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## Dependent Arising

*Paṭicca samuppāda*<sup>1</sup>  
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In the ignorance that implies impression that knits knowledge that finds the nameform that whets the wits that convey contacts that sweeten sensation that drives desire that adheres to the attachment that dogs death that bitches birth that entails the ensuance of existentiality.

(James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, NY: Viking Press, 1967: 18)

### Preamble

Dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*), or “interdependent arising” or even “dependent co-arising,” is the most important—and most difficult—canonical teaching of the Buddha. It serves as a reminder of where we stand on the path of awakening, or it should remind the unawakened that he has yet to awaken to the liberating truth. However, from the way that some write and speak of Buddhism—from the young Buddhist to the specialist scholar, ordained or lay—it appears as if they have found enlightenment. That is to say, they think that their notion of Buddhist doctrine is right, and the only right one.

It is important to understand that as long as we are not yet awakened or enlightened, whatever we say—rightly or wrongly—can be just that, an opinion. Only the awakened mind speaks the liberating truth; only such a mind speaks as he experiences it. Only one fully awakened can know whether another is awakened; others merely project their self-view and desire. In this case, a false opinion can be a greater spiritual hindrance than not knowing but seeking an answer.

My point is that as students of the Buddha Dharma, we must always respect an opinion—take it for what it is—whether it is ours or another’s. Our learning at this point can at best be third-hand (through reading and listening) or second-hand (through personal reflection). Only the fully awakened has first-hand knowledge. Unless we are fully awakened saints, we should not act as if we have first-hand wisdom and offer final judgements.

As seekers, we should regard every occasion for hearing and knowing the Dharma as an opportunity for straightening and focussing our views thus far. This is not to say that everyone is wrong, nor that everyone is right either, but that our wisdom grows through understanding that we have yet to awaken, and to that extent we are awakened, and to take the next step with compassion, mindfulness and eagerness to learn.<sup>2</sup>

The teaching of dependent arising is a fertile field for strong opinions and what appears to be contradicting views even amongst serious practitioners and teachers of Buddhism. This is not an opinions arena where right is might, but where seekers need to examine the connections amongst these differing opinions—and to search the Scriptures for insights—to see beyond the letter of the words of the masters. It behooves us to ever seek self-understanding, unless we are already awakened. An open inquiry into dependent arising is the best way towards awakening.

### 1 Terminology

**1.1 THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS**, teachings “special to the Buddhas,” are as follows:

- (1) the noble truth that is suffering (*dukkha*),
- (2) the noble truth that is the arising of suffering (*dukkha,samudaya*),
- (3) the noble truth that is the ending of suffering (*dukkha,nirodha*), and
- (4) the noble truth that is the way leading to the ending of suffering (*dukkha,nirodha,gamini paṭipadā*).

The first noble truth is a general statement of the universality and nature of unsatisfactoriness. The second and third truths are, respectively, the prognosis and the cure, while the fourth is the prescription, how the

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<sup>2</sup> On how to benefit from teachings, see **Sammā,ditṭhi S** (M 9) = SD 11.14 Intro (1).

medication is to be applied. The two middle truths “are actually telescoped versions of a longer formulation that discloses the origin and ending of bondage in saṃsāra” (M:ÑB 30), which in its full form is called “dependent arising” (*paṭicca samuppāda*).<sup>3</sup> When elaborated, the second noble truth—the arising of suffering (*samudaya*)—expresses itself as the direct (*anuloma*) cycle of dependent arising [4]; the third noble truth, on the other hand, is a succinct expression of the reverse (*paṭiloma*) cycle of dependent arising [4].

**1.2 THE PALI TERM PAṬICCA,SAMUPPĀDA** is a compound resolved as *paṭicca* (because of) + *sam,uppāda* (com + arising). *Paṭicca* is the gerund of the verb *pacceṭi* (*paṭi* + *i*, to return to, ie to fall back on) means “on account of, conditioned by, dependent upon, because of.” The prefix *sam-* (together) is cognate with the Latin *com-* or *con-* (as in *communicate*, *connect*); *uppāda* (arising) is a noun from the verb *uppajjati*, meaning “it arises”; as a compound, *samuppāda* therefore means “arising together.” As such, *paṭicca,samuppāda* is sometimes rendered as “dependent co-arising” or “conditioned co-production.” Other translations of the term are “conditioned genesis,” “interdependent arising,” “dependent origination” and “**dependent arising**.” The last translation is preferable as it is broad enough to encompass all the applications of the term *paṭicca,samuppāda*, as reflected in the **Visuddhi,magga**’s colourful etymologies:

**16.** This word *paṭicca,samuppāda* that is the totality of states (*dhamma,samuhā*) arising from conditionality (*paccayatā*) is to be regarded in two ways. When it is arrived at (*paṭīyamāna*), it leads to welfare and happiness, and therefore the wise regard it as worthy to fall back on (*pacceṭum*)—hence it is *paṭicca*.

And when arising (*uppajjamāno*), it arises together (*saha*) and rightly (*sammā*), neither singly nor without a cause—since it is dependent (*paṭicca*) and it is co-arising (*samuppāda*), it is *paṭicca,samuppāda*.

**17.** Furthermore, it arises together (*saha uppajjati*), hence it is co-arising (*samuppāda*), but it does so dependent upon (*paṭicca*) a combination of conditions, not rejecting any—since it is dependent (*paṭicca*) and it is co-arising (*samuppāda*), it is *paṭicca,samuppāda*...<sup>4</sup>

**18.** This totality of causes...is called “dependent” (*paṭicca*), taking it as “united with its opposite” (*paṭimukhaṃ ito gato*) by the mutuality (*aññā-m-añña*) of its combined factors, in that none are missing and they accomplish a common result. It is called “co-arising” (*samuppāda*) because it gives rise to states together, such that each gives rise to the other and they are inseparable by nature— since it is dependent (*paṭicca*) and it is co-arising (*samuppāda*), it is *paṭicca,samuppāda*.  
(Vism 17.16-18/520 f)

**1.3 HISTORY & POLEMICS.** Vedic scholar, **Joanna Jurewicz**, in an important article, “Playing with fire: The *pratīyasamutpāda* from the perspective of Vedic thought” (2000), explains in detail how the terms of the dependent arising have a definite meaning, evoking definite associations. The Buddha skillfully uses these familiar terms incorporating the Vedic cosmogony, the centrality of the *ātman* concept and its association with fire (such as the fire-god Agni and fire-worship), to gain the interest of his intended audience, the educated brahmins, only to win them over by interpreting them in terms of the 12-link dependent arising without any a notion of a soul, leading to the “blowing out” of the first of existence, that is nirvana.<sup>5</sup>

**1.4 DEFINITIONS OF THE 12 LINKS** have been given in the footnotes of **the (Paṭicca,samuppāda) Sutta** (S 12.23).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See, eg **Titth’āyatana S** (A 3.61/1:177) = SD 6.8, where the two sides of the formula are given in full as explanations of these two truths. On the problem of *samudaya* and *nirodha*, see **Kaccāna,gotta S** (S 12.15/ :16 f) = SD 6.13 Intro.

<sup>4</sup> See John Peacocke 2006.

<sup>5</sup> See **Mahā,nidāna S** (D 15) = SD 5.27(2.1).

<sup>6</sup> S 12.2.12/2:3 = SD 5.15.

## 2 Specific conditionality

**2a.** The oldest *paṭicca,samuppāda* formula is perhaps the “**one-factor dependent arising**,” mentioned in the Buddha’s first discourse in connection with Koṇḍañña’s attainment of arhathood:

<i>Yam kiñ ci samudaya.dhammañ,</i>	Whatever is of the nature to arise,
<i>sabban tañ nirodha.dhammañ.</i>	All that is of the nature to cease.

(V 1:11; D 1:110, M 3:280; S 4:47, 214, 330, 5:423; A 4:143 f)

The simplest form of the one-factor dependent arising, containing the essence of what is called **specific conditionality**, however, is:

<i>Yathā idaṃ tathā etaṃ, yathā etaṃ tathā idaṃ.</i>	
Just as this is, so is that. Just as that is, so is this.	(Sn 203 = Tha 396) <sup>7</sup>

**2b. The Dasa,bala Sutta 1** (S 12.2), that follows the Paccaya Sutta, gives the full specific conditionality (*idap,paccayatā*) formula thus:<sup>8</sup>

<i>imasmim̐ sati idaṃ hoti</i>	when this is, that is,
<i>imass’uppādā idaṃ uppajjati</i>	with the arising of this, that arises;
<i>imasmim̐ asati idaṃ na hoti</i>	when this is not, that is not,
<i>imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati</i>	with the ending of this, that ends. (S 12.21/2:28)

In modern logical terms, this becomes:

When A is present, B is present;	A arising, B arises;
When A is not present, B is not present;	A ceasing, B ceases.

The first two lines (ab) of the quatrain show the **sufficient condition**, that is, a cause that must always produce the effect (that is, A therefore B), for example, a fire *must* cause heat. The last two lines (cd) show the **necessary condition**, that is, a cause without which there would be no effect, for example, fuel is a necessary condition for a fire. These two terms<sup>9</sup> will be discussed further in section [6].

*Idap,paccayatā* is a compound resolved as *idaṃ + paccayatā*. *Idaṃ* means “this”, with the final nasal changed, following sandhi (euphonic combination) rules, to be consonant with the initial letter of *paccayatā*, which in turn is resolved as *paccaya + tā*. *Paccaya* is a noun derived from the verb *pacceṭi* (*paṭi + √ i*, to go = to return to, ie to fall back on). The suffix *-tā* forms an abstract noun (meaning -ness, -hood, etc). The whole term means “the state of being conditioned by this (condition)” and as such is translated as “specific conditionality.”

<sup>7</sup> See Sn:P n11:11ab.

<sup>8</sup> For examples of how the two parts (ab & cd) this formula are applied and elaborated, see **Mahā Taṇhā,sāṅkha-ya S** (M 38): arising of suffering (M 38.19/1:262 f) and ending of suffering (M 38.22/1:264).

<sup>9</sup> Anthony Flew: “This is a necessary condition for that if and only if that cannot be without this. This is a sufficient condition for that if and only if this is by itself enough to guarantee that... To say that this is a logically necessary condition of that entails that to affirm *that* and to deny this must be to contradict yourself; being a man is thus a logically necessary condition of being a husband. To say that this is a logically sufficient condition of that entails that to affirm *this* and to deny that must be to contradict yourself: being a husband is thus a logically sufficient condition of being a man. From which it becomes clear that if this is a logically necessary condition for that, then it must be a logically sufficient for this... if the sufficient condition is the causally sufficient condition, then it can only be simultaneous with or precedent to its effect, that of which it is the causally sufficient condition” (*A Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, NY: St Martin’s Press, 1984:242, sv Necessary and sufficient conditions. Emphases added.) See **Necessity and sufficiency in early Buddhist conditionality** = SD 35.16.

Looking at the first line [of the Dasabala Sutta 1], we can see that it opens with the locative absolute (*imasmiṃ sati*),<sup>10</sup> which does not convey causality, but structural or logical coincidence. “When this, is, that is” does not say that this *causes* that; it says this invariably *accompanies* that. To say that when there is *x* there is *y* and when there is no *x* there is no *y* is to assert both *x* and *y* are experienced, in the present, as contingent. Their “reality” or “substance” depends on that of entities other than themselves, entities whose reality or substance in turn depends on entities other than themselves. Contingency asserts the reality of things to be their lack of independent or separate reality; their substance to be their lack of independent or separate substance. [sic]

The conclusion of the line is unambiguously causal; *because* this arises (*imass’uppādā*), that arises (*idam uppajjati*). To say because *x* arises, *y* arises, and because *x* ceases, *y* ceases, is to assert causality, which implies change over time. However, the causation of *entities* is not being asserted, because the notion of independence and separate entities has already been denied in the opening. Causation occurs, but no entities are caused.

*Idappaccayatā* expresses the nature of phenomena in terms of its relationship with other phenomena. It does not deal with the essence of a phenomenon [which, after all, does not exist], but with its movements, its activity; or rather, it sees the essence of any given thing to be its behaviour. We are what we do, identity is activity. *Idappaccayatā* describes a dynamic model of reality, a model of things as processes. The pattern of this process, the behaviour of phenomena, is expressed in our next term [*paṭicca,samuppāda*]. (Kearney, 2002a:3 digital ed, amplified)

### 3 Dependent arising in one thought-moment

**3a. Lost teaching?** Buddhaghosa, in his **Sammoha,vinodanī** (Commentary to the Vibhaṅga), states that the Buddha teaches dependent arising as occurring both in a plurality of consciousness and also “in a single thought-moment” (*eka,citta-k,khaṇika*) (VbhA 199 f., passim). However, most modern teachers and scholars either reject this teaching<sup>11</sup> or avoid it altogether. Payutto makes a sobering note:

This point needs to be reiterated, because modern day study of the teaching (at least in traditional scholastic circles) interprets it completely on a lifetime-to-lifetime basis. Accordingly, when there are attempts to interpret the Dependent Origination cycle as a process occurring in everyday life, those who adhere to the traditional interpretations are [wont] to dismiss them as baseless and in contradiction to the scriptures...

Indeed, it is worth noting that what evidence there is for this interpretation is possibly only a shadow from the past which has become well-nigh forgotten, and which is still in existence only because the *Tiṭṭaka* stands as an irrefutable reference. (Payutto, 1994:98)

It is interesting to note that 13 of the 18 chapters of analysis (*vibhaṅga*) of **the Vibhaṅga** (the second volume of the Abhidhamma), of which the *Paccay’ākāra Vibhaṅga* (the analysis of interdependence) is divided into two sections. The first is called “the analysis (or definition) according to the Suttas” (*suttanta bhājanīya*) and the second, “the analysis (or definition) according to the Abhidhamma” (*Abhidhamma bhājanīya*). The Vibhaṅga Commentary is likewise divided into two sections, and their difference is described thus:

The Master, who has unobstructed knowledge regarding all states, has thus shown in the *Suttanta Bhājanīya* by way of numerous moments of consciousness..., but because this interdependence (*paccay’ākāra*) exists only in numerous thought-moments but also in a single thought-moment... he now seeks to explain interdependence as it occurs in a single moment by means of the *Abhidhamma Bhājanīya*. (VbhA 199 f)

<sup>10</sup> Locative absolute, see AK Warder, *Introduction to Pali Grammar*, [1963] 2<sup>nd</sup> ed 1974:103.

<sup>11</sup> See eg BDict: Paṭiccasamuppāda, 1980:161.

