

12

Taṇhā Mūlaka Sutta

The Discourse on the Rooted in Craving | A 9.23

Theme: Dependent arising of social conflicts

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2010, 2021

1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

1.1.1 The 2 aspects of suffering

1.1.1.1 The Taṇhā Mūlaka Sutta (A 9.23) is a short teaching on how social discord, including interpersonal strife, are all “rooted in **craving**” (*taṇha, mūlaka*) [2.1.1.1]. The Sutta applies the mechanism of dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*) to show how craving initiates and sustains an endless series of interdependent conditions bringing about all kinds of social discord and personal unwholesome qualities.

1.1.1.2 It should interest us that **the ninefold cycle of dependent arising of social strife** actually starts with craving, grows with more *craving*, and ends with *craving*, entrenching itself and proliferating our human condition with conflict, violence and immorality [§2]. In other words, the roots of social strife are in the individual, in us as a person living and interacting with others.

What makes us a **person** (*puggala*) is that we have *only* a human body, and *a* mind, the capacity to sense things, to learn; but that nascent mind is not yet human. That nascent mind has only *one* quality: the desire to live, but *how* we live as such a newly born person, at this early formative stage, depends vitally on how our parents raise us.

1.1.1.3 We are born helpless; we have with us only **the karmic capacity** from our past and previous lives. If we are born “equal,” it is only that we have *a human body*, but that’s all. The health of our mind depends on how loved or loving we are, how happily we have learned and played as children, how free we are to live and learn, to develop our different sense-faculties, especially our **mind**.

We are not born free; we are totally dependent, at least for the first few months, perhaps first few years, on our human parents and care-givers to *humanize* us. Yet, when we are raised by animals, especially during our first 7 years, we, **our minds**, will be that of an animal; we become feral children. When our parents live like predators, animals, ghosts or hellbeings, or we grow in the shadows of such adults, we are likely to grow into *asuras, animals, pretas and hellbeings*, too.

We may have a human body, but our minds are still **subhuman**. The sad reality is that there is much of us, our mind, that is still subhuman. Our greed, hate and delusion chain us to those subhuman states. Given the wrong (or right) conditions, we will devolve, even now, into any of those subhuman states, that is, when we *kill, steal, commit sexual misconduct, lie or become intoxicated*, or we mistreat others. In doing so, we also mistreat ourselves by our lack of the capacity for loving and caring. When we hate ourselves, we are more likely to harm others and ourselves; we are less likely to grow humanly.

1.1.1.4 We are neither born free nor born human; nor do we grow to be become free or equal. Our karma makes us different from others, as unequal beings in body and mind, but more so in mind. Our minds are often fettered to the karma of greed, hate, delusion and fear. However, we have the **capacity to learn**, that is, to understand our senses and sense-based capacities so that we are able to cultivate the

mind behind it to become *human*; we remain human, we become a better human, by our capacity for love, ruth,¹ joy and peace.

Only through **learning**—seeing causes and effects, understanding good and bad, making wise and right choices—do we grow humanly. If we really want to be mentally free, we must face and see our mental darkness for what it is, as *greed, hate, delusion*. These 3 roots of unwholesome actions are summed up in one word: **craving**. The more we overcome craving, the more likely that we are able to be charitable, to love, to be wise: the more human we become.

The freer we are from craving, the more our physical senses are in our service for good; the healthier our mind is. Otherwise, we remain slaves to our *eye, ear, nose, tongue and body*, and are easily enslaved, body and mind, by others. We master our senses by knowing and taming **our mind**; for, it is the mind that shapes our senses. How well we master the mind will give us that level of wisdom to free ourselves from the body and its limitations. This is what meditation does for us.

1.1.1.5 Only our mind, not our body alone, makes us faster, higher, stronger, or *better* in any way. The Olympics are not a competition or challenge of the body, which is just a vehicle for our actions; it is a challenge for our minds to break the limits of those last few racing moments to become champions, **Olympians**, virtual gods amongst humans. Clearly, then, it is our mind that makes us gods, humans, or *predators, animals, ghosts, hellbeings*.

Human challenges such as the Olympics, indeed, our life itself, can only be meaningful and beneficial when we accept the fact that we are not alone; that we live amongst other humans and other beings, amongst nature. Hence, we cannot be *faster, higher, stronger*, alone, but always in terms of others. We can and must be better, never alone, but *together: faster, higher, stronger—together*.²

On a moral and spiritual level, this **togetherness** is what makes us human in how we cultivate our body and speech, our actions and words: our moral conduct; how well we treat others. This is what makes us truly human, with the potential to cultivate **the divine qualities** of *lovingkindness, compassion, joy and equanimity*, qualities that create a heaven, a divine abode, for us even here in this world.

