

1 How Can We Escape from the Cycle of Rebirth?

The Essence of Buddhism

Before his ordination, the venerable Saributra asked the venerable Assaji (one of the Group of First Five Disciples) what Buddhism taught. The venerable Saributra replied: whatever was produced by causation, Lord Buddha had explained the causes as well as complete extinction of such existence resulting from elimination of the causes. The great disciple's answer has been considered to be the briefest summary of Buddhist doctrine.

This summary points out that all phenomena arise from causes. When the causes are eradicated, the phenomenon vanishes. Life, birth, aging, death, and other sufferings come from causes; that is, they have been originally developed through craving. Without causes, they cannot happen. Life, birth, aging, death, and all sufferings which are the results of the causes are extinguished once the causes are removed.

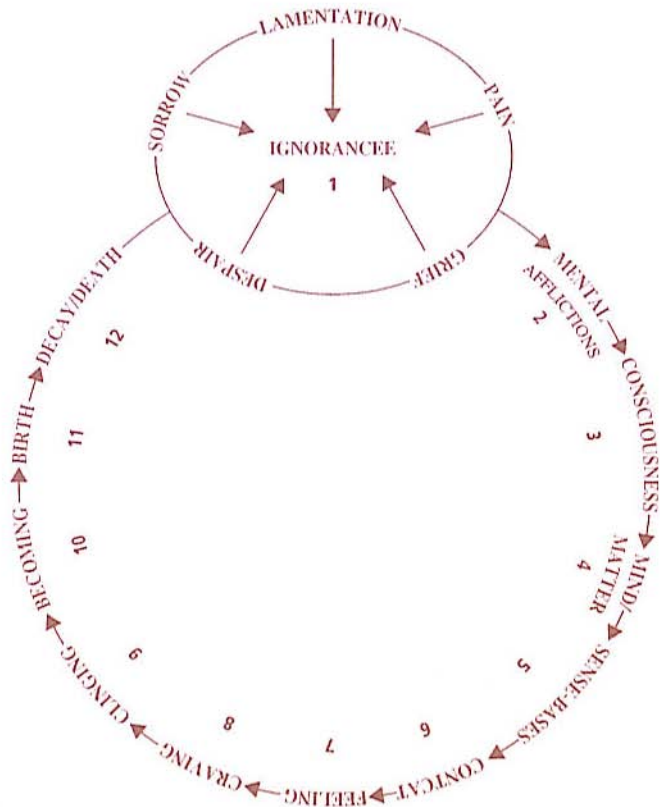
The question is whether it is true that human beings are born and pass away repeatedly in rounds of existence. What causes our birth? Why is the cycle of rebirth ended, and when suffering is eliminated?

These complicated questions are immensely difficult to understand.

Lord Buddha provided a detailed explanation in the theory called “the Law of Dependent Origination.” A crucial law of nature, dependent causation of all phenomena initiates and perpetuates our lives.

Studying the principle of Dependent Origination, we find that the original cause of all sufferings such as aging, death, sorrows, lamentation, grief, physical pain, and mental afflictions is *avijja*, or ignorance. According to this law the chain of arising is as follows:

From ignorance arise mental afflictions
From mental afflictions arises consciousness.
From consciousness arise mind and matter.
From mind and matter arise the six sense-bases.
From the six sense-bases arises contact.
From contact arises feeling.
From feeling arises craving.
From craving arises clinging.
From clinging arises becoming.
From becoming arises birth.
From birth arises decay, death, sorrow,
lamentation, pain, grief, and despair.



Birth is suffering. The more we contemplate this fact, the more suffering we discern. We have seen so much and such intense suffering that it is beyond our description. Without reforming ourselves, that is without practice which guides us through the labyrinth and power of conditioned arising, we will be besieged by excessive and severe suffering, as we were in the past.

Aware of this, what should we do to escape the power of dependent origination or rounds of rebirth? Being born again and again in the cycle of rebirth is excruciating pain. Why is it painful? Considering only one lifetime, we can see clearly that there is no stability after birth. We are bound to get old, be sick, and die finally.

We cannot be born according to our will. Birth is the result of volitional actions. There are meritorious actions and unwholesome actions. If we happen to engage in an unwholesome action, we will certainly suffer from its result. In this way, all of us have been born immeasurable number of times.

It has been pointed out that we are born into woeful states more frequently than into blissful states. This is easily confirmed by the greater number of beings born as animals rather than as humans.

As we have been born human, have found Buddhism, and have learned the practical way to free from suffering, we should be proud of these great blessings. And, therefore, we should follow Lord Buddha's instruction by beginning our practice of insight meditation, in order to be liberated from the horrible and frightening suffering.

There have been numerous examples of the disciples who, having followed the Lord Buddha, were liberated from suffering. Practicing insight meditation does not require material investments. We need only determination and then begin to practice the way recommended by the Lord Buddha. Besides, there are many good meditation teachers nowadays who can help students / meditators.

How does dependent origination turn us around an endless cycle? This is an exemplification. When the sensitive part of the eye sees a visible object, what we call **eye consciousness** takes place. The sensitive part of the eye is comprised of visual nerves. Visible objects are objects of various colors. When visual nerves and visible objects make contact, seeing the objects takes place. Seeing the objects is called eye consciousness.

When an object is seen, the mind becomes fond of or is displeased, with it. In this way, the process of dependent origination begins.

Lord Buddha taught us to interrupt dependent origination, or conditioned arising, and not let it exert its power on us.

How can we interrupt it?