Regarding causality functioning in one thought-moment in daily life, the Vibhaṅga Commentary says, for example, "...because these are the birth etc of **the formless states** (*arūpa*), therefore, 'growing old, the falling apart of the teeth, the graying of hair, the wrinkling of the skin, the decline of vitality, the degeneration of the faculties' are not mentioned." (VbhA 208). In his study of dependent origination, Payutto makes this interesting note: In the Vibhaṅga of the Tipiṭaka, the section which describes the lifetime-to-lifetime interpretation contains only five pages of material. The section which describes the principle of dependent arising in one mind moment contains seventy-two pages.<sup>12</sup>

But in the *Sammoha,vinodanī*, Buddhaghosa's commentary, it is the reverse. Namely, the section dealing with the lifetime-to-lifetime interpretation is long, containing ninety-two pages, whereas the section dealing with the one-mind-moment interpretation contains only nineteen pages.<sup>13</sup>

Why the commentary on the one-mind-moment version of Dependent Origination is so short is possibly because the author did not have much to say about it. Perhaps he thought that it had been already explained sufficiently in the Tipiṭaka, there being no need for further commentary.

Whatever the case, we can affirm that the interpretation of Dependent Origination in everyday life is one that existed from the very beginning, and is founded on the Tipiṭaka, but only traces of it remain in the Commentaries. (Payutto, 1994:101; reparagraphed)

**3b. Dependent arising within the present moment.** Payutto goes on to quote this passage from **the Dhātu Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 19) as an example of the cycle of rebirth within the present moment:

**30** 'Those who stand on them [the four foundations of wisdom, truth, generosity and peace] do not go with the flow of mental conceiving (*mañña*),<sup>14</sup> not flowing with mental conceiving, one is called a "sage at peace".' So it was said. And in what connection is this said?

**31** Monk, 'I am' is a mental conception; 'I am this' is a mental conception.

'I will be' is a mental conception; 'I will not be' is a mental conception.

'I will have form [birth in the form world]' is a mental conception; 'I will be formless' is a mental conception.

'I will be percipient' is a mental conception; 'I will be non-percipient' is a mental conception;

'I will be neither percipient nor non-percipient' is a mental conception.

Mental conceiving, monk, is a sickness; mental conceiving is a tumour; mental conceiving is a dart.

By overcoming all mental conceiving, monk, one is called a 'sage at peace.' And a sage at peace is not born, does not age, does not die. He is not shaken, not agitated. For there is nothing present in him by which he might be born.<sup>15</sup> Not dying, how could he be shaken? Not shaken, why should he be agitated?

**32** 'Those who stand on them [the four foundations] do not go with the flow of mental conceiving, not flowing with mental conceiving, one is called a "sage at peace".' So it was said. And it is in this connection that this said.

(M 19.30-32/3:246; see also M 3:225; S 3:238, 4:14; Tha 247)

**3c. Rune Johansson** is an early pioneer scholar of Buddhist psychology. In one of his early writings, he makes an interesting observation:

<sup>12</sup> Suttanta Bhājanīya, Vbh 135-138; Abhidhamma Bhājanīya, Vbh 138-191. Payutto is probably referring to the Thai text. The PTS ed pages total 4 and 54 respectively.

<sup>13</sup> Suttanta Bhājanīya VbhA 130-199; Abhidhamma Bhājanīya VbhA 199-214. Payutto is probably referring to the Thai text. The PTS ed pages total 70 and 16 respectively.

<sup>14</sup> See §7 & nn there.

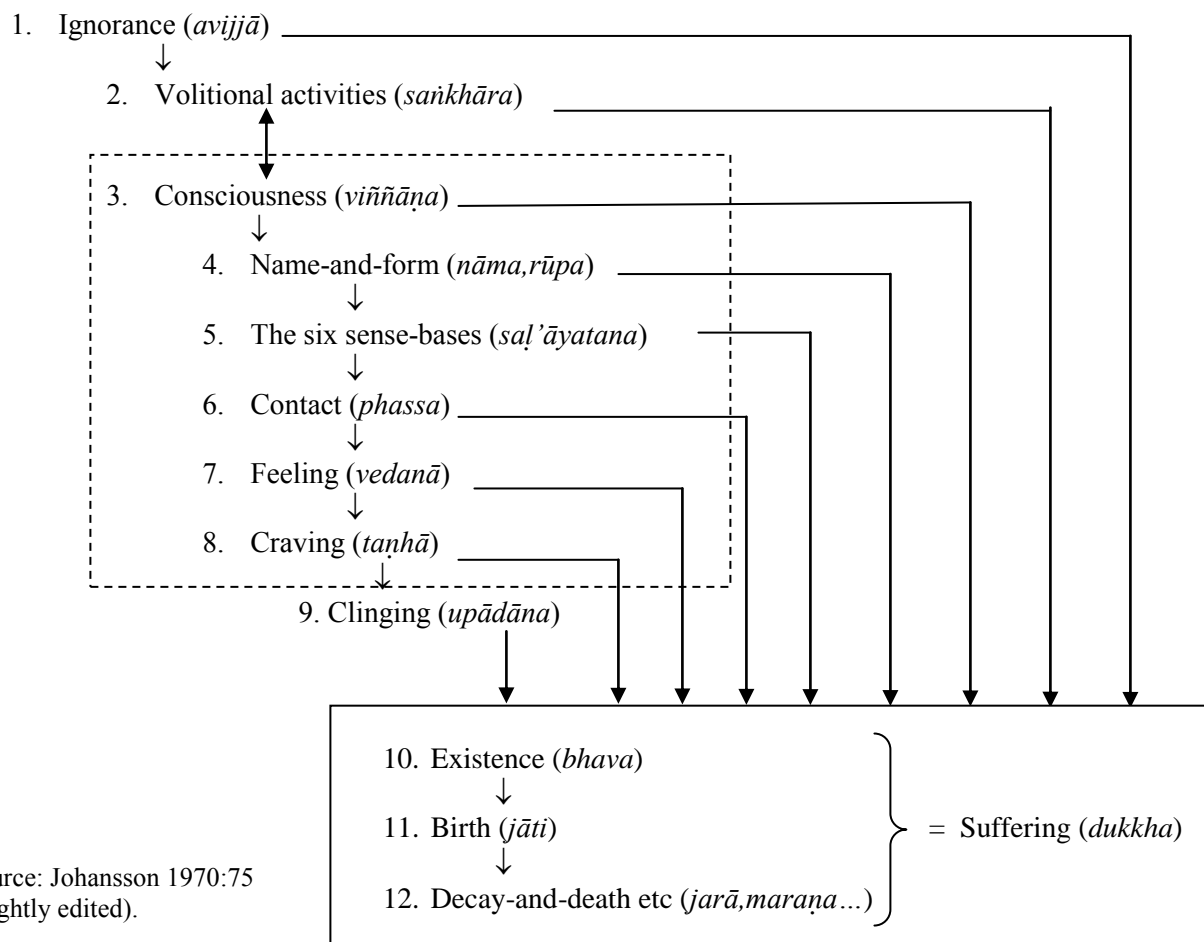
<sup>15</sup> What is not present in him is the craving for being. Those who still have this craving are reborn ever again.

The interpretation of *avijjā* [ignorance] and *saṅkhāra* [formations] as belonging to a previous existence is impossible, as it would make *nibbāna* unattainable in this life: *nibbāna* is the cessation of *dukkha* [suffering] which is effected through the cessation of *avijjā*. But it is impossible to eradicate the *avijjā* of a former existence. It must be maintained that the present *dukkha* depends on a present *avijjā*: that is the condition for making them both cease. We conclude that inter-dependence rather than a strict time-sequence was intended. (Johansson, 1965:211)

If we speak in terms of *causality*, that ignorance “causes” suffering, Johansson’s notion might hold water. However, dependent arising occurs through **conditionality** (*paccayatā*) [3c]. He is right in noting that no “strict time-sequence was intended” here, since conditionality is simultaneous: “when a is, b is” and so on. A simple example would suffice: A might claim that he is angry because of B (let us say he took A’s property without asking). In Buddhist psychology, this situation is purely circumstantial: B is simply the condition for A’s anger, that is, it arose from within A through A’s own willing. In other words, A could have chosen not to be angry, but to be forgiving, for example.

Johansson also subscribes to the notion of the single thought-moment dependent arising. He has worked out a helpful diagram to illustrate how dependent arising operates in a single thought moment, as shown in the diagram:

**Diagram 1.** Dependent arising within one thought-moment.



Source: Johansson 1970:75 (slightly edited).

This arrangement would mean that each factor in itself leads to suffering but that, *when analyzed*, it will be found to involve the succeeding factors. There are indications that this interpretation may be true. We find, for instance, that *avijjā* is an *āsava* [mental influxes], just as *bhava*. As

such, it is said to cause suffering in its own right, without the intervening links. *Viññāṇa* is said to lead to rebirth without the other links being mentioned. And in D 2:308 [D 22.19, **the Mahā Sati-paṭṭhāna Sutta**], it is said that *taṇhā* directly leads to suffering. It happens, on the other hand, that a dependence in the reversed direction is mentioned: *viññāṇa* is, eg, said to depend on *nāma-rūpa* and *saṅkhāra* on *phassa* (S 3:101). (Johansson, 1970:74)

**3c. Moment to moment.** However, there are differing opinions here. In the case of specific conditionality (*idap-paccayatā*), it is very important to note that there can be, and usually is, a substantial interval between a cause and an effect.

It is a mistake to assume that the effect follows one moment after its cause, or that it appears simultaneously with its cause. In Buddhist causality, the cause and its effect can be separated by any length of time. (Brahmavamso, 2003b:58 f)

In **the Nidāna Saṃyutta**, an important collection of suttas dealing with dependent arising, “birth” (*jāti*) and “death” (*maraṇā*) are to be understood as commonly used. It is clear that birth and death do not occur simultaneously, nor does birth precede death by one moment. Birth can precede death by a whole life-time—80, 90, 100, 120, or even 160 years, as in the case of Bakkula (**Bakkula Sutta**, M 124.40/3:127 f), or longer still in the case of celestial beings.

The view of the “simultaneous” occurrence of the twelve links, and some other views, is discussed critically in the Sarvāstivāda compendium, the **Mahāvibhāṣā**.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4 Dependent arising in the Canon

The fullest statement or “standard version” of the dependent arising formula (the X-paccayā-Y pattern) or “if x, then y” conditionality, has *twelve factors in eleven propositions*. Similarly, the full or standard version of dependent ending has the same twelve links but the eleven propositions are given in reverse. This twin formula is found in such discourses as **the (Paṭicca,samuppāda) Desanā Sutta** (S 12.1) and **the Kaccā(ya)na,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15),<sup>17</sup> thus:

<i>avijjā,paccayā</i>	<i>saṅkhārā</i>	with ignorance as condition, there are volitional activities;
<i>saṅkhāra,paccayā</i>	<i>viññāṇam</i>	with volitional activities as condition, there is consciousness;
<i>viññāṇa,paccayā</i>	<i>nāma,rūpam</i>	with consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form;
<i>nāma,rūpa,paccayā</i>	<i>saḷ'āyatanaṃ</i>	with name-and-form as condition, there are the six sense-bases;
<i>saḷ'āyatana,paccayā</i>	<i>phasso</i>	with the six sense-bases as condition, there is contact;
<i>phassa,paccayā</i>	<i>vedanā</i>	with contact as condition, there is feeling;
<i>vedanā,paccayā</i>	<i>taṇhā</i>	with feeling as condition, there is craving;
<i>taṇhā,paccayā</i>	<i>upādānaṃ</i>	with craving as condition, there is clinging;
<i>upādāna,paccayā</i>	<i>bhavo</i>	with clinging as condition, there is existence;
<i>bhava,paccayā</i>	<i>jāti</i>	with existence as condition, there is birth;
<i>jāti,paccayā</i>	<i>jarā,marāṇam</i>	with birth as condition there arise decay-and-death,
<i>soka,parideva,dukkha,-</i>		sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.
<i>domanass'upāyasā sambhavanti</i>		
<i>evam-etassa kevalassa dukkha-k,-</i>		—Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.
<i>khandhassa samudayo hoti</i>		
<i>avijjāya tveva asesā, virāga, nirodhā</i>		But with the utter fading away and ending of ignorance,
<i>saṅkhāra, nirodho</i>		volitional activities end;
<i>saṅkhāra, nirodhā viññāṇa, nirodho</i>		with the ending of volitional activities, consciousness ends;
<i>viññāṇa, nirodhā nāma, rūpa, nirodho</i>		with the ending of consciousness, name-and-form ends;

<sup>16</sup> See Potter et al, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, 1996:114 and refs there.

<sup>17</sup> S 12.1/2:1 f, 12.15/2:16 f = SD 6.13. See **Dependent arising** = SD 5.16 (4).

<i>nāma,rūpa,nirodhā saḷāyatana,nirodho</i>	with the ending of name-and-form, the six sense-bases end;
<i>saḷ'āyatana,nirodhā phassa,nirodho</i>	with the ending of the six sense-bases, contact ends;
<i>phassa,nirodhā vedanā,nirodho</i>	with the ending of contact, feeling ends;
<i>vedanā,nirodhā taṇhā,nirodho</i>	with the ending of feeling, craving ends;
<i>taṇhā,nirodhā upādāna,nirodho</i>	with the ending of craving, clinging ends;
<i>upādāna,nirodhā bhava,nirodho</i>	with the ending of clinging, existence ends;
<i>bhava,nirodhā jāti,nirodho</i>	with the ending of existence, birth ends;
<i>jāti,nirodhā jarā,marañam</i>	with the ending of birth, there end decay-and-death,
<i>soka parideva,dukkha,-</i>	sorrow, lamentation, physical pain,
<i>domanass'upāyasā nirujjhanti</i>	mental pain and despair.
<i>evam-etassa kevalassa dukkha-k,-</i>	—Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.
<i>khandhassa nirodho hoti</i>	S 12.1/2:1 f, 12.15/2:16 f = SD 6.13

This 12-link series is, in fact, an elaboration of the second noble truth, explaining the arising of suffering (*dukkha*), as evident in **the Tittth'āyatana Sutta**.<sup>18</sup> It traces the chain of causal arising back beyond craving (*taṇhā*) to its ultimate origin in ignorance (*avijjā*).

The 12-link dependent arising formula is often given in reverse (*anuloma*). The causal chain is traced backward from decay-and-death to birth, and so on down to the ending of suffering, as given in **the Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 38/1:261-264),<sup>19</sup> a more elaborate version of which is found in **the Paccaya Sutta** (S 12.20) thus:

And what, bhikshus, is dependent arising?

