

*Foundation Series on Buddhist Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM)*  
*As taught by*  
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*the Gift of Dhamma is Priceless!*

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**Training→ 2010-FS-15- What is BIRTH (Jati) ?**

**Q. Now what will you say about Birth I wonder?**

**A: Ah!**

Because there has been some contention over the years in Buddhism as to what the Birth link actually means, perhaps we should clarify why there is a debate about this.

We need to do this because talking about Dependent Origination isn't any different from so many other parts of the teaching. It doesn't have to be locked into one explanation of what it means. It can be observed microscopically, macroscopically, something in the middle.

The important thing is that understanding it helps the meditator succeed in seeing VERY clearly what is most essential to helping them succeed with their meditation practice.

In this case of Dependent Origination we have to understand how the process can become the key to peaceful coexistence in our lives. How can understanding these links connect into our daily life?

It turns out that the Buddha didn't teach Dependent Origination in the same way in every sutta! He taught whichever links helped the most to clear up understanding. Sometimes it was 5 links. Sometimes it was 9. Sometimes it was 11. Sometimes there were additional links given that demonstrated a line of development for the student to use as a guide. In that case there was 23 links!

The bottom line here is that, teaching someone Dependent Origination was not confined to one set of definitions. It was not a cut and dry teaching. The Buddha used the links to teach many things and he encouraged curiosity and investigation.

As we develop our meditation practice, our observation lens gradually becomes stronger and we are encouraged to go in and take a closer look. There are many levels of observation.

At the gross level we see surface things. Some people are happy to accept this level of vision.

But there is a deeper level of understanding the Buddha challenged us to learn about that is very interesting.

There is more to realize than you think.

If one shifts around the angle of observation, some useful things turn up to help us in daily life.

As I have told you in the past, the Buddha saw more deeply than any of us will see how things work.

He encouraged us to attain only what is needed in one lifetime to liberate mind, seeing things clearly, and setting ourselves free from suffering and from further production of bad kamma.

It is clear to us that He left us enough information to get off the wheel of suffering and certainly, along this journey, we will experience a reduction of suffering here and now even if we do not entirely succeed in forever stopping it.

Having said this, the Buddhist presentation of Human Cognition, which he called the Impersonal Process of Dependent Origination is no exception to this rule.

Therefore we should be checking it from all angles of possible understanding as we proceed to study it. This means we can re-examine the links from different angles.

Especially with the BIRTH link we can do this by considering everyday events in life and keeping track of our actions.

**Q: Originally what did people believe this link to be?**

**A: Most often scholars tried to define the BIRTH link only from the aspect of a human baby being born into the world.**

A very famous commentarial writer who produced a main commentary had taken the entire process of D.O. and philosophically applied it over lifetimes rather than considering its possibilities in daily life events.

Using this translation any use of the entire chain of links is lost within this lifetime. Only part of them would be used.

The living process of human cognition therefore became more or less a theoretical philosophy discussion instead of something that could actually be seen by personal experience.

**Q: But the process is REAL. Even I can experience it at some level.**

**A: Precisely my point. Most people can see it if it is demonstrated for them to see from a different angle.**

**Therefore, I suggest that perhaps it's time to bring this process home and see how it can change people's lives.**

What gets lost in all of this is the prime directive of the Buddha and his express request in MN-95 that

**"...a student should never blindly accept what is handed down to them or told to them via an authority figure or tradition. [ This included himself ]. They should be able to prove everything step by step through personal experience in meditation."**

Once again we see the Buddha advocating that we question everything, test it and know something only through attaining " KNOWLEDGE AND VISION". This means Knowing directly and Seeing by understanding.

This should become a guiding principle in our investigation on this journey.

Every generation should keep on testing the practice. They should attempt to see what precisely leads to the experiences in the texts; a practice that successfully purifies and re-trains mind, and leads to clear understanding of the way things actually are.

**Q. OK. That would be the 6R's. But what does this have to do with the link of Birth in the process of cognition?**

**A: I'm getting to that part, "Q".**

You see, within this realm of philosophy and the consensus that the impersonal process of dependent origination flows across three lifetimes, this just isn't Buddhist.

YOU, or your soul, do not personally move lifetime to lifetime. This idea is an eternalistic belief where YOUR personal soul stays alive after you die and this unchanging self travels across lifetimes. This is totally unfounded.

**Q: Which isn't Buddhist?**

**A: Right. You caught that. Good.**

Remember Sati, Son of the Fisherman in MN-38 and how he got caught in a vast trammel of suffering?

**Q: Yes.**

**A: The talk about Sati is presented by Bhante Vimalaramsi for you online at the website [www.dhammadownload.com](http://www.dhammadownload.com) . Listen to it one more time. Please go to <http://dhammasukha.org/Study/mn-1.htm> and roll down the page to MN-38. You may listen to any of the versions found here.**

In that talk the Buddha tried to get across that this same consciousness does not travel across lifetimes. The Buddha explained that this was a process outside of philosophy that had to do with practical direct experience.

