

Dependent Origination

The Link of Taṇhā or Craving

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Table of Contents

V. Taṇhā	1
Chanda and Taṇhā	6
Types of Taṇhā	11
Kāmatāṇhā	13
Abandoning Sensual Craving through Right Effort	20
Bhavataṇhā	25
Abandoning Existential Craving through Right Effort	34
Vibhavataṇhā	40
Abandoning Craving for Non-Existence through Right Effort	54
Taṇhānirodha	60
The Four F's of Craving	65
Taṇhā and Vedanā	81
Kāmarāgānusaya	87
Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Sensual Craving through Right Effort	93
Paṭighānusaya	97
Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Aversion through Right Effort	102
Diṭṭhānusaya	107
Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Views through Right Effort	115

Vicikicchānusaya 121

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Doubt through
Right Effort 125

Mānānusaya 128

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Doubt through
Right Effort 135

Bhavarāgānusaya 140

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Craving for
Existence through Right Effort 144

Avijjānusaya 150

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Ignorance through
Right Effort 154

Final Words on Craving 158

“Bhikkhus, there are these Four Noble Truths. What four? The noble truth of suffering, the noble truth of the origin of suffering (craving), the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering.

Saccasamyutta Sn 56.13(3) Aggregates

V. Taṇhā

Katamo cāvuso, dukkhasamudayo? Yāyaṃ taṇhā ponobbhavikā nandīrāgasahagatā tatrataṛābhinandinī, seyyathidaṃ— kāmataṇhā bhavataṇhā vibhavataṇhā—ayaṃ vuccatāvuso, dukkhasamudayo.

And what is the origin of suffering? It is craving, which brings renewal of being, is accompanied by delight and lust, and delights in this and that; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being, and craving for non-being. This is called the origin of suffering.

Chayime, āvuso, taṇhākāyā— rūpataṇhā, saddataṇhā, gandhataṇhā, rasataṇhā, phoṭṭhabbataṇhā, dhammataṇhā.

There are these six classes of craving: craving for forms, craving for sounds, craving for odors, craving for flavors, craving for tangibles, craving for mind-objects.

~ MN 9, Sammāditṭhi Sutta

Taṇhā is usually translated as craving. However, the literal meaning of Taṇhā is “thirst.” Quite the word chosen by the Buddha, as it denotes an insatiable desire. We must understand that desire is not necessarily the same as craving. It is to be obsessed with something, to “thirst” for it, that this can be called craving. It is interesting to note that in today’s parlance, that is, of the early 2020s, the word “thirst” also has a similar connotation, generally in a sexually desirous context. That burning desire, that unquenchable

Dependent Origination

thirst, that insatiable hunger is the feeling of craving. It is where the mind lights up in a myriad of ways that result in further mental proliferation through clinging, becoming, and birth of personal action. Craving manifests as tension, whether that be psychological or physiological. This tension can be consciously felt, although due to a lack of mindfulness, the mind becomes unaware of such tension and rather goes downstream from this tension, resulting in mental, verbal, and physical deeds rooted in greed, hatred, and delusion.

Craving is in the nexus between one flow of Dependent Origination – the potentials, as they can be called, namely Ignorance, Formations, Consciousness, Mentality-Materiality, Six Senses Bases, Contact, and Feeling – and the other – the active principles of Clinging, Habitual Tendencies, Birth of Action, and Suffering. Therefore, it is vital for one in this training to understand and recognize whenever Craving arises so that one can release it, relax it, replace it with a wholesome mental object, facilitated through the smile, and return to homeostasis of non-craving. In reality, that is the true nature of mind, as the Buddha states in AN 1.51 and AN 1.52, in the *Accharāsaṅghāta Vagga* or the Chapter on a Finger Snap.

Pabhassaramidaṃ, bhikkhave, cittaṃ. Tañca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ.

Luminous, bhikkhus, is this mind, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements.

V. Taṇhā

In other words, the luminous nature of the mind is to be purely aware at all times. That is its programming, as it were, but due to constant mental hindrances and the continuous bombardment of various data through the other sense bases, the mind is veiled in, by, and through Ignorance, which is just another way of saying lack of mindfulness. Mindfulness of what? Mindfulness of every given moment. In other words, we must always remember to observe how mind's attention moves from one object to another. By doing so, we are heralded back to the so-called present. Mindfulness is essentially the gatekeeper. Through mindfulness, one is able to ward off craving or drop it and let it go if craving has arisen. This mindfulness is dependent on a certain kind of effort – the Right Effort or Samma Vāyāmo – which the Buddha stipulates is imperative, along with mindfulness, to come to a collected mind through Right Collectedness or Samma Samādhī.

This Right Effort is fourfold: recognizing unwholesome states, which all ultimately find their roots in craving; abandoning those unwholesome states; generating a wholesome state; and maintaining that wholesome state. This is where the 6Rs come in. They are Right Effort. The crux of this Right Effort is to abandon or to relax, as we understand through the 6Rs. Relaxing tension, therefore, is the letting go of the craving that has arisen, and in doing so, we exercise the application of the Four Noble Truths. That is to say, we recognize Dukkha in the form of a hindrance, mental disturbance, reaction, and so on; abandon the Taṇhā that is the attachment, aversion, or

Dependent Origination

identification; experience Nirodha, or the total cessation of Taṇhā and Dukkha; and follow and cultivate the Magga, or the Noble Eightfold Path, which leads to that total cessation. Once we understand this process and know how to relax, everything else falls into place.

We will further explore this understanding as well as the various types of craving that are mentioned in the suttas. The intent is to provide a thorough exploration of craving in all its facets so that, in practical ways, we can recognize these types of craving. The list may seem exhaustive, but it may not be complete, although that is the ultimate aim of this particular chapter. The theory will only get us so far, but unless we know what to look for, we won't be able to let go of the things needed to be let go of in order for us to experience the complete polar opposite of craving – the quenching of that thirst, which is Nibbāna. Remember, what we are dissecting is for the purpose of understanding, application, and practice. Once we are able to find the root cause of the issue, we can then fix the issue. That is the essence of the prescriptive model of the Buddha's dispensation of the Four Noble Truths. Don't take this text to be something to be memorized. Instead, it is to be revisited on different occasions as a guide and a mini-encyclopedia of sorts that can help you in further refining your ability to pinpoint craving at the minutest levels, even at times before it can fully emerge into a full-blown taṇhā. Before we delve into the categories and conditions of craving and the bridges between Vedanā and Taṇhā, it's important to clarify a key point that

V. Taṇhā

many practitioners have time and time again had to wrestle with – the distinction between craving and desire in general.

Chanda and Taṇhā

When we speak of chanda, it must be understood that, like many words in Pali, it can have many meanings depending on the context. In the suttas, the word chanda is used to imply desire in general, sometimes attachment, and at other times it is used to denote a wholesome desire, namely enthusiasm for the Dhamma or for wholesome states in general. Oftentimes, during practice, a meditator will have proper enthusiasm for the sitting. They may have the willingness, the energy, and the attitude of “let’s get this done” with a fully wholesome intention. This is good and required in order for the practice to progress. This enthusiasm, which is what is the usual translation for chanda, is essential for getting towards the ultimate goal of Nibbana. Indeed, in many suttas, the Buddha describes concurrent states of cofactors with other aspects required for progress through the jhānas. This is particularly found in MN 111, Anupada Sutta, which relays the accomplishments of Sāriputta concerning various states within Samma Samādhī. As the Buddha describes his chief disciple’s progress through the jhānas and ultimate achievement of sañña-vedayita-nirodha or the cessation of perception and feeling (and consciousness), from which his mind emerges to experience the total destruction of the āsavas, he includes chanda as one of the many cofactors.

Now chanda can also mean enthusiasm for the Dhamma. This is related to saṃvega, or spiritual urgency, to find a way out of

Chanda and Taṇhā

suffering. When one encounters this urgency, there is enthusiasm for that which helps one out of suffering. One becomes introduced to the Dhamma through some medium, such as listening or reading, and then there is an immediate recognition that indeed this must be the way out of suffering altogether, and so one intends to follow the Dhamma. One intends to keep the precepts, be generous, meditate, be mindful, and cultivate the states necessary for ultimate liberation. All of this constitutes chanda. Therefore, chanda can be seen within this context as wholesome desire or wholesome intention. When one sits, one intends for release. One intends to let go of hindrances and to remain in a wholesome state or with one's object of meditation. This is chanda. When one inclines one's intentions for the purposes of liberation, for vimutti, for Nibbāna, that too is chanda. Chanda is like setting one's course toward a destination and then allowing the ship or plane to continue on that course. We know the destination – Nibbana – and so we set our minds towards it by using the Eightfold Path, utilizing Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Collectedness in particular while sitting and, more specifically, letting go of unwholesome states at the granular level of the meditation whenever they arise. But whenever the mind becomes obsessed with the goal, it has left the territory of chanda and entered taṇhā.

It would then be wise to understand the difference between chanda and taṇhā so that one may recognize them in one's practice and be able to release the latter whenever it may arise. Chanda is

Dependent Origination

setting the tone for the practice – “my aim is to achieve emancipation from craving and suffering by letting go and attaining Nibbāna” – whereas taṇhā has become obsessed with the tone, trying to tinker with the tone, continually seeing if Nibbāna has been achieved or is about to be achieved, resulting in quite the opposite. This expectation and obsession can happen at any stage of the practice and at any jhāna, but it more often occurs in the state of neither perception nor non-perception, where the mind is quiet. At this stage, if one has entered into the Quiet Mind where mental vibrations seldom arise, or into the animitta samādhi or signless awareness of mind or the objectless awareness, there can be some slight formations or proto-thoughts that bubble up but quickly fade before forming into full-blown thoughts and concepts. From here, the mind enters into a deeper level of quietude where one may experience “micro-cessations” where the mind dips into the lake of cessation and yet has not entered into total cessation of feeling, perception, and consciousness.

At this point, a few things can happen – the mind returns from these dips refreshed, brighter, and more alert, or there is an expectation of fully entering into total cessation or sometimes fear arises. There is a general tendency for the mind to experience fear or expectation more than just further releasing and relaxing into that bright mind post-micro-cessation. The fear arises due to the sense of self-diminishing and then temporarily ending. Here, one may hear one’s breathing fluctuate or listen to the continual drumming of one’s

heartbeat, and it truly feels like one is about to die. In reality, this is what happens to the sense of self. For decades and even lifetimes, conceit has created the identification with the self to one or more of the five aggregates, and so when it feels like they are disappearing, it is no wonder the mind thinks death is approaching. In the case of the expectation of Nibbāna, it is like being in the “waiting room” to visit the doctor. Indeed, all of Saṃsāra is waiting. We wait in queues, we wait for our food, we wait at the cashier, we wait to speak and to be heard, and so on. The notion of waiting, the general sense of waiting, is interlaced with anticipation. When anticipation arises, there is agitation. Anticipation, expectation, and waiting – these are all sister terms for craving. In both cases, whether there is a fear of losing oneself or an expectation of cessation to occur because one has read or heard about it, the answer is equanimity. One ought to go back to radiating equanimity for some time before the mind settles back into the quietude and then relax further into it with the wisdom that there is no permanent self to hold onto and the attitude of “let’s see what happens,” void of any expectation where one flows through every moment of the quiet space without holding onto anything that arises or passes away. Just see, meditate, don’t analyze, and try to build up; keep letting go, and when you least expect it – where no craving is present! – it will happen.

Finally, let’s understand how to practically recognize the difference between chanda and craving. Craving manifests as tension. Chanda does not. When we are obsessed with something,

Dependent Origination

when our mind becomes frenetic with thoughts about the object of our desire, tension manifests within our nerves and throughout our body, however subtle it may be. This tension can result from unwholesome states that are detrimental to us, detrimental to others, or to both. Chanda, on the other hand, being an inclination towards a wholesome state of mind, relieves us of this stress and tension. When the mind has this type of chanda, it feels spacious, without blemish, clear, and uplifted. As a result, the body too feels comfortable and relaxed without a trace of tension present anywhere. To put it simply, chanda is expansive while craving is constrictive. With this understanding, let us now in earnest explore the various types of craving and how to recognize and release them for the ultimate fruit of total liberation.

Types of Taṇhā

Katamo cāvuso, dukkhasamudayo? Yāyaṃ taṇhā ponobbhavikā nandīrāgasahagatā tatrataṛābhīnandinī, seyyathidaṃ— kāmataṇhā bhavataṇhā vibhavataṇhā—ayaṃ vuccatāvuso, dukkhasamudayo.

And what is the origin of suffering? It is craving, which brings renewal of being, is accompanied by delight and lust, and delights in this and that; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being, and craving for non-being. This is called the origin of suffering.

~ MN 9, Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta

In most suttas, the general categories for craving are kāmataṇhā, bhavataṇhā, and vibhavataṇhā, or craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, and craving for non-existence. We will look at each of these categories, and more, in more detail. For now, let us explore a brief overview of each type of craving.

Craving for sensual pleasures generally arises from the five physical cords of sensual stimulation, namely the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, and sometimes it may include the sixth, which is the mind itself. In this craving, there is an attachment, a grasping, a longing for the object of one or more of the sense bases. There could be aversion as well, or identification with such an object.

Craving for being or craving for existence arises from the identification with a particular state of mind or existence. Here, the

Dependent Origination

mind seeks to maintain the status quo or wishes for a state of being that is better than one's current state.

Craving for non-existence, therefore, is the desire to be out of the current situation.

We will now explore each of these types of craving and how to utilize the Right Effort to recognize and let them go.

Kāmatañhā

Chayime, āvuso, tañhākāyā— rūpatañhā, saddatañhā, gandhatañhā, rasatañhā, phoṭṭhabbatañhā, dhammatañhā.

There are these six classes of craving: craving for forms, craving for sounds, craving for odors, craving for flavors, craving for tangibles, craving for mind-objects.

~ MN 9, Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta

Kāmatañhā is the craving for sensual experiences. We have to explore this in a careful manner as, oftentimes, when people think about craving for sensual experiences, their mind withdraws from all sensual pleasures, which is suppression and repressive in nature. Let us understand what kāma means. Depending on the context, kāma can have a whole host of meanings and holds within it many ideas. It can refer to a sense of longing. Kāma can mean lust. It refers to the five cords of sensuality – eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body – or sometimes including the sixth, the mind.

Kāma is personified as a deity in ancient Indian stories as Kāmadeva. This deity is much like the Greek deity Eros or even associated with today's modern rendition of Cupid. He rides a parrot and carries with him a bow and various types of arrows. These arrows are symbolic of the types of kāma or the consequences thereof that could arise when one indulges and becomes intoxicated by, ultimately resulting in disappointment. The flowers are lotus, ashoka,

Dependent Origination

mango, jasmine, and blue lotus. The lotus represents infatuation – where one is obsessed with the object of one’s desire, in this case, a potential lover. The ashoka represents becoming enamored. The mango represents the depression one experiences in the absence of one’s object of desire. The jasmine represents the longing for the object, and the blue lotus represents the mental and emotional paralysis that arises when one becomes totally enchanted and mesmerized by the object. Kāmadeva’s many epithets are also interesting to note, including Manmatha, Madana, Mara, Kandarpa, Manasija, and many more. These particular names, however, are of importance to the context of taṇhā. Manmatha means one who stirs up the mind. Madana means one who intoxicates. Mara, interestingly, refers both to the deva who taunts those on the path of awakening and means one who wounds. It could be said that this personification of Kāmadeva and Mara are one and the same. Kandarpa means the inflamer. Manasija means one born of the mind. All of these terms can be seen as perfect representations of sensual craving and craving in general. Indeed, taṇhā stirs up the mind, proliferates more kamma, intoxicates the intellect or the ability to develop insight, wounds the mind, inflames the mind, and is, of course, born of and in the mind.

Now, in the larger context of life as imagined and divided up in ancient Indian thought, kāma is one of the four human pursuits, or purusharthas. They are dharma (dhamma), artha, kāma, and moksha. Dharma here refers to one’s purpose. Similar to the Japanese concept

of ikigai, it is the work one does that is fulfilling and takes advantage of one's inborn talents, provides one proper compensation, and also benefits society. Artha is the rightly begotten accumulation of resources or wealth through means of one's dharma. Kāma here refers to the wholesome enjoyment of life through the rightly begotten gains from artha. Moksha is the ultimate pursuit – transcending the wheel of Saṃsāra. Therefore, kāma in this context is not shunned and is seen as the proper enjoyment of what life has to offer. It is not to be seen as ugly or despicable or to be avoided.

One must be careful when traversing this line of thought as it can be fatal in one's pursuit of the highest goal of Nibbāna. In MN 22, Alagaddūpama Sutta, or the sutta known as the Simile of the Snake, Ariṭṭha is a monk who believes that indulging in sensual pleasures, particularly of a sexual nature, is not to be shunned by monks and that no harm comes to one who does so. For this, he is reprimanded by the Buddha, who provides the many similes of the nature of kāma or in the indulgence of sensual pleasures. The Buddha likens kāma to a skeleton, a meatless bone, a grass torch, a pit of embers, a dream, borrowed goods, fruits on a tree, a butcher's knife and block, a sword stake, and a snake's head. All of these connotations offer to the mind an image of what sensual craving can be like and what it causes – fleeting satisfaction and much suffering. Then, in the same sutta, the Buddha goes on to describe the correct grasping of the meaning and statements rooted in the Dhamma. Just as one would grasp the snake from its tail and get bitten, so too when

Dependent Origination

one wrongly grasps the meaning and context of the Buddha's words they find themselves in venomous confusion and despair. However, just as one would grasp the snake by the head so as not to get bitten, so too one rightly understands the Dhamma for the sake of crossing the river to the far shore of Nibbāna, and does not misapprehend the words of the Buddha for the sake of detrimental indulgence brought on by sensual craving or craving in the Dhamma itself.

It is in this sutta that the Buddha introduces the simile of the raft, where he likens the Dhamma to the raft used to cross to the other shore of Nibbāna. When one crosses to the other side, one need not carry the raft. Rather, one sets it down. In the same way, once the Dhamma is fully understood in the right manner, it is not to be used as a means of argument, to hold views, to misinterpret for one's selfish purposes, or to become a source of conceit and pride, but as a reference that becomes the essence of one's life, where the Noble Eightfold Path becomes one's operating system and spontaneously arises in everything one does – essentially the nature of the arahant and their way of traversing life post full awakening. Here, the Dhamma remains as the core of one's behavior but it does not become a thing to attach to – it naturally arises in the mind when required but is never held onto as an object of craving or identification.

With this understanding and careful attention to the mind and the sense bases, we can now explore another aspect of the Buddha's teaching in regards to the difference between sensual experience and

craving. In AN 6.63, Nibbedhika Sutta, the Penetrative Discourse, the Buddha states in verse:

Saṅkapparāgo purisassa kāmo,

Nete kāmā yāni citrāni loke;

Saṅkapparāgo purisassa kāmo,

Tiṭṭhanti citrāni tatheva loke;

Athettha dhīrā vinayanti chandanti.