1.1.2 Passages on the dependent arising of social strife

1.1.2.1 The Sutta teaching of the 9-limbed dependent arising of social strife is also found in **the Mahānidāna Sutta** (D 15),³ with more details given below [3.2.1]. Other mentions of the causal origins of social strife are found in the following suttas:

Vāseṭṭha Sutta	M 98 = Sn 3.9/629-639 ⁴	SD 37.1	The spirit of renunciation
Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda Sutta	D 26,14-22/3:57-79	SD 36.10	Our morality affects society
Aggañña Sutta	D 27,26-29/3:80-98	SD 2.19	Respecting society through moral virtue, not birth, purifies us

1.1.2.2 Other suttas that investigate, in a broader way, the causal conditions behind social disorder include the following:

¹ On “ruth,” meaning compassion, see SD 38.5 (2.3.2.1); SD 48.1 (5.2.1.3).

² The original Olympics motto, in Latin, *Citius, altius, fortius* (faster, higher, stronger) was adopted by the founder of the modern Games, Pierre de Coubertin in the 19th century. In 2021, the International Olympics Committee amended the Games motto to *Citius, altius, fortius—communis*, highlighting the need for solidarity during difficult times such as the COVID-19 pandemic widespread worldwide then.

³ D 15,9-18/2:58-61 (SD 5.17). On how society declines, cf **Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 26,9-13), SD 36.10.

⁴ See discussion in Payutto 1994:73-75.

Sakka,pañha Sutta	D 21,2.2.6-2.3	SD 54.8	Desire arises from thinking
Mahā Dukkha-k,khandha Sutta	M 13,11-15	SD 6.9	Sensual desire brings social strife
Kalaha,vivāda Sutta	Sn 4.11/862-877	SD 27.4(11)	The pleasant and the unpleasant bring about social strife

Despite their differences in formulation, they all come to the same conclusion: every one of these cycles of social strife is always rooted in craving.

1.2 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

1.2.1 Social strife is rooted in self-view

1.2.1.1 What we do affects others, and what others do affects us [1.1.1.2]: they reinforce each other, like the notorious **uroboros**, the serpent that painfully and incessantly devours itself. Yet, it is only a serpent: we are each that serpent, a suffering individual who, in turn, generates suffering for ourself and others, all caught in a network of suffering. Clearly, the strife is *not* linear, but a network of conditions, causes and effects, that feed on themselves: this is social strife, the suffering of the many.

1.2.1.2 Since social strife starts in **craving**, that is, a personal defilement, it can and must end in ourself, in each and every one of us. Hence, we must each make our own efforts to see and understand craving, to restrain from it and end it within ourself.

The notion of “**self**” arises and is reinforced by our seeing only differences in comparing our “selfness” with those of others. But this is only an idea, a view, a **self-view**, a virtual world propped up by the phantoms of “I, me, mine,” which are nothing but the manifestations of *views, conceit and craving*.⁵

1.2.2 Our actions affect others without end

1.2.2.1 Basically, this means that we measure ourselves against others in terms of what we *have*. Hence, we are spurred on to covet what we see that others *have*. Driven by the notion of **having**, we see our *lack* as making us inferior to others; our *having* more things as making us superior to others; when we imagine having the “same” things as another, we regard ourselves as being equal to others. These are the 3 kinds of **conceit** (*māna*).⁶

1.2.2.2 We identify so profoundly with the notion of **having** that we see everything as being measurable. We see non-tangible states like goodness, kindness, generosity, friendship, strength, beauty, learning, even love and holiness as being measurable: we see them as **status, titles, entitlement**. Hence, they are something we *collect* rather than cultivate. We are deluded by the notion that we can *gain*, accumulate, these states, and that we can *have* these **things** from others, especially the wealthy, the famous, the powerful, the beautiful, the special, the holy, just by associating with them, by feeding them with what we think we *have* in exchange for something more than what think we *have*. We put a mere 10 dollars in the temple donation box and pray for a million more!

Rule of thumb regarding **Buddhist prayer**: *we must be willing to work for what we pray for*.

Often, we imagine that **we are what we have**. The more we have, the better we feel. Feelings only generate craving: we want more and more. The want and wanting only grow, a wanting that creates a **lack** in us, no matter how much more we have. Then, we lose what we have—it is its nature to be *lost*. When

⁵ On “I, me mine,” see the 3 essays: SD 19.1, 19.2a, 19.3.