**Q: Did he?**

**A: Yes he did.** We have to move away from the three lifetime chart to bring this entire process closer to home to really understand it. You do this by changing the angle of your observation.

**Q: Was that kind of a chart right or wrong?**

**A: Well, this is where it gets fun!**

See, it could be considered wrong if you approach this across three physical lifetimes using the example of the human being. But, at the same time, the chart could be perfectly correct if you shift into the impersonal perspective and change your angle of observation!

**Q: HOW?**

**A: Well, in the case of dividing the 12 links across PAST, PRESENT, and FUTURE physical lifetimes it gets very confusing.**

However if one takes a moment to consider the word lifetime, this could expand the meaning exponentially of the same chart.

If the meaning of the word lifetime includes moments, seconds, cycles within thoughts, sights, sounds, or events in life, one-by-one, well, now we may have something significant to work now. This could be useful in this very lifetime.

At this point, I don't think anyone can declare the chart to be wrong anymore, eh?

Perhaps when the chart was first formulated, it wasn't made clear that it wasn't supposed to ONLY be confined into one view. By considering *the view of individual Phenomenological events which occur during our life*, we will open a whole new perspective of how this process could help each of us find more peace in everyday life.

**Q: This is interesting.**

**A: If we keep our minds open to possibilities, then things always get fascinating in Buddhism.**

Would you like to consider this further as we go more deeply into our training?

**Q: I'm willing. What about now?**

**A: Our most useful angle of observation should be seeing what is essential for clearly understanding events in daily life.**

**If we can retrain mind see clearly HOW ANGER arises and operates or see clearly how depression arises and operates, then this would really help our world today.**

When we see with a stronger lens what is going on, often we let go of all the unessential parts of these events. This sort of observation is very helpful.

**Q: It sure is.**

**A: OK.**

**Q: What you are saying then is that if you really want to understand something, don't confine yourself to one viewpoint or angle of observation when investigating it.**

**A: Exactly**

Q: You are suggesting that I experiment with the definition of BIRTH across a wider spectrum than just using the stock definition of a physical human being born into a life and by doing this, it could help me to understand real life situations better?

**A: That's right. We need to find the definition that works effectively that will help us move towards more peaceful co-existence in the world. Lets not talk about peace here. Let's live it.**

All of this is just an extension of the idea of gradual levels of development in training. Gradual training always equals gradual learning.

These links can be looked at in this way if it is helpful for the meditation and if it leads us to Peaceful solutions in life, we should keep going with this.

In the example of the woman working in the office, it was very helpful.

**Q: Can you show me?**

**A: I'll try.**

Remember in our last discussion that the lady in the office had an unhappy manager to face every Monday morning? Remember how it was happening over his reading of the past weekly report?

**Q: Yes.**

**A: If she takes herself out of the picture and watches only what is essential in the situation, like seeing the frames of a movie, then, perhaps she would see precisely how the suffering is happening for the manager and for herself.**

From this angle of observation, without emotional involvement, she would have the space to develop a creative RESPONSE instead of RE-ACTING. Make sense?

**Q: Yes.**

**A: Let's break down this event in terms of the process of dependent origination.**

**The lady observed her manager entering the room, picking up the weekly report, SEEING it with the eye, and realized that he made EYE-CONTACT. The event continued onward....**

With EYE-CONTACT as condition; a painful EYE-FEELING arose;  
With this painful FEELING as condition, CRAVING arose and this revealed his personal dislike for the reported information. It made tension and tightness arise in his body and mind and then his "I" don't like it mind took this information personally.

With CRAVING as condition, CLINGING arose for him. His mind leaped into the stories, concepts, ideas, and opinions about WHY he did not like this report.

With CLINGING as condition, HABITUAL emotional TENDENCY arose in him. He chose a card in his library of the re-actions and then;

With HABITUAL TENDENCY as condition, the BIRTH of action took place.

**Q: There's the BIRTH link?**

**A: Right.**

But here we are considering Birth to be defined as the BIRTH OF ACTION. Do you see this?

**Q: Yes. Go on.**

**A: Now Action, according to the Buddha, is of three kinds.**

There is **Mental Action** which consists of personal opinionated thoughts arising. There is **Verbal action** which can be verbalizing words of Anger to someone.

There is **Bodily Action** which would be doing something physical with the body like stamping the foot in this case or slamming the report onto the desk etc.

**Q: In this specific event can we recap one more time how this observation works by seeing how she changed her perspective?**

**A: Sure.**

Synopsis of event: As observed from the angle of an impersonal perspective!

She saw a man is standing in the doorway. It's actually her boss. He walks to her desk. As he picks up the weekly report she notices that he SEES something..

Eye- CONTACT has happened. AS she watches, she witnesses that a Painful FEELING arises while he reads it.

He gets more anxious as he is obviously thinking about all the times he has read this bloomin report! She sees him CRAVING with 'I' don't like it mind and CLINGING tenses him up with this extra thinking going on.

