>contact</u> as condition, | there is feeling; |
| (7) with <u>feeling</u> as condition, | there is craving; ⁷ |
| (8) with <u>craving</u> as condition, | there is clinging; |
| (9) with <u>clinging</u> as condition, | there is existence; |
| (10) with <u>existence</u> as condition, | there is birth; |
| (11) with <u>birth</u> as condition | there arise <u>decay and death</u> , sorrow, lamentation,
physical pain, mental pain and despair. |

—Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.

The 12 links defined: their arising and ceasing

3 (1) And what, bhikshus, is **decay-and-death**?⁸

DECAY. Ageing, decaying, broken teeth, grey hair, wrinkled skin, the dwindling away of one's years, the weakness of the sense-faculties, in various beings, in various groups of beings, here and there.⁹

This, bhikshus, is called *decay*.

DEATH. Falling away, passing away, breaking up, disappearance, death, dying, one's time being up¹⁰ [completion of one's time], breaking up of the aggregates, discarding of the body, [uprooting of the life-faculty,]¹¹ in various beings, in various groups of beings, here and there.¹²

This, bhikshus, is called *death*.

4 With the arising of birth, there is the arising of decay-and-death.

With the ceasing of birth, there is the ceasing of decay-and-death.

This very noble eightfold path is the way leading to the ceasing of *decay-and-death*,

⁷ In (**Samuday'atthaṅgama**) **Loka S** (S 12.44), the dependent arising is shown to be broken here when “with the remainderless fading away and ending of that same craving comes cessation of clinging...” the rest of the chain breaks accordingly leading to the ending of “this whole mass of suffering.” (S 12.44/2:71-73)

⁸ This def is stock: **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22.18/2:304); **Sammā Ditṭhi S** (M 9.22/1:49); **Sacca Vibhaṅga S** (M 141.12+13/3:249); (**Paṭicca,samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2/2:2); (**Avijjā**) **Paccaya S** (S 2:42); **Ñāna,vatthu S** (S 2:57); Nc:Be 61; Pm 1:37; Vbh 99, 137.

⁹ *Yā tesam tesam sattānam tamhi tamhi satta,nikāye jarā jīraṇatā khaṇḍhiccam paliccām valittacatā āyuno saṃhānī indriyānam paripāko—ayam vuccat'āvuso jarā.*

¹⁰ *Kāla,kiriyā*, lit “having done one's time”.

¹¹ *Jīvit'indriyass'upacchedo*, found in Be; omitted here and in **Sammā Ditṭhi S** (M 9.22/1:49).

¹² *Yā tesam tesam sattānam tamhi tamhi satta,nikāyā cuti cavanatā bhedo antaradhānam maccu maraṇam kāla,-kiriyā khandhānam bhedo kaḷebārassa nikkhepo* [Be: *jīvit'indriyass'upacchedo*]*—idam vuccat'āvuso maraṇam.*

that is to say, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

5.1 (2) And what, bhikshus, is **birth**?

The birth of various beings into the various orders of beings, their being born, descent into the womb, production, the arising of the aggregates, the obtaining of the sense-bases.¹³

This, bhikshus, is called birth.

5.2 With the arising of existence, there is the arising of birth.

With the ceasing of existence, there is the ceasing of birth.

This very noble eightfold path is the way leading to the ceasing of *birth*, that is to say, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

6.1 (3) And what, bhikshus, is **existence**?

Bhikshus, there are these three kinds of existence: sense-sphere existence, form-sphere existence, formless-sphere existence.

This, bhikshus, is called existence.¹⁴

5.2 With the arising of clinging, there is the arising of existence.

With the ceasing of clinging, there is the ceasing of existence.

This very noble eightfold path is the way leading to the ceasing of *existence*, that is to say, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

7.1 (4) And what, bhikshus, is **clinging**?

Bhikshus, there are these four kinds of clinging:¹⁵ clinging to sensual pleasures, clinging to views, clinging to rituals and vows,¹⁶ clinging to the doctrine of a self.¹⁷

This, bhikshus, is called clinging.¹⁸

7.2 With the arising of craving, there is the arising of clinging.

With the ceasing of craving, there is the ceasing of clinging.

This very noble eightfold path is the way leading to the ceasing of *clinging*, that is to say, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

¹³ As at (Paṭicca,samuppāda) Vibhaṅga S (S 12.2.4/2:3) = SD 5.15.

¹⁴ “Existence,” *bhava*: as at (Paṭicca,samuppāda) Vibhaṅga S (S 12.2.5/2:3) = SD 5.15, where see n.

¹⁵ For def of the 4 types of clinging (*upādāna*), see Dhs §§1214-17. In brief, *clinging to sensual pleasures* (*kām’u-pādāna*) is syn with sensual desire, sensual lust, sensual delight, sensual craving, etc. *Clinging to views* (*diṭṭh’upādāna*) is the taking up of any wrong view except those included in the third and fourth types of clinging. (See Dhs §1215, where the nihilist view is given as an example.)