⁶ On the 3 kinds of conceit (*māna*), see **(Māna) Soṇa S** (S 22.49), SD 31.13; giving them up, **(Tisso) Vidhā S** (S 45.-162), SD 84.4 (by the path); **(Pahīna) Vidha S** (S 46.41) by 7 awakening-factors.

we see ourself as *what we have*, and we lose what we have, we are nothing! We have, by our own craving, conceit and view, created this nothingness, this suffering over nothing!

1.2.2.3 The wealthy and professionals become part of the conditions for social strife when they do not mobilize their wealth, status, expertise or talent in a human manner to prevent such strife, or perhaps to lessen, even end, it. The wealthy and professionals morally fail when they think and act as if, on account of their wealth or status, they can define, revise or ignore the Buddha Dharma, or use it for their own agenda: this is hubris (excessive arrogance).

Through past good karma and present right conditions, the wealthy and professionals enjoy what they have and what they are. But they are feeding on *stale food*,⁷ and heading from light into darkness.⁸ To refresh their sustenance, they should wisely work, alone or in concert with wise peers or Dharma workers to appropriately educate others in Buddha Dharma or give them a good education to alleviate the lack and lot of the less fortunate. This is a noble way of enriching the lives of those who are likelier to turn to less socially acceptable ways, even criminal lifestyle. **With wealth comes responsibility** to better the world, at least, to help one's fellows in a wholesomely skillful way. It is like being well endowed with strong limbs and using them well to benefit self and others.⁹

1.2.2.4 When we work to understand that each of us is the same in that we are each and all **rooted in craving**, then, we will see that, psychologically, we are all very similar to one another, interconnected with one another. We are controlled and driven by the same negative force: craving. Hence, this craving can only end when *each of us* restrains and removes it, as a person, one with a "conscious body" (*sa,viññāṇa-ka kāya*) seeing it as impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.¹⁰

In other words, *craving* arises in our **minds**, and is expressed through our body (the first 3 precepts) and speech (the 4th precept). When we see and understand this **process of change** that we are, in every sense, in all our senses, we are truly *learning*. The solution, then, is clear: we must learn to see true reality. To truly see, we must know, tame and free our mind from craving. This is the basis of **moral training**, which is the basis for **mental training**, and both are the bases for **wisdom training**, which will free us from suffering.¹¹

2 Related suttas

2.1 THE LIMBS OF CRAVING

2.1.1 The 9 roots of social disorder

2.1.1.1 This nonad recurs in **the Das'uttara Sutta** (D 34) as "**the 9 things to be abandoned**" (*nava dhammā pahātabba*)¹² and in **the Vibhaṅga** (Vbh 390). In the well-known dependent arising formula, we have the basic sequence, "**contact** → **feeling** → **craving**." However, here, in **the Taṇha,mūlaka Sutta** (A 9.23), the formula starts with feeling as the condition for craving, *successively followed by 9 other limbs*, the last being a list of social problems.

⁷ See the story of Visākhā & her father-in-law, Migāra: see SD 14.11 (1).

⁸ See **(Tamo,joti) Puggala S** (S 3.21), SD 18.6.

⁹ We must be diligently wary never to give money and assets to monastics. Such worldly goods should be properly managed by Dharma-spirited licitors or stewards (*kappiya*). See SD 19-23 (7.3).

¹⁰ On *sa,viññāṇa-ka kāya*, see SD 17.8a (12.3); SD 56.1 (4.3.2.2) n.

¹¹ On moral training (*sīla,sikkhā*), see SD 5.7 (2.2.1); SD 21.6 passim.

¹² **D 34,2.2(4)/3:288 f.**

2.1.1.2 The Dīgha Commentary on **the Māhā,nidāna Sutta** (D 15) gives some helpful details in its explanation of the 9 states rooted in craving (DA 2:499). It also gives a helpful explanation of these roots of craving by way of 10 limbs. It labels the 2 sides of craving as “craving which is the root of the rounds” (*vaṭṭa,mūla,tanḥā*) and “obsessional craving” (*samudācāra,tanḥā*) (DA 2:500) [2.1.2].¹³

2.1.2 The dynamics of craving

2.1.2.1 The Mahā,nidāna Sutta (D 15,9) records the Buddha, as if digressing from his exposition on *dependent arising*, turning to show how it can explain social disorder. He lists the 10 states rooted in craving, headed by *feeling*, as the conditions for *the dependent arising of social disorder*. The Commentary explains that to this extent, the Buddha shows how “**previous craving**” (*purima,tanḥā*) (instead of present *feeling*) becomes the root of dependent arising. Colourfully, it says:

“Now, as if going so far as striking someone on the back, or seizing him by the hair, as he shouts and hollers, drag him off the road,”¹⁴ the Blessed One takes the teaching from its usual sequence and presents this passage [D 15,9], to show *samudācāra,tanḥā* by way of 9 terms. (DA 2:499,3-7)

2.1.2.2 The Dīgha Subcommentary (Dīgha Aṭṭhakathā Ṭīkā) explains “**previous craving**” as the craving accomplished in the previous existence. “Taking up the teaching from its usual sequence” (*tañ ca desanaṃ sarasato appavattim pasayha*) means that in the sequence for teaching dependent arising by the method that has traditionally come down in other suttas, contact is cited as the condition for **feeling**.