They are not sensual pleasures, the pretty things in the world:

a person's sensual pleasure is lustful intention;

the pretty things remain just as they are in the world,

but the wise remove the desire for them.

The experiences of the sense bases, whether pleasurable, painful, or neutral, are just experiences. Those that are a delight to the senses, painful, or neutral are not to be seen as kāmā in and of themselves. When we see a beautiful rose in the garden, hear a harmonious melody, smell a luxe fragrance, taste refined foods, or feel soft material on our skin, those are all wonderful experiences. The problem arises when the sensual pleasure is infused with an intention of craving. As the Buddha says, the beautiful experiences remain as they are, but one who sees with wisdom makes an effort to remove any craving for them. It is not that one should not experience the pleasurable events of life. Rather, one should see these sensations

Dependent Origination

for what they are – impersonal, without any substantiality, liable to change, and therefore not worth holding on to. The experiences that arise are not dependent on whether we like them or not – instead, whether we like them or not is dependent upon how we take those experiences. If they are pleasant, the mind grasps them and doesn't want them to change. This is craving. It manifests as a subtle tension tied to the thought of "I hope this lasts forever. I hope this doesn't change." If the experiences are unpleasant, then the thought arises, "I don't like this. I wish this would stop." Such a thought is accompanied by tension, which only adds to the discomfort. If the experiences are neutral, then one may identify with them, leading to further entrenchment into conceit and identity view, where one thinks, "I am this. This is me, this is mine, this is myself."

The key is to understand all experiences as fleeting, impermanent, liable to change, and therefore not worth grasping. This can only happen through mindfulness of every given moment. The lack of mindfulness is and gives rise to ignorance. Ignorance gives rise to formations fettered in greed, hatred, and delusion. These formations, which allow for the experience of perception and feeling, for the functioning of thinking and expression of speech, and for the maintenance of the body, when fettered, give rise to consciousness that can be stained by one or more of the upakkilesas or defilements. Such a stained consciousness gives rise to mentality and materiality, which are then geared towards craving. This then gives rise to the sense bases, which now are besmirched by that craving, from where

Kāmatanḥā

the contact – that is, the joining of the sense base, the sensory object, and the corresponding sense consciousness or the attention given to the object, which is already tainted by craving – then gives rise to the feeling or experience. Depending on the quality of the feeling – pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral – one or more underlying tendencies may arise due to the lack of mindfulness of the experience. These underlying tendencies will then give rise to full-blown craving in the form of grasping, aversion, or further identification, and so the rest of the links will continue if mindfulness is not regained. It is through mindfulness – the observation of every given moment and watching mind’s attention – that the proper attention, or attention rooted in reality, which is inclining the mind towards the cessation of an experience rather than its arising, and seeing it through the lenses of the three characteristics of the experience being impermanent, liable to cause suffering due to its volatile changeability, and impersonal, that craving is kept at bay. This mindfulness does not deter one’s enjoyment of sensual experiences. Rather, it actually enhances it since the mind is fully established in the Dhamma in that moment and has great clarity. Since it can see the experience as fleeting, it doesn’t hold on to it and enjoys it while it lasts, leading to total contentment in that moment of the experience. With this in mind, let us now further explore how to completely abandon kāmatanḥā.

Abandoning Sensual Craving through Right Effort

One of the most direct ways of preventing the flow of sensual craving from arising is through the realization of emptiness. Emptiness has three contexts within the suttas – the emptiness of what is not present, the emptiness of self, and the supreme emptiness of Nibbāna. The emptiness of what is not present refers to the empty space of something that was once present in the mind or in external reality. The Buddha explains this in MN 121, Cūḷasuññata Sutta, or The Shorter Discourse on Emptiness, in which he provides pithy examples – when the monks are in the longhouse of Migāra, he states the house is empty of horses, elephants, and so on. In other words, the house is empty of what is not inside the house. Likewise, if we jump a few statements down, the base of infinite space is empty of the perception of the fourth jhāna, the base of infinite consciousness is empty of the perception of the base of infinite space, and so on.

The second emptiness is referred to as the emptiness of the world. In SN 35.85, Suññataloka Sutta, or Empty is the World, the following occurs:

Atha kho āyasmā ānando ...pe... bhagavantam etadavoca:
“suñño loko, suñño loko’ti, bhante, vuccati. Kittāvātā nu kho,
bhante, suñño lokoti vuccatī”ti?

Abandoning Sensual Craving through Right Effort

“Yasmā ca kho, ānanda, suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā tasmā suñño lokoti vuccati. Kiñca, ānanda, suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā? Cakkhu kho, ānanda, suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā. Rūpā suññā attena vā attaniyena vā, cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā, cakkhusamphasso suñño attena vā attaniyena vā ...pe... yampidaṃ manosamphassapaccayā uppajjati vedayitaṃ sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkhamasukhaṃ vā tampi suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā. Yasmā ca kho, ānanda, suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā, tasmā suñño lokoti vuccatī”ti.

Then the Venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One ... and said to him: “Venerable sir, it is said, ‘Empty is the world, empty is the world.’ In what way, venerable sir, is it said, ‘Empty is the world’?” “It is, Ānanda, because it is empty of self and of what belongs to self that it is said, ‘Empty is the world.’ And what is empty of self and of what belongs to self? The eye, Ānanda, is empty of self and of what belongs to self. Forms are empty of self and of what belongs to self. Eye-consciousness is empty of self and of what belongs to self. Eye-contact is empty of self and of what belongs to self.... Whatever feeling arises with mind-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant—that too is empty of self and of what belongs to self. “It is, Ānanda, because it is empty of self and of what belongs to self that it is said, ‘Empty is the world.’”

This realization of emptiness is referred to as the emptiness of the world, or emptiness of the self. Here, as it is described in the sutta,

Dependent Origination

one observes every possible pathway of experience – the sense base, the sensory consciousness, the sense object, the sensory contact, and the sensations themselves – and understands them to be empty of a self or of what belongs to the senses. In order to root out sensual craving, one may reflect and contemplate – that is, just to see without further analysis that leads to mental proliferation – on how the sense bases are essentially void of any inherent, independent existence. One sees that the sense bases are dependent on mentality-materiality, and when the preceding link changes, so do the sense bases. Being dependent and liable to change, one abandons the idea that the sense base is a self or what belongs to a self. The self refers to an entity that is supposedly our true nature and is permanent and the manifestation of joy. The sense base does not match the qualities of such an entity or what belongs to such an entity. Each of the sense bases is referred to as the world because it is through them that the world is experienced, perceived, and conceptualized. Taking this understanding, we then are able to see that if the sense bases are empty, then their dependent – sensory contact and its components of the sense base object and corresponding sensory consciousness – is also empty. We abandon any notion of self in such contact. When this happens, the feeling or sensation or experience dependent on the contact is also seen as “not me, not mine, not myself,” and there is nothing further to do. As per MN 148, Chachakka Sutta, or the Six Sets of Six, even the sixth set of sensual craving is to be seen as “not me, not mine, not myself.” We don’t even take the craving personally

Abandoning Sensual Craving through Right Effort

and instead see the craving as just another process – one to absolutely be abandoned and rooted out, but nonetheless empty of a self. This automatically relaxes the mind into a supreme emptiness that is Nibbāna – whether mundane in the moments of everyday reality or supramundane upon the realization of a path and fruit of the level of awakening. It is only at the level of the anāgāmi's mind that sensual craving and its flipside, aversion, are utterly rooted out so as never to arise again.

When one sees tension arising as the manifestation of sensual craving, in which one recognizes the mind stretching out towards an object, being repulsed by it, or identifying with it and therefore experiencing discomfort, one has understood that this discomfort is the First Noble Truth of Dukkha. Then, one relaxes the Second Noble Truth of Samudaya in the form of lack of mindfulness of the emptiness of the experience that has been taken personally and experiences relief as the Third Noble Truth of Nirodha. Using the Right Effort to do this, one has utilized the Fourth Noble Truth of Magga. In summary, one:

- Recognizes tension born from sensual craving, aversion, or identification with the experience as Dukkha.
- Releases attention from them and thus abandons Samudaya.

Dependent Origination

- Relaxes the tension present as a manifestation of the sensual craving, aversion, or identification, thereby experiencing Nirodha.
- Re-smiles and uplifts the mind with a wholesome state of the absence of sensual craving.
- Returns to mindfulness in the present and deepens one's awareness of Nirodha.
- Repeats whenever the mind drifts back to sensual craving, aversion, or identification – thus cultivating Magga.

Bhavataṇhā

Bhavataṇhā can be translated to existential craving. It is the craving brought about by the desire for changing one’s current state of existence. When we refer to existence, it should be understood as ephemeral and subject to changing in every moment. What we consider to be our life, that is from birth to death, is just one concept from a myriad of various belief systems. It is just a view that when we are born, we come into existence. We live throughout this one existence called “life” and then that existence ceases when we “die.” In one sense, birth is the accumulation of the five aggregates – form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. In another sense, it is the moment we enter this world from our mother’s womb. This is the general consensus on birth, even in medical terms. Death, then, is seen as the decay and destruction of the body and departing from this world. It is the dissolution and ending of this so-called life. With such an understanding, existence is then defined in such a mind as being and non-existence as the destruction of being.

Such a notion arises whenever the mind takes personally one of more of the five aggregates. The mind sees the aggregates as “me, mine, or myself,” and identifies with them. Holding such an idea is *sakkāyadiṭṭi* or “self-view.” To refresh one’s understanding, there are generally twenty such self-views. The mind may take the five aggregates self, belonging to a self, separate from a self, or self in them. We multiply each of the five aggregates with each of the four

Dependent Origination

self-views to come to the number twenty. While the self-views all dissolve at the attainment of stream-entry, there is māna or conceit that continues to function in a now less deluded mind. Conceit is deeply rooted in the mind. It causes the mind to attach to self-views, but even when they are gone, through this fetter, the mind still subtly identifies with various objects as self. The difference between self-view and conceit is that the former is more intellectual and the latter is like an encoded piece of data in the mind that distorts the way one sees the world, which is through the lens of “me, mine, myself.” This conceit can only be fully eradicated at the fruit of arahantship. Until then, there is still bhava that is informed by this conceit, which results in a myriad of habitual tendencies.

This is an integral approach to understanding bhava or existence and the craving it arises from; habitual tendencies are bhava and they inform how one sees oneself. This is why when one completes the path, there is the knowledge that there is no new existence, or the proliferation of further habitual tendencies, that will ever arise. Habitual tendencies in this context make up existential craving by having a library of ideas and concepts in which a sense self fully forms to create a decision towards acting unwisely or in a manner that results in suffering. Coming back to the understanding of existence as that which is present between birth and death, if we carefully dissect this notion, we see it to be true at one level but at the quantum level we see another reality. Habitual tendencies that make up this quantum existence continually change due to causes

and conditions. This being the case, existence too continues to arise and pass away dependent upon the conditions present. Existence then is not just at the macro level of one life or many lives or multiple planes in which many lives are present but also at the micro level where our habitual tendencies make up our mental existence. There is a granularity to existence that is made up of iotas of craving, conceit, and ignorance.

Recall from the larger section on Bhava that being or existence is also the way our minds are in every given moment. In one moment, the mind may be conducive towards practice and keep precepts, thereby making it more deva-like. In another moment, the mind may break a precept, have anger and resentment, thereby making it more peta-like or niraya-like. Every moment presents a choice. If the mind is agitated, seeks a way out and wants something more, or is unsatisfied with the present situation, then it will erupt into existential craving, resulting in the mind wanting something else, a higher form of existence or whatever may be the case.

Within the context of dependent origination, we can see how this existential craving may arise. Even before the link of ignorance, there is the āsava of existential craving. This āsava has been built up over multiple choices throughout a life of a being where they have decided to clutch to the sense of identity and from that act through a myriad of various habitual tendencies. If that is the case, then such an āsava informs the link of ignorance, which means one may be unable to see the four noble truths in every given moment. This

Dependent Origination

ignorance fetters the next link of formations. The āsava of existential craving strengthens the three roots of greed, hatred, and delusion that fetter the formations. These fettered formations then stain consciousness with the defilements that are connected with existential craving. Such a consciousness then infects mentality and materiality. Here, the factors of mentality – contact, feeling, perception, intention, and attention – have some levels of existential craving encoded in their receptors. The faculty of contact here would then result in the process of contact being tainted by existential craving. Likewise, the faculty of feeling would give rise to the process of feeling where the underlying tendency towards certain types of existences can arise. Perception would taint how one takes the feeling or experience and intention would incline the mind towards a habitual tendency that results in further suffering. Attention would be directed towards seeking a higher existence since it too is rooted in existential craving. In short, all five aggregates, not only being taken personally due to conceit, would also be rooted in existential craving.

From this, the six sense bases would be geared towards seeking out a new existence due to the preceding condition of mentality-materiality. When the process and link of contact arise, the tainted sense bases will incline towards their corresponding objects, and with the craving-based attention given to them, the corresponding consciousness will result in an experience or feeling that causes the anusaya of existential craving to arise. From this, the mind will crave

something better than what is being contacted, resulting in full-blown craving. This link of craving can give rise to clinging, where the mind rationalizes why it needs to have a different existence, and the habitual tendencies that form the sense of self provide a myriad of choices that are tainted by this inclination. The mind then chooses and plans, which makes up the birth of mental action, then either says something, which is the birth of verbal action, or takes steps towards achieving that existence, which is the birth of physical action. From this personalized action – that is, the mind acting out of greed, hatred, or delusion – the consequences may be positive or negative. However, in the end, they result in suffering. If the consequence is negative, that is suffering itself. If the consequence is positive, ultimately it is short-lived and thus liable to change again, therefore resulting in suffering as well. Perhaps the new existence may be quite satisfying for a while and result in immense happiness and joy. Over time, due to the mind’s continual arising of further strengthened āsavas, especially existential craving, through craving-based choices, the mind will find something wrong with the new existence or see the prospect of an even better existence, resulting in further existential craving. This is, in essence, a case of “the grass is always greener on the other side.”

From the hell realm beings who seek solace and a way out to the petas who seek freedom from such an existence to the devas who always want more and better furnishings and experiences, beings’ minds are riddled with existential craving. In the human world, such

Dependent Origination

existential craving manifests in multiple ways. When someone sees that their neighbor has purchased a new vehicle, their mind thinks up ways to outdo that person. When someone scores highest on an examination, those with a competitive mind seek to outdo the highest scorer. Seeing others happy in their relationships, single people seek to find a partner who can fulfill the fantasy of that form of happiness. None of this seeking is necessarily craving insofar as the non-monastic life is concerned. In fact, in such a life, wealth is important, fulfillment and a good life are important, but how one spends their time obsessing over these elements determines whether one has wholesome inclinations to better their and their loved ones' lives or has more nefarious desires born out of jealousy, stinginess, greed, hatred, or delusion.

Many people who are in relationships may find themselves dissatisfied with their partners and seek to come out of it and immediately find themselves in another relationship, repeating the same patterns. Likewise, it is not just seeking out another existence but the underlying behavioral patterns that constitute existential craving. These patterns are embedded in habitual tendencies at the link of bhava, from where someone may act out, which would ultimately result in suffering. For example, when someone seeks to find a relationship, they may do so because they are seeking a person who can subconsciously fulfill the role of a caregiver from their childhood, and they may repeat patterns of how they may have behaved with that caregiver with their newfound partner. When they

continue to repeat these sometimes-harmful patterns, seeking out love in ways they thought were right based on their relationships in childhood, they only sabotage their current relationships. Then, for a while, they stay in it until it's too much and then they leave. Now they're in a state of mind that's filled with grief and despair. After some time, they find someone new to enter into a partnership with, only to find themselves repeating those same patterns yet again. This is existential craving that results in a mini-samsara of repeated broken relationships.

The same applies to other aspects of life. Motivated by jealousy or a lack of self-worth, one may seek to compete against their fellow colleagues or classmates in order to get the highest score or be recognized as the top performer in their company. Even within the meditative communities, people may seek the appreciation of their teachers and do what they can to provide the right answers during their interviews for the fleeting satisfaction of a smile or nod of approval. Deeper than this, when we seek out to experience certain states of mental realms such as the first to fourth jhānas, motivated by outdoing their peers on a retreat or being recognized by their guides as the “fastest, highest, or best” meditator, this is yet another form of existential craving. Whenever such competitiveness arises, we must look into the core patterns of where they stem. Whether it is being recognized or being in a relationship, they all take root in conceit. We may want to be seen as equals and therefore vie for that so-called better state of mind or existence. Or we may seek to show

Dependent Origination

ourselves as humble in our approach and therefore behave through habitual tendencies to make ourselves seem in such a manner, or we may seek to show how superior we are by training hard to become the best of our colleagues, classmates, fellow meditators, neighbors, and so on.

These patterns rooted in conceit and collected into habitual tendencies drive forward our state from one existence to another, whether within one life or another. Becoming a good practitioner or a good religious person in order to attain heaven is yet another form of existential craving. People may seek to attain a certain *jhāna* or *āyatana* in order to enter into the corresponding realm, believing that to be the best. Others may seek to find the *devaloka* realms more enticing and therefore they may contribute heavily to different causes, make sure to keep their precepts, and so on. They may do the same in order to attain wealth in this very life. While these are all deemed non-problematic in the average lay life, for someone seeking a way out of *Samsāra*, they should be wary of such wholesome inclinations. They are all a good start, but they only provide the firm basis upon which the next important steps of meditation practice and mental development towards wisdom and total freedom of mind can occur. For this reason, such inclinations are still seen as part of existential craving because they continue the round of existences, not just within one life but through the strings of countless rebirths over many different lifetimes.

It is only the arahant who has completely eradicated this type of craving. They have done away with the roots of this existential burden by destroying greed, hatred, and delusion. Any forms of behavioral patterns, whether rooted in the unwholesome or wholesome, and lying dormant at the link of habitual tendencies are all seen through with the eye of wisdom and burned out without a trace of residue. Conceit is at the core of it all. Therefore, the arahant has dissolved any trace of conceit, having experienced the Nibbāna element at final fruition, whereupon the mind is fully liberated through insight and a thorough understanding of the framework of Saṃsāra. Like the Buddha, such a one has seen the architect of the house of existence and with certitude knows that the architect can build no more. Inspired by such a possibility, let us now see how we can do away with existential craving through Right Effort.