“With birth as condition, there is decay-and-death”—whether Tathagatas [Buddhas thus come] arise or not, this element stands, the certainty [fixedness] of phenomena, the natural order, the specific conditionality. To this a Tathagata awakens and attains. Having awakened to it, having attained to it, he explains it, teaches it, proclaims it, establishes it, reveals it, analyses it, clarifies it, saying, “See! Bhikshus,

with birth as condition,	there is decay-and-death;
with existence as condition, bhikshus,	there is birth;
with clinging as condition, bhikshus,	there is existence;
with craving as condition, bhikshus,	there is clinging;
with feeling as condition, bhikshus,	there is craving;
with contact as condition, bhikshus,	there is feeling;
with the six sense-bases as condition, bhikshus,	there is contact;
with name-and-form as condition, bhikshus,	there are the six sense-bases;
with consciousness as condition, bhikshus,	there is name-and-form;
with volitional activities as condition, bhikshus,	there is consciousness;
with ignorance as condition, bhikshus,	there are volitional activities.”

Whether Tathagatas arise or not, this element stands, the fixedness of phenomena, the natural order, the specific conditionality. To this a Tathagata awakens and attains. Having awakened to it, having attained to it, he explains it, teaches it, proclaims it, establishes it, reveals it, analyses it, clarifies it, saying,

“See! Bhikshus, with ignorance as condition there are volitional activities. Such, bhikshus, is the reality, not unreality, being not otherwise, the specific conditionality.”<sup>20</sup>

This, bhikshus, is called dependent arising. (S 12.20/2:25 f)

**The Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** gives the causal formula in its order of arising (M 38.17-19/1:261-263) and in its order of ceasing (M 38.20-22/1:263 f). This formula is an example of dependent arising in a *synchronic* cycle, that is, in the course of an individual's life (M 38.26-40/1:265-270). **The Bahu,-**

<sup>18</sup> **Tittth'āyatana S** (A 3.61.11/1:177). See SD 6.8.

<sup>19</sup> This is identical to the **Madhyama Āgama** version (Taisho 768a-c).

<sup>20</sup> “[T]he reality...the specific conditionality,” *tathatā avitathatā anaññathatā idap.paccayatā*.

**dhātuka Sutta** presents the formula by first making a statement of the general principle of specific conditionality (*idap, paccayatā*), followed by both sequences together (M 115.11/63 f). A more elaborate version of the formula giving an analysis of each of the twelve factors in the reverse order and using the four noble truth framework is given in **the Sammā Ditṭhi Sutta** (M 9.21-67/1:49-54). In such cases, the reverse order causal formula is an elaboration of the third noble truth, as evident in **the Tittḥ'āyatana Sutta** (A 3.61.12/ 1:177).<sup>21</sup>

The standard 12-link formula of dependent arising as presented in the Suttas sometimes includes explanations of the 12 component factors. In his essay, “Conditioned arising evolves: Variation and change in textual accounts of the *paṭicca-samuppāda* doctrine,” Roderick S Bucknell points out that “[t]hese exhibit a few disagreements between Pali and Chinese/Sanskrit versions of the same sutra,” and he gives a useful concordance of these variations (1999:312-314).

**The condensed versions of the formula** are also found in the Canon. For ease of comparison, the numbering system follows that of the standard version:

4.	<i>nāma, rūpa</i>	(name-and-form)
3.	<i>viññāṇa</i>	(consciousness)
4.	<i>nāma, rūpa</i>	(name-and-form)
[5.	<i>saḷ'āyatana</i>	(the six sense-bases)]
6.	<i>phassa</i>	(contact)
7.	<i>vedanā</i>	(feeling)
8.	<i>taṇhā</i>	(craving)
9.	<i>upādāna</i>	(clinging)
10.	<i>bhava</i>	(existence)
11.	<i>jāti</i>	(birth)
12.	<i>jarā, maraṇa</i>	(decay-and-death. etc.)

The square brackets for item 5 indicates that this link is not always present. It is missing in **the Mahā Nidāna Sutta** (but present in other sources).<sup>22</sup> In **the Nagara Sutta** (S 12.65), the Buddha says before his awakening, he reflected on the ten-factor cycle starts with (12) decay-and-death (*jarā, maraṇa*) and ends with (4) name-and-form, and, remarks KR Norman, “the longer chain is probably only a later extension of an earlier idea” (1990:24).

Sometimes the chain that culminates in decay-and-death is made to begin only at item 5 (the six sense-bases), eg **the Añña Tittḥiya Sutta**,<sup>23</sup> or at item 9 (clinging), eg **the Piṇḍolya Sutta**<sup>24</sup> and **the Māgandhiya Sutta**,<sup>25</sup> or at item 10 (existence), eg **the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta** (M 1.171/ 1:6). Sometimes the chain begins at item 9 (clinging) and goes back to ignorance, eg **the Cūḷa Sihanāda Sutta** (M 11.16/ 1:67).<sup>26</sup>

Using a plant simile, **the Bhava Sutta** gives a succinct description of dependent arising by way of defining “existence” (*bhava*) (A 3.76/1:223 f). The importance of dependent arising is attested by Sāriputta when, in the **Mahā Hatthi, padôpama Sutta**, he declares that “he who sees dependent arising sees the Dharma; he who sees the Dharma sees dependent arising.” (M 28.28/1:191 f). And whether Buddhas arise or not, declares **the Paccaya Sutta**, there will always be dependent arising (S 12.20/2:25 f).

<sup>21</sup> See SD 6.8.

<sup>22</sup> The six sense-bases is missing at D 15.2/2:55 f = T61b20 = Dīrgh'āgama T243b5-7 = Madhyam'āgama 579c4-7, but present at Madhyam'āgama T845a24-28. See Bucknell 1999:315 n12.

<sup>23</sup> S 12.24.26-31/2:36 f.

<sup>24</sup> S 3.23-30/3:94.

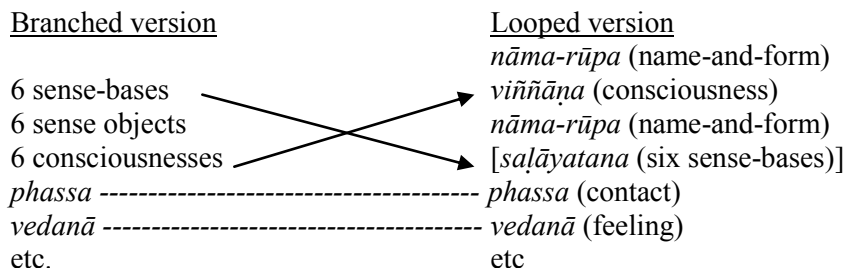
<sup>25</sup> M 75.24 f/1:511 f.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion on other versions of dependent arising formula, see Bucknell 1999:314-342.

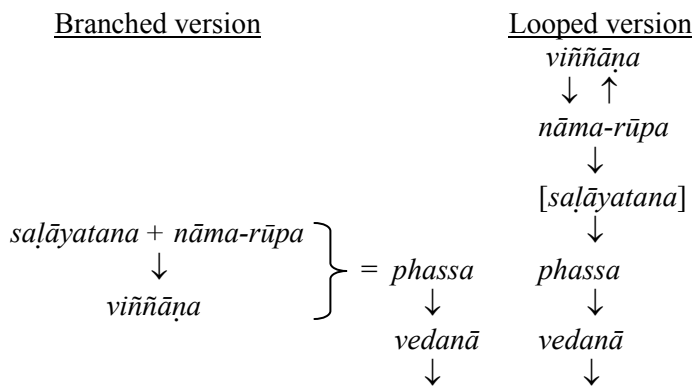
### 5 Other forms of the dependent arising formula

Roderick S Bucknell (1999) identifies five main variations or versions of dependent arising: the standard version(s) [4], the branched version, the looped version, the Sn (Sutta,nipāta) version and the ancestor of the standard version. Bucknell’s diagrams of these four versions are given here:<sup>27</sup>

**Diagram 2.** Correspondence in content between the branched and the looped versions:



**Diagram 3.** Contrast in structure between the branched and the looped versions:

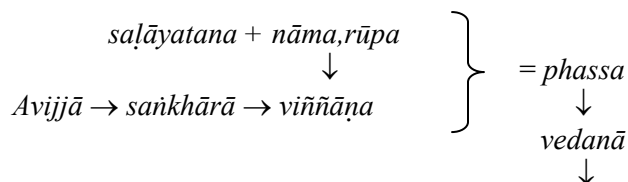


**Diagram 4.** Derivation of *viññāṇa* in different versions:

(a) Branched version: *saḷāyatana + nāma-rūpa*  
↓  
*viññāṇa*

(b) Standard & Sn versions: *avijjā* → *saṅkhārā* → *viññāṇa*

**Diagram 5.** Inferred structure of ancestor of standard version:



<sup>27</sup> Slightly edited for standard format.

Examples of the standard version of the dependent arising [4] are found in **the (Paṭicca,samuppāda) Desanā Sutta** (S 12.1/2:1 f), **the (Paṭicca,samuppāda) Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 12.2/2:2-4)<sup>28</sup> and a number of others in the Nidāna Saṃyutta (S 12).

The branched version has this basic formula.<sup>29</sup>

5. six sense-bases (= *saḷ'āyatana*)  
plus six sense-objects
3. six consciousnesses (= *viññāṇa*)
6. contact (*phassa*)
7. feeling (*vedanā*)
8. craving (*taṇhā*)
9. clinging (*upādāna*)
10. existence (*bhava*)
11. birth (*jāti*)
12. decay-and-death (*jarā, maraṇa*)

In the branched version, the causal chain begins with the -faculties and their corresponding objects, with this complete set of “the 18 elements” as they are often called.<sup>30</sup>

eye	( <i>cakkhu</i> )	+	form	( <i>rūpa</i> )	→	eye-consciousness ( <i>cakkhu, viññāṇa</i> )
ear	( <i>sota</i> )	+	sound	( <i>sadda</i> )	→	ear-consciousness ( <i>sota, viññāṇa</i> )
nose	( <i>ghāṇa</i> )	+	smell	( <i>gandha</i> )	→	nose-consciousness ( <i>ghāṇa, viññāṇa</i> )
tongue	( <i>jivhā</i> )	+	taste	( <i>rasa</i> )	→	tongue-consciousness ( <i>jivhā, viññāṇa</i> )
body	( <i>kāya</i> )	+	touch	( <i>phoṭṭhabba</i> )	→	body-consciousness ( <i>kāya, viññāṇa</i> )
mind	( <i>mano</i> )	+	dhammas	( <i>dhamma</i> )	→	mind-consciousness ( <i>mano, viññāṇa</i> )

The meeting of each horizontal set of three items (eg eye, visible form and eye-consciousness) is called contact (*phassa*), ie eye-contact (*cakkhu, samphassa*), which is then conditioned by feeling (*vedanā*) and so on. The most famous example of this branched version is **the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta**.<sup>31</sup>

The looped version is so called because it represents consciousness and name-and-form as mutually (*añña-m-añña*) conditioning each other, and “this causal loop is confirmed when the series is reiterated in summary in the forward direction,”<sup>32</sup> thus:

Conditioned by name-and-form is consciousness.  
Conditioned by consciousness is name-and-form.  
Conditioned by name-and-form is contact...<sup>33</sup>

The most famous example of the looped version is found in **the Mahā Nidāna Sutta**; other examples are found in **the Nala,kalapiya Sutta** and **the Mahāpadāna Sutta**.

The Sn version (as found in **the Dvayatānupassanā Sutta**, Sn 3.12/724-765) is the same as the standard version in tracing the causal series back beyond consciousness (*viññāṇa*) to volitional activities (*sankhārā*) and ignorance (*avijjā*). It differs from the standard version in omitting name-and-form (*nāma, -*

<sup>28</sup> Identical with **Saṃyukt'āgama** T85a-b. See Bucknell 1999:311 n2.

<sup>29</sup> See Bucknell 1999:319-333.

<sup>30</sup> See Bucknell 1999:320.

<sup>31</sup> M 18.16/1:111 f. This set is found in **Cha,chakka S** (M 148.3-9/3:280 f = MĀ 562b-c) and **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.-2.2/3:243 f = DĀ 231b-c).

<sup>32</sup> **Mahā Nidāna S**, D 15.2/2:56 = DĀ 61b20 = 243c2-3 = MĀ 580a1-2 = 845b11-12; **Nala,kalapiya S**, S 12.-26/2:114 = SĀ 80c3-6; **Mahāpadāna S**, D 14.2.18/2:32. See Bucknell 1999:315 n13.

<sup>33</sup> See **Necessity & sufficiency** = SD 35.1 (6.3.1).

*rūpa*) and the six sense-bases (*saḷ'āyatana*), and in adding extra items at the beginning and at the end of the series.<sup>34</sup>

#### Diagram 6.

<u>Standard version</u>		<u>Sutta,nipāta version</u>
		<i>upadhi</i> (life substrate)
<i>avijjā</i>	(ignorance)	<i>avijjā</i>
<i>saṅkhārā</i>	(volitional activities)	<i>saṅkhārā</i>
<i>viññāṇa</i>	(consciousness)	<i>viññāṇa</i>
<i>nāma,rūpa</i>	(name-and-form)	
<i>saḷ'āyatana</i>	(the six sense-bases)	
<i>phassa</i>	(contact)	<i>phassa</i>
<i>vedanā</i>	(feeling)	<i>vedanā</i>
<i>taṇhā</i>	(craving)	<i>taṇhā</i>
<i>upādāna</i>	(clinging)	<i>upādāna</i>
<i>bhava</i>	(existence)	<i>bhava</i>
<i>jāti</i>	(birth)	<i>jāti</i>
<i>jarā,maraṇa</i>	(decay-and-death)	<i>jarā,maraṇa</i>
		<i>ārambhā</i> (exertions)
		<i>āhāra</i> (food)
		<i>iñjitā</i> (movements)

While the standard and Sn versions agree in tracing the causal chain back to *saṅkhārā* and *avijjā*, the branched version and looped versions agree in not mentioning these two links (Bucknell 1999:320). The branched and the looped versions, **Rod Bucknell** adds, “show evidence of being derived from a single earlier form” and that the standard 12-link version “points to derivation of the well-known linear series from an earlier structure that was even more elaborately branching than the ‘branched version.’” (1999: 340). He concludes:

[I]t shows the standard version as a combination of the Sutta-nipāta version and the branched version. The analysis has also identified, as an important element in the process of transformation, a scholastic reinterpretation of the doctrinal import of the early part of the causal series, entailing redefinition of *nāma-rūpa*, and of *viññāṇa* as well in the case of the looped version.

(1999:341)

### 6 Necessary condition and sufficient condition

In his article, “*Paṭicca-samuppāda*: Dependent origination” (2003b), **Brahmavaṃso** shows how specific conditionality (*idap,paccayatā*) relates to what in Western logic is called a “necessary condition” and a “sufficient condition” [2b]. **A sufficient condition** is a cause that must always produce the effect—this is a *sufficient condition* for that if and only if this is by itself enough to guarantee that. That is to say, “this is a sufficient condition if and only if this is by itself enough to guarantee that.”<sup>35</sup> For example, a fire is a sufficient condition for heat. A fire *must* cause heat. The sufficient condition is expressed by the first half of *idap,paccayatā*:

*imasmim sati idam hoti | imass 'uppādā idam uppajjati*

when this is, that is; | with the arising of this, that arises. (S 12.21/2:28)

<sup>34</sup> For further discussion on the Sn version, see Bucknell 1999:317-323, 333-336.