Thus, immediately after saying, “This is the condition for craving, namely, feeling,” the Blessed One would (usually) say: “It was said: ‘With contact as condition there is feeling.’” But here he does not follow that sequence. Instead, by showing *samudācāra,tanḥā*, he teaches the states rooted in craving, descending from the familiar path of the teaching, from its usual sequence, to teach with force and stress, that there is no such arising (of craving) for one who sees that teaching. (DAṬ 2:127) [3.2.1.1]

2.1.2.3 In the compound, *samudācāra,tanḥā*, the component *samudācāra*¹⁵ has 2 senses: (1) to be current, operating now;¹⁶ (2) to beset or assail one.¹⁷ Hence, *samudācāra,tanḥā* is craving that either is habitual (hence, always present), or is arising *now*, controlling us. The Commentary goes on to explain these terms “therein” (*tattha*) as the 2 kinds of craving: the craving of seeking (*esana,tanḥā*) and the craving for the found (*esita,tanḥā*), that is, “acquisitive craving” and “possessive craving,” respectively. (DA 2:499,8)

Acquisitive craving, the craving of seeking, is so called because (continues DA 2:499,9 f) one travels along difficult paths, such as a goat track or a pathway of stakes and cane,¹⁸ seeking wealth and fortune. **The Serissaka Vimāna,vatthu** (Vv 1230*) puts it poetically:

¹³ See SD 5.17 (3.2). On dependent arising being applied to the rise of *social disorders*, see **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (19.5).

¹⁴ *Ettavatā pana bhagavā vaṭṭa,mūla,bhūtaṃ purima,tanḥaṃ dassavā idāni desanaṃ piṭṭhiyaṃ paharivā kesesu gahetvā viravantāṃ viravantāṃ maggato ukkamāpento viya navahi padehi samudācāra,tanḥāṃ dassento iti kho ānanda vedanaṃ vedanaṃ paṭicca tanḥā’ti ādim āha* (DA 2:499,3-7).

¹⁵ Derived as *saṃ*, “complete, together,” + *ud*, “upward,” + *ā-carati*, “accomplish.”

¹⁶ “Accomplished by way of body and speech: (*kāya,vacī,dvāraṃ sampatta,samudācārati*, MA 182).

¹⁷ M 1:109, 112, 453; S 2:273; It 31.

¹⁸ *Yāya tanḥāya aja.patha,saṅku.path’ādāni paṭipajjitvā bhoge esati gavesati, ayaṃ esana,tanḥā nāma* (DA 2:499,9 f).

*Pāraṃ samuddassa idaṅ ca vaṇṇuṃ
vett'ācaram saṅku, pathaṅ ca maggam*

And this sandy waste beyond the seas,
the way a rugged path of stakes, of creepers, to be
warily trodden.

*nadiyo pana pabbatānaṃ ca duggā
puthu-d, disā gacchatha bhoga, hetu*

Then, there are rivers and cliffs, difficult to traverse—
many are the quarters you go for the sake of wealth.

(Vv 7.10,11*/127)¹⁹

Hence, this acquisitive craving is the persistent desire to seek and accumulate wealth, fame, status, power and things.²⁰

Then, there is **possessive craving**, the clinging to the found. This is the persistent desire that compels us to hold on to and cling to what we think we *have*: wealth, fame, status, power and things.²¹ Both acquisitive craving, that drives us on the quest to *have*, and possessive craving that compels us to keep them, constitute **samudācāra, taṇhā**, the “on-going” craving *to have and to hold*. This is the craving that is always present in us, the unawakened, that compels us to crave; hence, we can call it “**persistent craving**.”

In our desire to have and to keep on having, we are overwhelmed by these **feelings** (*vedanā*). Since they are insatiable, we continuously generate **craving** (*taṇhā*), we keep wanting *more*. This is because we think of goodness and states as *things* we can have as **gains** (*lābha*). We plan and make **decisions** (*vinichaya*), spurred and prodded on by our **desire and lust** (*chanda, rāga*).

Then, we are **attached** (*ajjhosaṇa*) to what we get, what we have, since we see them as defining us, our things, titles and status. This condition of being **possessive** (*pariggaha*) is just another word for **clinging** (*upādāna*), which also translates as “fuel.” It fuels and feeds our wants.