Abandoning Existential Craving through Right Effort

Right Effort is first and foremost to recognize the unwholesome state of mind. How does one recognize existential craving, which is detrimental on one's path to full liberation? Notice the tension in the body and/or mind. That tension may be quite subtle or may not even be felt in that moment; however, it is important to recognize the vibrational disturbance that occurs in the mind. Perhaps no physical tension may be present, but there will always be an agitation in the waters of the mind that causes one to incline towards further existential craving that ultimately leads to suffering. This disturbance may arise in the form of agitation, a mental clenching towards a thought, or a sudden contraction of attention that hones in on one line of thinking or a trail of ideas enamoring the mind towards desires for continued or better states of existence. Tied to this, but not always, a physical tension may arise. It is easier to recognize this physical tension, so if you do see the body subtly tensing up, you can use that as your anchor to check in with the mind and see whether any unwholesome states in general, and existential craving in particular, have arisen. If so, then one can release the attention towards thoughts related to the existential craving. Turning the attention away from it lessens the strength of the craving. It also stops fueling it from further arising.

Abandoning Existential Craving through Right Effort

Next, the mind relaxes. This can be a conscious relaxation of the physical body throughout or a part of the body that feels tense. This relax step allows for the manifestation of that craving in the form of tension to dissolve. We are essentially tranquilizing bodily formations. Here, a sense of relief is felt. For a few moments, the mind remains unconditioned in the cloudless sky of mundane Nibbāna. With such a renewed and refreshed mind, one then returns to a smile. The release and relax steps allow us to abandon the unwholesome state of existential craving. The smile step now generates a wholesome state of mind, namely joy and relief. Finally, one returns to their object of meditation if one is in formal sitting meditation, or remains with the relief from where they can spontaneously act dependent on the requirements of every given moment. One may repeat this whenever existential craving arises again in the mind. This is, in summary, the utilization of Right Effort in order to abandon such craving.

The permanent eradication of existential craving only occurs at the attainment of arahantship. In order for this to happen, one must realize the impermanence of all conditioned experiences. It is due to contact through the six sense bases that experiences (*vedanā*) occur. These experiences may be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. The reaction to the experiences determines whether they are taken personally or seen through with wisdom. If taken personally, these experiences give rise to one or more of the underlying tendencies. In this case, the underlying tendency towards existence can arise,

Dependent Origination

leading to craving for a newer, better state of existence or for the continuance of the current state of existence. This desire arises due to a lack of mindfulness in every given moment. Lack of mindfulness is ignorance. The mind does not recognize the Four Noble Truths of the experience and is unable to see through the lenses of the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and emptiness of self. Therefore, one training to become fully liberated understands through proper wisdom born from attention rooted in reality (*yoniso manasikāra*) that all experiences and states of existence inherently possess these three characteristics.

Through proper study and practice, the mind begins to see with collected attention that this moment, the previous moment, and the next moment, and all preceding and succeeding moments are conditioned by their predecessors of various causes and conditions. Being conditioned, every experience is subject to change. Every moment inherently changes and is therefore unstable and impermanent. Ultimately, if the moment or series of moments are pleasant, due to their inherently unstable nature they will change towards ending, leading to suffering. Seeing this, and realizing that these moments or states of existence cannot qualify as a self or belonging to a self, because they don't match the characteristics and idealizations of such a self – being permanent, a source of infinite happiness, and one's true nature – the mind abandons them as states that have an inherent essence. The mind then experiences equanimity, where it sees all experiences as they truly are – not worth

Abandoning Existential Craving through Right Effort

grasping and inclined towards their inevitable cessation. Disenchantment, where the mind has had enough of the suffering caused by grasping, and dispassion, where the mind remains unaffected by any moment or state of existence, set in.

This understanding of each moment can be zoomed in to the timescale of subatomic particles at the most quantum level or zoomed out to the timescale of every big bang or big crunch and everything in between those events. Whether at the level of a proton or at the arising of another multiverse, and everything in between, all states of existence are to be understood as conditioned. Even jhānas are seen in this same manner. The desire for continued states or better states is then dropped. Abandoning this desire, the mind becomes free and experiences liberation in that very moment. The key is to continue to do this – see with proper wisdom, experience the relief and equanimity and their natural fruits of disenchantment and dispassion, remain in those fruits, and finally watch how the mind experiences liberation from the existential craving. As the mind repeats this process, the layers of subconscious desires and their corresponding formations fettered in greed, hatred, and delusion fade away without any residue. Ignorance is destroyed, which means mindfulness is never lost anymore, and all future existences and their roots are carved away. At the fruition of arahantship, there is the knowledge that the mind is permanently liberated and that there is no more to do. What had to be done has been done. There is now

Dependent Origination

permanent establishment of Nibbāna in the form of the spontaneous wise and compassionate mind of the arahant.

Until this happens, one must recognize the Four Noble Truths inherent in the existential craving that arises. One sees the desire to achieve the highest status, wealth, or be recognized in society as a cumbersome process that is in itself suffering, therefore understanding the First Noble Truth. The Second Noble Truth of Samudaya is apparent when one recognizes the constant obsession and undue attention to the desire for these things. One abandons this attention and the desire itself, experiencing the Third Noble Truth of Nirodha. To abandon them, one utilizes the Eightfold Path that is the Fourth Noble Truth of Magga. This is encapsulated in Right Effort as one:

Recognizes tension born from existential craving with the experience as Dukkha

- Recognizes tension born from existential craving with the experience as Dukkha
- Releases the desire for further existences and the undue attention towards it, which is the Samudaya
- Relaxes the tension present as a manifestation of the existential craving or the continual grasping at states, thereby experiencing Nirodha

Abandoning Existential Craving through Right Effort

- Re-smiles and uplifts mind with a wholesome state of the absence of existential craving
- Returns to mindfulness in the present and deepens one's awareness of Nirodha
- Repeats whenever mind drifts back to existential craving – thus cultivating Magga

Vibhavataṇhā

Whereas bhavataṇhā is the craving for existence, vibhavataṇhā is the craving for non-existence. This form of craving can pop up in a myriad of ways and stems mainly from a wrong grasp of the practice in some cases or from a desire to end existence due to strong identity view and conceit-rooted identification with the aggregates. Vibhava here has multiple meanings. In some contexts, depending on the Indic region or language, it can mean to flourish, glory, and the accumulation of wealth and power. In the context of the Dhamma, however, it means non (vi) and existence (bhava). It is the annihilation of life. It is the disappearance of something. For example, in SN 22.55, Udāna Sutta, the Buddha explains how one may destroy the first five fetters –

So rūpassa vibhavā, vedanāya vibhavā, saññāya vibhavā, saṅkhārānaṃ vibhavā, viññāṇassa vibhavā, evaṃ kho, bhikkhu, ‘no cassaṃ, no ca me siyā, nābhavissa, na me bhavissatī’ti— evaṃ adhimuccamāno bhikkhu chindeyya orambhāgiyāni saṃyojanāni’ti.

“With the extermination of form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness, that bhikkhu, resolving thus: ‘It might not be, and it might not be for me; it will not be, [and] it will not be for me,’ can cut off the lower fetters.”

Extermination is the translation for vibhava that Bhikkhu Bodhi has used. In the greater context of this sutta, what the Buddha is guiding the student through is seeing that the five aggregates are conditioned, impermanent, ultimately leading to suffering, empty of self, and so subject to extermination or non-existence. The five aggregates will disappear and indeed in every moment continue to arise and pass away depending on causes and conditions. Seeing this, one understands that there is no form, experience, conceptualization, intention, or awareness that is worth holding on to or considered to be permanent. Thus, vibhava in this context refers to the ultimate annihilation of the aggregates at the end of a lifetime. Therefore, vibhavataṇhā is the craving for their annihilation one way or another, or the craving for non-existence.

When one has wrong views or a misguided interpretation of the Dhamma, craving for non-existence can arise. If someone identifies with the five aggregates and takes them personally, such craving can arise due to an attachment to materialist views. If there is no understanding of the Dhamma that aligns with Right View, then the mind may automatically subscribe to the idea that this world of matter and the enjoyment of the senses is all there is to life. Such a view offers nothing deeply satisfying. One is left to keep seeking out more pleasure in increasing increments until they either dull their senses or it may become too much. Oftentimes, this could lead to a disgust with life, and one may crave non-existence. Suicidal ideations due to an excess of pleasure can arise. The mind has

Dependent Origination

become so warped by the idea of continually seeking pleasure that it begins to ask, “Is this all there is to life?” This can happen through prevalent drug use that causes a new high with ever-increasing doses that ultimately fail to bring the same satisfaction as before. Drug use may be one aspect in the life of someone who is successful in the material world. Such a person may have all the money they could ever require, have access to every pleasure and comfort in life. However, having dulled the receptors in their brain, along with unsatisfying relationships with their so-called loved ones, where they believe no one really loves them, can cause a person to contemplate their life. If they have ears pointed in the direction of the Dhamma, there is some hope that they may be able to slowly incline towards seeking wisdom instead of miring their lives in further confusion. Sadly, if this is not possible, their one sense of escape is to escape life itself – hence, one seeks to end this life and craves non-existence. With the continual identification with the senses and the material aspects of life, one equates the body’s lifespan as all there is, and that the finality of life occurs with the dissolution of the body. Suicidal ideation becomes the dominant stain in the mind.

Such a materialistic view also perverts the idea of Nibbāna. If one takes existence to be all that the current life has to offer and that there is nothing beyond it, then to enter Nibbāna is the solution to the suffering in life by ending it. This view is absolutely misguided. One must carefully consider what Nibbāna actually is before even allowing such a view to enter the mind. There may be arguments

about Nibbāna referring to non-existence when there is the misinterpretation of bhavanirodha. In AN 10.7, Sāriputta Sutta, Ānanda asks Sāriputta about a state of mind where one doesn't perceive the usual objects of the world, this or the other, or any meditative states like the jhānas. Sāriputta responds with the following –

Bhavanirodho nibbānaṃ bhavanirodho nibbānaṃ'ti kho me, āvuso, aññāva saññā uppajjati aññāva saññā nirujjhati. Seyyathāpi, āvuso, sakalikaggissa jhāyamānassa aññāva acci uppajjati aññāva acci nirujjhati; evamevaṃ kho, āvuso, 'bhavanirodho nibbānaṃ bhavanirodho nibbānaṃ'ti aññāva saññā uppajjati aññāva saññā nirujjhati. 'Bhavanirodho nibbānaṃ'ti saññī ca panāhaṃ, āvuso, tasmim̐ samaye ahoṣin'ti.

One perception arose and another perception ceased in me: 'The cessation of existence is Nibbāna; the cessation of existence is Nibbāna.' Just as, when a fire of twigs is burning, one flame arises and another flame ceases, so one perception arose and another perception ceased in me: 'The cessation of existence is Nibbāna; the cessation of existence is Nibbāna.' On that occasion, friend, I was percipient: 'The cessation of existence is Nibbāna.'

The cessation of existence is Nibbāna as stated by Sāriputta. This does not mean that non-existence is Nibbāna. There is a key difference – non-existence is annihilation into oblivion, while Nibbāna is not an annihilation but the release from suffering. The

Dependent Origination

cessation of existence refers to the mind inclining towards cessation in every given moment. While non-practitioners and non-arahants may tend towards the arising of an experience, which is a state of existence in that moment, arahants' minds always tend towards the cessation of an experience. Doing so, such a mind is always in Nibbāna. The analogy of the fire of twigs and the arising and ceasing of flames refers to the reflective awareness dependent upon Nibbāna. This is the *anidassanam viññāṇam*, or non-reflective consciousness that perceives the mind had touched the Nibbāna element. While it is non-manifestative, non-reflective, and non-dependent upon any prior conditions, such a consciousness is still reflective in that it arises from contact with Nibbāna as the unconditioned, signless, undirected, and empty element. This is the true understanding of the cessation of existence. Therefore, no craving for non-existence is present in such a mind. It is just the constant awareness of the irreversible and permanent destruction of bhava as an existence that could potentially be built upon and rise again.

In the sequence of dependent origination, *vibhavataṇhā* finds its origin in *avijjāsava*. The *avijjāsava* arises fueled by a lack of mindfulness in every given moment. This feeding back of energy then informs the link of ignorance. This ignorance of not seeing the Four Noble Truths in the present moment leads to fettered formations, primarily rooted in delusion and hatred. Delusion because one takes things personally and doesn't see through the experience or state of existence with wisdom and understand them to

be impermanent, prone to cause suffering, and therefore without any inherent essence. Hatred in that it is the seed of aversion, the mind that says, “I don’t like this.” Now what does it mean to see the Four Noble Truths in every given moment? Whenever the mind has a lack of attention in any given moment, it is unable to perceive the truths – that is, it is unable to realize the taking of things personally, the craving, or the aversion, leading to suffering, because it is unable to utilize the path leading to its cessation. Whenever the mind does have proper attention rooted in reality – that is, the understanding of every given moment as conditioned, impermanent, leading to suffering, and therefore empty of inherent permanent essence – the mind relaxes right there and then, utilizing the whole heartwood of the path, which is to let go and abandon any unwholesome states, and therefore experiences the immediate relief of the cessation of suffering in that very moment.

Through the link of ignorance of having not seen the Four Noble Truths in that moment and the fettered formations, particularly rooted in delusion and hatred, the consciousness that arises is steeped in the stain of heedlessness, aversion, and other such defilements. This consciousness then conditions the mentality – the potentiators or faculties of contact, feeling, perception, intention, and attention – and materiality – the body made up of the elements – with inclinations towards hating an experience and wanting it to end or at the most extreme wanting total non-existence, whether that’s the misguided idea of Nibbāna or taking one’s own life. From this link,

Dependent Origination

the six sense bases – the receptors of sensory data packets – are tainted with an inclination towards delusion and hatred. When contact arises, where the sense base, its object, and the corresponding attention or consciousness come together to form it, this consciousness tainted by the defilements gives rise to a contact that conditions the experience with certain anusayas or underlying tendencies, particularly towards ignorance and resistance, and possibly doubt, conceit, and views.

Since the particular vedanā or experience is colored as unpleasant in that the state of existence is not desired for, the craving that arises is the craving for non-existence. Now the mind wants a way out, thinking, “I don’t want to be here. I don’t like this. I want something else.” From this craving, the clinging that arises associates relief with ending the present state of existence. The habitual tendencies that arise concretize into a sense of self that presents a library of choices towards ending that state of existence for the desired relief. The birth of action then results in a mental action of intentional thoughts to end one’s current state of existence. Perhaps a verbal action that vocalizes this may arise and then the physical action of ending would then result in the suffering of a myriad of unpleasant experiences. If one were to end one’s current state of existence by then seeking another state of existence in this very life, the next state of existence may provide some mental relief for some time, as short as a few moments to as long as the rest of one’s

lifetime. The latter is suspect because such a mind with such intentions will always be seeking out better states of existence.

Let's explore some situations of craving for non-existence. Someone decides they don't want to be in a relationship. They begin to see their current partner's flaws. These build up into a collection of thoughts that create a jealous, spiteful, and critical mindset. They are now seeking a way out and they may flat out say they don't want to be in the relationship anymore. Conflict may arise. The other person may criticize the first person's actions throughout the relationship and retaliate in a violent manner. In another scenario, the person seeking out of the partnership may hold in their feelings and let them foment. In a third case, the second person may relent and understand the first person's feelings and decide to part ways in an amicable manner. The first person may feel relief in that moment. In the coming days and weeks, however, they may feel regret and realize they want the second person again in their lives as a romantic partner. The second person may have moved on and decided indeed the relationship was stifling them and they are happy where they are now. Alternatively, the first person may find a new person to explore a relationship with, only to find themselves repeating the same behavioral patterns and causing themselves the same kind of suffering.

In this situation, the craving for non-existence is the desire to end a relationship. The clinging is associating the relationship or even the other person with negative states of mind and rationalizing

Dependent Origination

how the person isn't good for them. The habitual tendencies or existence bring up a collection of choices from which to act, dependent on previous choices all the way from how one's caregiver treated one or vice versa. From here, the birth of action is to call off the relationship. The suffering that may arise is the backlash from the other person or the dissatisfaction with one's own choices or, at a later time, when one is in a new relationship, feeling the same dissatisfaction and regret in being in the new relationship. The key here is to recognize the craving for non-existence as a lynchpin for adding to one's behavioral patterns. The more one acts from these patterns, the more enmeshed in the world of perpetual kamma one finds themselves in and the less mindfulness is applied to every similar situation. Once mindfulness is applied, even if the decision is to end a relationship, it can be done in a manner that isn't rooted in craving but rather in wisdom that sees that the relationship is indeed unbeneficial for both parties. There may still be some backlash, but instead of reacting to the situation, one can respond with intuited and spontaneous wisdom and equanimity, thus mitigating the backlash and learning from and resolving the old behavioral patterns. Instead of craving for non-existence, which launches the whole chain of suffering, the mind has a wholesome inclination to amicably end a relationship that isn't going anywhere without taking either one's own choices personally but seeing them as a means to a peaceful end or the other person's backlash as a personal attack but seeing with compassion the other person's reaction as more about their own pain

than anything else. In this way, one realizes the mistakes of the broken relationship and even if there is a decision to enter a new relationship, it won't be with the baggage of the previous habitual patterns but rather an intention rooted in spontaneous wisdom and understanding.

This entire model can be seen in various other scenarios. In the case of someone wanting to quit their job and craving for its non-existence, they may get triggered by contact with an unpleasant experience. Perhaps their boss comes up to them with an additional workload when they'd already been promised an early day off for some personal time, or the coffee machine is broken, or whatever may be the case; in any triggered experience, that is just the event that brings about what was already decided upon – to leave one's job based on a myriad of incrementally increasing amounts of unpleasant situations at the workplace. Whatever the trigger, it may be the so-called last straw that brings about a series of decisions leading to one saying, "I quit," perhaps followed by a slew of expletives or other unwholesome speech. The trigger is contact, the experience is the unpleasant vedanā, the decision towards craving is the underlying tendency towards resistance, perhaps followed by views, conceit, ignorance, and doubt depending on the situation. Then, one's continual associations in the past with one's boss or the workplace arise, which is the clinging, leading to a flurry of choices dependent on previous actions, whether mental, verbal, or physical, which are all stored at the link of habitual tendencies. Even the mental action

Dependent Origination

of imagining quitting has an effect on the mind and creates impressions that are stored deep in the formations. In general, then, it is important to pay attention to intentions and mental actions of actively imagining something – they could have a karmically detrimental effect on one’s psyche. From these choices, one may select to verbalize the intention to quit and then walk out of the workplace. This is the birth of action. From here, there may be some relief, even some elation. One has quit, and one may feel free. However, reality sets in. There are bills to pay, responsibilities to fulfill. Perhaps, one has to go into debt, and then when one gets a new job, it may be higher paying and better hours. However, the same behavioral patterns set in, and one finds them again displeased with one’s colleagues, employer, and the seemingly monotonous nature of the workplace. This is suffering, both the reality of not being able to pay bills or eating up one’s savings or having to feel once again dissatisfied with the new situation.