<sup>35</sup> Anthony Flew, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, NY: St Martin's Press, 1984:242.

A **necessary condition** is a cause without which there would be no effect—this is a *necessary condition* for that if and only if that cannot be without this. For example, fuel is necessary for a fire. That is to say, “this is a necessary condition for that if and only if that cannot be without this.”<sup>36</sup> The necessary condition is expressed by the second half of *idap,paccayatā*:

*imasmim asati idam na hoti | imassa nirodhā idam nirujjhati*  
when this is not, that is not; | with the ending of this, that ends.<sup>37</sup> (S 12.21/2:28)

In order to demonstrate the difference between these two types of causes I will use the example just given. Fuel is a necessary condition for fire, because with the ceasing of fuel, the fire ceases. But fuel is not a sufficient condition for fire, because fuel doesn’t always produce fire—some fuel remain unlit. Fire is a sufficient condition for heat, because fire must cause heat, because without fire there can still be heat—heat can be generated from other sources.

So a necessary condition is a cause without which there would be no effect, and it is expressed by the second half of *Idappaccayatā*. A sufficient condition is a cause that must produce the effect, and it is expressed by the first half of *Idappaccayatā*. Together they make up Buddhist causality. (Brahmavaṃso 2003b:62 f)

The forward (*anuloma*) mode of dependent arising, when analyzed, shows that only some of the 11 factors are a sufficient condition for the following factor. That is to say, that the following factor must come about sooner or later as a consequence of the preceding factor, which are as follows:

ignorance	—	volitional activities
...		
consciousness	—	name-and-form
name-and-form	—	the six sense-bases
the six sense-bases	—	contact
contact	—	feeling
...		
craving	—	clinging
...		
existence	—	birth
birth	—	suffering (sorrow, etc).

Thus, when there is ignorance, volitional forms will follow tending towards rebirth. When there is consciousness, there must follow name-and-form, the six sense-bases, contact and feeling. When there is craving, there will be clinging. Existence (*bhava*) leads to birth.<sup>38</sup> Most importantly, birth (*jāti*) must produce suffering (*dukkha*). Therefore, the only escape from suffering is to cease from being reborn. As Sāriputta declares to the wanderer Sāmaṇḍakāni in **the Sukha Sutta** (A 10.65):

*Abhinibbatti kho āvuso dukkhā; anabhinibbatti sukhā.*  
To be born, friends, is suffering; not to be born is happiness. (A 10.65/5:120 f)<sup>39</sup>

## 7 Other conditions

It is useful now to look at the links in the wheel of dependent arising that are not sufficient conditions. **Volitional activities** (*saṅkhārā*) is not a sufficient condition for consciousness (*viññāṇa*), or more specifically, rebirth-linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi.citta*) and the stream of consciousness that follows.

<sup>36</sup> Anthony Flew, id.

<sup>37</sup> “With the ending of this, that ends” or better “with the non-arising of this, that does not arise.”

<sup>38</sup> See **Bhava S** (A 3.76/1:223 f).

<sup>39</sup> For a detailed study, see **Necessity & sufficiency** = SD 35.1.

This is because, having produced many rebirth-inclining *kamma* formations [*sankhārā*] early on in one's life, it is possible to make them all null and void (called 'ahosi kamma') with the attainment of *Arahant*[hood], which attainment eliminates the stream of consciousness that would otherwise begin at rebirth. (Brahmavaṃso 2003b:64)

Similarly, **clinging** (*upādāna*) is not a sufficient condition for existence (*bhava*). Through the cultivation of the noble eightfold path, no new clinging is generated and all previous clinging no more become the ground for generating a new existence. It is more so in the case of **feeling** (*vedanā*) not serving as a sufficient condition for craving (*taṇhā*). Even in ordinary people, not all feeling produces craving.

It is also important to note here the fact that **feeling** (*vedanā*) exists is due to karma from a past life. However, the quality of such feeling—whether it is pleasant, or painful, or neutral—is not always due to past karma. This is clearly stated in such suttas as **the Tīth'āyatana Sutta** (A 3.61/:173-177)<sup>40</sup> and **the Devadaha Sutta** (M 101/2:228). In other words, it is important to make a distinction between *vedanā* as a fact and the quality of *vedanā*.

## 8 The wheel of life

The causal sequence of dependent arising goes in a cycle wherein it is impossible to point out a first cause, simply because it forms a circle—the “wheel of life” or “wheel of existence” (*bhava.cakka*). Most people are accustomed to regard time as a line stretching from a finite past to a finite future. Buddhism, however, views life as a circle or cycle, and life, reflected as such, is repeated over and over as an endless continuum.

It should be remembered that each of the factors of dependent arising is conditioned (*paṭicca.samuppanna*) as well as conditioning (*paṭicca.samuppāda*). They are all relative, interdependent or interconnected, not something absolute. Hence, no first cause is accepted by Buddhism. The formula is best illustrated by a circle rather than a chain, for *paṭicca.samuppāda* simply means “arising and coming into existence causally.” The term usually translated as “link” is **nidāna** (origin, cause), but each link arises by having the previous one as support (*paccaya*), beginning and ending with ignorance.<sup>41</sup>

Both Buddhaghosa and Nāgārjuna, reflecting the early tradition, present dependent arising as occurring over three different lives of a being.<sup>42</sup> This gist of the twelve links spread over three lives is given in the Introduction of Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi's Majjhima Nikāya translation, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*.<sup>43</sup>

Because of **ignorance** (*avijjā*)—defined as non-knowledge of the Four Noble Truths—a person engages in volitional actions or *kamma*, which may be bodily, verbal, or mental, wholesome or unwholesome. These kammic actions are the **formations** (*sankhārā*), and they ripen in states of **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*)—first as the rebirth-consciousness at the moment of conception and thereafter as the passive states of consciousness resulting from *kamma* that matures in the course of a lifetime. Along with consciousness there arises **mentality-materiality** [name-and-form] (*nāmarūpa*), the psychophysical organism, which is equipped with **the sixfold sense base** (*saḷāyatana*), the five physical sense-faculties and mind as the faculty of higher cognitive functions. Via the sense-faculties **contact** (*phassa*) takes place between consciousness and its objects, and contact conditions **feeling** (*vedanā*). The links from consciousness through feeling are the products of past *kamma*, of the causal phase represented by ignorance and formations. With the next link of kammically active phase of the present life begins, productive of a new existence in the future. Conditioned by feeling, **craving** (*taṇhā*) arises, this being the second

<sup>40</sup> See SD 6.7.

<sup>41</sup> For a definition of each of the 12 links of dependent arising, see eg **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12:2/ 2:2-4). See SD 5.10 (ie, this volume).

<sup>42</sup> See Gethin 1998:150-155.

<sup>43</sup> For another helpful discussion, see Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 1998:149-159.

noble truth. When craving intensifies it gives rise to **clinging** (*upādāna*),<sup>44</sup> through which one again engages in volitional actions pregnant with a renewal of **existence** (*bhava*). The new existence begins with birth (*jāti*), which inevitably leads to **ageing and death** [decay-and-death] (*jarāmaraṇa*).  
(M:ÑB 30 f; slightly edited)

This well known diagram shows how the 12 links extend *diachronically* over 3 consecutive lives: past, present and future:

**Table 1**

PAST EXISTENCE	1. Ignorance 2. Volitional activities	<b>Karma process</b> ( <i>kamma.bhava</i> )  5 causes: 1,2,8,9,10
PRESENT EXISTENCE	3. Consciousness 4. Name-and-form (mental and physical existence) 5. The six sense-bases 6. Contact 7. Feeling	<b>Rebirth process</b> ( <i>upapatti.bhava</i> )  5 results: 3-7
	8. Craving 9. Clinging 10. Existence	<b>Karma process</b> ( <i>kamma.bhava</i> )  5 causes: 1,2,8,9,10
FUTURE EXISTENCE	11. Birth 12. Decay-and-death	<b>Rebirth process</b> ( <i>upapatti.bhava</i> )  5 results: 3-7

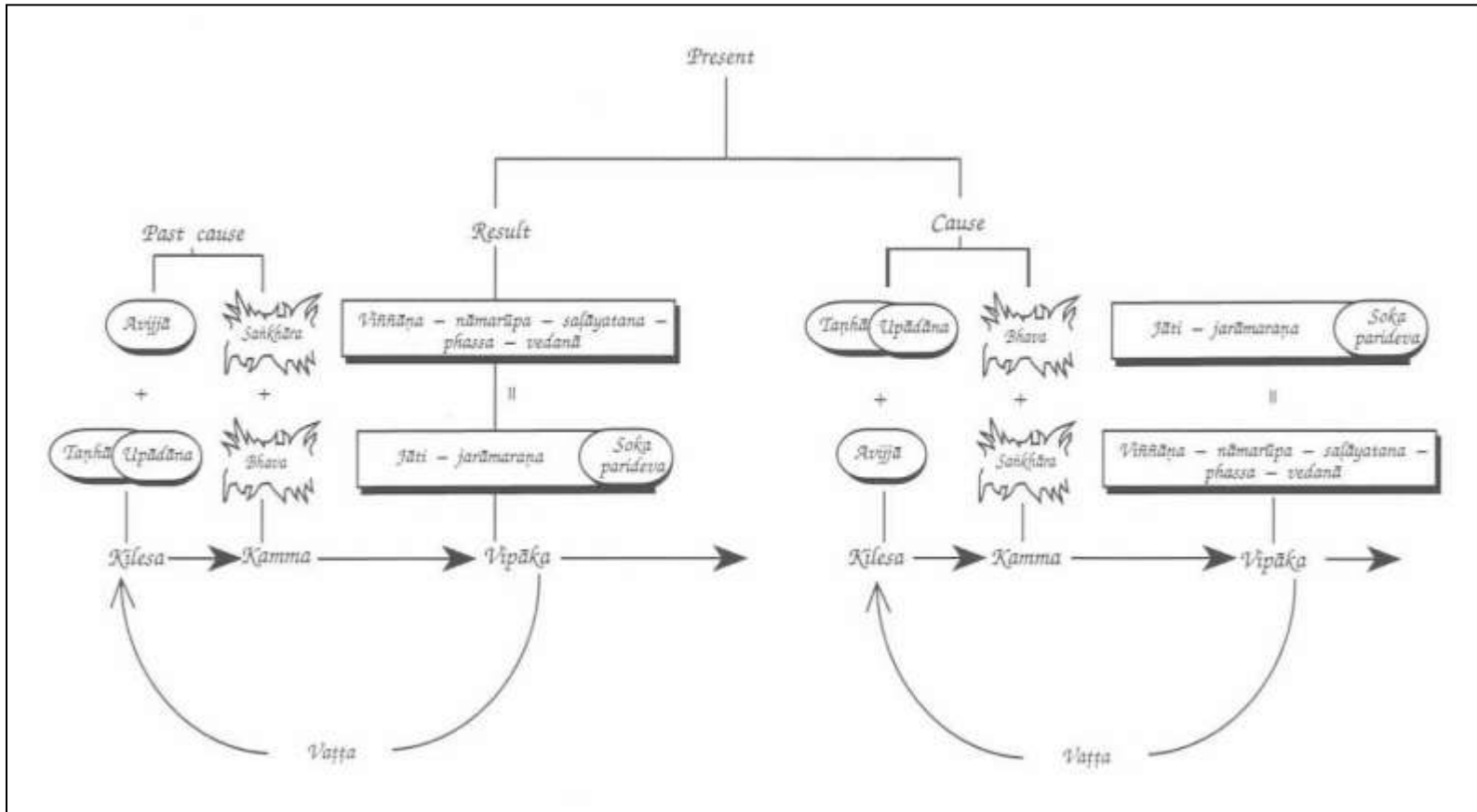
Links 1-2, together with 8-10, represent the Karma Process, containing the five karmic causes of rebirth. Links 3-7, together with 11-12, represent the Rebirth Process, containing the five karmic results.

<sup>44</sup> Craving refers to desire for what we do not have. Clinging is grasping to a desirable object that we have obtained. Comy speaks of 2 kinds of craving (*taṇhā*): craving for what is sought (*esana,taṇhā*) and craving for what i been found (*esita,taṇhā*) (DA 2:499).

**Table 2**

**Dependent arising over three lives (Prayudh Payutto)**

The dependent arising is represented here in a flow-chart:



[<http://www.geocities/Athens/Academy/9280/d04.jpg>; Eng version at Payutto, 1994:40]



## 9 Contra three-life dependent arising

The three-life dependent arising is an interesting notion, especially in connection the teaching of rebirth. However, for some Buddhist teachers and writers argue, all this is at best theoretical since the only reality we can deal with is the present. The Thai Buddhist monk and reformist philosopher, **Buddhadāsa** (1906-1963), vehemently rejects this diachronic view of dependent arising, charging that it introduces the notion of an enduring self and eternalism.<sup>45</sup>

Explaining dependent origination as spanning three births is wrong because it is not in accord with the original Pali of the Buddha's sayings and the Suttas, because it introduces the incorrect notion of self or *atman*, which is eternalism, and because, most harmfully, it is of no benefit or use to anyone.

Explaining dependent origination as spanning three births is of no use at all because it cannot be practised when the cause is in that birth and the result is in this birth. How can the situation be corrected? When the cause in this birth gives forth a result in a future birth, how can it be of any use to anyone, except those who are eternalists who can only dream about practice? Moreover, the three births explanation is not something that can be seen by oneself, is not without delay and is not something that can be directly experienced by oneself, and so it must be taken to be incorrect. It is of no use at all—it can't be practised because it introduces the eternalist concepts of a soul or a self—so let's be finished with such an explanation. Let's return to the original Pali, which is correct in letter and spirit. (1992:77; also see 1986:49)

A similar stand is taken by the English Theravada monk, **Ñāṇavīra** (1920-1965),<sup>46</sup> who rejects the three-life dependent arising since it cannot be seen or realized now. In his "A note on Paṭiccasamuppāda," he says, "It is a matter of one's fundamental attitude to one's own existence—is there, or is there not, a *present* problem or, rather, *anxiety* that can only be resolved *in the present*?" (1987:21 §7 digital ed).<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, such a view reflects an annihilationist tendency popular with agnostic and materialist Buddhists, and with modernists who measure Buddhism against science and other religions.