Fearing we may lose what we have, we become selfish, calculating, politically savvy: we are weighed down with **avarice** (*macchariya*). We feverishly promote and fiercely **guard** (*ārakkha*) what we have, and this leads to violence, conflicts, disputes, back-biting, slander, lying, and countless bad things. These are **the 10 limbs of craving**.²²

3 Sutta teachings

3.1 DEPENDENT ARISING: AN OVERVIEW

3.1.1 A descriptive teaching

3.1.1.1 The suttas often present **the dependent arising** formula as a cycle of 12 interdependent links (*nidāna*). Each link arises dependent on the one proximately before it, and, conversely, in **the dependent ending**, each link ceases with the ceasing of its preceding one. Since **ignorance** is the root of the cycle, when it ends, the whole cycle also ends, resulting in “the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.”

The individual links are defined in **the (Nidāna) Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 12.2), SD 5.15. However, in some other suttas dealing with dependent arising, there is no precise explanation how these links operate as a cycle. Apparently, this is neither a *prescriptive* listing of the links nor a *theoretical* analysis of the process, but simply a descriptive one, that is, about how we experience **true reality** in our personal practice and how to understand this so that we awaken to it and gain freedom.

¹⁹ For Comy: VvA 338,7-19 (VvA:M 511).

²⁰ *Esana, taṇhā ti bhogānaṃ pariyesana, vasena pavatta, taṇhā* ().

²¹ *Esita, taṇhā ti pariyiṭṭhesu bhogesu pavattana, taṇhā* (DAṬ 2:127,2).

²² These **10 limbs of craving** are simply an extension of the 9 roots of craving [3.2.1.2]. For a tr of the related commentarial notes, see Bodhi 1984:90-94.

3.1.1.2 The Buddha’s silence on the technical theory behind dependent arising is clearly to prevent speculations by those who have not attained the path, and to serve as **a guideline for the practitioner**. Scholars tend to see this famous spiritual silence²³ as “ambiguity,” which feeds their imaginations with the possibility of different interpretations of the formula. Those who have some understanding or acceptance of Buddhism generally agree that dependent arising is a teaching regarding how samsara (*saṃsāra*), the endless cycle of rebirths and re-deaths operates in the backdrop of various kinds of suffering.

3.1.2 The lives of dependent arising

3.1.2.1 Traditionally, the 12 links of dependent arising, as taught by the Buddha, spans over 3 lives: the past, the present and the next lives. Beginning with our previous life (representative of all our past lives), rooted in fundamental **(1) ignorance** (*avijjā*),²⁴ we now (in this life) continue to span the 3 kinds of **(2) volitional formations** (*saṅkhārā*) or karmic activities²⁵—bodily, verbal and mental—that feed our **(3) consciousness** incessantly renewing life [2.1.2.2].

Table 3.1.2: Dependent arising over 3 lives²⁶ [3.1.3]

PAST EXISTENCE	1. ignorance 2. volitional formations	karma cycle (<i>kamma.bhava</i>) 5 past causes: 1,2,8,9,10
PRESENT EXISTENCE	3. consciousness 4. name-and-form (mental and physical existence) 5. the 6 sense-bases 6. contact 7. feeling	rebirth cycle (<i>upapatti.bhava</i>) 5 present results: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
	8. craving 9. clinging 10. existence	karma cycle (<i>kamma.bhava</i>) 5 present causes: 8, 9, 10, 1, 2
FUTURE EXISTENCE	11. birth 12. decay-and-death	rebirth cycle (<i>upapatti.bhava</i>) 5 future results: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Links 1-2, together with 8-10, represent the Karma cycle, containing the 5 karmic causes of rebirth. Links 3-7, together with 11-12, represent the Rebirth cycle, containing the 5 karmic results.

²³ On the Buddha’s silence, see **Silence and the Buddha**, SD 44.1.

²⁴ Technically, this is our ignorance (in the Dharma sense) of **the 4 noble truths**: we have *not* fully understood the 1st truth (suffering), we have *not* abandoned craving (the 2nd truth); we have *not* attained the path (the 4th truth), and we have *not* realized the ending of suffering, nirvana (the 3rd truth). This is the “practice” sequence of the truths: M 149,11 etc + SD 41.9 (2.4); SD 53.26 (2).

²⁵ “Formations,” for short.

²⁶ This is also found as Table 8a in SD 5.16. For further details, see **(Nidāna) Desanā S** (S 12.1), SD 59.17.