The lesson here – it’s not the situations, experiences, or people that need to change, but the perception of them. Craving for non-existence is just the flipside of existential craving through a different lens in one way. By seeing with wisdom and responding rather than being reactive, one sees the best path forward even if an experience or situation is not as one desires. There can be a level of acceptability and a shift in one’s outlook that helps change the so-called unpleasant into what it truly is – impermanent, not worth holding onto, and impersonal. Otherwise, if there truly needs to be a change,

with the right understanding, one patiently sees a way out that is the path of least harm and resistance to oneself and to others, causing the least amount of suffering. Finally, when one is fully realized, then everything is seen with wisdom and energized with true understanding and compassion. In fact, synchronicities abound such that one doesn't even have to make a personalized decision – whatever is best suitable for the situation and people involved is intuited by the awakened mind and followed through in a way that is beneficial for all.

Some final thoughts on what can arguably be considered the most grievous craving for non-existence – suicide. We have discussed this fairly briefly in previous sections, but it is important to just review that and provide greater context into the nature of suicide. Firstly, we must understand that suicidal ideation could arise as a side effect of certain kinds of medications and that it is important to discuss this with our doctors. Aside from that, in general terms, when a person decides to end their life, they are essentially looking for relief. It may be due to pressures from one's peers, colleagues, parents, loved ones, or just the dire situations of life itself that lead a being towards contemplating ending this existence. This arises due to the mind's processing of the world and self. Whenever one may see self as the aggregates or self in them or self apart from them or the aggregates in self, there will arise deeper layers of conceit and attachment to that so-called self. This would translate into a myriad of ways, but a person generally would see their experiences as

Dependent Origination

overwhelming whenever such views arise. The idea of suicide then would be enticing if one were to totally identify with this existence. One may see the terrible experiences of people or just the sensory overload of various events in one's life as "me, mine, or myself." Doing so, the idea emerges if one were to just end this existence, there would be an end to all of that.

As we saw earlier, others may contemplate suicide because they may believe from a purely materialistic standpoint that there is just this one life. Even if one were to say that, it should be observed that one doesn't just maintain a sole identity in a singular existence. Rebirth is happening all the time. We were not the same person as we were when we were born into this life. Every day, our senses kept evolving. The information we received continued to mold our opinions of the world and ourselves. Our desires continued to change. We had different dreams at various stages of our lives. Even the situations that came to us constantly changed. Our ideals, beliefs, opinions, and identities continued to evolve as life went on and continue to do so even now. Seeing it in this way, we can say we continue to arise and pass away in every moment. Even if this is not seen, we can say we do so through chunks of our life. Such an understanding would allow a person with suicidal contemplation to see the current unbearable situation as impermanent and subject to change. Of course, it may be difficult for them to see this right away, which is why one who can easily navigate this person's mind may be required to guide them out of the rut of their mental suffering and

lead them to at the very least a mindset that doesn't continue down the path of committing suicide even if they continue to lament their situation.

Unfortunately, another route people may take is non-suicidal self-harm. The reasons for this may be the same as those that lead to suicidal contemplation – relationship issues, feeling unheard, feeling worthless, financial troubles, grief, various kinds of abuse, sensory and emotional overwhelm, and so on. Others may self-harm because they feel numb and want to feel something. They've suppressed all the emotional pain that they feel totally anesthetized inside, and they cause themselves pain to actually feel connected back to the world at the physical level. Sometimes, the rush of it becomes addictive, and a person may do this ritualistically or haphazardly as a way of chasing the feeling of supposed relief or release they feel from it. The underlying rationales may be different at some level, but the general theme behind them all is a deeply hurt sense of self, tied to a strong self-view and an almost immovable identification with whatever the situation, emotional pain, thought process, or overwhelm may be, leading to finding such an outlet.

Abandoning Craving for Non-Existence through Right Effort

The total eradication of the craving for non-existence occurs when one enters the stream and attains Right View. What is Right View? There are two kinds – mundane and supramundane. The supramundane is achieved through the establishment of the Four Noble Truths in one’s mind at an unshakeable and permanent level. The mundane Right View has six components – the value of generosity, the recognition of kamma, the understanding of life hereafter, the acknowledgment of the value of one’s parents, spontaneous rebirth, and the presence of teachers who’ve walked the path and seen for themselves the truth and can teach it to others.

The key component that helps alleviate the craving for non-existence, especially where one wants to end one’s life with the idea that that’s all there is to life and that “you only live once,” is the understanding of a life hereafter and to some extent spontaneous rebirth. When we can consider that there is another life after death, and that it is possible that ending one’s life out of such heavy emotions and circumstances could lead to a bad destination, the mind recoils at the idea and may even begin to look for immediate alternate solutions to suicide. Indeed, in the cases of people who’ve had near-death experiences after an attempted suicide, there is an immediate regret that arises just before they enter what can only be described as

Abandoning Craving for Non-Existence through Right Effort

an unfortunate realm. Some people report being in a space where other beings are filled with regret and seeking a way out. We do not need to believe in these experiences, however, for some they may lend weight to the considerations of the negative spiritual effects of suicide. Even if we were to discount these experiences, we can look at the fatal effect in this very life and realize that if there is another life, it would be devastating to end this current life for a possibly worse destination. In other words, even if we discounted the logical kammic understanding that wholesome leads to wholesome and unwholesome leads to unwholesome, and one were to see the universe as a set of random anomalies and no meaning is given to life, how much would one risk the possibility that, even if left to chance, this unwholesome act would lead to an unwholesome state in the next life.

For those with suicidal tendencies or with intentions of self-harm, it will always be strongly advised that one seek professional help and care if required, depending on the situation at hand. Only then should one seek out the help of fellow spiritual travelers in the Dhamma or lend ears to someone who can help one out of the mental turmoil bit by bit through instruction in that which is wholesome, lifts up the mind, and provides solace, even if it's momentary. It is then through continuous reflection on the uplifted states and abiding in them that the mental storms that led to drastic measures in the first place start to subside. To keep them at bay, one may need consistent effort until the new model in the mind is rooted in Right View and

Dependent Origination

established in the Dhamma, in which case craving for non-existence at that extreme level is eradicated.

Right View indeed is the deterrent against craving for non-existence. Its complete establishment in the mind, which occurs at stream-entry, is the total elimination of this craving. It may not necessarily be the supramundane, rather the mundane Right View that is established, and this is enough for the eradication of *vibhavataṇhā*. When one understands and walks the Eightfold Path, one is beginning to enter the stream, more like walking at the edge ready to enter and dipping one's toe into that stream. Then, when one sees the effectiveness of the path and the fruits of the path, one experiences greater degrees of confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. This then results in the fruition of stream-entry, where one at the very least has a total openness to the possibility of future lives that are the result of one's *kamma*. Seeing this, one doesn't crave for non-existence. Instead, one strives for the transcendence from existence and non-existence altogether, which is *Nibbāna*. Initially, it might seem like striving for this transcendence is striving for non-existence, but that is based on the notions of self. Since stream-entry includes the destruction of the belief in a personal, separate, permanent self, the views on self are extirpated and what remains is a deeper experience of the nature of the emptiness of self and the impersonal nature of the process of how the world is constructed and conceptualized in the mind. Seeing this, the mind abandons the idea that ending this life or ending this existence in this

Abandoning Craving for Non-Existence through Right Effort

moment is final. Instead, it realizes the arising and passing away of all existence moment by moment and that understanding is then expanded at the level of lifetimes. Coupled with the experiential insight into the nature of kamma, the mind drops any form of craving for non-existence in terms of suicidal ideation and annihilationist views. When it comes to the aversion towards a certain state of existence, this may still reside in the mind until one eradicates even that at later stages.

Until any of this happens, it is a matter of rinse and repeat when it comes to contemplation, meditation, practice, and resting in the insight of the emptiness of reality and self. First, one must understand the nature of self. By seeing the sense of self manifesting in the thoughts such as “this is me, mine, or myself,” the mind can let go and rest back into the awareness of this emptiness. This in itself offers much relief to the mind and in that silence, the mind remains content, not affected by greed, hatred, or delusion. The more one does this, the quicker the mind is able to release notions of self until it becomes a permanent reality. Initially, it may be a view to hold, but as one relaxes into the impersonal nature of reality – that is the experience of emptiness where there is just pure observation of every moment without further ideological or conceptual projections or proliferations – the mind becomes stabilized in that as a lived experience and the craving for non-existence due to notions of a personal self is dissolved. One looks at every experience as conditioned and doesn’t hold onto any of it. This starts to unwind the

Dependent Origination

mind to see things as they are – being conditioned, they are impermanent, and therefore not worth holding on to – and from that knowledge and vision, it is liberated.

Finally, one must catch the mind entering the territory of craving for non-existence, extreme or otherwise. The best way is to see any aversion to a situation, event, circumstance, person, object, or any aversive concepts towards life. Seeing this, one realizes the First Noble Truth of Dukkha in which one has tension and aversion. One then abandons the Second Noble Truth of Samudaya by relaxing the tension and therefore experiences the Third Noble Truth of Nirodha. By relaxing the tension and letting go, one utilizes the Fourth Noble Truth of Magga. In terms of the 6Rs, one –

- Recognizes the craving for non-existence as first an aversive response to an experience, therefore understanding Dukkha
- Releases the attention towards the object of the aversion, which is the Samudaya
- Relaxes the physical and mental tension, thus experiencing Nirodha
- Re-smiles in order to bring up a wholesome object
- Returns to the mindfulness of the present moment or persists in remaining in a wholesome object
- Repeats whenever necessary, thus cultivating Magga

Abandoning Craving for Non-Existence through Right Effort

We have now explored the three categories of craving – sensual, existential, and craving for non-existence. Let us now delve into what the cessation of craving, taṇhānirodha, is and how it can be immediately realized for oneself in the here and now.

Taṇhānirodha

What is taṇhānirodha? The cessation of craving. This is a wonderful statement, but what does it actually mean? How does it translate into the real world? Perhaps, we can begin to explore this question by examining the Four Noble Truths. It would be better to recontextualize this in a more modern setting. The word suffering brings about a myriad of connotations that may overdramatize the essence of this word. That essence is unease. There is disturbance, a lack or loss of mental and physical homeostasis. There is discomfort that is present, perhaps a *je ne sais quoi* in regards to the uneasiness present in the mind. It would be useful to wait before labeling the particular discomfort as something – mental grief, physical pain, lamentation, unhappiness, unpleasantness with regards to an experience, and so on – although it may have its utility in certain situations. It may be easier to recognize the underlying psychic stress in the form of tension, whether present in the body or mind.

If we were to postulate that the uneasiness one experiences (as *dukkha*) is indeed manifesting as tension or stress, then we can explore what that cause is as the Second Noble Truth. What is that craving? Is it tension as well? Perhaps. Recall the ancient word for craving found in the suttas is *taṇhā*, which literally translates to “thirst.” This unquenching dissatisfaction can be seen as craving. Perhaps the tension is merely a manifestation of that craving, and in that sense, we can see the unease as one thing – *dukkha* – and the

reaction to it – taṇhā – as another thing. That reaction, however, isn't just aversive to unease. It is also important to note that the reaction can be grasping towards something as a way of obtaining or keeping something that seems pleasant to the senses and the mind. Another form of a reaction is to identify with an experience, situation, person, or object as “me, mine, myself.” These are the three common reactions that form the link of craving. There may be a few other models for craving that are worth exploring – those that could better contextualize humans' responses to situations based on past kamma or in some sense trauma.

Before we look at these different models, let us understand what the cessation of craving is in the context of nirodha. Nirodha literally means to put a stop to something or the cessation of something. Depending on the Indic language used, it could also refer to suppression, obstruction, or restraint. We know suppression of anything only gives it more fuel to arise yet again with the same force of the suppression utilized. To obstruct or to restrain assumes that there is something to be cleared away or to resist in some way, while cessation would be to bring to a state of non-activity, or in the context of taṇhā, non-reactivity. Any form of reaction to the reactivity itself only furthers the waves of reactivity by way of an equal and opposing force of that reaction. It's reactive ways all around and doesn't serve to understand the unease, stress, or tension, or to relieve them.

What then is the way to reduce and ultimately end the string of reactions? To respond. Reactivity is immediate, without thought, and

Dependent Origination

comes from deep core wounds present in the recesses of the citta or heart-mind. It is rooted in past kamma in the form of previous experiences that became the foundation for future reactions. It is a learned response based on exposure to the same or similar stimuli, whether stressful, pleasant, or neutral. The mind then reacts as a shorthand way of dealing with the experience rather than spending what it may deem unnecessary fuel of energy to reflect on and respond in a new way. It is a protection mechanism for what it deems necessary for survival. This unconscious mentality is craving. The reduction of it using a response rooted in understanding, wisdom, compassion, and other effective strategies to counterbalance the unease is the nirodha, the non-reactivity to the stimuli. The way to do this is traditionally the Noble Eightfold Path. The heart and thread that connects the factors of the path is Right Effort. If we were to encapsulate that even further, we can come to one idea – to relax. To relax is to drop something. The path is rooted in Right View, which is essential for a positive outlook on the world, self, and life in general, and one learns to relax and let go through Right Mindfulness – the careful observation rooted in the aware presence of every given moment.

The Right View allows us to then examine what is happening in every situation with fresh wisdom. When we do this mindfully, we are in the present moment, allowing us to then let go of the stored-up kamma of past experiences that may inform the next choice to be reactive. In this way, we open up the mind to spontaneity and act

according to the situation by allowing for a pause, even for a few seconds before taking action, and this is the response that is required to break asunder the chain of kamma rooted in past hurts, trauma, and various survival mechanisms. This leads to a more homeostatic mind and body and a clarified approach to returning to what is the mind's true essence – pristine and uncorrupt cognizance, empty of concepts rooted in past conditioning.

It can be argued that the relief one experiences after having dropped the tension and reactivity stirring up in the mind returns one back to the original state of the mind, which is Nibbāna. Nibbāna is not only the supramundane experience outside of all conditionality, but it is also the characteristic, quality, and nature of mind itself. It is an unestablished awareness not rooted in the self nor in any conditioned phenomenon. This is the ultimate connotation of the cessation of all craving and hence the cessation of all suffering. Nibbāna is the flipside of what we often take to be our true nature, an idea of some kind of original sin that presupposes us as flawed beings who must now pay our dues. At one level, this is true, and yet in an absolute sense, it can be seen as only half true in that the other part of that is the pure essence that is the true reality of existence. In other words, the mind being luminous (of a quality to be aware without any residue or defilements) it would stand to one's own experience of it that the true nature of existence is Nibbāna. It is the defilements that do not define the mind but rather cover up the sheen

Dependent Origination

of the natural mind, which is Nibbāna. Saṃsāra then is seen as the defiled mind and Nibbāna as the undefiled mind.

The relief we experience of having abandoned the tension is just a radiance of Nibbāna. If we allow the mind to further sink into that relief as a form of meditative practice, we will see that other rays are naturally present – wisdom, compassion, joy, peace, harmony, and other wholesome qualities that are innate in a non-conceptualized awareness uncluttered and undefined by previous causes and conditions. This is the absolute sense of the meaning behind taṇhānirodha. That is why one is then able to intuitively interact with the world without being affected by it. This is the arahant – one who has understood reality’s true nature and responds from that unconditioned state in every moment through a personalized response rooted not in past kamma or traumas but rooted in what is required for that particular moment and to best serve the people and situations involved with it. Taṇhānirodha is the space of the arahant’s mind - relief in every moment, without an ounce of reactivity, and a responsiveness that is synchronous with the potential liberation of others. The path and its various requisites encompass the methodology that aids in one’s own development of mind towards first seeing and acknowledging and then realizing and living out the innate and fundamental undefiled awareness rooted in Nibbāna, which is in tandem with this first effortful and ultimately effortless responsiveness in every given present moment.

The Four F's of Craving

Let us consider the view that beings, particularly humans, as this is primarily catered to a human audience, find their homeostasis in relief and remain in the natural, original state of perfection – Nibbāna. It is the reactions of craving that obscure this luminosity. Over the years, during their developmental stages, individuals deal with the trauma of not having their needs met. As infants, they may still have underlying tendencies present, as the Buddha mentions in MN 64, Mahāmāluṅkyā Sutta –

Daharassa hi, mālukyaputta, kumārassa mandassa uttānaseyyakassa sakkāyotipi na hoti, kuto panassa uppajjissati sakkāyadiṭṭhi? Anusettevassa sakkāyadiṭṭhānusayo Daharassa hi, mālukyaputta, kumārassa mandassa uttānaseyyakassa dhammātipi na hoti, kuto panassa uppajjissati dhammesu vicikicchā? Anusettevassa vicikicchānusayo. Daharassa hi, mālukyaputta, kumārassa mandassa uttānaseyyakassa sīlātipi na hoti, kuto panassa uppajjissati sīlesu sīlabbataparāmāso? Anusettevassa sīlabbataparāmāsānusayo. Daharassa hi, mālukyaputta, kumārassa mandassa uttānaseyyakassa kāmātipi na hoti, kuto panassa uppajjissati kāmesu kāmacchando? Anusettevassa kāmārāgānusayo. Daharassa hi, mālukyaputta, kumārassa mandassa uttānaseyyakassa sattātipi na hoti, kuto panassa uppajjissati sattesu byāpādo? Anusettevassa byāpādānusayo.

Dependent Origination

For a young tender infant lying prone does not even have the notion ‘identity,’ so how could identity view arise in him? Yet the underlying tendency to identity view lies within him. A young tender infant lying prone does not even have the notion ‘teachings,’ so how could doubt about the teachings arise in him? Yet the underlying tendency to doubt lies within him. A young tender infant lying prone does not even have the notion ‘rules,’ so how could adherence to rules and observances arise in him? Yet the underlying tendency to adhere to rules and observances lies within him. A young tender infant lying prone does not even have the notion ‘sensual pleasures,’ so how could sensual desire arise in him? Yet the underlying tendency to sensual lust lies within him. A young tender infant lying prone does not even have the notion ‘beings,’ so how could ill will towards beings arise in him? Yet the underlying tendency to ill will lies within him.

What the Buddha is referring to is that even though an infant may not have conceptualized reality in the same way as an adult might, it still has the underlying tendencies, which are deeply rooted in the mind and arise due to certain experiences. Through these underlying tendencies, reactions become built up based on the stimuli encountered and the outcomes that arise. An infant may learn to cry whenever it requires its needs to be met and starts to build up the underlying tendencies associated with any predominantly unpleasant situation. As one grows up, they then pick up other coping mechanisms. If early trauma – notwithstanding the trauma of birth

The Four F's of Craving

itself – arises in one's toddler stage or even later through one's childhood, the reactions can vary. One may freeze up as a caregiver shouts at them or demands an answer, or fight back at peers who try to tease them. They may learn to supplicate others in order to feel accepted and okay with the present situation, even if their immediate needs of safety and assured well-being are not met, in order to avoid any sort of conflict. This supplication or appeasement is known as fawning. Other times, one may flee from the scene to feel more secure once away from the object of aversion and perceived threat. Let us now explore each of these F's – fight, flight, fawn, and freeze – in greater detail and how they relate to craving.