This becomes obvious by the shift in his body language.

He very quickly chooses a HABITUAL emotional TENDENCY and crashes forth into the BIRTH of ACTION through the mental, verbal, and physical eruption of ANGER

He thinks in anxiety. He speaks in irritation. Then he physically motions his anger with the stamp of his foot his distaste for this report!

Finally, he is gone through the door into his own office.

The event is over!

**Q: Wow! That played like a movie!**

**A: Yeah. Life does! But what did you notice happening as she observed this time?**

**Q: She impersonally identified the individual frames of the movie!|**

**A: That's right.**

She shifted into an impersonal non-judgmental observer of this event without becoming involved.

She watched the event from with the perspective of an audience.

After it happened, she realized she had not been upset by it. Her reaction faded away. Instead she gained space for considering a response. That is what changed!

**A: Can you summarize what she saw this time?**

**Q: She impersonally observed 'a man' this time.**

This man SAW something via CONTACT with his eyes that brought up a painful FEELING, which, with CRAVING arising, he did not like.

He latched onto thinking, which was CLINGING to thoughts about why he did not like it.

Then she saw him shift into deciding what to do in his own HABITUAL emotional TENDENCY library and gave **BIRTH to RE-ACTION** in the same old way.

Finally, she noticed how frustrated he was having to deal with the report and how all of this was impersonal for them both when seen clearly.

Then what did she do?

**A: She contemplated this situation and decided that next Monday she would attempt to activate a solution.**

She thought about next time and she planned that before he had a chance to re-act emotionally, she would skillfully invite him to have some coffee with her and discuss how they could create another form of report that both might find more useful.

**Q: When she does this she will be force-playing a different RESPONSE out of him without him having a chance to RE-ACT one more time, eh?**

**A: Yes. She will opt for a CREATIVE PEACEFUL SOLUTION.**

**This leads her to PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE through activating a compassionate creative solution.** Space opened up for a meeting of the minds so to speak and brought about the creation of a new more useful workplace.

**Q: How did it go with this woman's situation?**

**A: Actually, she kept her job and everything improved in the office environment.**

She became more useful for him in the office and he was happier and more supportive to work with.

**Q: So both people in a situation do not have to be practicing like this in order for positive change to come about?**

**A: That's right.**

Remember, we can't change other people. We can only change ourselves. But what you do in the present moment dictates what happens in the future.

That is one of the points that is interesting. It only takes one person to understand what is actually going on concerning this Cognitive Process to bring about change.

Both people don't have to understand the impersonal process of Dependent Origination.

When it becomes clear to one person how things work, and they stop taking things personally, reactions cease and everything changes.

All personal doubt and fear in the situation end for the person with this knowledge and vision.

Compassion can arise when parties begin to get what they actually need.

This impersonal perspective is what opens the way for exhibiting compassion in action and allowing the growth of altruism.

Usually, both parties can get free from war and realize peaceful coexistence.

**Q: How?**

**A: It was knowledge that set her free wasn't it?**

**Q: Well. Was it her own Knowledge and Vision that helped here?**

**A: Yes. She learned by hearing from a guiding teacher.**

Then she practiced herself and she saw what needed to be done. Then she realized what can happen.

It was in this way she acted from a foundation for peace. AND it worked.

Her knowledge and Vision shifted into Knowledge and Wisdom. She saw the links for real.

**Q: And it happened very fast didn't it?**

**A: Extremely.**

This entire event included all three kinds of action happening in a fraction of a second as the information reached the manager's brain when he read the report and his cognition flowed to the link of Habitual emotional Tendency.

He thought something, said something, and did something physical so fast it looked like it all happened together!  
Anyway, you get the idea?

**Q: Yes. After this link , what happens? How exactly do we witness the suffering while the process is happening?**

**A: At this point, a combination of things happen which are the symptoms of the suffering in detail and this will be discussed with the next link..**

There are descriptive symptoms within the link called AGING AND DEATH. It is always important to include these when talking about this link because they deepen and clarify the understanding of what suffering is.

There are some texts that give us more information on these symptoms and we shall use these as our guide in the next installment.

**Q: And the way out of the suffering?**

**A: Oh "Q". <grin> I know you already know the answer to this!**

**Q: OK. The 6R's is the way out because they fulfill the steps of Right Effort or what we like to call Harmonious Practice as we study this practice as taught by the Buddha in the texts.**

**These 6R's fulfill the entire Noble 8-Fold Path?**

**A: Right you are.** In this particular event of human interaction, the BIRTH link signified the actual internal and external action as it happened.

Of course we are talking here about observing at the gross level while passing through a human life an interaction or single event which occurs in daily life.

The end of the event comes after we discuss this next link which is called AGING AND DEATH. This will come up for discussion in the next installment called **2010- FS-16- What is AGING AND DEATH?**

Metta and smiles.  
Rev. Sister Khema

Next installment: **2010- FS- Training 16: "What is Karma? (Action) ?**

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