In the 3-life model of early Buddhism, this cycle constitutes the past existence (especially the previous life), comprising ignorance and formations. Inherent in these conditions, called the “**karma cycle**,” are *craving, clinging and existence*, feeding both these cycles, that is, continuing as the karma cycle (*kamma,-bhava*) that conditions our new life, too. [Table 2.1.2]

3.1.2.2 Our consciousness takes a new life (we are reborn)—that is, this present life—where we continue to perceive forms (sense-objects) and giving names to these experiences from the time we are born. On account of **consciousness**, we cognize sense-objects (our experiences). To *cognize* is to “name,” and *sense-objects* are the “forms”; hence, they are **(4) name-and-form** (*nāma,rūpa*).

Notice how infants play with colour, noisy toys of various shapes, and infants would “taste” these toys. As infants, we learn to sense things in this way: “sense” is *nāma*, “things” are *rūpa*. This is how through the process of *name-and-form*, our **(5) 6 sense-bases** (*saḷ-āyatana*) evolve.

As our physical senses process *sights, sounds, smells, taste, and touches*, and as we *mind*²⁷ their respective objects, **(6) contacts** (*phassa*) or sense-impressions occur. These give rise to **(7) feelings** (*vedanā*), depending on how our unawakened mind recognize (perceive) them from past experiences. Basically, in terms of dependent arising, this constitutes *active* rebirth cycle” of our present life.

3.1.2.3 Those feelings we perceive as pleasant and cling to, feed our latent tendency for **lust**; what we perceive as unpleasant and reject, feed our latent tendency for **aversion**; what we see as neither pleasant nor unpleasant, we ignore, feeding our latent tendency of **ignorance**. Hence, feeling leads to **clinging**.

All these links—from consciousness to feeling—constitute the *active* “rebirth cycle” of our present life that feed the *passive* “karma cycle” of our present **(8) craving** (*taṇhā*), **(9) clinging** (*upādāna*) and **(10) existence** (*bhava*). Through craving and clinging, we create and feed volitional activities—we create new karma—which keeps our present life very busy.

Psychologically, *craving* and *clinging* refer to how our latent tendencies work their way to control our every action, conscious or unconscious. *Existence* refers to the subconscious²⁸ that is always there, but not “seen” when we are conscious, but actively keeping us alive as our “life-continuum” (*bhav’āṅga*) when we are asleep or unconscious. All the constitute the *passive* “karma cycle” of our present life.

3.1.2.4 Clinging keeps feeding the **volitional activities**, the seeds for our continued existence, beginning with **(11) birth** (*jāti*) in a new life. As soon as we are born, we begin to decay: when we are young, we call it “growing,” when we are older, we call it “aging.” They are decay all the same; hence, we have **(12) decay and death** (*jarā,maraṇa*). This is the new “rebirth cycle” in samsara, repeating the dependent arising cycle all over again.

3.1.3 The background: dependent arising

3.1.3.1 Dependent arising, as the 12-limbed formula, shows how our existential suffering is rooted in ignorance. Working with volitional activities, ignorance—our past karma—gives rise to our present karm-

²⁷ I use “**mind**” here in a broad sense of how we see, hear, smell, taste and touch things, including how we cognize or conceive them; simply, how we “make sense” of things, create ideas about them. On the next level, when we have some “sense” of thing, we then perceive or recognize them. While **conceive** refers to how we process a present experience creating ideas and views about them, **perceive** is how we “recognize” present experiences based on memories of the past. What follows is described next.

²⁸ On the subconscious, see SD 3.13 (5.3.2.3); SD 9 (9.10.5.2); SD 17.8a (6.1.2); SD 17.8b (3 + 5.1); def SD 17.8b (1.1.2).

ically active phase of our existence rooted in craving and clinging [Table 3.1.2]. These 5 conditions work together to generate consciousness and name-and-form, which arise as soon as we are born, continuing to evolve as we grow up to the moment of death.

Our whole life, then, is one continuous interplay between the 6 senses, contact and feeling. This pentad—consciousness, name-and-form, the 6 senses, contact and feeling—work together to generate the craving to sustain our present “rebirth cycle,” this life of ours, and, in turn, feeds this life’s karma cycle: our past *resulting* in the former, which in turn *results* in the latter. The present life itself forms the mind-body complex of *craving*, *clinging* and *existence* that generate the karma for both the rest of our present and future lives, continuing our birth that is decay, ending in death. [Table 3.1.2]

3.1.3.2 While **the 5 aggregates** (*pañca-khandha*) teaching explains the “structure” of our existence, as comprising form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness (all rooted in impermanence and suffering), dependent arising explains them from an analytic perspective of non-self. It shows how our existence and rebirth arises and continues without any abiding entity, permanent self or eternal soul. There is no underlying subject or agent, evolving through life, into the next and subsequent lives.