Consider someone in a disagreement with a colleague or even a stranger. If, during their early years, they were met with situations or people – even one or more caregivers – that were aversive in quality, their reactions could be defensive. With a sense of separate self, the mind of such a person feels different from others in some ways. The “other” or “them” can seem like a threat to one's survival. For this reason, one stands their ground and reacts out of that defensiveness, either verbally or physically attacking the threat – in this case, someone who disagrees with them, depending on the severity of the argument. As the other person may back down, there's a feeling of relief for just a moment for the person in fight mode. If the other person also reacts in the same manner, there may be a sense of familiarity as it relates to past kammic situations where the only way to react that one knew was to continue to fight. In either case,

Dependent Origination

whether the “threat” backs down eventually or continues the fight, there’s a sense of ease in that situation now that they feel like they have a sense of control.

The flipside of the fight reaction is the pursuit of something or someone that one desires. If one is attracted to someone, they may pursue the person as best as they can because they feel unease with not having them in their lives. They may fight by trying to manipulate situations or their image to make themselves seem more attractive, or they may try to belittle sexual competitors in some way in order to be seen as more likeable. Whatever tactics are used, they all arise from this fight mode where the need is to control a person or situation. The fear of a lack of control and the desire to establish one’s identity are rooted in all three roots of greed, hatred, and delusion. The unease that one feels may arise in the form of a dysregulated nervous system, a mental or physical tensing up. Therefore, that unease is only relieved when one feels like they are getting control of a perceived threat, person, situation, or object. After the relief is experienced, the mind then starts to condition this as a valid response to stress and difficult situations in order to come back to the homeostatic sense of relief. The cycle continues in this manner where such reactions become immediate and arise unconsciously.

How does one break that cycle? In order to decondition the reactive nature rooted in fight mode, one must make the effort to see with clarity and use the process of relaxing into the moment first and

The Four F's of Craving

foremost, thereby beginning to allow for wisdom to flow through one's intentions. A pause is required. This is the most crucial factor in breaking the conditioned cycle of reactions stemming from fight mode. When in an argument, if one can recognize the urge to renew the argumentative position or to rebut in an unharmonious manner, there is some possibility of taking a pause. Even if the other party is continually seeking conflict in those moments by trying to instigate, it is better to stay silent and allow the mind to relax and let go as best as possible of any antagonistic feelings. They may still arise, but the pause will help one to gather together wisdom, allowing for the mind to come back into the present moment. From there, a spontaneous intention rooted in non-craving, non-aversion, or non-delusion will arise, and the cycle will be broken for that time being. It may take more cases where one finds themselves in such a situation before the cycle is broken without the possibility of it arising again.

The same would apply in the pursuit of someone or something. Notice the unease that arises in the form of any tension. Take a pause. Don't do anything. Let the mind gather its thoughts. "Do I really need to pursue this person out of lust? Perhaps I should assess their behavior before intending to develop a relationship." Such thoughts will bring wisdom to one's decisions so that, if the person is compatible and a good match for oneself, the direction taken will be in a harmonious manner. Moreover, with such an intention, if the person is not a good match or one sees traits that do not match with one's values, one can graciously let go of the idea of any future

Dependent Origination

relationship. The same would go for the pursuit of any kind of object. If one desires to purchase something, first one may notice the urge in the form of tension, relax and pause. See what comes up and then decide accordingly, as this gives one time to have presence and wisdom to act accordingly. Eventually, the mind and the body, including the nervous system, start to regulate towards a more peaceful and collected state. One becomes more mindful of any unease and tensions that arise from the urge to dominate, control, or to fight back, and is then rewarded with further levels of peace and collectedness every time the urge is relaxed and new conditioning rooted in wholesome attitudes and intentions becomes the predominant structure in the mind.

Flight is a response primarily rooted in resistance. The flight response is all about removing oneself from a difficult situation, interaction, person, or object that one subconsciously considers a threat. In one's development, perhaps one found safety in avoiding an abusive caregiver and folding in on oneself, sometimes quite literally in a fetal position. This response offered some soothing relief to the emotional turbulence lodged in the mind. As one grows up, one may find oneself around difficult peers in school and other social settings. One may find rest in work – quite literally relief in engaging in work that distracts from the problem. Such a person may also turn out to be socially anxious or anxious in general. They seek perfection in their work as a means of escape and to avoid any criticism of their projects as a way of protecting the sense of self. This avoidant

The Four F's of Craving

behavior finds root in almost all interactions, possibly even in one's own interpersonal relationships. In order to avoid conflict, one may go silent instead of communicating in a way that's deemed secure and leading to solving an issue rather than sweeping it under the rug.

This flight response can also arise in situations where one is presented with unpleasant sensory experiences in general. One avoids places, people, objects, and so on associated with those sensory experiences at a subconscious level. What arises, whether in conflict, social interactions, or sensory experiences that are seen as unpleasant, is a resounding unease throughout the nervous system. One starts to tap into the sympathetic nervous system as a response to the stressful stimuli and begins to back away, sometimes quite literally from the object of one's aversion. Tension in the mind and body arises, the heart rate increases, perhaps the blood pressure elevates, and one might feel panicked in some cases. These are all signs of an aversive or flight response towards various unpleasant stimuli. As soon as the seeming threat is gone or one has avoided or deflected the threat, there is a sense of relief.

The mind starts to return to some sense of homeostasis, and one feels a certain peace in having escaped the threat. However, this only continues to condition the response to be the only valid way of dealing with unease and stress. This primarily deepens the roots of aversion and strengthens the craving link as a response to unpleasant experiences. In turn, this leads to further clinging, which is the associations created and supported by rationales for why something

Dependent Origination

is unpleasant and deemed a threat. From here, the bhava of creating a self that acts in accordance with its conditioning rooted in past kamma and trauma acts out at the birth of action. For a while, it may seem like relief is on the horizon, but then the same loop is fed back, and one isn't able to escape the cycle.

To break the cycle, one requires wisdom into the nature of things. As a practical tool, the pause is again vital to begin the arising of this wisdom. In most cases, if not all, pausing before responding is crucial to not only the reduction of old kamma but also its non-proliferation in the future. Therefore, first pause before allowing the system to go into auto-pilot and feed into the flight or aversive reactivity to a stimulus. With this pause, one may notice tension somewhere in the body. Even if one is in the middle of an argument, one may take a few seconds to just check in with the mind and body and relax. As soon as there's an overall relaxation, the mind feels more open. With this openness and arising clarity of the mind, wisdom comes in, followed by certain wholesome states that allow one to have equanimity towards the unpleasant experience. Instead of running away, cowering, deflecting, or pushing away the feeling, one remains neutral to it. There is no indifference, just careful observation and total non-judgment of even the aversion and unease that arises. But in the very recognition of the unease, one's mind softens. In this softening, there is the natural pause that is sustained from the moment one decided to pause all the way to this sky-like mind, from where one can see through the aversion and object of

The Four F's of Craving

aversion. One then responds, if needed in situations like a disagreement and the like, or remains neutral to an object of aversion. Now, instead of running away, one deals with it using the tools and intuition that spontaneously arise to best handle the situation at hand. Eventually, this becomes the norm, and the mind is able to fully break free from the flight response and its causal cycle, letting wisdom naturally guide the way moving forward.

The freeze response is towards an experience, person, object, or situation that is, for the most part, aversive in nature. Sometimes, there may be a person that one may feel attracted to, yet one is unable to engage with them in a meaningful manner due to the freeze response. In general, the freeze response stems from anxiety, which locks up the muscles of the body and causes one to shut down mentally. This can translate to mental fogginess, procrastination, uncertainty about decisions, and perceiving general experiences as threats when they aren't really the case. This protection mechanism arises due to past experiences where a caregiver may have been verbally or emotionally abusive and there was no one to guide one on how to best manage such a conflictive situation. Instead, the most primal mechanism of the brain – the brain stem – which deals with the basic functions for the survival of the mind-body complex, kicks into overdrive and causes the body to lock up and the mind to shut down. Then, such a being is unable to best assess how to deal with the person. As a child develops certain habitual tendencies through the years, one such tendency that can arise is to literally freeze up.

Dependent Origination

For example, a caregiver may have been emotionally abusive, leading the child to question their own self-worth and be unable to offer up a response or action that allows them to feel safe in the situation. As a result, the mind is unable to clearly process what is happening and begins to disassociate with the present moment. It's almost as if there is a vacant gaze on the person's face and they are sometimes unable to even emote their feelings on their face or in their body.

This response, in the context of the flow of dependent origination, occurs as a result of continual births of action rooted primarily in aversion. Everything arises from this anxiety – a question of “what if” that challenges the sense of self and its survival in front of the perceived threat. Even approaching or facing one's crush or someone who one finds attractive is seen as a threat because all forms of association in clinging cause the mind to say, “what if I mess up? What if I don't know what to say? I'm not good enough to be with this person, whether in the long-term or in this moment.” All of these and similar thoughts and concepts cause the mind to shut down into a tendency to freeze up. However, this then becomes the dominant reaction, whether towards a crush, towards someone arguing with oneself, or even just towards an object or a place one has traumatic associations with. As soon as the mind contacts this, the experience is seen as hedonically aversive. The experience (*vedanā*) having been colored as unpleasant immediately brings about an unconscious reaction to freeze until the perceived danger,

The Four F's of Craving

whether the object is removed, one leaves a place, one's crush leaves, or the argument fizzles out, is gone. At that point, the mind kicks back online, feeling a sense of relief, and one may still have to process the mental fog, tightness and tension, and general anxiety or malaise and procrastination that may follow suit. One can still feel zoned out and disassociated with the present moment. Therefore, even if the relief is felt, it is a false sense of relief, as the effects of such a response result in suffering in the form of feeling helpless, stuck, or even isolated, depending on the severity of the trigger and the freeze response itself.

There are multiple ways to deal with the freeze response. One must first be present as much as possible to the reaction arising. One can tune into the body. This is essential, as while the mind and its conceptualizations and even perceived mental tightness are happening in the later evolved parts of the brain, the body is immediately associated with the brain stem, from where the freeze response is directed. Once one begins to attune to the body, one can feel tension and immediately begin to relax it. Sometimes, in order to retrain the mechanism to relax, one may need to come into contact with the body by tapping on it or patting it in some way. Then, one begins to loosen up the tightness in the muscles, and this then gives the mind a message to tranquilize not only bodily formations but any mental tension as well. From this relaxed state, the mind comes freshly into the present and, from there, one determines to act or speak in alignment with wisdom and according to the situation.

Dependent Origination

Other important preventative or remedial practices after the fact of freezing (and indeed the other three F's) include using forgiveness. Forgiveness and inquiring into the nature of one's associations, traumas, and ultimately the emotional reactivity rooted in the craving link and associated with the freeze response, will allow the mind to better understand and relax the formations that cause such reactivities in the first place. From here, one may use affirmations or the brahmavihārās to navigate the unwholesome or burdening reactivities and consciously and incisively replace them with responses rooted in clarity, power within one's self-confidence, and intuition informed by the Dhamma and the path leading to it.

Fawning can be seen as an extension of any of the three F's but mostly stems from the aversive nature of sometimes freezing and sometimes flight responses. Fawning develops in childhood where a caregiver is emotionally abusive and more often than not has narcissistic qualities. This causes the child to become an appeaser. In order to change the invalidation they feel, they try to seek validation by becoming an overachiever or being helpful towards the caregiver when that isn't their responsibility at all. As the being grows up into adolescence, they may learn to deflect bullies with appeasement and become a people-pleaser. Such a response can develop in adulthood where one experiences domestic violence. In such instances, they try to please their attacker and "go with the flow" to protect themselves from any assault. If one has been bullied, whether in school, college, or the workplace, one begins to put on a mask in order to appear

The Four F's of Craving

friendly, betraying their true emotions. Oftentimes, putting on this mask emotionally tires a person out, and they generally feel exhausted throughout the day. There arises a codependency in abusive relationships, or a crisis of identity – one doesn't know who one is as they put on multiple masks around people – and one is unable to set clear boundaries or speak in a way that asserts themselves in the situation rather than giving power to the abuser or attacker. This is done to avoid conflict and brush unpleasant situations under the rug.

Therefore, it can be seen that the fawn response is generally related to unpleasant situations with people more than with sensations or objects. Nevertheless, similar sensations do arise in the body as the person meets with someone who reminds them of an abusive caregiver or is abusive themselves. As the sympathetic nervous system kicks in, one tenses up, locks up the body, and the mind begins to go into protection mode by trying to deflect conflict at the slightest hint of it. Doing so, the mind is entrained into further habitual patterns where it feels relief only when the person who is abusive or even just slightly agitated doesn't continue the argument or disagreement. Once this relief is felt, the pattern is strengthened as one continues to recycle the same actions. First, the contact with someone who seems like a threat arises. There's an unpleasant sensation of tightness in tandem with the internal emotional response of fear and anxiety. From there, the mind covers into the response of "I don't like this, so I'm going to change it." Associations in

Dependent Origination

clinging cause the mind to regress back to one's childhood or general past traumatic response to what it considers is a current traumatic situation. The behavioral patterns rooted in the habitual tendencies flow out and one acts from there, only to strengthen the cycle. From there, one feels exhausted, ashamed, guilty, worthless, and self-hatred after the ordeal, either immediately, at the end of the day, or at some point in the future.

To break this cycle, one must learn what is a reaction rooted in appeasement stemming from fear of conflict and what is a response rooted in equanimity stemming from the base of wisdom and understanding. Whenever one finds oneself in an argument or with a person that triggers the fawn response, the first step is to come back to the body and relax as much as possible. Notice whenever there is a thought to evade conflict or some potentially unpleasant words or exchanges. Release that thought and hone into the relaxation. Allow the other person to speak and remain silent for a couple of moments instead of immediately trying to fill in the gap of silence. If one can tune into equanimity, even better. If not, just remain in the silence and release any urge to appease. If a thought arises to engage in an assertive way instead of giving in to the person's demands or arguments, then take that. Remember, it's not about winning the argument. It's about asserting your self-worth. One goes from a maladaptive reaction rooted in fear to a healthy response rooted in confidence and understanding what is required for any given situation. Forgiveness is a great preventative process to allow the

The Four F's of Craving

mind to let go of the times during traumatic situations when one used fawning as a defense mechanism so that it doesn't go into those same habit patterns in future situations. Another important tool is to relax any thoughts of self-worthlessness and blaming oneself for one's mistakes in a way that puts one down instead of learning from them. As one does this, one can use gratitude for oneself and list out all the ways in which one is successful, happy, and engaging. This opens the world up as a place to play and be curious about people rather than defensive. In this way, the craving link is replaced with a spontaneous sense of joy and openness rooted in non-aversion and a more equanimous and wise mindset. Finally, one of the most powerful counters to people-pleasing is to engage in a meditation where one sends loving-kindness to oneself and makes that the only meditation one does for one to three months. Over this time, one will see there is a ground or strong foundation of love that one stands upon without seeking the approval of others or trying to appease them out of fear and anxiety.

In any situation and craving-based reaction, there is one commonality. This is the tension that arises in the mind and body as an immediate recoiling towards an object of obsession or away from an object of aversion. The key is to recognize this tension. Once we release our thoughts associated with the object of craving or aversion, the mind and body can relax. This relaxation allows for a sky-like mind where there is an expansive pause from where wisdom can arise to deal with the situation, object, person, or experience in

Dependent Origination

the way it is required and doesn't lead to further associations and rationales in clinging, a respawning and strengthening of habitual tendencies in being, or a birth of reaction that leads to further mental and sometimes even physical suffering. The response that is rooted in that pause and allows for wisdom to seep in makes for a level of deeper mindfulness that gatekeeps the reactivities rooted in the craving link and stemming from the underlying tendencies that underlie the qualitative vedanā, whether it is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. That tension, remember, can arise even in a neutral feeling, where one further identifies with the experience as “me, mine, myself.” The key is not disassociation that leads to further aversion. Instead, it is to see with mindfulness and let the mind understand the emptiness of a self or clearly recognize the projection and misappropriation of self onto a vedanā and then let go of the tightness and tension in mind and body associated with the conceit of self. Feeling this relief, one opens up the path towards wisdom and liberation.

Tañhā and Vedanā

Vedanā should be translated as experience. There has been some debate on whether the word translates as sensations, feelings, or anything related thereof, which allows for some understanding. Experience is all-encompassing. Any experience can be physical, emotional, internal, external, in the past, present, future, subtle or gross, and so on. It can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. To understand and cognize this experience is cognition or consciousness (*viññāna*). To recognize the experience, or to label it based on one's memory of an experience just like it – whether it is the color red, the taste of strawberries, the fragrance of roses, the feel of a warm bath on a cold winter's night, the thoughts of yesteryear or of the hopes of tomorrow – is perception or *sañña*. Vedanā is dependent on *phassa* for it to arise. *Phassa* or contact is the meeting of awareness dependent on the contact between a sense base and its object. This contact or initial touch (as is the literal translation of *phassa*) or trigger gives rise to the experience, colored in by the perception of what the experience is – pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. This experience can give rise to craving. However, we must understand that experience itself is just that. In the experience, there is only the experience. Nothing more, nothing less.

In order to see this, the mind realizes the emptiness of all experience as being “not me, mine, or myself.” Through mindfulness or the careful observation of mental movement from object to other

Dependent Origination

– the ability to remain present in all experience – the link of craving cannot arise and is held at bay by that wisdom born from that sati. This wisdom is the understanding of the impersonal nature of feeling or *vedanā*. Through this wisdom, one finds liberation. When one sees with wisdom as it actually is that all experience is conditioned, therefore impermanent or subject to change, therefore liable to cause or to be suffering, and therefore not to be taken as self in any way, whether as self, belonging to self, in self, or separate from self, the mind experiences deep collectedness and equanimity. From this equanimity, there is disenchantment and dispassion.

Disenchantment is a state of mind where all experience, from the most minor and subtlest to the most floundering and grossest, becomes tiresome. There is no tinge of aversion or indifference in disenchantment. Instead, the mind remains resolute and steady. It is just that the mind is content without any of these disturbances, whether in meditation or in daily life. Disenchantment in daily life translates to a mind that doesn't hold on to anything and tends towards the cessation of experiences in every given moment. When one has the equanimity to see all experience as it is, then it loses disinterest in the experience, not out of boredom, but out of the realization that getting caught up in an experience ultimately results in suffering. One prime illustration of this experience is with regard to food. Say someone's favorite dessert is strawberry ice cream. A friend invites them over and serves them the best, freshest, highest quality strawberry ice cream, made with the finest ingredients. This

is more than enticing for someone who enjoys such food. They sit down, the mind in anticipation at the prospect of enjoying the best strawberry ice cream there is, and they take the first bite. That first bite contacts the tongue. The experience is beyond pleasant. One relishes with delight the taste of that ice cream and hungers for more. Craving has now set in. The anticipation was the first craving, interdependent with one's habitual tendencies towards always choosing strawberry ice cream. The formations rooted in greed arose when the first contact arose in the ear base that ice cream was being served and then at the eye base when one saw it and finally at the tongue and mind base when one tasted it and thought of having more even before the first bite was fully absorbed.