## 10 Pro three-life dependent arising

In a paper published in the *Buddhist Studies Review*, **Bodhi**<sup>48</sup> gives an important and comprehensive response to Ñāṇavīra's "Note." The paper should be read in full: only the two main points of Bodhi's conclusion will be mentioned here. Bodhi quotes **the Bāla,paṇḍita Sutta** (S 12.19), "a terse and equally tricky text—that confirms the three-life interpretation of [the *paṭicca,samuppāda*] almost as explicitly as one might wish." (1998.20/p22). The sutta opens thus

Bhikshus, for the fool, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving, this body has thereby been obtained. Hence there is this body and external name-and-form—such is this dyad. Dependent on this dyad there is contact. There are just the six sense-bases, when touched by which, or by any one of them, the fool feels joy and pain.

[*Exactly the same is said of the wise man.*]

For the fool, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving, this body has been obtained. But for the fool that ignorance has not been abandoned and that craving has not been destroyed.

Why not?

Because the fool has not lived the holy life for the complete destruction of suffering. Therefore, when the body breaks up, the fool goes to a [new] body. Being one who goes to a [new]

<sup>45</sup> 1992:65-77, 86-104. Buddhadāsa says that the 13th Siamese Supreme Patriarch, Vajirañānavamsa (Wachirayanawong) (r 1945-58) held the same view (1992:65 f, 76), and also argues that the three-life model of dependent arising was prob introduced by Buddhaghosa, who still had brahminical inclinations (1992:78-104).

<sup>46</sup> See **Channovāda S** (M 144) = SD 11.12.

<sup>47</sup> See also Kearney, *Freedom and Bondage*, 1994: ch 1.

<sup>48</sup> "A critical examination of Ñāṇavīra Thera's 'A note on paṭiccasamuppāda,'" *Buddhist Studies Review*, 1998.

body, he is not freed from birth, decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, anxiety, despair—he is not freed from suffering, I say. (S 12.19/2:23 f)

The wise man, on the other hand, having lived the holy life fully, has abandoned ignorance and destroyed craving. Thus when his body breaks up, he does not go to a new body, and so is freed from birth, decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, anxiety, despair—he is freed from suffering.

In this sutta excerpt, not only are the three lives explicitly depicted, but “we also find the other basic exegetical tools of the Commentaries already well adumbrated: the three links (*ti,sandhi*) and the four grounds (*catu,sāṅkhepa*).”<sup>49</sup> Towards the end of his rebuttal of Ñāṇavīra, Bodhi says:<sup>50</sup>

...let us first remember that the Commentaries do not treat the twelvefold formula of [*paṭicca,samuppāda*] as a rigid series whose factors are assigned to tightly segregated time-frames. The formula is regarded, rather, as an expository device spread over three lives in order to demonstrate the self-sustaining internal dynamics of saṃsāric becoming. The situation defined by the formula is in actuality not a simple linear sequence, but a more complex process by which ignorance, craving and clinging in unison generate renewed becoming in a direction determined by the *saṅkhāra*, the kammically potent volitional activity. Any new existence begins with the simultaneous arising of *viññāṇa* and *nāma,rūpa*, culminating in birth, the full manifestation of the five aggregates. With these aggregates as the basis, ignorance, craving and clinging, again working in union, generate a fresh store of *kamma* productive of still another becoming, and so the process goes on until ignorance and craving are eliminated. (Bodhi 1998:27 digital ed)

In the **Devā,daha Sutta** (M 101), notes **Brahmavamso**, the Buddha refers to *the type* of feeling, rather than to *feeling itself*. It is true that whichever one of the three types of feeling that one experiences, happiness or suffering or neutral, is not always due to karma from a past life. But it is also true that *the situation whereby one can experience feeling at all, the fact that feeling exists, is due to karma from a past life*.

A simile might clarify this. The fact that you possess a TV on a public holiday is due to your having purchased it on some previous day. Its presence, as it were, is due to karma from a past event. But whichever one of the *three* available channels that appears on the screen—Channel Happiness, or Channel Suffering, or Channel Neutral—is not always due to what you did on some previous day. The quality<sup>51</sup> is not at all due to what you did on some previous day: the quality is not due to karma from the past.

Once the distinction is made between feeling (*vedanā*) and the quality of feeling (happiness, suffering or neutral), it becomes clear why, for example, **the Tittth’āyatana Sutta** (A 3.69) does *not* state that feeling is not caused by karma-formations from a previous life.<sup>52</sup> This does not disprove that traditional understanding of dependent arising as spanning three lives. (2003b:66f)

Indeed, in a later part of the Tittth’āyatana Sutta, dependent arising is presented from a unique starting point [§9]:

Dependent on the six elements,<sup>53</sup> bhikshus, there is descent into the womb;<sup>54</sup>  
When there is descent, there is name-and-form;<sup>55</sup>

<sup>49</sup> (Bodhi 1998 §20/p22 f). On the 3 links (cause-effect-cause) and 4 grounds (ignorance & formations; consciousness, name-and-form, sense-bases, contact & feeling; craving, clinging & existence; and birth, decay & death) [Table 1], see *Vism* 17.288-290/579.

<sup>50</sup> For an important discourse in this regard, see **Bālena Paṇḍita S** (S 12.19/2:23-25) = SD 21.2 Intro (3); see also *BDict: Paṭiccasamuppāda* §24<sup>th</sup> ed 1980:161 f.

<sup>51</sup> *Brahmavamso*’s original word here is “content,” which I have changed to “quality,” which I think reflect the facts better.

<sup>52</sup> A 3.61/1:173-177 = SD 6.8.

<sup>53</sup> That is, earth, water, fire, wind, space and consciousness.

<sup>54</sup> “Descent into the womb,” *gabbhassāvakkanti*. See §9n ad loc.

<sup>55</sup> See §9n ad loc.

With name-and-form as condition, there are six sense-bases;  
 With the six sense-bases as condition there is contact;  
 With contact as condition, there is feeling.

*Channaṃ bhikkhave dhātūnaṃ upādāya gabbhassāvakkanti hoti,  
 okkantiyā sati nāma,rūpaṃ,  
 nāma,rūpa,paccayā saḷāyatanaṃ,  
 saḷāyatana,paccayā phasso,  
 phassa,paccayā vedanā.* (A 3.61.9/1:176)

Thus the Buddha clearly shows that the arising of feeling is due to the descent of the being to be born into the womb. This passage should now be compared to the definition of *nāma,rūpa* in **the Mahā,nidāna Sutta** (D 15):

“It is said: **‘With consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form.’**

Ānanda, how consciousness conditions name-and-form should be known in this manner:

If there were no consciousness to descend into a mother’s womb, would name-and-form take shape in the womb?”<sup>56</sup>

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

*“Viññāṇa,paccayā nāma,rūpaṃ ti iti kho pan’etaṃ vuttaṃ.*

*Tad-Ānanda iminā petaṃ pariyāyena veditabbaṃ, yathā viññāṇa,paccayā nāma,rūpaṃ  
 Viññāṇaṃ ca hi Ānanda mātu,kucchismim na okkamissatha, api nu kho nāma,rūpaṃ  
 mātu,kucchismim samuccissathā ti?”*

*“No hetam bhante.”*

(D 15.21/2:63) = SD 5.17

This passage clearly equates the descent of the being-to-be-born (*gabbha*) of the *Tiṭṭh’āyatana Sutta* with the descent of rebirth-linking (*paṭisandhi*) consciousness of the *Mahā,nidāna Sutta*. Thus feeling is said in the *Tiṭṭh’āyatana Sutta* to be caused by the first consciousness arising in this life, whose own cause can only be found in a previous life. As such, the *Tiṭṭh’āyatana Sutta*, far from supporting the idea that dependent arising does not span more than one life, actually clearly proves the opposite! The fact that feeling exists at all is due to ignorance (*avijjā*) and karma-formations (*sankhāra*) from the previous life, and dependent arising, as taught by the Buddha, does indeed span more than one life.<sup>57</sup>

## 11 Seeing dependent arising in this life

Although dependent arising can explain birth over three lives, one can also see one or two of the 12 links at a time. One cannot see all the 12 factors at one and the same moment simply because they do not occur in one moment. However, it is possible to see the workings of the whole process of dependent arising in this life itself. For this reason, dependent arising is said to *sandiṭṭhika* and *akālika*, two common epithets of the Buddha Dharma (eg **Veḷu,dvāreyya S**, S 55.7.14/5:356).<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Cf **Tiṭṭh’āyatana S** (A 3.61) where the Buddha declares: “Based on the six elements, there is descent into the womb; | (On account of) such a descent, there is name-and-form; | With name-and-form as condition, there is contact; | With contact as condition, there is feeling. | Now, it is for one who feels that I make known [the 4 noble truths]” (A 3.61.9/1:176). This clearly shows that feeling arises with the descent of the gandharva (rebirth consciousness) into the womb. However, this is not a common interpretation of *viññāṇa-nāma,rūpa* dyad, where “*viññāṇa* in this context became the consciousness that descends into the mother’s womb at conception, while *nāma-rūpa* became the body complex that takes shape and, after developing sense-faculties (*saḷāyatana*), experiences contact (*phassa*) and so on.” (Bucknell 1999:339). More commonly, *viññāṇa* is “the consummation of the six types of consciousness associated with the sense-faculties, which makes the version read like an account of the psychological process of sensory perception.” (Bucknell 1999: 327): see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18.16-18/1:111-113). See discussion on *nāma,rūpa* in the essay “Dependent Arising” = SD 5.11 Intro.

<sup>57</sup> The same arguments are found in **Tiṭṭh’āyatana S** (A 3.61/1:173-177) = SD 6.8 Intro (2).

<sup>58</sup> See Brahmavariso 2003b:60-62.

One of the clearest definitions of *sandiṭṭhika* is found in **the Mahā Dukkha-k,khandha Sutta** (M 13), where the dangers of sensual pleasures are shown by seven example of consequences to be experienced “in this life”(*sandiṭṭhika*) (M 13.14 f/1:87). Then in the very next paragraph, the painful consequences are said to be experienced “after death” (*samparāyika*). Hence, *sandiṭṭhika* and *samparāyika* are antonyms.<sup>59</sup>

You can also see in this life the causality that links each pair of neighbouring factors. Through the development of penetrating insight empowered by tranquil meditation, you can see in this life how feeling (*vedanā*) gives rise to craving (*taṇhā*). You can similarly witness how craving gives rise to clinging/fuel (*upādāna*). And you can likewise understand in this life how craving and clinging/fuel produces existence (*bhava*) and birth (*jāti*) in the next life.

(Brahmavaṃso 2003b:61 f)

Brahmavaṃso quotes **the Mahā Sīha,nāda Sutta** (M 12.32-43/1:73-77) where, for example, one can know from what is seen in this life that a person’s conduct will lead him to a painful rebirth in just the same way that one can know that a person walking along a direct path must fall into a pit of blazing coals at the end of the path. “Thus, even the causality that links connected factors on either side of death also qualifies as a *Dhamma* which is *sandiṭṭhika* and *akālika*, to be seen in this life.” (id).

## 12 The middle way

The central importance of dependent arising is that it is *the* middle way traversing beyond the extremes of existence and non-existence, as stated in **the Mahā Kaccā(ya)na,gotta Sutta**:

This world, Kaccāna, for the most part, depends on a duality—upon the notion of existence and the notion of non-existence.<sup>60</sup> But for one who sees the origin of the world as it really is with right wisdom, there is no notion of non-existence with regard to the world. And for one who sees the ending of the world as is really is with right wisdom, there is no notion of existence in regard to the world.<sup>61</sup>

(S 12.15/2:17 qu at S 22.90/3:134 f)

Our daily life, from the moment we wake up, is ruled by a computer-like series of 1’s and 0’s—the ones representing things we want to do and the zeroes those that we rather not do—and we are often torn between the two so that by the day’s end, we find that we are really nowhere. That is, we if take the time and wisdom to examine our life. Understandably such an existence is cyclic and meaningless because one has unwittingly surrendered one’s inner goodness to the mood swings between one-upmanship and anxiety, or in spiritual terms, between covetousness (*abhijjhā*) and aversion (*domanassa*).<sup>62</sup>

On a deeper existential level, we tend to have a very narrow notion of existence and non-existence. We often hold the simplistic notion that “I” exist simply because “I” am here, and we cling to our experience of ourselves as something physical, substantial and independent of us and others. “I think, therefore I am,”<sup>63</sup> as Descartes puts it, which by the very same argument, means that the “I” is just as impermanent and unpredictable as one’s thought.

Holding on to such an enduring notion of self, one then fears one might not, after all, be real, or worse, one would be annihilated after death.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, as in the case of the materialist, one hopes for

<sup>59</sup> According to Brahmavaṃso (2003b:59 f), *sandiṭṭhika* (in this life) and *akālika* (timeless) are synonymous, and quotes **Samiddhi S** (S 1.20/1:9) and other passages (S 4.21/1:117; M 70.4/1:474) to prove it. See S:B 754 n103.

<sup>60</sup> See S:B 734 n29.

<sup>61</sup> See S:B 735 n30.

<sup>62</sup> These two represent the first two hindrances (*nīvaraṇā*) to mental focus. See eg **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22.1/2:290), esp n on *abhijjhā,domanassaṃ* ad loc in SD 13.2.

<sup>63</sup> Interestingly the original Latin of the quote, *cogito, ergo sum*, like Pali and Sanskrit does not show the pronoun “I,” but which needs to be shown in English tr.

<sup>64</sup> The ideas of self-protection and self-preservation are psychologically deep-rooted in humans. For self-protection, man creates God, on whom he depends for his own safety and security, just as a child depends on its parents.

self-annihilation at death, and hence one is absolved of all the evil that one has done, as it were. In reality, man's greatest fear is *dukkha*, the intrinsic unsatisfactoriness of the world. This is in fact the Buddha's first noble truth. And the way out of this duality of existence and annihilation is the "middle way".

In popular Buddhism, we often link "the middle way" to the noble rightfold path.<sup>65</sup> **R Gethin** notes that "This 'middle' would seem to be rather more significant for the subsequent development of Buddhist thought than the specific notion of the *ariyo atthaṅgiko maggo* as the middle way between sensual indulgence and self-torment" (Gethin 2001:200 f). **A K Warder**, for example, points out that this is best exemplified in **Nāgārjuna's** *Mūla, madhyamaka Kārikā*, where dependent arising appears to represent the "middle way" par excellence.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the most frequently quoted and most important canonical text for Nāgārjuna is apparently the *Nidāna Saṃyutta* (book 12 of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*), especially **the Kaccānagotta Sutta** (S 12.15/2:17).

### 13 Cycles within the Wheel

Both **Buddhaghosa** and **Nāgārjuna** agree on the division of dependent arising into three rounds or cycles (*vaṭṭa*) (Vism 581; Mahā.prajñā, pāramitā Śāstra, T 1509.100b). The first is the "defilement cycle" (*kilesa.vaṭṭa*) comprising of ignorance, craving and clinging. This cycle is the basis for personality-belief (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*) and spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*). In relation to the sense worlds, this means the desire for sense-pleasures (that is, attachment to visual objects, sounds, etc). In the higher realms it refers to attachment to form existence and to formless existence.