3.1.3.3 The worldview during the Buddha’s time was dominated by 2 opposing camps. The first, **the eternalists**, affirmed rebirth. They believed that we were each a substantial person with an abiding self as our essential core that persisted through the cycles of rebirths and redeaths. In the end, it attains liberation in its unchanging identity. This is basically, the view of the God-believers today.

The other camp, **the annihilationists**, denied any abiding self, that is, nothing survived our bodily death. With the breaking up of our body at death, all consciousness ceases, so that we are annihilated as a living being. In other words, they see the “self” as being coexistent with the body: when the body dies, the self dies, too. This view persists today amongst the materialists, who hold that this body is itself our self or soul; when the body dies, so does the self/soul.

3.1.3.4 The Buddha rejects as *extreme* both the eternalist and the annihilationist views. Instead, he teaches **dependent arising** (*paṭicca samuppāda*) as a “teaching by the middle.” This teaching avoids the extreme that “all exists,” the claim of eternalism, by showing how the sequence of rebirths occurs without any abiding self during the whole process; and it avoids the extreme that “all does *not* exist,” a view of annihilationism, by showing that so long as there are conditions feeding the process of being, the cycle of conditions persists from one life to the next.

3.2 DEPENDENT ARISING OF SOCIAL DISCORD

3.2.1 The arising of social strife

3.2.1.1 The Taṇha,mūlaka Sutta (A 9.23) shows how we can use dependent arising to understand, and thus prevent the arising of social strife. In the usual sequence of dependent arising, we have contact conditioning feeling, which, in turn, conditions craving, thus: “... contact → feeling → craving” In depending arising formula in **the Mahā,nidāna Sutta** (D 15) and elsewhere,²⁹ after saying, “With feeling as condition, there is craving,” the Buddha *goes back* to “feeling,” and then introduces a new variation of the cycle. [2.1.1.1]

From feeling, he returns to craving, and from craving, he lists a new series of **10 roots or limbs**, each of which arises in dependence on its predecessor, thus:

²⁹ **Mahā,nidāna S** (D 15,9/2:58), SD 5.17 (see §§3-20 for full text with elaborations). See also **Das’uttara S** (D 34,-2.2(4)/3:289), “the 9 things to be abandoned”; Vbh 390.

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--|
| (1) dependent upon <u>feeling</u> | (<i>vedanā</i>), | there is craving |
| (2) dependent upon <u>craving</u> | (<i>taṇhā</i>), | there is seeking |
| (3) dependent upon <u>seeking</u> | (<i>pariyesanā</i>), | there is gain |
| (4) dependent upon <u>gain</u> | (<i>lābha</i>), | there is decision-making |
| (5) dependent upon <u>decision-making</u> | (<i>vinicchaya</i>), | there is desire and lust |
| (6) dependent upon <u>desire and lust</u> | (<i>chanda, rāga</i>), | there is attachment |
| (7) dependent upon <u>attachment</u> | (<i>ajjhosāna</i>), | there is possessiveness |
| (8) dependent upon <u>possessiveness</u> | (<i>pariggaha</i>), | there is avarice |
| (9) dependent upon <u>avarice</u> | (<i>macchariya</i>), | there is safe-guarding |
| (10) dependent upon <u>safe-guarding</u> | (<i>ārakkha</i>), | there arise the taking up of the rod, taking up of the sword, conflicts, quarrels, disputes [strife], back-biting, divisive speech, false speech, (and) numerous unwholesome things. |

(D 15,9/2:58 f), SD 5.17,³⁰ cf §2 below

3.2.1.2 The Dīgha Commentary explains the 9 terms rooted in craving [§2] as follows, as follows:³¹

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| (1) <i>pariyesanā</i> | the seeking of sense-objects such as forms |
| (2) <i>lābha</i> | the obtaining of sense-objects such as forms |
| (3) <i>vinicchaya</i> | when we have made a profit, we make judgements by thinking [deciding] what is desirable or undesirable, beautiful or ordinary or ugly; how much we will keep and how much to give to others, how much to use and how much to save |
| (4) <i>chanda, rāga</i> | weak desire (<i>chanda</i>) and strong lust (<i>rāga</i>), respectively, which arise toward the object thought about unwholesomely (with greed, hate or delusion) |
| (5) <i>ajjhosāna</i> | the strong conviction in [attachment to] “I, me, mine” |
| (6) <i>pariggaha</i> | taking possession by way of craving and views |
| (7) <i>macchariya</i> | unwillingness to share with others |
| (8) <i>ārakkha</i> | guarding carefully by closing our doors, storing in boxes, and so on |
| (9) <i>daṇḍ’ādāna</i> , etc | the taking up of rods, weapons, etc, for the purpose of warding off others |
- (DA 2:499 f)

The purpose of this summary is clear: it is to show that dependent arising can be used to explain the origins of social disorder just as effectively as it can be used to understand the origins of individual suffering.³² Thus craving not only brings further rebirth with personal pains, but also causes various unwholesome conditions leading to social disorder.³³ [1.1.2]

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³⁰ These nn also appear in SD 5.16 (19.5).