From these formations, there arose the awareness stained by the defilements stemming from greed, further conditioning how the experience would be taken personally. Enjoyment may arise in the process of finishing the first bowl. The friend offers a second, third, fourth, and even fifth bowl. With each bowl, however, there is less inclination to enjoy it as much as the first bowl. If the sugar rush hasn't already set in by the fifth bowl, there is definitely a feeling of fullness and even disgust. Now one is deterred from further bouts of ice cream. One has had their fill. One is beyond content. Such a feeling is akin to disenchantment. Likewise, with regard to every experience, one has had their fill of it right from the moment it arises and nothing in the mind holds on to the experience. There is only the experience, no further grasping or even desiring more of the

Dependent Origination

experience. If it comes, okay. If it goes, also okay. This is the attitude of disenchantment at the experiential level.

Dispassion is like disenchantment 2.0. It goes a step further in the mind's ability to now remain deeply collected in the midst of the flotsam and jetsam of the world around and within, such that it doesn't move and is absolutely steady and still. If we break down the translation of dispassion, it comes from the word *virāga*. This means the absence of passion. *Rāga* also means color. In other words, the mind no longer colors anything as one way or the other. All experience is seen for what it is – just experience. One experiences the world without the sense of “I.” This is the secret to the end of all suffering. Experience totally, all without the sense of an experiencer, without the lens of duality and color that is projected upon the experience. Dispassion naturally arises in the deepest meditative states where proto-thoughts or formations arise but no heed is paid to them, not because the mind isn't meditative or mindful, but because disenchantment – the total disinterest in all forms of mental movement – has set in so deeply that the mind becomes motionless. It becomes like Teflon, like a non-stick pan upon which nothing can be grasped onto or stuck to and all experience slides easily through it and past it without any lack of mindfulness.

The quality of dispassion is to be in an almost non-dual state. We say almost because there may still be some form of an object and subject sweeping in occasionally, however this doesn't happen on a consistent basis. The dispassion is tied to the signless state. The

signless state is a presence of mind where no object of meditation or collectedness is taken and one rests in the silence of such an absence. The signless is the same quality as the emptiness of self, where one doesn't take anything as self or belonging to a self and so on, and it also shares the same quality of undirected awareness, where the mind does not point to a specific direction. Through the realization and experience of the three characteristics – the impermanence, suffering, and the impersonality – of every moment, the mind invariably sees and experiences the signless, undirected, and the emptiness as the dominant space in awareness. Through impermanence, one realizes no object is worth holding on to, thus the signless or objectless. Through suffering, one realizes no intentionality leads to contentment, hence the undirected meditation. Through impersonality, one realizes the lack of inherent essence – the emptiness – of all experience. As a result, the space in the mind remains non-stick, where almost no thoughts, formations, or concepts can find footing in the crevices of the mind. One remains in a state that has the slightest inkling of “I.” When even this disappears, one is firmly rooted in vimutti or freedom of mind, a mind without any craving. Therefore, from here no bridge can be found linking an experience to a corresponding link of craving in the schema of dependent origination.

Before such a pristine state arises, however, there are challenges. There can still be the potential for craving to arise due to the bridge that can connect vedanā and tañhā. This bridge is an

Dependent Origination

underlying tendency or anusaya. Let's first clear the confusion between what is an underlying tendency and a habitual tendency. There is a way in which these two are the same in meaning and different in name, and a way in which they are different in meaning and different in name. In the first case, they do refer to tendencies that propel the mind towards an action. In the latter, the habitual tendencies can vary from a vast host of interdependent choices from which action arises while underlying tendencies have a set range in number. Depending on the sutta, the list may vary, but the general list of seven is as follows – kāmārāgānusaya or the underlying tendency towards sensual passion, paṭighānusaya or the underlying tendency towards resistance, diṭṭhānusaya or the underlying tendency towards views, vicikicchānusaya or the underlying tendency towards doubt, mānānusaya or the underlying tendency towards conceit, bhavarāgānusaya or the underlying tendency towards desire for existence, and avijjānusaya or the underlying tendency towards ignorance. These underlying tendencies differ from habitual tendencies at bhava because the first case is related to the quality of feeling in particular and the latter is related to the karmic tendencies from previous choices that lead to an almost automatic action. Let us now explore each anusaya and how it arises to give rise to craving, acting as a bridge between vedanā and taṇhā.

Kāmarāgānusaya

Kāma, as we saw earlier, can mean lust or relate to sensual experiences. Rāga is passion or the coloring of an experience as something. In that sense, kāmarāga is the passion for sensual experiences, related to the five physical senses. It can also mean the coloration of sensual experiences as “me, mine, myself,” and the projection of concepts that create proliferation in the mind towards a particular sensual experience. Since rāga denotes interest in something, it is closely related to the positive aspect of craving – not positive in the sense of wholesome, but the inclination towards an experience. Therefore, kāmarāgānusaya can be translated as the tendency towards sensual craving. This tendency, being directed towards an object rather than against or in resistance to something, underlies a positive feeling or a pleasant experience.

Exploring vedanā, we see that it is just an experience. This can mean a sensation, thought, or any kind of feeling or emotion. In and of itself, vedanā has no hedonic tone other than what is conceptually projected onto it. This is the process of saññā or perception, the labeling of an experience as something. At the most basic level, this projection of valence upon the experience includes the qualities of pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. These qualities projected upon an experience are subjective, particularly pleasant and unpleasant as concepts. One person’s pleasure is another person’s pain. For example, in sexual acts, certain experiences that could be considered

Dependent Origination

unpleasant or not enticing at all by one person can be fetishized by another and seen as pleasurable. Even in terms of other sensual experiences, various scents, tastes, touches, sounds, and sights could be pleasant to one party and completely unpleasant to another and seen as aversive. The taste of sourness can be pleasant to one and displeasing to another. Likewise with floral scents, warm blankets, the sound of heavy metal music, or stark psychedelic colors – these can all be experienced as pleasant or unpleasant.

Oftentimes, throughout one's lifetime, these qualities may swap, evolve, or transform. When one first detested the taste of yogurt because it reminded one of baby vomit, now one relishes it. When at one point one loved the sound of jazz, at another time one has grown bored of it. When one once enjoyed the scent of petrichor, now the smell is not one's cup of tea. When in the past one hated the sensation of rain falling on the skin, now one feels exhilarated by it. When black-and-white movies were all the rage in one's mind, now they seem boring and trivial to the eyes. Even in terms of ideas, what was once pleasant can become unpleasant; generally, in one's youth, one tends to be liberal, but as one starts to grow older, one's ideas tend towards being conservative. Therefore, there is no objectively pleasant or unpleasant sensation or experience.

The tendency towards sensual craving underlies a pleasant experience. How does this translate in one's mind? Whenever the mind says, "I like it," simply stating it is not the craving or the underlying tendency towards sensual craving. It is the grasping sense

of wanting to possess, own, keep, or prevent it from slipping or changing that is the craving. It is the initial tension that arises as a pleasant experience arises that is the tendency which underlies it. This translates to a mind that begins to feel obsessed with the object of craving. The initial spark of “I want more of it,” or “I hope this doesn’t stop,” is the underlying tendency towards sensual craving. What then is the difference between the thought, “this is pleasant and I like it!” and “I want more of this?” In the first case, a pleasant sensation is perceived as such, and when one thinks, “I like it,” it doesn’t necessarily mean one is identifying with it but using such words as a manner of expression. In the latter case, when one says, “I want more of this,” while it may just be that one wants more of another helping of food, for example, which is not craving but just the need to fill up the body, the underlying tendency towards sensual craving arises where one feels like if the object of craving is removed it would be unpleasant, and the tightness and tension that arise in the mind and body, giving rise to full-blown craving, is what sets it apart from just the mere idea of wanting more. There is a desire to possess and hold on to the pleasant experience rather than just mere appreciation or wanting to have one’s reasonable fill of food or whatever may be the object.

In the model of dependent origination, underlying tendencies bridge the gap between feeling and craving. When a sense base makes contact with its object, a corresponding consciousness arises tied to that contact, brought on by the formations that are triggered

Dependent Origination

by that contact. If the formations are conditioned by ignorance, then they will be rooted in greed, hatred, or delusion or any combination of the three, depending on what work is left to do to eradicate any leftover seeds. In the case of the underlying tendency towards sensual craving, the roots of greed and delusion will condition the formations. These formations will then condition the consciousness that arose as a result of the sense base and its object making contact. For this to happen, the following co-arise – mentality-materiality and the six sense bases, which are both required for the process of contact and feeling to arise. Since the consciousness that arises from this trigger and which conditions the rest of the links after it is conditioned by greed and delusion found in the formations, it is defiled or stained by certain upakkilesas that stem or can stem from these two roots. Therefore, the feeling that arises, if it is a pleasant experience, can give rise to full-blown craving for the object of one's obsessive desire manifested as mental and bodily tension. That which underlies the pleasant experience is the tendency towards sensual craving. If we were to see dependent origination as the flow of a river downstream, it would start with the taints as the glacier that originates the river. The whirlpools found in the river are each of the links, and the undercurrents that produce these or fuel these whirlpools are namely the roots for formations, the defilements for consciousness, and the underlying tendencies for feeling. Therefore, the underlying tendencies color the feeling and vice versa to give rise to a reaction to the experience as not only “me, mine, myself,” but

also something that has to remain “me, mine, myself,” especially in the case of kāmarāgānusaya.

Let us look at a mundane example to see how this river flows through every moment of our everyday experience. Consider someone we feel attracted to. When our eyes make contact with this person, there is a corresponding consciousness that arises, triggered by the formations rooted in greed and delusion. The experience is pleasant – we are seeing someone we like. We may think in our minds, “this is my person, or this person will be mine,” and the tension that follows with that thought is found in the underlying tendency towards sensual craving. We want to become this person’s lover and we want to make them ours. This translates to craving, and now we associate the person with goodness and excitement such that we rationalize why this person is good for us, even if we don’t know them enough. This is clinging. There is, it should be pointed out, a strong emotional undercurrent to be found both in craving and clinging rather than just mere thoughts of the person. From here, we choose to speak to them with the idea of impressing them or we become nervous around them. These are our habitual tendencies. We then act accordingly, and depending on our emotions, the other person’s reactions, or the long-term viability of a potential relationship, we experience suffering at some point – immediate rejection and dejection, a tumultuous relationship, or the eventual end of the relationship through a breakup, separation, or death. In this chain, the underlying tendency was the initial urge and pull of tension

Dependent Origination

in the body that leads to some form of craving, whether in the dualistic choices of craving or aversion or the fourfold reactions of the four F's – fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. Let us now explore how to recognize and ultimately extirpate this particular underlying tendency towards sensual craving.

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Sensual Craving through Right Effort

When one understands the emptiness of all sensual pleasures, in that moment, there is no underlying tendency towards sensual craving. There comes a time when one totally eliminates any underlying tendency towards sensual craving, where no obsessive thoughts of ownership or the desire to keep the pleasure going arise. Instead, one experiences reality as it actually is – conditioned, impermanent, subject to suffering, and therefore impersonal. This seeing through wisdom is the key to eradicating this tendency. Sensual pleasures are not the problem, as we’ve discussed earlier. It is the intention rooted in craving that leads the mind to grasp them as “me, mine, myself,” and therefore causes the tendency to arise in the form of that initial tension of holding on, grasping, clutching, obsessing over the object of one’s sensual craving.

The recognition of this, but the non-judgment of it, is an essential first step towards letting go of this tendency. In other words, while one notices the initial tension and thoughts of “I want more of this. I don’t want this to stop. This is mine. I don’t want it to ever end,” and so on, one may then say, “I shouldn’t be feeling this way.” This judgment causes further tension in the mind. Instead, one ought to just see it for what it is – an impersonal thought that arose as a result of contact with a sensually pleasurable experience. The

Dependent Origination

immediate recognition of this is enough to stop the underlying tendency in its tracks. One welcomes it as one would a friend or someone in need. The attitude is one of loving-kindness towards the sensual craving. It is present. And that's okay. No big deal. When one is ready, one releases any attachment, views, or ideas about how it should be and how one may have "failed" initially to recognize this tendency. One abandons that sense of failure and then relaxes, slowly, gently, and with total attention, every tension associated with that underlying tendency.

One feels this and allows the spaciousness of the moment where one is in mundane Nibbāna. One may smile in this and return back to his presence of awareness or remain in it if it hasn't wavered. In this way, one abandons any judgment and rests in a space where no underlying tendency towards sensual craving arises. Therefore, no full-blown craving arises, and the rest of the series is unable to arise. Wisdom naturally arises instead of a mechanical mentation of "this is not me, this is not mine, this is not myself," (although this may be a good exercise for one starting on the path). The experience of seeing through the tension and its release allows one to understand that when this tension and with it the tendency arose, it was due to some fuel, and when one released it, the fuel being spent or abandoned, so went the tension. This gives rise to the wisdom of the fundamental dependency of such a state. When it passes away, one also realizes the impermanent nature of the experience and therefore abandons any notions of personalization projected onto the

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Sensual Craving through experience. This is true wisdom, which results in complete release in the form of resting in Nibbāna.

In the context of the Noble Truths, the tension and its associated underlying tendency towards sensual craving is the First Noble Truth of Dukkha. The attention and taking the sensual pleasure as belonging to self or as some form of self is the Second Noble Truth of Samudaya. When one releases this undue attention without any judgment and relaxes the tension, one experiences the Third Noble Truth of Nirodha. Having done this process, one has utilized the Fourth Noble Truth of Magga. To recap using the 6Rs, one:

- Recognizes the underlying tendency towards sensual craving as the initial tension of grasping towards the object of craving, which is the Dukkha in that moment and one understands this as such
- Releases any judgments about this experience and abandons any undue attention that fuels this grasping, which is the abandoning of Samudaya
- Relaxes the tension associated with the underlying tendency towards sensual craving and experiences relief, which is Nirodha
- Re-smiles if needed to remain or just remains in that spacious quality of mundane Nibbāna

Dependent Origination

- Returns to a wholesome object or continues to remain in the quality of Nibbāna
- Repeats whenever the process repeats, thus cultivating Magga

Paṭighānusaya

Paṭigha means collision or resistance. Depending on the context, it can mean a reaction to sensory contact, resistance to an object, or ill will or aversion toward someone or something. Paṭighānusaya, then, is the underlying tendency towards aversion. It underlies a painful feeling. Whenever an experience is perceived as unpleasant, this tendency may arise, acting as a bridge to full-blown aversion in the link of craving. An unpleasant experience can be a sensation, situation, dealing with an unpleasant person, or negative memories or emotions associated with those memories. This underlying tendency primarily finds its root in hatred and, to some extent, delusion. It is not possible for this underlying tendency to arise with a pleasant feeling because it is inherently opposed to one or more experiences.

The resistance one feels is manifested as the initial tension in contact with an unpleasant experience. First, there is the external object of one or more sense bases, which makes contact with the corresponding sense base. The contact between the object and the sense base triggers the arising of a corresponding consciousness, which is brought about by formations rooted in hatred, conditioned by ignorance. This consciousness, stained by one or more of the defilements rooted in hatred, gives rise to a hate-conditioned mentality and materiality. This continues to condition the six sense bases and thus the contact that arises, giving rise to an unpleasant

Dependent Origination

sensation or experience. This unpleasant experience is deemed unpleasant due to its association with past experiences. Hence, the perception projected onto it sees it as unpleasant.

When one experiences it as unpleasant, an initial and immediate reaction to that unpleasantness can arise. This is the underlying tendency towards aversion. This initial reaction can manifest as a thought, such as, “I don’t like this,” or “I hate this,” or any other variant. When someone takes the unpleasant experience personally, they may say, “Doesn’t this person realize how much they’re hurting me? How stupid can they be?” As soon as it’s taken personally, the underlying tendency towards aversion has arisen. What may accompany this is tension in the mind and body. One may physically tighten up, feel blood pressure rising, heart rate increasing, and muscles tensing. There may arise a furrow in the brow, a grimace on the face, and a general disposition of hatred towards a person, object, or situation. At this point, full-blown aversion has arisen. The initial reaction of “I hate this” turns into mental proliferation of thoughts surrounding that initial reaction, culminating in aversion and then reacting through clinging – making associations or returning to associations with the unpleasantness – and habitual tendencies – utilizing the usual reactions to a particular stimulus – terminating at the birth of action, which then causes a whole range of suffering depending on the scenario.

Let’s explore an example of how this underlying tendency towards aversion arises. You are walking down the street, and it’s a

warm, sunny day. You enjoy the sun on your skin, and you smile. It is a pleasant experience. As you turn the corner, you are met with a sudden whiff of malodorous garbage flowing from a passing truck. Immediately, your attention is on the odor, and you scrunch your face in disgust. It is an unpleasant experience. Now, due to the unpleasant experience, your mind immediately cringes, tenses up, and tightens along with your body as an immediate reaction to the smell. You may even think, “That’s horrendous!” However, the smell quickly passes as you walk down the street. There was tension initially, but your reaction was limited to being in the vicinity of the smell. Even so, there arose an initial tightness, which was the underlying tendency towards aversion. You even thought of how terrible the smell was; however, the proliferation was limited to just that as the odor dissipated. Had the smell lingered, the mind might have felt even more hatred towards it, resulting in full-blown aversion, in which the tendency to avert turned into deeper anger or irritation towards the smell. Now, you may associate the smell with some memory or start to rationalize why you hate it so much. You may then choose to do something about it, like yell or complain, these being the habitual tendencies and the taking of such a verbal action being the birth of action. Now the anger burns through the mind, ruining your mood. This is suffering.

Another example may be an unpleasant exchange with a close loved one, like a partner. You find yourself starting to disagree on what happened a few days ago. Your partner says they recall the

Dependent Origination

events one way but it makes you look bad. Perhaps, they misperceived you speaking in a harsh or sarcastic tone with their boss at an office party. You say that that was not the case and that, in fact, you were sharing a laugh with their boss. They don't agree and start becoming critical and using harsh words. The harsh words make contact with your ears, and the desire to be proven right or seen a certain way makes contact with your mind. Both are unpleasant objects that give rise to an unpleasant feeling – the first is the harsh sensation of the piercing words, the other is the burning urge to rectify the criticism and be seen and accepted as what you think is the truthful way of how things went that particular day and how you behaved. In your mind, the underlying tendency towards aversion manifests as tension and tightness where the mind thinks, via conceit, “How dare my partner say this to me. Don't they trust me?” This initial reaction bends towards full-blown aversion, where the mind is now fully blinded by ill will towards the partner. The clinging that arises, if you don't recognize the ill will at the link of craving or the initial reaction of hatred in the underlying tendency towards aversion, will manifest as associations. Perhaps, when you were a child, your parents misunderstood you when you spoke or accused you of something you know for a fact that you did not do, and due to that misunderstanding, you associated it as a lack of connection. In this moment, that's how you feel with your partner's accusations. Then, if this is not recognized, habitual tendencies set in, which provide your mind with a plate of choices that are almost

automatically selected due to the fact that you've made those choices so many times that your mind inclines to them without any forethought. If, at this point, the mind doesn't recognize the habitual tendency to lash out and defend the sense of self, then the birth of action is to do the very same and, therefore, this leads to further conflict, misunderstanding, and a whole swarm of suffering in that vein. What's crucial at any point during these moments, as the links co-arise, is to recognize, ideally even before the link of craving sets in, the initial clutch of the nervous system and the mind and body – the underlying tendency towards aversion – and then release their hold on the mind and experience freedom from them. This is what we will explore next.