¹⁶ “Clinging to rituals and vows,” *sīla-b, bat’upādāna*. Here *sīla* can mean “conduct, nature”: see eg the common phrase, *iminā ’ham sīlena vā vatena vā tapenā vā brahmacariyena vā devo vā bhavissāmi dev’aññataro vā* (“by this precept or observance or asceticism or holy life, I will become a god or some lesser god”) (eg **Ceto, khila S**, M 16.-12/1:102). Here *ritual* refers to a *ritualistic* way of keeping the precepts or making our practice merely as a routine, “observance.” By *vata* is meant some kind of vow, aspiration, prayer, etc, that we do not or cannot really put into practice, or which is not really beneficial. Dhs §1222 says, “Clinging to rituals and vows is the view of recluses and brahmins outside the religion that purification is achieved by rituals and rules...” An example of such a view is “the dog ritual, dog vow” (*kukkura, sīla kukkura, vata*) described in **Kukkura, vatika S** (M 57.2/1:387) = SD 23.11. Cf S:B 726 n5.

¹⁷ “Clinging to a doctrine of a self” (*atta, vād’upādāna*) is defined by way of the 20 types of identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*). See eg **Upādāna Paritassanā S 1** (S 22.7/3:15-18).

¹⁸ As at (Paṭicca,samuppāda) Vibhaṅga S (S 12.2.6/2:3) = SD 5.15. Comy glosses *upādāna* as *dalha-g, gahaṇa* (“tight grasping”) (SA 2:14).

8.1 (5) And what, bhikshus, is *craving*?

Bhikshus, there are these six classes of craving: craving for forms, craving for sounds, craving for smells, craving for tastes, craving for touches, craving for mind-objects. This is called craving.¹⁹

8.2 With the arising of feeling, there is the arising of craving.

With the ceasing of feeling, there is the ceasing of craving.

This very noble eightfold path is the way leading to the ceasing of *craving*, that is to say, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

9.1 (6) And what, bhikshus, is *feeling*?

Bhikshus, there are these six classes of feeling: feeling born of eye-contact, feeling born of ear-contact, feeling born of nose-contact, feeling born of tongue-contact, feeling born of body-contact, feeling born of mind-contact.

This, bhikshus, is called feeling.²⁰

9.2 With the arising of contact, there is the arising of feeling.

With the ceasing of contact, there is the ceasing of feeling.

This very noble eightfold path is the way leading to the ceasing of *feeling*, that is to say, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

10.1 (7) And what, bhikshus, is *contact*?

Bhikshus, there are these six classes of contact: eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, mind-contact.

This, bhikshus, is called contact.²¹

10.2 With the arising of the six sense-bases, there is the arising of contact.

With the ceasing of the six sense-bases, there is the ceasing of contact.

This very noble eightfold path is the way leading to the ceasing of *contact*, that is to say, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

11.1 (8) And what, bhikshus, are *the six sense-bases*?

Bhikshus, the eye-base, ear-base, nose-base, tongue-base, body-base, mind-base.

These, bhikshus, are called the six sense-bases.²²

11.2 With the arising of name-and-form, there is the arising of the six sense-bases.

With the ceasing of name-and-form, there is the ceasing of the six sense-bases.

This very noble eightfold path is the way leading to the ceasing of *the six sense-bases*, that is to say, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

12.1 (9) And what, bhikshus, is *name-and-form*?

NAME. Bhikshus, feeling, perception, volition, contact, and attention: this is called *name*.

FORM. And the four great elements and the material form derived from the four great elements:²³ this is called *form*.

¹⁹ As at (**Paṭicca,samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2.7/2:3) = SD 5.15.

²⁰ As at (**Paṭicca,samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2.8/2:3) = SD 5.15, where see n.

²¹ As at (**Paṭicca,samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2.9/2:3) = SD 5.15, where see n.

²² As at (**Paṭicca,samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2.10/2:3) = SD 5.15, where see n.

²³ Although the “derived forms” (*upādā,rūpa*, later Pali *upādāya,rūpa*) are mentioned here, their analysis first appears in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka (Dhs 596; Tkp 3, qu at Vism 535; Tkp 89, 109; Vism 444), according to which there are **24 “derived forms,”** namely: (1-5) the 5 sense-faculties (*pasāda,rūpa*): seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching; (6-9) the 4 sense objects: form, sound, smell, taste (touch being identical with three of the great elements,

Thus, bhikshus, this is name and this is form, and (together) they are called name-and-form.²⁴

12.2 With the arising of consciousness, there is the arising of name-and-form.

With the ceasing of consciousness, there is the ceasing of name-and-form.

This very noble eightfold path is the way leading to the ceasing of *name-and-form*, that is to say, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

13.1 (10) And what, bhikshus, is **consciousness**?