The "karma cycle" (*kamma, vaṭṭa*) comprises volitional activities and existence (here known as *kamma, bhava*). This cycle refers to the willful activities involving the ten unwholesome courses of conduct<sup>67</sup> and the ten bases of meritorious actions.<sup>68</sup> In the higher realms, it refers to wholesome actions leading to and performed in the form worlds and the formless worlds.

The "karmic-result cycle" (*vipāka, vaṭṭa*) comprises consciousness, name-and-form, the six senses, contact and feeling. This cycle refers to the resultant aggregates (*khandha*) in the sense-world, the form world and the formless world.

The cycle can be applied *synchronically*, that is, to **a single life-time of a human being**. In this case, the twelve links are systematically divided up into sets of three. Thus, ignorance, volitional activities and consciousness form the "cognitive being" (Skt *jñāna, vajra*) triad. This represents one's childhood and therefore has the least conflict.

The second triad is that of name-and-form (on a simple level, mind and body), the six senses, and contact, which form the "physical being" (*kāya, vajra*), representing one's adolescence with middling conflicts. The third triad comprises feeling, craving and clinging forming the "communicative being" (*vāg, vajra*), representing one's adulthood with deep conflicts. And the fourth triad is made of existence, birth, and decay-and-death, which form the "mental being" (*citta, vajra*), representing one's senility with serious conflicts. (Guenther, *Tibet Buddhism in Western Perspective*, Dharma, 1977:103 ff.)

### 14 A history of the Wheel of Life

The earliest reference to dependent arising as a wheel or a circle is that by **Buddhaghosa** in his works, the **Visuddhi.magga** and **Vibhanga Commentary**, where he speaks of a round of rebirths (*samsāra.cakka*, Vism 163 165) and of a wheel of existence (*bhava.cakka*) (Vism 451 493 f; VbhA 138 194).<sup>69</sup> **Buddhaghosa**

For self-preservation, man invents the immortal soul. See Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 2nd ed Bedford: Gordon Fraser 1967. NY: Grove Press 1974:51. For further discussion, see "Is there a soul?" SD 2.16.

<sup>65</sup> See eg **Dhamma.cakka-p.pavattana S** (S 56.11) in SD 1.1 esp Introd.

<sup>66</sup> A K Warder, "Is Nāgārjuna a Mahāyānist?" in *The Problem of Two Truths in Buddhism and Vedānta*, ed M Sprung, Dordrecht, 1973:79, 81.

<sup>67</sup> *Dasa akusala kamma, patha* (M 1:287; A 5:266, 275-278; Abhs:BRS 5.22): 3 actions of body, 4 of speech, 3 of mind; see eg (**Kusalākusala**) **Saṅcetanika S** (A 10.26/5:292-297) in SD 3.9 (2003).

<sup>68</sup> *Dasa puñña, kiriyā vatthu* (DA 3:999; Abhs:BRS 5.24, Abhs:SR 146).

<sup>69</sup> Cf Skt *anādi, bhava.cakraka*, "the beginningless wheel of existence" (Mañjuśrī, mūla, kalpa 434).

sa compares the links of the wheel of life to a blind man and his predicament. (1) A blind man (2) stumbles and (3) falls. His fall results in (4) a wound (5) that festers and (6) hurts resulting in (7) pain. The person (8) longs for a cure, and (9) gets the wrong ointment which he (10) applies and (11) causes a change to the wound which (12) bursts as a result. (Vism 582 f; VbhA 196).

**The Sarvāsti,vāda** (“All Exist” school) regards all causes and effects of the wheel as identical. Buddhist philosophers like Nāgārjuna and Aryadeva interpret this law as the pure relativity of the Middle Way (*madhyama.pratipāda*), identical with emptiness (*sūnyatā*) (Mādhyama.kārikā 14.1-6).

**The Vijñāna,vāda** (“Consciousness Only” school) sometimes take this law to mean the process of the manifestation of all phenomena out of the fundamental “Store” Consciousness (*ālaya,vijñāna*). The Huayen or Kegon (Avatāmsaka) school of China and Japan interpret dependent arising as the interpenetration of all things in the universe throughout the past, present and future, asserting that nothing can exist by themselves and that all things are interrelated and interdependent.

In the Mahāyāna texts, dependent arising first found artistic expression in the form of a wheel in chapter 21 (*śahasōdgatāvadāna*) of **the Divyāvadāna** (a Mahāyāna life of the Buddha). According to a Mahāyāna tradition, the Buddha gave instructions for the drawing of the wheel as a result of **Mahā Maudgalyāyāna**’s psychic journeys into the various realms and returning with reports regarding how the deceased had fared according to their karma. The wheel was to act as a visual aid to and reminder of the true nature of existence. The Tibetan Tanjur (“Translated Treatises”), however, attributes the painting of the first such drawings to **Nāgārjuna** (bsTan-hgyur, go 32; quoted by Lama Govinda, 1960:245n).

According to the Mahāyāna tradition, the Buddha is said to have instructed that a five-spoked wheel (representing **the five destinies**, *pañca.gati*) be drawn over the gateway of the Bamboo Forest outside Rājagrha. The hells were depicted in the bottom sector, the animals and the hungry ghosts above that and the gods and the human beings the two top sectors. Also depicted were the four ancient continents: Purva,-videha, Aparā, godaniya, Uttara, kuru and Jambu, dvīpa. The tradition of “the five destinies” is a common one as it is also found in many places in the Pali Canon,<sup>70</sup> but where the six realms (incorporating the asuras) [15] are not mentioned.

At the wheel’s hub are represented lust (a red dove), hate (a green snake) and delusion (a black pig). On the perimeter of the hub, apparitional beings are depicted by means of a windlass as passing away and being reborn. On the outer perimeter, following the hours of a clock, are depicted the twelve links in direct and reverse order. A figure of the Buddha is shown hovering above the wheel pointing to the moon and the way out, that is, the escape (nirvana) from this cyclic existence. The whole wheel is depicted as being gripped in the maw of Impermanence (Skt *anityatā*) or Time (*kāla* or *mahā,kāla*, or, according to later tradition, in the grasp of Yama, the Lord of the Underworld), and two verses are inscribed (on a panel) thus:

Exert yourself! Go forth (into the houseless state)!  
Apply yourself to the Buddha's Teaching!  
Smite away the Army of Death  
As an elephant (smites) a house of reeds!  
Whoever in this Doctrine and Discipline  
Lives heedfully  
Abandoning the cycle of births  
Shall make an end of pain. (Divy 300 = S 1:157)

## 15 Structure of the Wheel of Life

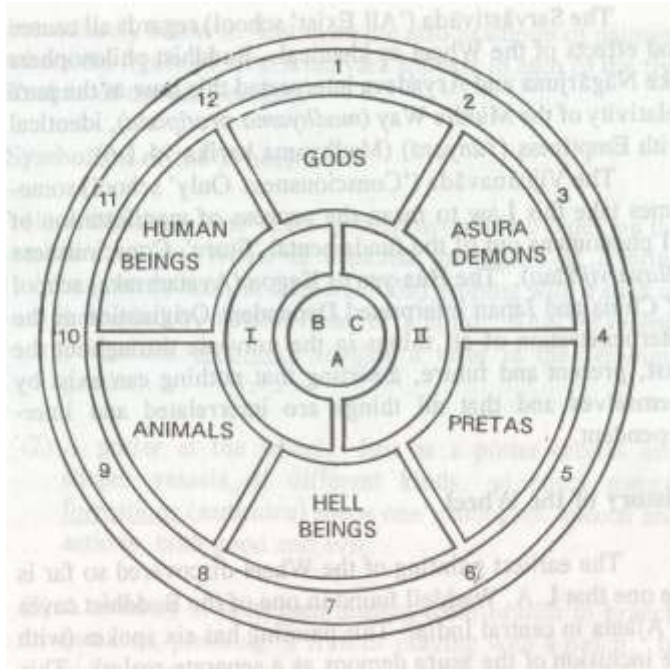
The outermost circle containing the drawings of figures 1-12 represents the twelve links of dependent arising. [14]

The second inner circle represents **the six realms** (ie the traditional five realms and the asura or titan realm). Only five realms (*pañca,gati*) are mentioned in the Pali Canon [14]. According to the Pali Com-

<sup>70</sup> D 33.2.1(4)/3:234; M 12.35-36/1:73; S 56.102-131/5:474; A 9.68/4:459; also Vism 443 passim.

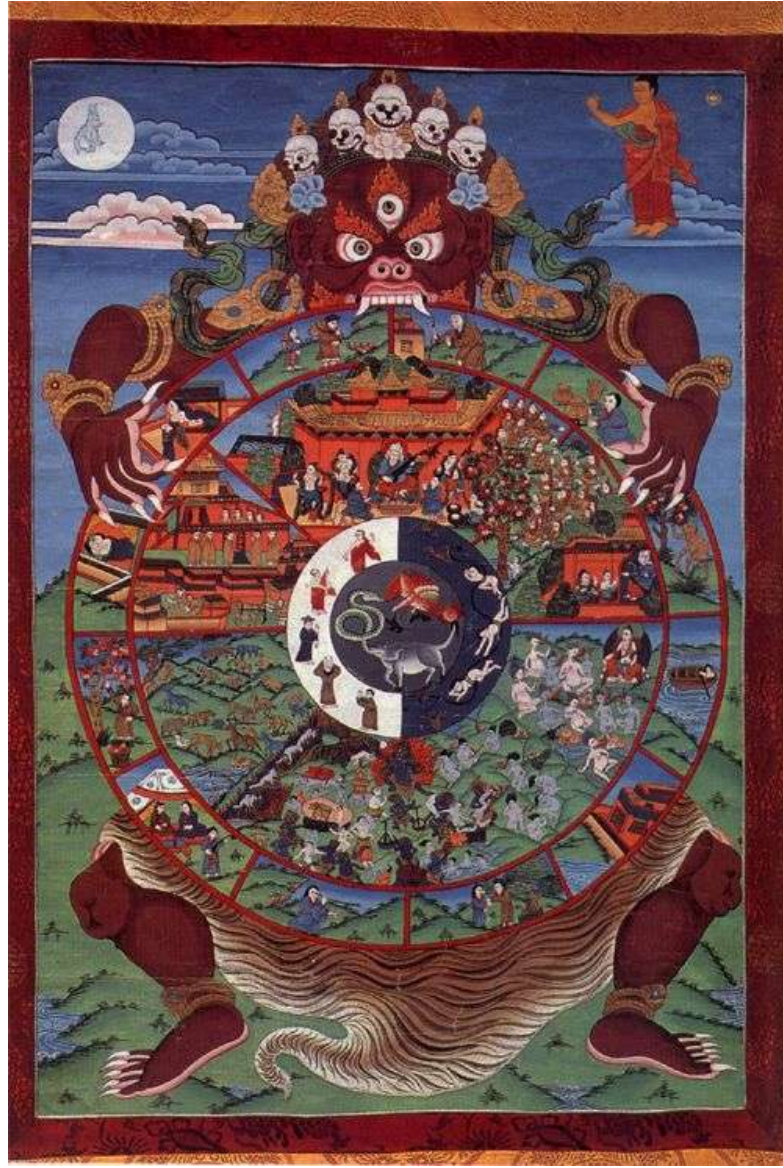
mentaries, the titans (*asura*) or “fallen gods” are classed with the hell-beings (DA 3:1061; UA 140, 418; ItA 1:73, 101, 2:118).<sup>71</sup>

Sectors I and II represents **the cycle of rebirth** (*samsāra*). Sector I (usually white) depicts beings floating upwards towards higher births (eg from a poorly dressed man to a beautifully attired god). Sector II (usually coloured black) carries on from Sector I showing beings tumbling down towards lower realms.



The hub of the wheel contains **three animals**: (A) a black pig (ignorance), (B) a green snake (hatred), and (C) a red rooster (greed), each biting the other’s tail reflecting their interrelationship and neurotic inter-reaction or co-dependency.

<sup>71</sup> The Paṭisambhidā, magga Comy, however, defines “the plane of misery” (*apāya*) as comprising the hells, animals, departed ghosts and asuras (PmA 2:411), all of which however comprise “the lower realm” (*vinipāta*) (ThīA 282).



**Table 4**

Schematic representation of the Tibetan Wheel of Life [see previous page]

## 16 History of the Wheel

The earliest painting of the Wheel discovered so far is the one that the British orientalist and archaeologist Lawrence A Waddell (1854-1938) found in one of the Buddhist caves of Ajanta in central India. This painting has six spokes (the sixth representing the asura demons). This Ajanta painting is believed to belong to the 6th century CE.

The Tibetan version of the Wheel is said to be a copy of one brought to Tibet by the Indian monk, Bande Yeshe, in the 8th century CE. This picture is to be found at the entrance of almost every gumpa or temple in Tibet. There are two versions of the Tibetan painting—the “old” and the “new.” The new version has a figure of Avalokiteśvara in each of the six realms and in a few of them depict the causes of rebirth and the position of the Buddha figure differently. The dove is replaced by a red rooster.

In the new version of the Tibetan wheel drawing, the realms are laterally inverted, that is, the asura host are depicted at 2 o’clock with the ghost realm immediately below, and the human realm at 10 o’clock with

the animal kingdom immediately below it. But there are also examples of paintings where the figure of Avalokiteśvara appears in each of the five realms of the old version.

## 17 Symbolism in the Wheel

(1) **A blind person.** Starting from noon to 1 o'clock on the rim of the Wheel is depicted the figure of a blind woman (a man, in later tradition) groping with a stick or being led by another man or a child. This represents primordial ignorance (*avijjā*, a term in the feminine gender).

(2) **A potter** at the wheel. Just as a potter creates and shapes vessels of different kinds, so one's volitional activities (*saṅkhāra*) shape one's thoughts, speech and actions, both good and evil.

(3) **A monkey** is then seen leaping from branch to branch in a tree, plucking a fruit or playing with a peach. In older versions, the monkey is seen entering a house. This represents our consciousness (*viññāna*) which jumps of one mental object to another, never remaining still for a moment.

(4) **A boat** with a man, sometimes two or four of them. One of them is seen steering and another on the lookout. This is the symbolism of the "name-and-form" (*nāma.rūpa*) dichotomy. The boat represents the body aggregate (*rūpa,k-khandha*) and the four men represent the four mental aggregates (*nāma-k,khandha*) or feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness.

(5) **A house with five windows and a door**, or six empty houses (in the older version). These represent our five physical senses and the mind (the door), together constituting the six senses (*saḷāyatana*).