³¹ For a comparative diagram of these 9 roots of strife, see **Table 3** (SD 5.17).

³² Further see SD 5.17 (3.2).

³³ Comy labels the 2 sides of craving as “craving which is the root of the rounds” (*vaṭṭa, mūla, taṇhā*) and “obsessional craving” (*samudācāra, taṇhā*) (DA 2:500). On *samudācāra, taṇhā*, see (2.1.1.1 f).

Taṇhā Mūlaka Sutta

The Discourse on Rooted in Craving

A 9.23

1 “I will teach you, bhikshus, **9 things rooted in craving**.³⁴

Listen and pay close attention. I will speak.”

“Yes, bhante!” the bhikkhus replied.

2 The Blessed One said this:³⁵

“And, bhikshus, what are the 9 things rooted in craving?

(1) Dependent upon craving there is	seeking.	<i>taṇhā</i>
(2) Dependent upon seeking there is	gain.	<i>pariyesanā</i>
(3) Dependent upon gain there is	judgment [decision]. ³⁶	<i>lābha</i>
(4) Dependent upon judgment there is	desire and lust. ³⁷	<i>vinicchaya</i>
(5) Dependent upon desire and lust there is	attachment.	<i>chanda, rāga</i>
(6) Dependent upon attachment there is	possessiveness.	<i>ajjhosāna</i>
(7) Dependent upon possessiveness there is	miserliness.	<i>pariggahā</i>
(8) Dependent upon avarice there is	safeguarding.	<i>macchariya</i>
(9) With safeguarding as the foundation arise		<i>ārakkha</i>

the taking up of rods [401] the taking up of the sword, conflicts, quarrels, disputes [strife], accusations, divisive speech, false speech, (and) numerous bad unwholesome things.

ārakkh’ādhikaraṇaṃ
*daṇḍ’ādānaṃ satth’ādānaṃ*³⁸
kalahā viggaha vivādā
tuvam, tuvaṃ pesuññā musa, vādā
aneke pāpakā akusalā dhamma
sambhavanti

These, bhikshus, are the 9 things rooted in craving.”

tatiyaṃ

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³⁴ *Nava bhikkhave taṇhā, mūlake dhamme desessāmi.*

³⁵ This list of **the 9 states rooted in craving** is, in **Mahā, nidāna S** (D 15.9), but is preceded by feeling. For details, see (2.1).

³⁶ “Judgement [decision],” *vinicchaya*, “judgement, decision, deliberation, examination, discrimination, investigation, discernment (*dhamma, vinicchaya*).” “Dharma discernment” refers to noting the rise and fall of states (*idaṃ udāya, ñāṇaṃ idaṃ vāya, ñāṇan’ti*; such a person is said to be *dhamma, vinicchayaññū* (SnA 1:334). But in this Sutta, it has a negative sense of “measuring” people and things by way of conceit (*māna*).

³⁷ “Desire and lust,” *chanda, rāga*, here treated as dvandva: “desire and passion” (D:RD ad loc). Comy says that here, *chanda* is said to be “weak desire” (*dubbala, rāga*) while *rāga* is “strong lust” (*balava, rāga*) (DA 2:499,30 f; AA 4:190,1-3). Elsewhere treated as karmadharaya: “lustful desire” (D:W ad loc).

³⁸ Be *daṇḍ’ādānaṃ satth’ādānaṃ kalahā, viggaha, vivādā, tuvaṃtuvaṃ pesuññā, musavādā*; Ce *daṇḍ’ādāna, satth’ādāna, kalahā, viggaha, vivādā, tuvaṃtuva, pesuññā, musavādā*; Ee Se *daṇḍ’ādāna, satth’ādāna, kalahā, viggaha, vivādā tuvaṃtuvaṃpesuññā, musavādā. Tuvaṃ, tuva* cf AMg *appatumaṃtuma*, Utt 29.39). Comys explain it as a disrespectful expression (while quarrelling): “You! You!” (*agāraṇa, vacanaṃ tuvaṃ tuvaṃ*, DA 500,11; *agāraṇa, vacanaṃ tvaṃ tvaṃ’ti attho*, VbhA 513,13).