Bhikshus, there are these six classes of consciousness: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, mind-consciousness.

This, bhikshus, is called consciousness.²⁵

13.2 With the arising of volitional activities, there is the arising of consciousness.

With the ceasing of volitional activities, there is the ceasing of consciousness.

This very noble eightfold path is the way leading to the ceasing of *consciousness*, that is to say, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

14.1 (11) And what, bhikshus, are **volitional activities**?²⁶

Bhikshus, there are these three kinds of volitional activities: the bodily formation, the verbal formation, the mental formation.

These, bhikshus, are called volitional activities.²⁷

14.2 With the arising of ignorance, there is the arising of volitional activities.

With the ceasing of ignorance, there is the ceasing of volitional activities.

This very noble eightfold path is the way leading to the ceasing of *volitional activities*, that is to say, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

The noble eightfold path and dependent arising

15 Bhikshus, when a noble disciple understands condition [conditionality] in this way, understands condition, that is, arising, understands condition, that is, ceasing, understands condition, that is, the way leading to the ending,

16 this, bhikshus, is called a noble disciples who,

viz earth, fire and air); (10) femininity (*itthatta/itth'indriya*); (11) masculinity (*purisatta/puris'indriya*); (12) physical base of the mind (*hadaya,vatthu*); (13) physical life (*rūpa,jīvitā*); (14) material quality of food (*āhāra,rūpa*); (15) the space element (*ākāsa,dhātū*); (16) bodily intimation (*kāya,viññatti*), (17) verbal intimation (*vacī,viññatti*); (18); physical agility (*rupassa lahutā*), (19) physical elasticity (*rūpassa mudutā*), (20) physical adaptability (*rūpassa kam-maññatā*); (21) physical growth (*rūpassa upacaya*); (22) physical continuity (*rūpassa santati*); (23) decay (*rūpassa jaratā*) and (24) impermanence (*rūpassa aniccatā*) (Dhs 127; Vism 443; Abhs:SR 159; Abhs:BRS 6.2-5/235-242).

The Abhidhammattha,saṅgaha lists 28 “material phenomena” by adding the 4 great elements (earth, water, fire, air) to the head of the list. See BDict: Khandha & also *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma* (Abhs:BRS 6.2-5). For a useful discussion, see Harvey 1993:3-5 (digital ed); also Karunadasa 1967:38 f & Boisvert 1995:37-42.

²⁴ As at (**Paṭicca,samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2.11/2:3 f) = SD 5.15, where see n.

²⁵ As at (**Paṭicca,samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2.12/2:4) = SD 5.15, where see n.

²⁶ “Volitional activities,” *saṅkhārā*. As the 2nd factor of dependent arising, as here, *saṅkhārā* are the karmically active volitions (“volitional activities”) responsible, in conjunction with ignorance and craving, for the producing rebirth and binding one to the wheel of existence (eg **Saṅkhār'upapatti S**, M 120). This kind of *saṅkhārā* gives an active synthetical explanation of how an individual existence arises, while as an aggregate (*khandha*), they apply in a passive analytical way. For details, see (**Paṭicca,samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2.13/2:4) = SD 5.15 n.

²⁷ As at (**Paṭicca,samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2.13/2:4) = SD 5.15, where see n.

as such, is accomplished in view,
 as such, is accomplished in vision,
 as such, is one who has arrived at this true Dharna,
 as such, sees this true Dharma,
 as such, is accomplished in the learner's knowledge,
 as such, is accomplished in the learner's true knowledge
 as such, is one who has entered the Dharma stream,
 as such, is a noble one who has penetrative wisdom,
 as such, stands right before nirvana's door,

*diṭṭhi,sapmanno iti'pi,
 dassana,sampanno iti'pi,
 āgata imam saddhammam iti'pi,
 passati imam saddhammam iti'pi,
 sekkhena ñāṇena samannāgato iti'pi,
 sekkhāya vijjāya samannāgato iti'pi,
 dhamma,sotam samāpanno iti'pi,
 ariyo nibbedhika,pañño iti'pi,
 amata,dvāram²⁸ āhacca tiṭṭhati iti'pīti.*

— evaṃ —

120430; 120501; 120514; 120521; 120601; 120605a

²⁸ This enigmatic phrase appears at **Cūḷa Gopālaka S** (M 34.12/1:227,11*); **Aṭṭhaka,nagara S** (M 52.15/1:353,2+7); **(Avijjā) Paccaya S** (S 12.27.15/2:43,22); **Bhikkhu S** (S 12.28.37/2:45,8); **Ñāna,vatthu S** (S 12.33.21/2:58,24,36/59,30); **Ariya,sāvaka S 2** (S 12.49.11/2:80,11). It is poss that **Aṭṭhaka,nagara S** = **Amata,dvāra S** (A 5:346): CPD 1:389. Qu at AA 2:1.