

PATICCA SAMUPPADA

By Ven Ambalangoda Chandrasiri Thera

The Paticca Samuppada, the law of Dependant Origination is one of the very important teachings of the Buddha Dhamma. It is essential to the proper understanding of the law of impermanence - Anicca, which pervades throughout existence, inexorably and most pitilessly. "It is at once a general explanation of phenomena and an explanation of the special phenomenon of Evil. The value of the series does not lie in the fact that it explains Evil, but in the fact that the right understanding of the casual origination constitutes that very insight by which the source of evil – the consciousness of I and the desire of the I is destroyed."

The why and the where of the incessant suffering, to which all beings are subject to, could be realised only when one understands the universality of the law of Dependant Origination. Sariputta, the Chief Disciple of Buddha, was able to grasp the full meaning of the teaching of Buddha when Assaji Thero, in reply to Sariputta's Question as to what the teaching of the Master was, declared.

“Of those conditions which spring from a cause”

The cause has been told by Thathagatha,
And the manner of their suppression
The great Samana has likewise taught"

“Who so knows the Dependent Origination knows the truth (and who so knows the truth) knows the Dependant Origination." All misconceptions of life could be removed and the proper path sighted, only through the understanding of Dependent Origination.

Many a man had vainly attempted to solve the problem of life. The pendulum of thought had swung from one extreme of self-indulgence to the other extreme of self-torture, taking man more and more to the dark abyss of ignorance. All that these religious teachers could do was to posit the consciousness of an Ego entity and consequently the idea of a creator as God or Brahma. This has been ingrained into man so deeply that today, as of the past, the greatest obsession is the fetter of Sakkaya Ditthi and the Doubt regarding the law of Dependent Origination.

Life is an endless process of becoming a flux without beginning or end. As is taught in the Abhidhamma, duration of existence is only the time taken for just one thought. We all live just that brief moment, the time taken by a thought. As explained in the Viduddhi Magga.

“Just as a Chariot wheel, in rolling rolls only at one point, in exactly the same way, the life of a living being lasts only for the period of one thought. As soon as that thought has ceased, the living being is said to have ceased.

The law of Dependent Origination as enunciated by Buddha shows that life is but a cycle of causes. Beginning from any one of the twelve nidanas, the linking ends up at the beginning. In the formula as presented in the teaching, it begins with Avidya, the root cause of illusorily presenting Dukkha - hollowness or emptiness, as recognisable beings or things. The chain runs as follows.

Avidya or ignorance causes sankharas, the Karma formations sankharas bring about cognition or Vinnana. Vinnana causes the combination of Name and form - Nama rupa. Nama rupa creates the six bases or sense doors - salayatanas. Salayatanas cause impression – Phassa. Phassa causes feelings - Vedana. Through Vedana arises desire - Tanha. Tanha arouses clinging - Upadana. Upadana brings about Rebirth or Becoming - Bhavo. Through Bhava arise old Age, Death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. Thus arises the whole mass of suffering.

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