(6) **Two lovers** locked in a passionate embrace representing the contact (*phassa*) between the sense-faculties and their external sense-objects.

(7) **A man with an arrow stuck in his right eye**, screaming out in pain. The older version shows both his eyes pierced. This is feeling (*vedanā*) which results from the contact of the senses with their objects.

(8) **A thirsty man** or a drunkard being served by a woman. This symbolizes craving (*taṇhā*), especially craving for agreeable sense-experiences and a thirst for pleasure.

(9) **A person plucking fruits** from a tree and gathering them into a basket. The older version has a monkey snatching a fruit. This picture represents the clinging (*upādāna*) after ever more of the desirable objects.

(10) **A man and a woman coupling** or (in the older version) a pregnant woman. This represents the process of existence (*bhava*).

(11) **A woman in giving birth**, experiencing the pangs of bringing forth a new being. This represents rebirth (*jāti*).

(12) **A corpse** (with knees drawn up and wrapped in shrouds—in the Tibetan custom) carried by a man to the charnel ground, or, in later versions, six men carrying a large coffin. Decay, its attending ills and death (*jara.marāṇa*) are represented here.

## 18 Breaking out of the cycle

(A) **(Samuday'atthaṅga) Loka Sutta (S 12.44).** Since the dependent arising comprises links, if any of the links is broken or missing, it is possible that the cycle would be broken. As the links occur with such momentary rapidity, it is almost impossible for one to find a weak link. However, there is such a link, some say, that is, the link between feeling and craving.

It is at that brief moment when the present resultant phase has come to a culmination in feeling, but the present causal phase has not yet begun, that the issue of bondage and liberation is decided. If the response to feeling is governed by ignorance and craving, the round continues to revolve; if the response replaces craving with restraint, mindfulness, and methodical attention, a movement is made in the direction of cessation. (Bodhi, *The Great Discourse on Causation*, 1984:12)

This view, in fact, appears to be supported by the **(Samuday'atthaṅgama) Loka S (S 12.44)**, where the dependent arising is said to be broken "with the remainderless fading away and ending of that same craving comes cessation of clinging..."

And what, bhikshus, is the passing away<sup>72</sup> of the world?

Bhikshus, dependent on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. **The meeting of the three is contact.**

With contact as condition, there is feeling; with feeling as condition, there is craving.

**But with the remainderless fading away and ending of that same craving comes cessation of clinging;**

with the ending of clinging, there is the ending of existence;

with the ending of existence, there is the ending of birth;

with the ending of birth, there is the ending of decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.

Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.

—This, bhikshus, is the passing away of the world. (S 12.44/2:71-73)

**(B) Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta (M 38).** A similar passage but in greater detail is found in the conclusion of the Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta showing that the cycle of dependent arising can be broken just before craving arises, that is, between the feeling (*vedanā*) and craving (*taṇhā*) links:

On seeing a form with the eye, he does not lust after it if it is pleasurable. He does not dislike it if it is unpleasurable. He abides with mindfulness of the body established, with an immeasurable mind,<sup>73</sup> and he understands it as it really is the liberation of mind and the liberation by wisdom wherein those evil unwholesome states cease without remainder.

Having thus abandoned liking and disliking, whatever feeling he feels—whether pleasant or painful or neutral—he delights not in that feeling, does not welcome it, and does not remain holding on to it.

As he does not do so, delight in feelings does not arise and remain in him. With the non-arising of this delight, clinging ends [does not arise];

with the ending of clinging, existence ends;

with the ending of existence, birth ends;

with the ending of birth: decay and death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair end.

—Such is the ending [non-arising] of this whole mass of suffering.

On hearing a sound with the ear,...

On smelling a smell with the nose,...

On tasting a taste with the tongue,...

On feeling a touch with the body,...

On cognizing a mind-object with the mind, he does not lust after it if it is pleasurable. He does not dislike it if it is unpleasurable. He abides with mindfulness of the body established, with an immeasurable mind, and he understands it as it really is the liberation of mind and the liberation by wisdom wherein those evil unwholesome states cease without remainder.

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As he does not do so, delight in feelings does not arise and remain in him. With the non-arising of this delight, clinging ends [does not arise];

with the ending of clinging, existence ends;

with the ending of existence, birth ends;

with the ending of birth: decay and death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair end.

<sup>72</sup> “Passing away,” *atthaṅgama*, lit “going home, setting (of the sun).”

<sup>73</sup> Cf *aparitto mah’attā appamāṇa, vihārī* (A 1:249).

—Such is the ending [non-arising] of this whole mass of suffering. (M 38.40/1:270)

**The Dukkha Sutta** (S 12.43) similar begins the dependent arising with the ending of craving (but is more concise than the Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhata Sutta) and ends with a brief formula comprising **only the last four of the twelve links**, beginning with *Tassa-y-eva taṇhāya asesavirāganirodhā upādāna,nirodho...* (S 12.43.16/2:72 f).

**(C) Objection to feeling-craving as weak link.** However, not all scholars and teachers share this view, even amongst the more orthodox one. Brahmavaṃso, for example, disagrees:

Some Western Buddhists have proposed that the “forward” order of *Paṭicca-samuppāda* can be halted by “cutting” the process between *vedanā* and *taṇhā*. Often I have heard some suggest that rebirth can be avoided through using *sati* (mindfulness) on *vedanā* to stop it generating *taṇhā* and the following factors of *Paṭicca-samuppāda*. This is, in my understanding, misconceived on two grounds.

First, the “forward” order of *Paṭicca-samuppāda* was never intended to demonstrate how the process should be “cut.” The “forward” order is only meant to show how the process continues. The teaching on how the process is “cut,” or rather ceases, is the purpose reserved for the “reverse” order of *Paṭicca-samuppāda* or “Dependent cessation.”

Secondly, even though *vedanā* does not inevitably produce *taṇhā*, because it is not a sufficient condition, it is well stated by the Buddha that only when *avijjā* ceases once and for all does *vedanā* never generate *taṇhā*! This means that one doesn’t “cut” the process using *sati* on *vedanā*. *Sati* is not enough. The process stops from the cessation of *avijjā*, as Dependent Cessation makes abundantly clear. The cessation of *avijjā* is much more than the practice of *sati*.

(Brahmavaṃso 2003b:65)

The cycle of dependent arising, then, is broken with the destruction of ignorance. What happens when one breaks out of the chain of dependent arising?

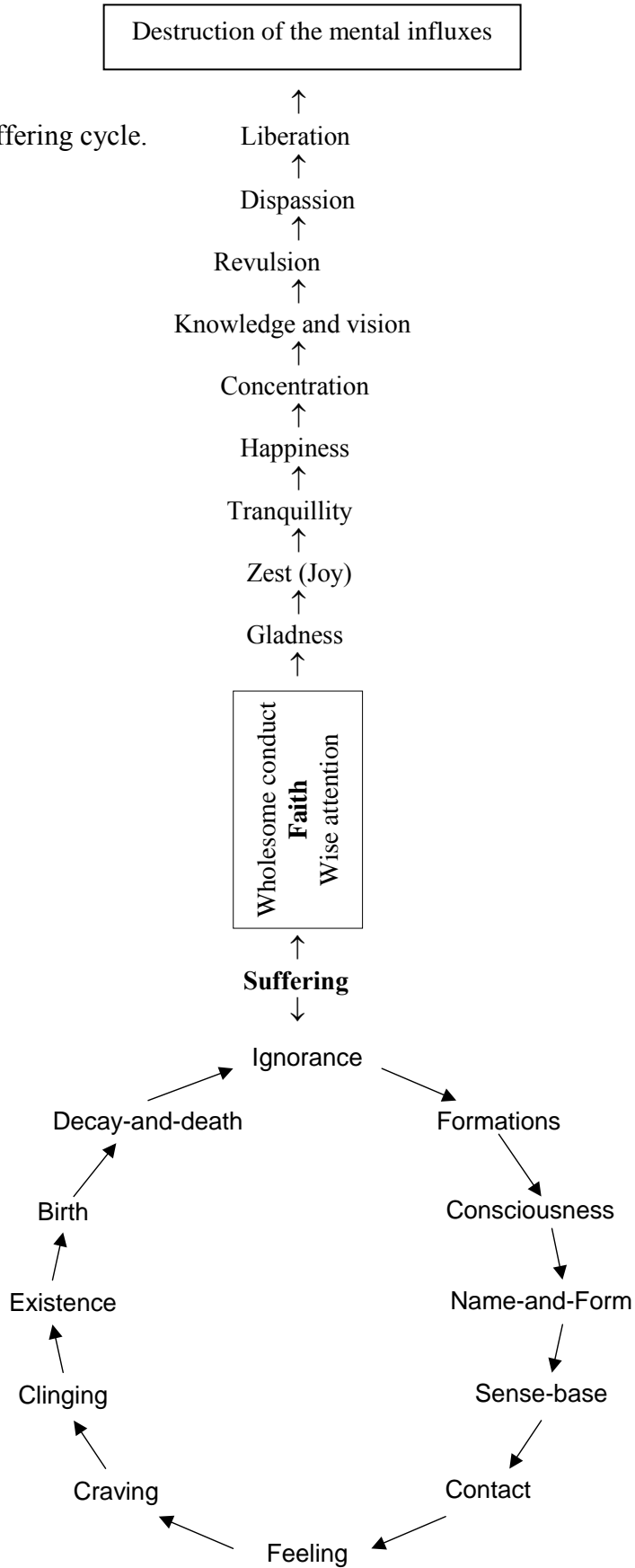
A remarkable but rarely quoted discourse in the Nidāna Saṃyutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya gives an insight on what happens when the chain is broken by providing a “positive” counterpart to the Wheel of Life. **The Upanisā Sutta** (S 12.23) gives three expositions of the “supramundane [transcendental] dependent arising” or “spiral path” out of the Wheel of Life. The first is given in reverse sequence; the second in a direct order (which is then repeated).<sup>74</sup>

Suffering is the condition for faith (*saddhā*);  
 Faith is the condition for gladness (*pamojja*);  
 Gladness is the condition for zest (*pīti*);<sup>75</sup>  
 Zest is the condition for tranquillity (*passaddhi*);  
 Tranquillity is the condition for happiness (*sukha*);  
 Happiness is the condition for concentration (*samādhi*);  
 Concentration is the condition for knowledge and vision of reality (*yathā,bhūta.ñāṇa.dassana*);  
 Knowledge and vision of reality is the condition for revulsion [disenchantment] (*nibbidā*);  
 Revulsion is the condition for dispassion [letting go of lust] (*virāga*);  
 Dispassion is the condition for liberation (*vimutti*); and  
 Liberation is the condition for the knowledge of the destruction of the influxes (*āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa*).  
 (S 12.23/2:29-32)

<sup>74</sup> See **Upanisā S** (S 12.23) = SD 6.12 & Bodhi, “Transcendental Dependent Arising,” 1980:14 f & Gethin 1998:157-159.

<sup>75</sup> “Zest.” *pīti*, also as “joy,” ie “joyful interest and energy.”

**Diagram 6.**  
Breaking out of the suffering cycle.



## 19 The purpose of dependent arising

**19a. Purposes.** The law of dependent arising is the most profound observations of the nature of existence ever formulated. It is therefore not surprising that differing purposes have been attributed to it. Most scholars agree that dependent arising explains unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and its ending, but this is only partly true.

A philosophical purpose of the law is to provide an empirical explanation of the causal and relative evolution of a *person* “in place of an explanation in terms of metaphysical first causes and final causes” (Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:451), thus avoiding the problems of the extremes of theism and atheism.

Brahmavaṃso discusses three purposes of dependent arising (2003b:69-83):<sup>76</sup>

- (a) To explain how there can be rebirth without a soul.
- (b) To answer the question, “What is life?”
- (c) To understand why there is suffering, and where suffering comes to an end.

**19b. Rebirth without a soul.** Dependent arising shows how a process empty of a soul flowing within one’s life and from one life into another, and over many lives. It also explains how karma one had done in a previous life can affect one in this life. According to dependent arising, rebirth is generated in two sequences:

1. ignorance (*avijjā*) + karma → the stream of consciousness beginning at rebirth (*viññāṇa*).
2. craving (*taṇhā*) + clinging/fuel (*upādāna*) → existence (*bhava*) + rebirth into that existence (*jāti*).

These parallel sequences describe the same process from two perspectives, which when combined reads:

Deluded *kamma* and craving produce the fuel which generates existence and rebirth (into that existence), thereby giving rise to the start of the stream of consciousness that is at the heart of the new life.  
(Brahmavaṃso 2003b:70)

Karma and craving, both under the sway of ignorance (or delusion), are the forces that propel the stream of consciousness into a new life. To illustrate this, Brahmavaṃso gives a delightful simile:

Someone goes to an airport to fly to another country. If they have enough money for the fare and they have a desire to go to a new country, then they may arrive in that land. If they have the fare but not the desire, or the desire but not the fare, or they lack both, then they will not arrive in that land. If they have the fare but not the desire, or the desire but not the fare, or they lack both, then they will not arrive in the new country.

In this simile: the person stands for the stream of consciousness; the airport stands for death; the new country stands for the next life; the fare stands for the person’s accumulated *kamma*; and their desire to go there stands for craving. With much good *kamma* and a craving for happiness, or just the craving to be, the stream of consciousness that one thinks of a “me” is propelled into one’s chosen next life.

But with much bad *kamma* and a craving for happiness, one cannot reach the happiness one wants, and thus one is propelled into an unsatisfactory next life. With much bad *kamma* and a craving for punishment, what we recognize in this life as a guilt complex, one falls into a next life of suffering.

Then with much good karma and no craving at all, one goes nowhere. Like the traveller at the airport, they have enough money to go wherever they want first-class, but the delusion [or ignorance] has been shattered and the desire that generated all this coming-and-going is no more. They cease at the airport.  
(Brahmavaṃso 2003b:70)

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<sup>76</sup> Buddhaghosa gives 4 points that arise from the teaching of dependent arising (VbhA 198 f). See Gethin, 1998:56.

Like **the (Kamma) Nidāna Sutta** (A 3.331:134 f), **the Bhava Sutta** (A 3.76) compares karma to seeds:

*Iti kho Ānanda kammaṃ khettaṃ viññāṇaṃ bījaṃ taṇhā sineho avijjā'avarāṇānaṃ sattānaṃ taṇhā,saṃyojanānaṃ hīnāya dhātuyā...majjhimāya dhātuyā...panitāya dhātuyā viññāṇaṃ patiṭṭhitaṃ. Evaṃ āyatinaṃ puna-b,bhavābhiniḅbatti hoti. Evaṃ kho Ānanda bhavo hotī ti.*

Thus, indeed, Ānanda, karma is the field, consciousness the seed and craving the moisture. For the consciousness of beings cloaked in ignorance and fettered by craving become established in a low realm ...in a middling realm...in an excellent realm. Thus there is further rebirth. Such, Ānanda, is existence. (A 3.76.1/1:223, abridged; see Matthews 1983:31 f)

### 19c. What is life?

(i) Duality. If there is no soul, then what is it that wills, thinks, feels or knows; what is it that is reborn? The answer lies in a remarkable text, **the Kaccāna,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15), which later plays a major role in the history of Buddhist philosophy through the works of **Nāgārjuna** (late 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE).