When an object is seen, it means that eye-consciousness arises from the encounter of eye nerves and the visible object. Then contact occurs; in this case, it is visual contact.

When contact occurs, feeling -- pleasure and displeasure -- results. Letting this cycle go on normally means being influenced by dependent origination.

This is the practical method which prevents dependent origination from drawing us into its cycle:

Not letting it lead to feeling, we must cut it when contact happens -- through seeing with mindfulness. Just see, and do not go beyond it to "we see" or "I see." Do not take what we see as male or female, good or bad, pleasing or displeasing. Acknowledge and contemplate seeing with mindfulness and stop the cycle at the point of contact (between the mind and the visible object). Keep practicing in this way.

In Fact, both the work of the sensitive part of the eye and the visual object happen in a moment and then they vanish. When they make contact, eye-consciousness happens in a flash and ceases instantly.

Thus, if meditators strive to acknowledge seeing as just seeing, the chain of dependent origination is finished and does not go on to "we see" or "I

see.” Being cut at the point of contact, the cycle of dependent origination stops turning.

Then, there are no more factors to cause feeling and craving. Meditators keep practicing this process in order to frequently interrupt the cycle of dependent origination. Eventually, as wisdom becomes stronger it can completely cut this cycle.

Thus, meditators should make an effort to cut the cycle of dependent origination at the point of contact.

To be aware of external objects, all of us all over the world have six sense-organs: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. While we are awake, through the sense-organs, the six sensory-objects appear to us: sight, sound, odor, taste, tactile objects, and mind-objects.

If meditators are not cautious, external objects will bombard and dominate them with the power of dependent origination.

Meditators should carefully watch over sensory organs in the way pointed out by Lord Buddha, not allowing feelings to arise. This is the way to stop dependent origination in all the sensory organs and sensory objects.

There are two kinds of objects of consciousness: those of conventional truth and those of absolute truth. Sensory objects of conventional truth arise in this way: a visible object is allowed to appear as male or female, good or bad, pleasing or displeasing. Thus, feeling arises. Then come craving and attachment successively. Seeing external objects as men or women is holding them as conventional truth, which is common among ordinary people.

However, if meditators take note of seeing as just seeing, it ceases naturally, unable to further cause feeling. Acknowledging the sensory object that arises in time to prevent the conventional truth causes the sensory object to manifest absolute truth.

Sensory-objects of conventional truth become real through a person's supposition. They are not true

in the absolute sense. On the other hand, absolutely true sensory objects are naturally real.

Meditators who keep acknowledging the body/mind can be certain of dwelling only in absolute truth. Conventional truth cannot arise, and as a result the cycle of dependent origination is interrupted, unable to continue. Because the cycle is stopped upon contact, feeling and craving cannot take place.

Taking notes only of sensory objects with absolute truth, and not allowing the arising of sensory objects with agreed truth, is considered to be the *right view*. Once “seeing” is noted, the noble eightfold path occurs simultaneously.

When the eightfold path is considered in practical terms, the “right view” is compared to the engine of a train. The other seven components are the seven cars of a train placed in order. When the engine moves, it pulls the first car to follow. The first car then pulls the second one, the second one in turn pulls the third one, and the other cars work successively in this way until the seventh car is moved. When all seven

cars run quickly at the same time, they form one train which can reach the destination simultaneously.

The noble eightfold path works in the same way. When right view takes place, right concentration arises. When right concentration occurs, right wisdom arises. Because of right wisdom, right liberation happens. That is, defilements are destroyed in Knowledge of the Path.

In this way, the entire noble eightfold path arises in one sensory object.

At this point of the meditation practice, the chain of dependent origination is severed, unable to lead the meditator's mind through its whole cycle. In this way the massive suffering is also ended. Usually human beings endlessly repeat going around the cycle of rebirth in the same way as ants walking around a cup's rim. Practice of acknowledging the contact between sensory organs and sensory objects can prevent human beings from the cycle of rebirth, and thus they can finish their part on the world stage.

“Monks, tell me
what cannot be achieved
through efforts.”

Dhamma that leads the mind away from hinderances is called tranquility meditation. Dhamma that helps one gain insight into the heart of matters and see them as impermanent, subject to suffering and non-self, is called insight meditation.

Nibbana

Lord Buddha preached:

“Ananda, neither knowledge nor ignorance can be used as measurement. The only measurement is the abandoning of defilements. To reach nibbana one needs only to abandon defilements. After having abandoned defilements, one can reach nibbana.”

The sun-rise is preceded
by the golden light on the horizon.

The dawn of the noble path is
likewise preceded by the precepts.

“Monks,

Nibbana exists

The way to nibbana exists.

The one who shows the way exists.

If you do not strive, how can you reach nibbana?”

Infinite knowledge cannot be compared
to a single time of practice.

Having listened to dhamma, practice it.

Having listened to dhamma, don't ignore it.

Not practiced, dhamma is wasted.

Which road should be taken?

At the intersection, which way should be taken?

One is the route of greed, lust, and
ambition -- the repeated cycle of rebirth.

The other is the route to the true goal
of life -- the end of life, termination
of suffering, and nibbana.

Mundane ones -- attached to
the world -- seek what exists
and dwell within it.

Supramundane ones -- rising
above the world -- look
for nothing and abide in nothingness.

Noble Ones

All the noble ones do what others cannot possibly do, endure what others cannot possibly endure, and overcome what others cannot possibly overcome.

Thus they achieve what others cannot possibly achieve.