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Aversion through Right Effort

The Buddha states in MN 64, Mahāmālunkyaṇḍita Sutta, that the notion of “beings” doesn’t exist in an infant, yet the underlying tendency towards aversion or ill-will towards beings is present in the infant’s mind. An underlying tendency, in general, can be considered something carried over from a previous existence, whether that’s the existence of the infant within the womb or a previous lifetime prior to the present life. If we consider that the previous existence was in the womb, then it would make sense that the notion of “beings” may be inherited from the mother. Perhaps, the infant can sense the idea of other beings due to the mother’s emotional state. We can get even broader with this idea by saying it’s not just beings but also objects in general. When a certain food is digested, the infant may relish it. Other times, not so much, or even detest it, making it feel uncomfortable. Such objects, whether taste, touch, sound, or even ideas as the infant starts to develop them in the neonatal brain, are seen as unpleasant. Reactions to unpleasant objects emerge. These reactions may be primitive and not too subtle – perhaps kicking in the womb or moving to and fro to show one’s discontent, and so on. This then strengthens the formations rooted in hatred, which gives rise to further underlying tendencies towards aversion. This underlying tendency becomes available to the mind whenever unpleasant experiences arise, in the womb or outside.

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Aversion through

If we consider the formations from previous lives prior to the present birth and before the consciousness descended into the womb to form the evolution of this infant, then we can see that the underlying tendency towards aversion developed over a period of time such that the formations that arose at the point in one's last moment drove forward this tendency and were transported into the next life via the rebirth-linking consciousness.

We come back now to the notion of “beings” or, in a broader context, objects external to us. It is only because we see them as separate from a sense of self that the idea of ill-will arises. Aversion is always targeted towards something we may see as a threat to the self or as displeasing to the self. However, we can remedy this notion of a separate self that is differentiated from the rest of the world. Through the understanding and experience of emptiness, the mind abandons notions of separate beings or the idea that there is a separate, permanent self that we are, or holds the idea that we are, or that things affect us as the self, whether they are pleasant or unpleasant.

Through *yoniso manasikāra* – proper attention – or the attention rooted in reality, one can see through the empty nature of the notion of a separate self. By understanding that what is experienced as unpleasant is conditioned, we then see it as impermanent. What is impermanent is understood as subject to change, decay, and therefore suffering. Indeed, it is not too difficult to consider the unpleasant experience causing aversion to be suffering. In this way, the mind

Dependent Origination

rejects the idea that this experience belongs to “me,” is “mine,” or is “myself.” It realizes the nature of emptiness – the lack of inherent or intrinsic existence or essence that can be considered a self. Seeing this, one experiences equanimity. Through this equanimity, one abandons further attachment such that one disengages and experiences disenchantment and dispassion, leading to the total cessation of aversion in that moment. The more one realizes emptiness – the nature of all conditioned phenomena – the easier it is to abandon any aversion, even if it’s in the seedling form of an underlying tendency towards aversion. Eventually, one’s mind rests in this emptiness and everything is seen through dispassion and total equanimity. Ultimately, when one realizes this as a lived phenomenon in everyday living, one transcends aversion altogether, traditionally becoming what is known as an *anāgāmi*, as per the suttas.

Mettā, or loving-kindness, is the antidote to aversion. One’s mind is so suffused with this genuine wish for one’s own happiness and the happiness of all that it cannot help but be in a state of near-perpetual happiness. The eradication of ill-will is just around the corner for one who is in loving-kindness for as long as one remembers until it becomes a dominant feature of one’s mindset. Through this, what was once deemed unpleasant, even dreadful and frightening or traumatizing, is now seen through the rosy lenses of acceptance born from this *mettā*, and one now allows the once aversive object with a smile. In this way, one remains steadfast,

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Aversion through confident, and without fear or lack of self-worth. Instead of becoming a doormat or passive, one may still be assertive but no longer with the aversive edginess brought on by the tension of the underlying tendency towards aversion.

This underlying tendency, through Right Effort, can then be seen as the First Noble Truth of Dukkha, recognized as tension. One's undue attention and the lingering thoughts of aversion make up the Second Noble Truth of Samudaya, which one abandons. Through this relinquishment, the mind experiences relief and remains in the Third Noble Truth of Nirodha. Having done this, one has followed the Fourth Noble Truth of Magga. Using the 6Rs to understand and transcend the underlying tendency towards aversion, the mind:

- Recognizes the underlying tendency towards aversion as the initial tension, tied to aversive thoughts, thereby understanding Dukkha
- Releases these thoughts and the direction of attention towards the aversion, thereby abandoning Samudaya
- Relaxes the tension and experiences and realizes for oneself Nirodha
- Re-smiles in the joy of freedom from the tension and remains in that experience

Dependent Origination

- Returns to loving-kindness as the antidote for the aversion
- Repeats whenever mind inclines towards further aversion, thus strengthening the cultivation of Magga

Ditṭhānusaya

Ditṭhi refers to views. Ditṭhānusaya is the underlying tendency towards views. This can refer to the six wrong views as detailed in various suttas, as well as views in general. Finally, it can also pertain to holding a view in relation to the Dhamma itself. What are the six wrong views as they were understood during the time of Gautama Buddha? They are materialism, fatalism, amoralism, eternalism, asceticism, and indecision. Views in general, which mean the judgment or opinion of something, are also detrimental on the path. Attachment to the Dhamma itself is a view that tethers the mind to concepts, no matter how refined and how Dhamma-friendly they are, and they cause one to be reborn in various states of existence. We have studied these different views quite extensively in the section on Clinging when discussing the clinging to views, so we will briefly reiterate each of these, but the main focus is to understand what exactly is the underlying tendency towards views.

This underlying tendency, like any other, arises with a feeling. However, different from the underlying tendency towards craving and the underlying tendency towards aversion, it arises with any quality of feeling, whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. One can have views, opinions, ideas, concepts, and judgments about any experience, be it good, bad, or indifferent. The key is to understand how this underlying tendency towards views manifests. In terms of a somatic expression, there can arise a slight tension in the muscles

Dependent Origination

of the body or a tightness in the mind. One can notice the immediate grasping towards views or the formulation of an opinion about an experience. It's not the opinion itself or the thoughts regarding an experience that are the underlying tendency. The opinion or thoughts are all part of the process of perception.

The underlying tendency towards views is the grasping at the opinion itself, seeing it as a barrier to understanding and connectivity with a person. Such an action causes the mind to remain steadfast and stubborn in its opinion, thereby causing an identification with the view. The inability to be flexible is a result of this underlying tendency, which can be conditioned by the defilement of stubbornness and rooted in delusion first and foremost, and the tension that arises to protect and hold that view is a major signature of this underlying tendency. The mind filters the perception of an experience, person, or situation through this view, and from it there arise a reaction of full-blown craving or aversion in the link of *taṇhā*. The opinion of the experience, or one of the detrimental views, or the attachment to the Dhamma can manifest the grasping around the experience (or even person or situation) and, if not recognized and released, can give rise to further bouts of craving or aversion all the way down the links to suffering.

Let us now look at how such an underlying tendency towards views could arise with regards to the six detrimental views, views in general, and the attachment to the Dhamma. In the case of someone with a materialist view, when an experience arises, they may see it at

face value. A materialist generally believes that there is only this world of matter and the body. The idea then can spawn a hedonistic bent, where one only looks at what can bring the maximum amount of physical pleasure and delights for the senses. Therefore, when met with an unpleasant experience, person, or situation, there is an immediate recoil in the form of the underlying tendency towards views seeing it as materially unwanted and so along with it can arise the underlying tendency towards aversion for the experience, person, or situation. There is a slight tension and one then, without any forethought, almost automatically and seamlessly enters into full-blown aversion.

Someone who has a more fatalistic approach to life will experience all situations with extreme passivity. Whatever the experience is, it is colored by the underlying tendency towards the view of fatalism, where the individual is resigned to whatever happens. At the outset, this may seem quite a fulfilling way of accepting things as they come, but it can quickly also create a sense of helplessness and total sense of nihilism – nothing matters and it causes anxiety in such a mind. When the underlying tendency towards the view of fatalism arises, the mind reactively looks at it in an accepting, passive manner but may also feel woeful, helpless, and victimized by the situation, person, or even object. This can cause a myriad of aversive thoughts and such a tense, contracted mind gives rise to full-blown aversion.

Dependent Origination

With the view of amorality, where there is no absolute morality, and so whatever arises is reacted to at the whim of the mind. When met a person, experience, situation, or object, at the most extreme level of this view, there can arise the desire to possess these categories of an experience if they are pleasant or to destroy them if they are unpleasant. There is a tension that results in thoughts of complete grasping or total aversion, resulting in a reaction rooted in the link of full-blown craving or aversion. There is no forethought filtered by the taking of the precepts. It's every person for themselves with this view. Nothing matters and there are no consequences. Even if met with consequences, a person deeply steeped in this view will not see them as such and just as a process of random occurrences. Ultimately, this causes immense suffering and radical dissatisfaction with life.

Similarly, with the view of eternalism, one may see all experiences, people, objects, and situations as part of or as complete eternal principles. This is a dangerous way of seeing things as in the most extreme cases if one were to destroy a being, one would just see it as a part of an eternal element and nothing is fully destroyed. At a more moderate level, this view results in the idea of someone being a smaller part of an eternal whole or that one is the eternal whole looking through the smaller part that is the being. This gives rise to sometimes a passive and fatalistic view of experiences. There may be a happy acceptance in the beginning but eventually, a certain kind of conceit dominates the mind where one thinks everything

being eternal, nothing is wrong with any kind of moral decay or that ultimately it all merges with the whole. It is a form of spiritual bypassing that only puts a bandage over the possible mental and emotional trauma underneath, which only suppresses and doesn't aim to resolve any underlying issues with an experience. This results in further identification with the idea of the eternal principle. This can lead to further delusion, and if the suppression goes unchecked towards explosive bouts of full-blown craving and aversion.

The ascetic view is related to the idea that all experience is seen as a process arising through kamma. While there is validity in this idea, this can be taken to an extreme level where every single experience, encounter with a person, object, and situation is seen as something that needs to be gone through and one must experience the suffering for it. Even further extreme than this is the idea that one must do certain rituals or ascetic practices like long fasts, perhaps self-flagellation, or living naked outdoors without food or water, to bring pain to the mind and body as a way of atoning for one's past actions. Whenever such a view is strengthened by such actions, the mind filters everything through that view. Therefore, when one experiences anything, it is seen through the view that this experience is meant to be a process to atone for one's past kamma or that one must do some kind of ascetic, ritualistic, or rite of passage kind of process that will atone for the present experience. This only results in further craving for that atonement or aversion when there is a barrier to that supposed atonement.

Dependent Origination

Finally, the sixth view of indecision – that is to say skepticism or agnosticism on any absolutes – filters the mind’s experiences where no conclusion on any situation, person, sensation, or object is made. Even if the mind defaults to some perception and judgment about the experience, due to the fear of entering into the realm of any absolutistic view, there is indecision about the opinions one has about an experience. This can result in restlessness, even a bout of full-blown aversion. Such a view serves to evade any kind of conflict on the surface but at the deeper level only causes an inner struggle about one’s purpose and confusion about everything that arises, rather than a sound judgment that allows one to live in a way that is spontaneous and altogether free of any form of craving.

When we look at the world around us, we have ideas about it or about how it should be and how we can make it the way our minds perceive that perfected ideal. These are all views the mind inherits from the myriad of experiences. We are, from our first breath on this planet, through our infancy, into our childhood, adolescence, adult life, and old age, geared towards holding beliefs or systems of belief that provide solace to us, which resonates with our expectations or ideals of what the best life might be, but over these various stages those ideas continue to change. As we start to hold on to these views, the mind formulates a certain state of existence, internally, but even externally as it appears that the people in that world or even the world itself and our place in it continue to mold around those views. It’s through these views that our world is filtered and therefore, when we

are met with an experience, person, situation, or object. This filtration process arises quite automatically and can manifest as the underlying tendency towards views in general when the mind comes to a conclusion about something based on the preexisting ideas or concepts that are projected on the person, experience, situation, or object. If a person doesn't subscribe to our beliefs, the underlying tendency towards views may then see the person as an aversive enemy or at the very least a neutral party. That is the nature of the mind that inclines towards such a view or the underlying tendency towards that view. When we hold on to views, we also limit the possibilities that can arise since our views in some ways quite literally make up our world. As soon as the mind lets go of any such views, we are not met with any kind of opposition and therefore no full-blown aversion with regards to the opposing view or the source of that opposing view can arise; likewise, when met with any kind of experience, person, situation, or object that corresponds or is in agreement with a view the mind holds, no craving arises in relation to it or the agreeing view. Finally, with regards to the attachment to the Dhamma as a view, if that arises, then the mind still makes judgments or builds up self-righteousness that it defends at the level of the underlying tendency towards views, leading to craving if the experience is in agreement with the Dhamma or to aversion if it opposes it. All such processes happen at the level of the underlying tendency towards views. Ultimately, all views are to be abandoned. When they are abandoned, the mind experiences peace, harmony,

Dependent Origination

and is open to all possibilities of every moment, so that it can act spontaneously in accordance with whatever is required for every situation, which means the fullest extent of mindfulness is utilized and therefore no craving or aversion or identification can arise as that mindfulness is informed through proper attention rooted in the Dhamma. We will now explore how one abandons the wrong views, attachment to views in general, and attachment to the Dhamma so that the underlying tendency towards views is extirpated.

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Views through Right Effort

Views are a natural occurrence of the mind. They arise as a result of contact between sense bases and their objects, and the mind interprets what it experiences from that contact. Seeing this, we don't need to look at every view as a bad thing. Instead, we acknowledge the view and observe how it filters our perceptions of reality. If we notice any kind of tension arising or, more specifically, tied to that tension, we notice that our mind holds tightly to that view and defends it to the point of having aversion towards the person opposing that view. Then we see this, relax, let go, and come to a mindset that is rooted in what some would call the causal standpoint.

What does this mean? In traditional Indic ideologies, there are generally three levels of reality – the material, the subtle, and the causal. The material is related to everything that essentially arises in the waking state of our consciousness. The subtle is related to our ideas, concepts, dreams, and imagination. Sometimes this is tied to the astral realms or higher realms of the jhanas. It is also related to the subconscious, while the material is more related to the conscious. The causal is the potentiality of all there is, a realm of infinite possibilities. It is related to the unconscious, where all our triggers and the formations arise. Beyond these three is the mind without craving, a Nibbānic mind, where no views take hold at all, and

Dependent Origination

whatever does come from here is spontaneously arisen, dependent on what is appropriate and required for a particular situation, event, person, or object. Views come up from the causal insofar as triggers can bring them up when made contact with, but are then made visible in the mind as filters at the subtle level and finally become the lenses at the material level, where they come to fullness and manifest through one's intentions, verbal and bodily actions.

This framework allows you to see where the views manifest most. If they come up more and more through our different levels of actions, then they are quite rigid and mostly unshakeable at the conscious level. If they arise as ideas, concepts, and "what-if" scenarios through the instrument of imagination, then they are quite active at the subconscious level. Outside of that, if they remain potentials and don't stir up but their seeds are present as triggers, which in most cases are difficult to locate, then they are present at the unconscious level. In the most practical application of this framework, the majority of time dealing with the underlying tendency towards views would arise in the material, conscious plane of the mind, which manifests at contact and feeling.

The six heretical views – materialism, fatalism, amoralism, eternalism, asceticism, and philosophical agnosticism or indecision – are countered by the Right View established in the Dhamma. First, we must address how these views arise in order to recognize and acknowledge them, then to take the pause from further reactivities stemming from these views, relax any tightness and tension

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Views through associated with and embodied from them, and allow the space where no views arise in that mind rooted in the rootless – Nibbāna – so that intuition can guide how to navigate the situation, interaction, or experience. That way, there is no preconceived idea or attachment to the idea, and one's mind can flow seamlessly through the realm of infinite potential at the causal level without any triggers.

Materialism is countered by the understanding and experience of mental states beyond just physical sensual experience. Whenever one enters jhāna, one experiences a supramundane state. The more one does this, the less invested one is in the view of materialism. Fatalism is countered by the understanding and perspective of kamma. There is choice, there is intention, and when one sees and experiences this firsthand, then fatalism falls away. Amoralism is countered in the same way since it shows that the general tendency in existence is to bring up wholesome effects from wholesome intentions and unwholesome effects from unwholesome intentions. For example, when you yell and lash out at someone, their general reaction will be to return that in kind. When one sees this, one lets go of the idea of moral nihilism. Eternalism is countered through further insight through careful observation sharpened through meditation and understanding of the nature of reality, specifically impermanence and conditionality and causality. Seeing this, we understand that all conditioned experiences are impermanent, and there is no eternal essence that can be seen as self or belonging to self. Asceticism is countered by seeing that through a comfortable

Dependent Origination

meditation practice, results are found in one's personality changes and transformation rather than ritualistic practices and causing oneself pain. Agnosticism is countered by taking a position, but not out of fear or attachment to the position. Rather, it is the experiential confidence in something because it has led to an experience of personality change and transformation. The established supramundane Right View is the antidote to this agnosticism. In other words, stream entry destroys all six views from the mind and no longer gives rise to the underlying tendency towards views in regard to these six.

Dealing with the attachment to the Dhamma as a view is abandoned when one understands and experiences the purity, freedom, and relief of arahantship, which brings about the eradication of all views. Can one start from this understanding right away? Not necessarily. In MN 74, the Buddha asks the wanderer Dīghanakha if he is attached to the views that he has no views. This allows him to let go of even that. For others, the process may start with letting go of wrong views to climbing to the Right View and from there to let go of attachment even to Right View. Ultimately, one sees the Dhamma as another model to let go of suffering. Just as seeing the links of dependent origination or the characteristics of the five aggregates or six sense bases is a useful tool by seeing these models for the understanding of emptiness and entering Nibbāna, even the Dhamma is that – a raft to get to the other shore. The Dhamma doesn't become reified but is used in a skillful way, and

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Views through any reification of it as a view to hold on to is seen as futile and unskillful. Finally, one may still have opinions and even effectively voice them at opportune times, but they won't have such a binding effect on the mind. They are seen as impermanent, and therefore the mind never holds on to them. The views are not the concern. It is how one relates to them that can lead to further suffering, and that relational quality is found in whether or not the underlying tendency towards view is present in the mind.