This world, Kaccāna, for the most part, depends on a duality—upon the notion of existence and the notion of non-existence. But for one who sees the origin of the world as it really is with right wisdom, there is no notion of non-existence with regard to the world. And for one who sees the ending of the world as is really is with right wisdom, there is no notion of existence in regard to the world. (S 12.15/2:17 qu at S 22.90/3:134 f) [12]

(ii) Dependent ending. When the Buddha states that it is untenable to hold that there is a self (or a soul or God) because an ending is seen, he is referring to the **dependent ending**: “with the remainderless fading away and ending of ignorance,...the ending of birth, there end decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair—such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering” (S 12.1).<sup>77</sup> It is this impersonal process that we identify as life.

Moreover, it includes all the ‘usual suspects’ that masquerade as a soul: the body (part of *nāma-rūpa*), will (part of the *kamma* formations [*saṅkhārā*], sometimes *taṇhā*), love (part of the *kamma* formations and mostly part of *upādāna*, clinging), consciousness (*viññāṇa*). These usual suspects are clearly seen in the light of Dependent Cessation as transient, insubstantial, granular and fading away soon after they arise. They are all conditioned. They exist as long as they are supported by external causes, which are themselves unstable. When the external supporting causes disappear, so do each of the usual suspects. Because these things do not persist, since they do not continue in being, it is untenable to hold that there is a soul, a self or a God.

(Brahmavariso 2003b:75)

By “granular” here, Brahmavariso means that dependent arising comprises of “tiny moments of consciousness, uncountable in number, close together but not touching, and each alone” like the sand on a beach that looks level and continuous, but which on closer examination reveal that the grains are really discrete particles (2003b:72 f).

(iii) Dependent arising. When the Buddha declares that it is also untenable to maintain that nothing exists because an arising is seen, by which he means **dependent arising**: “with ignorance as condition, there are volitional activities;...with birth as condition there arises decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair—such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.” (S 12.1).<sup>78</sup> Here again we seen an impersonal process that we identify as life. In this sense, life is real. Brahmavariso gives a very apt simile from his theoretical physics background:

A simile might help here. In mathematics a point is a concept drawn from the science of life. It describes aspects of real phenomena. Yet a point has no size. It is smaller than any measure

<sup>77</sup> S 12.1/ 2:1 f.

<sup>78</sup> S 12.1/ 2:1 f.

that you can suggest, yet it is bigger than nothing. In a sense, we cannot say a point is, because it does not persist, it does not continue in space Yet one cannot say it is not, as it is clearly different from nothing. The point is similar to the momentary nature of conscious experience. Nothing continues in being therefore it cannot be something. Something arises therefore it cannot be nothing. The solution to this paradox, the excluded middle, is the impersonal process.

(Brahmavamso 2003b:76)

**19d. Why suffering?** The main purpose of dependent arising is to explain why we suffer and to whom the way to end this suffering. As mentioned earlier [5], birth (*jāti*) produces suffering (*dukkha*). Therefore, the only escape from suffering is to cease from being reborn. As Sāriputta declares to the wanderer Sāmaṇḍakāni:

*Abhinibbatti kho āvuso dukkhā; anabhinibbatti sukhā.*

To be reborn, friends, is suffering; not to be reborn is happiness. (**Sukha Sutta**, A 10.65/5:120 f)

In the **Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26), the Buddha drops a broad hint on how suffering arises by making the wrong choices and seeking the wrong goals in life:

Here, someone being himself subject to birth, seeks what is also subject to birth; being himself subject to ageing, seeks what is also subject to ageing; being himself subject to sickness, seeks what is subject to sickness; being himself subject to death, seeks what is subject to death; being himself subject to sorrow, seeks what is subject to sorrow; being himself subject to defilement, seeks what is subject to defilement.

(M 26.5/1:161 f)

In the **Sukhumāla Sutta** (A 3.38), the Buddha recounts how powerful religious emotion (*samvega*) overcame him as a Bodhisattva when he reflected on the true nature of life:

(1) Bhikshus, amidst such splendour and wealth,<sup>79</sup> and because of such an exceedingly delicate life, this thought arose in me:

“An ignorant ordinary person, though by nature would himself age [decay] and being unable to escape ageing [decay], feels distressed, ashamed, disgusted<sup>80</sup> when seeing an old or aged person, being forgetful of himself [his own situation].

Now I, too, by nature, will age and cannot escape ageing. If, bhikshus, when seeing an old or aged person, I were to feel distressed, ashamed, disgusted, that would not be proper for one like myself.”

When I reflected thus, bhikshus, all my **intoxication with youth** vanished.

(2) (Again I reflected:)

“An ignorant ordinary person, though by nature would himself suffer disease and being unable to escape disease, feels distressed, ashamed, disgusted when seeing an ill person, being forgetful of himself.

Now I, too, by nature, will suffer disease and cannot escape disease. If, bhikshus, when seeing an ill person, I were to feel distressed, ashamed, disgusted, that would not be proper for one like myself.”

When I reflected thus, bhikshus, all my **intoxication with health** vanished.

(3) (Again I reflected:)

“An uninstructed ordinary person, though by nature would himself die and being unable to escape dying, feels distressed, ashamed, disgusted when seeing a dead person, being forgetful of himself.

<sup>79</sup> “Splendour and wealth,” *iddhi*, or in a word “majesty.”

<sup>80</sup> “Would feel pained, ashamed, disgusted,” *aṭṭiyeyyam harāyeyyam jeguccheyyam*. For fuller analyses of these terms, see **Kevalāḍḍha S** (D 11.5/1:213) = SD 1.7 n sv.

Now I, too, by nature will die and cannot escape dying. If, bhikshus, when seeing a dead person, I were to feel distressed, ashamed, disgusted, that would not be proper for one like myself.”

When I reflected thus, bhikshus, all my **intoxication with life** vanished. (A 3.38/1:145 f)<sup>81</sup>

This method of enquiry is known as *yoniso,manasikāra*, which literally means “working with the mind back to the source,” or more figuratively, “skillful consideration,” that is, thinking in terms of specific conditionality (cause and effect) and applying the three universal characteristics (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self).<sup>82</sup> Skillful consideration is said to fend off the mental influxes (*āsava*).<sup>83</sup> It is a condition for the arising of right view (M 43), of stream-winning<sup>84</sup> and of the awakening-factors.<sup>85</sup> Unskillful consideration (*ayoniso,manasikāra*) leads to the arising of the mental influxes<sup>86</sup> and of the mental hindrances.<sup>87</sup>

As already shown [6], birth is a sufficient cause for suffering, that is, birth *must* give rise to suffering. Every being that is born will become old, fall sick and die, all of which are painful in one way or another. In short, there is no perfect happiness to be found in any form of existence. As such, the Buddha declares:

Bhikshus, just as even a small bit of dung smells bad, even so I do not praise even a tiny bit of existence, not even for the length of a finger-snap. (A 1.18.13/1:34)



[Credit: S Marc Cohen, 2002]

Brahmavarṇso goes on to give a very witty simile, reminiscent of Plato’s cave allegory:<sup>88</sup>

A [group of persons are] born in a harsh prison, raised in that prison, who has spent all their time in the prison can only know prison life. They don’t even suspect that anything beyond their

<sup>81</sup> See further **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26) = SD 1.11(3); **Sukhumāla S** (S 3.38/145 f) = SD 63.7.

<sup>82</sup> S 5:2-30; A 1:11-31; It 9.

<sup>83</sup> M 2.5-10/1:7-9.

<sup>84</sup> D 33.1.11(13)/3:227.

<sup>85</sup> S 46.2/5:65-67, 46.49/5:101, 46.51/5:105 f.

<sup>86</sup> M 2.5-10/1:7-9.

<sup>87</sup> S 46.2/5:64 f; S 46.51/5:102 f.

<sup>88</sup> Plato’s cave allegory: Book 7 of *The Republic*. In the allegory, Plato likens people untutored in the Theory of Forms to prisoners chained in a cave, unable to turn their heads. All they can see is the wall of the cave. Behind them burns a fire. Between the fire and the prisoners there is a parapet, along which puppeteers can walk. The puppeteers, who are behind the prisoners, hold up puppets that cast shadows on the wall of the cave. The prisoners are unable to see these puppets, the real objects, that pass behind them. What the prisoners see and hear are shadows and echoes cast by objects that they do not see. (S Marc Cohen, 2002: <http://faculty.washington.edu/smcohen/320/cave.htm>)

prison can exist. So they make the best of [the] prison. Those who think positively, because they have gone to prison seminars, begin to think that the harsh prison is instead a wonderful place. They even compose songs like “All jails bright and beautiful...the good Lord made them all!” Others get involved in social service, compassionately decorating the prison cells of others. When someone gets tortured or otherwise punished in jail, they think something has gone wrong and look for someone to blame. If someone suggests that it is the very nature of [the] jail to be suffering, then they are dismissed as a pessimist and told to “Get a life!” One full moon night, a prisoner discovers a door leading out of the jail and goes through. Only then does he realize that [the] jail was inherently suffering and you can’t make it otherwise. He goes back to tell his fellow prisoners. Most don’t believe him. They can’t even imagine anything other than their jail. When he says that the jail is suffering and the cessation of imprisonment is happiness, he is accused by one and all of escapism... What’s wrong with escapism, especially when one realizes that the real world is the harsh prison. (Brahmavaṃso 2003b:78 f)

**19e. Origins of social disorder.** In the usual sequence, after giving craving as the condition for craving, contact as the condition for feeling would follow. Here, however, the Buddha introduces a variation. From feeling, he returns to craving and then, from craving a new series of nine factors are listed, each of which arises in dependence on its predecessor. This more down to earth sequence shows, as a result, how “there are born various evil unwholesome states” [9].<sup>89</sup> 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.<sup>90</sup> Thus craving not only brings further rebirth with personal pains, but also causes various unwholesome conditions leading to social disorder.<sup>91</sup>

**19f. Universal implications.** WS Waldron, in his interesting paper, “The dependent of a cognitive unconscious in Buddhism and science” (2002), discusses, besides the “dependent arising of awareness,” examines dependent arising in connection with “how circular causality brings forth a world” (2002:145 f) and the problem of language (2002:148-153). One important observation Waldron makes is this:

...in the biological view,...the very minds and bodies we embody today reflect the gradually accumulated results of reproductively successful interactions between our forebears and their natural and social environments. As with our analysis of cognitive awareness, evolutionary theory here shifts our attention from the arising of entities to the recurrent patterns of interaction. What “evolves,” biological philosophers Maturana and Varela observe, “is always a unit of interactions” (1980:12), neither the organism by itself, and certainly not the environment alone, but rather the organism-in-environment. In other words, it is *patterns of interaction* that evolves, representing for each species an “evolution of [its] cognitive domains.” And, similarly and reciprocally, the evolution of its cognitive domain is the evolution of the “world”—for that kind of organism—a process Maturana and Varela call a “structural coupling with the world.”

(Waldron 2002:146; footnotes omitted.)

He significantly concludes his paper with these insightful words:

For once we start thinking of organisms as complex dynamic organizations interacting in patterned relationships with their environments, our older, ultimately alienating, models of

<sup>89</sup> See **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15.9/2:58 f).

<sup>90</sup> Well known examples of the causal origins of social problems are found in **the Aggañña S** (D 27/3:80-98), **the Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda S** (D 26/3:57-79, esp 26.14-22/3:67-75) and **the Vāseṭṭha S** (Sn 594-656): see discussion in Payutto 1994:73-75. Other suttas that investigate the causal conditions behind social disorder are **Sakka,pañha S** (D 21), **Mahā Dukkha-k,khandha S** (M 13) and **Kalaha,vivāda S** (Sn 4.11). Despite their differences in formulation, they all come to the same conclusion.

<sup>91</sup> Comy labels the two side of craving as “craving which is the root of The rounds” (*vaṭṭa,mūla,taṇhā*) and “obsessional craving” (*samudācāra,taṇhā*) (DA 2:500).

human beings, as autonomous agents unilaterally acting on, or passively being acted upon, an independent, external and pre-existing world becomes limited at best and misleading at worst. The constructive power of these models comes not only from the idea that we can understand living processes better by understanding the patterns of interaction through which they arise, that is, their “dependent arising,” but also from the notion that we are collectively responsible for the world we continuously construct together. For if we are not really trapped inside our heads, but are causally as well as cognitively intersubjective through and through, then it matters indeed which particular concepts, categories and classifications we produce, proclaim and protect. (Waldron 2002:152 f; footnotes omitted.)

## 20 Summary

The teaching of dependent arising is to show the causal relationship or interdependence of psychological and existential factors. Its purpose is to show how suffering (both personal and social) arises and how it can be overcome [19e]. From the varying lengths of the dependent arising formulae and their components found in the Nikāyas, it is clear that no strict causality and no strict time sequence was intended, and that the sequence could be taken to occur in a single thought moment [3, 9], within a single life or over three lives (or more) [8, 10].

In explaining how the human situation arises from an interaction of causes and effects, the law of dependent arising avoids the extremes of fatalism and of determinism (A 1:173). And putting ignorance as the basis of the causal chain, the law need not resort to the theory of chance (A 3:440) or fortuitous origination (D 1:27), or of moral licence and bondage (A 3:440).<sup>92</sup> Dependent arising is primarily used to explain karma and rebirth without resorting to the two extremes of Upanishadic eternalism (“eternal self-identical soul”) and of Amoral Materialism (which denies survival after death and moral responsibility). dependent arising is a universal law, when reflected upon and applied to one’s daily life, would liberates one’s mind.

The law of dependent arising serves as a heuristic method of “self-discovery” method by which one could see the causal process of the arising of the illusion of a “person” and of pain without resorting to the extreme notions of “being” (everything is) and “non-being” (nothing is), and the extremes of monism (all is one) and pluralism (all things are different) (S 2:77). For, if any of the causal links is broken, the whole wheel stops turning. In other words, it is possible for one to get out of this cyclic rut.

Nirvana is the ending of existence (*bhava,nirodho nibbānam*). (**Kosambi Sutta**, S 12.68/2:177)




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<sup>92</sup> See B C Law, *Concepts of Buddhism*, Delhi: Gian, 1986:20 f & B Barua, *A History of Pre-Buddhistic Indian Philosophy*, 1921, repr 1970:77 ff.

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