In the context of the Four Noble Truths, the underlying tendency to views is seen as the First Noble Truth of Dukkha, the attachment to them, the fuel of attention provided them is seen as the Second Noble Truth of Samudaya, the letting go of the view is the Fourth Noble Truth of Magga, by which one experiences the Third Noble Truth of Nirodha, the space of Nibbānic relief from where intuition arises in order to correctly assess and act (or not act) depending on what is required in every given situation. Through the Right Effort of the 6Rs, one –

- Recognizes the underlying tendency towards views as Dukkha
- Releases the attention that fuels the intensity of the view, which is Samudaya
- Relaxes the tightness and tension and experiences Nirodha, relief from the attachment to a specific view
- Re-smiles as a result of the relief

Dependent Origination

- Returns to or remains in the relief so that intuition can arise
- Repeats whenever necessary to finally let go completely any attachment to views, thereby cultivating Magga

Vicikicchānusaya

Vicikicchā, as we've seen in previous sections, refers to doubt. It can mean perplexity or uncertainty. When we use the word doubt in this context, it can refer to these two words, especially to uncertainty. Therefore, vicikicchānusaya is the underlying tendency towards doubt. Such a doubt is in regard to the Dhamma but also the perplexity in regard to what is wholesome and unwholesome.

Rather than just skepticism about the Dhamma, it is also confusion about what is the true Dhamma and what is the false pretense of the Dhamma. At the level of skepticism, it is the apprehension of even approaching the principles of the Dhamma. It is not the healthy sort of experimental skepticism where one tests out the Dhamma for the purposes of experience and understanding. It is the total doubt in the benefits of the Dhamma. One doesn't even consider it a viable option for the alleviation of suffering.

At the level of uncertainty or confusion, it is the misperception of what is wholesome and unwholesome. One may not understand what is wholesome or unwholesome, confuse the wholesome for the unwholesome, or the unwholesome for the wholesome. Doubts in terms of not understanding principles of the Dhamma are one thing, but the total misperception and misapprehension of the basic understanding of the wholesome and unwholesome are entirely another thing. The former type of doubt can be cleared right away.

Dependent Origination

One may not know what level of jhāna one is in or may need clarity on a subtler and deeper aspect of the teachings, and this is completely fine since such doubts can be cleared by true knowledge through the voice of another and the clarifications of a wise and experienced teacher. However, the confusion about the state one is in regards to it being unwholesome or wholesome is the vicikicchā that we are referring to in regards to the underlying tendency towards doubt.

Here, one is unable to understand the quality of an experience or one's perception of or reaction to it. When contact arises between one or more of the sense bases and their corresponding objects, ignorance-conditioned formations arise that may be rooted in delusion. From this, the consciousness that arises may be defiled by those upakkilesas that are rooted in the kilesas underlying the preceding formations. This defiled consciousness then conditions the mentality-materiality so that when the six sense bases do make contact, there is the underlying tendency towards doubt in regards to the experience. Such doubt may filter the experience in such a way that one is unable to recognize whether the reaction to it is wholesome or unwholesome. There may not be any doubt about the hedonic tone of the experience, but there is an uncertainty or inability to recognize the reaction as being rooted in craving or aversion and therefore this can give rise to other underlying tendencies including towards conceit, desire for existence, sensual craving, ignorance, aversion, and views. From here can stem full-blown craving or aversion, and if the underlying tendency towards doubt is strong

enough, it can deter the mind's ability to recognize this and lead it further down the chain towards suffering.

Let us look at some examples of how the underlying tendency towards doubt may arise. When you're meditating, especially the first few times, it might be difficult to identify what is arising in the mind. There is confusion about whether or not one is with the object or whether one is doing the practice correctly. There may be uncertainty about whether something is a wholesome thought or not or a hindrance or not, and the mind may have doubts about the nature of the practice itself. All of these arise when the mind makes contact with a mental object and is unsure about its quality or whether or not it is helpful during the meditation. There is also doubt as to how to respond to these mental objects and what response is wholesome or unwholesome. Eventually, however, as you get more acquainted with these states, you're more clear on the qualities of these mental objects.

Another example is when you find yourself in a disagreement with a loved one. Because your mind looks at the loved one through a certain lens based on previous experiences, you may automatically assume the nature or quality of their reaction, even though it may arise from something else or it isn't the reaction you're assuming it is, in which case the mind has confusion about what it is seeing. This too is a form of the underlying tendency towards doubt. There is also doubt as to how to respond and what response is wholesome or unwholesome. These can lead to aversion or craving depending on

Dependent Origination

the hedonic tone of what is heard or seen as the mind jumps to conclusions, confused or mistaking one thing for another. Closely tied to the underlying tendency to ignorance, one may also misperceive one state for another – seeing the wholesome as unwholesome or the unwholesome as wholesome – at the level of the underlying tendency towards doubt. All of this can be abandoned through the process of Right Effort, which we will see now.

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Doubt through Right Effort

The antidote to doubt is investigation. It is as quick and simple as taking a pause before jumping to a conclusion about what state is experienced. When you take a pause, your mind is able to better assess the situation. Through investigation, which is different from analysis and thinking about it over a longer period of time, the mind understands the quality of the experience or the interactions with a person. Through this investigation, the mind abandons any conclusions and allows the experience to be just as it is, thereby preventing the arising of any other underlying tendencies and thus the arising of any form of craving or aversion.

The underlying tendency towards doubt in the form of doubt in regard to the Dhamma itself is completely eradicated when one enters the stream. Such doubt is to be removed through careful investigation into the Dhamma. While faith is an important deterrent against skeptical doubt, one need not have blind faith. The Buddha encourages the process of careful investigation by testing out the Dhamma through one's own experience. Through this process, one gains a better understanding of the Dhamma and, by extension, the difference between the wholesome and unwholesome.

Although we can be told that the wholesome represents certain good qualities and principles and the unwholesome represents

Dependent Origination

certain bad qualities and principles, this may not always be helpful. One can utilize the guidance of one's teachers about morals and ethics to determine the difference between the wholesome and unwholesome, and this is a good framework, but it will only help at one level. For it to be understood at all levels, one needs to see at the experiential level. Once this happens, any doubt as to what is wholesome and unwholesome vanishes.

As a general rule, one can apply this principle: that which is wholesome is both beneficial to oneself and to others and has an expansive quality to it, and that which is unwholesome is both harmful to oneself and to others and has a constrictive quality to it. In other words, the wholesome relaxes any tightness and tension in the mind and body while the unwholesome tenses and tightens the mind and body further, leading to mental and even physical suffering. Once you understand this and see it for yourself, any confusion about the difference between the two is eradicated.

Once Right View is established and one enters the stream, all doubt about the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha is further eradicated. As MN 9 states, Right View is also the understanding of the difference between the wholesome and unwholesome.

The underlying tendency towards doubt is the First Noble Truth of Dukkha. The attention to that doubt fuels it further and is the Second Noble Truth of Samudaya. One utilizes the Fourth Noble

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Doubt through Truth of Magga to abandon the undue attention to that doubt and experience the Third Noble Truth of Nirodha. Using the 6Rs, one:

- Recognizes the underlying tendency towards doubt, which is the Dukkha
- Releases the undue attention to it, which is the Samudaya
- Relaxes any tightness and tension, thus experiencing Nirodha
- Re-smiles if needed or remains in the Nibbānic space free of any craving
- Returns to a wholesome object such as a brahmavihārā or remains in a mind without craving
- Repeats whenever the underlying tendency may arise again, thus cultivating Magga

Mānānusaya

Bhagavā etadavoca: “taṇhaṃ vo, bhikkhave, desessāmi jāliniṃ saritaṃ visaṭaṃ visattikaṃ, yāya ayaṃ loko uddhasto pariyaṇaddho tantākulakajāto gulāguṇṭhikajāto muñjapabbajabhūto apāyaṃ duggatiṃ vinipātaṃ saṃsāraṃ nātivattati. Taṃ suṇātha, sādhukaṃ manasi karotha, bhāsissāmi”ti.

“Evaṃ, bhante”ti kho te bhikkhū bhagavato paccassosūṃ.

Bhagavā etadavoca: “Katamā ca sā, bhikkhave, taṇhā jālinī saritā visaṭā visattikā, yāya ayaṃ loko uddhasto pariyaṇaddho tantākulakajāto gulāguṇṭhikajāto muñjapabbajabhūto apāyaṃ duggatiṃ vinipātaṃ saṃsāraṃ nātivattati? Aṭṭhārasa kho paṇimāni, bhikkhave, taṇhāvicaritaṇi ajjhattikassa upādāya, aṭṭhārasa taṇhāvicaritaṇi bāhirassa upādāya. Katamāni aṭṭhārasa taṇhāvicaritaṇi ajjhattikassa upādāya? Asmīti, bhikkhave, sati itthasmīti hoti, evaṃasmīti hoti, aññathāsmīti hoti, asasmīti hoti, satasmīti hoti, santi hoti, itthaṃ santi hoti, evaṃ santi hoti, aññathā santi hoti, apihaṃ santi hoti, apihaṃ itthaṃ santi hoti, apihaṃ evaṃ santi hoti, apihaṃ aññathā santi hoti, bhavissanti hoti, itthaṃ bhavissanti hoti, evaṃ bhavissanti hoti, aññathā bhavissanti hoti. Imāni aṭṭhārasa taṇhāvicaritaṇi ajjhattikassa upādāya. Katamāni aṭṭhārasa taṇhāvicaritaṇi bāhirassa upādāya? Imināsmīti, bhikkhave, sati iminā itthasmīti hoti, iminā evaṃasmīti hoti, iminā aññathāsmīti hoti, iminā asasmīti hoti, iminā satasmīti hoti, iminā santi hoti, iminā

itthaṃ santi hoti, iminā evaṃ santi hoti, iminā aññathā santi hoti, iminā apihaṃ santi hoti, iminā apihaṃ itthaṃ santi hoti, iminā apihaṃ evaṃ santi hoti, iminā apihaṃ aññathā santi hoti, iminā bhavissanti hoti, iminā itthaṃ bhavissanti hoti, iminā evaṃ bhavissanti hoti, iminā aññathā bhavissanti hoti. Imāni atṭhārasa taṇhāvicaritāni bāhirassa upādāya. Iti atṭhārasa taṇhāvicaritāni ajjhattikassa upādāya, atṭhārasa taṇhāvicaritāni bāhirassa upādāya. Imāni vuccanti, bhikkhave, chattiṃsa taṇhāvicaritāni. Iti evarūpāni atītāni chattiṃsa taṇhāvicaritāni, anāgatāni chattiṃsa taṇhāvicaritāni, paccuppannāni chattiṃsa taṇhāvicaritāni. Evaṃ atṭhasataṃ taṇhāvicaritaṃ honti. Ayaṃ kho sā, bhikkhave, taṇhā jālinī saritā visaṭṭhā visattikā, yāya ayaṃ loko uddhasto pariyaṇaddho tantākulakajāto guṇāguṇṭhikajāto muñjapabbajabhūto apāyaṃ duggatiṃ vinipātaṃ saṃsāraṃ nātivattatī”ti.

“Bhikkhus, I will teach you about craving—the ensnarer, streaming, widespread, and sticky— by which this world has been smothered and enveloped, and by which it has become a tangled skein, a knotted ball of thread, a mass of reeds and rushes, so that it does not pass beyond the plane of misery, the bad destination, the lower world, Samsāra. Listen and attend closely; I will speak.”

“Yes, Bhante,” those bhikkhus replied.

The Blessed One said this: “And what, bhikkhus, is craving—the ensnarer, streaming, widespread, and sticky—by which this world has been smothered and enveloped, and by which it has

Dependent Origination

become a tangled skein, a knotted ball of thread, a mass of reeds and rushes, so that it does not pass beyond the plane of misery, the bad destination, the lower world, Samsāra? “There are, bhikkhus, these eighteen currents of craving related to the internal and eighteen currents of craving related to the external. “And what are the eighteen currents of craving related to the internal? When there is [the notion] ‘I am,’ there are [the notions] ‘I am thus,’ ‘I am just so,’ ‘I am otherwise,’ ‘I am lasting,’ ‘I am evanescent,’ ‘I may be,’ ‘I may be thus,’ ‘I may be just so,’ ‘I may be otherwise,’ ‘May I be,’ ‘May I be thus,’ ‘May I be just so,’ ‘May I be otherwise,’ ‘I shall be,’ ‘I shall be thus,’ ‘I shall be just so,’ ‘I shall be otherwise.’ These are the eighteen currents of craving related to the internal. “And what are the eighteen currents of craving related to the external? When there is [the notion], ‘I am because of this,’ there are [the notions]: ‘I am thus because of this,’ ‘I am just so because of this,’ ‘I am otherwise because of this,’ ‘I am lasting because of this,’ ‘I am evanescent because of this,’ ‘I may be because of this,’ ‘I may be thus because of this,’ ‘I may be just so because of this,’ ‘I may be otherwise because of this,’ ‘May I be because of this,’ ‘May I be thus because of this,’ ‘May I be just so because of this,’ ‘May I be otherwise because of this,’ ‘I shall be because of this,’ ‘I shall be thus because of this,’ ‘I shall be just so because of this,’ ‘I shall be otherwise because of this.’ These are the eighteen currents of craving related to the external. “Thus there are eighteen currents of craving related to the internal, and eighteen currents of craving related to the external.

These are called the thirty-six currents of craving. There are thirty-six such currents of craving pertaining to the past, thirty-six pertaining to the future, and thirty-six pertaining to the present. So there are one hundred and eight currents of craving. “This, bhikkhus, is that craving—the ensnarer, streaming, widespread, and sticky—by which this world has been smothered and enveloped, and by which it has become a tangled skein, a knotted ball of thread, a mass of reeds and rushes, so that it does not pass beyond the plane of misery, the bad destination, the lower world, Saṃsāra.”

~ AN 4.199, Taṇhāsutta

Mānānusaya is the underlying tendency towards conceit. Māna means to measure and is usually translated as conceit. Through conceit, we measure our sense of self against others, considering ourselves better than, worse than, or equal to others. The Taṇhāsutta details the various ways craving arises due to conceit, totaling one hundred and eight ways in which such craving is rooted in conceit. Whenever there is a sense of a separate self, conceit measures it up against something else. This dualistic approach, or subject-object dichotomy, is the function of conceit.

It is important to differentiate between conceit and personality view. Personality view is eradicated as an intellectual belief in a personal self at the point of stream entry. Conceit, however, remains ingrained in the idea of a separate self, conditioned over one's lifetime and even from previous lifetimes. Māna is the immediate

Dependent Origination

reaction stemming from this sense of a separate self. Therefore, the underlying tendency towards conceit triggers reactions based on experiences.

When the sense bases make contact with their corresponding objects, energy is fed back up the chain of dependent origination to the level of formations. If conditioned by ignorance, these formations can root themselves in greed, hatred, or delusion. Conceit primarily finds its roots in delusion, which views all experiences as “me, mine, myself,” from an intrinsic sense of self. These formations then condition the arising of consciousness, mainly defiled by the upakkilesa (mental defilement) of māna. This consciousness conditions the faculties of mentality-materiality, so that contact, feeling, perception, intention, and attention are geared towards experiencing every event, person, interaction, or object as belonging to self or as self in a dualistic approach of subject and object.

The six sense bases become tainted by the flow of the kilesas (defilements) and upakkilesas, so that when contact arises, the conceit-riddled consciousness conditions the feeling that arises. Whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, this feeling is taken personally through the underlying tendency towards conceit. This tendency inclines one to see every experience as affecting, belonging to, or being a sense of self.

There is a tension and tightness tied to the underlying tendency towards conceit. Every time the sense bases make contact with an

object and feeling arises conditioned by that contact, there can be a sense of self tied to that experience. For example, when you meet someone you find attractive, your mind may grasp at their features with the underlying tendency towards sensual craving pushing towards full-blown craving. Along with this, the underlying tendency towards conceit may arise, leading you to think, “This is the person for me! I want this person to be mine! They make me happy!” This is the grasping towards wanting to acquire a relationship because it pleases the “me,” which is tied to conceit.

Conversely, when experiencing an undesirable situation, such as standing in a long line at a bureaucratic office like the Department of Motor Vehicles, you might think, “Why me? How do I get out of this situation? I hate it here.” Not only is there the underlying tendency towards aversion, leading to full-blown aversion, but also the underlying tendency towards conceit, where the experience affects the “me” and you feel a tensing up tied to both these underlying tendencies.

Even in a neutral experience, such as listening intently to a Dhamma talk with total equanimity, there can be a sense of conceit around the talk and equanimity. There is essentially the subject, “me,” listening to the sound and experiencing the equanimity. As long as there is a sense of a “me” separate from others as a self, there is conceit. The underlying tendency towards conceit produces and is produced by this sense of self, rooted in conceit and conditioned by

Dependent Origination

it at consciousness. This bond to the fetter of conceit continues to give rise to countless rebirths.

To dismantle this conceit at all levels, especially the underlying tendency towards conceit, the following processes and insights will be crucial.

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Doubt through Right Effort

The eradication of the idea and experience of a separate sense of self leads to the destruction of conceit and, consequently, the underlying tendency towards conceit. Understanding that there is no separate self and recognizing that what arises as an experience of self is merely a projection of the mind conditioned by ignorance is essential. Ignorance, simply put, is the forgetting, ignoring, or not knowing—the hidden veil obscuring the true nature of all experiences. What we call ourselves as “self” is a collection of various karmic imprints that coalesce into an experience in the relative world as the “self.” In other words, all experience, including what is currently seen as identity, is a karmic expression of past karmic causes where no absolute beginning point can be found.

To find a beginning would be to find the start of one universe. Let’s explore that for a moment. When you enter the cessation of perception, feeling, and consciousness, what happens? First, the mind experiences a gradual shift downwards into deeper states of quietude and stillness. Eventually, as the mental formations start to subside, the mind experiences micro-cessations, coming in and out of consciousness but with a bright and alert mind. Then, just when you least expect, everything turns off. It may be for a moment, for a minute, or even for days if you can intentionally enter this state. This

Dependent Origination

is the potentiated state of all experience. There is no sensory traffic coming in, even through to the mind. When the mind reboots, there is contact with the element of awakening, the Nibbāna dhātu.

Let's set that aside and ask the question: what is it that triggers the mind to reboot and leave this state? If there was prior intention, then that's what triggered it. If it was entered into because causes and conditions fell away in an opportune way for the mind to enter, then what triggers its leaving? You could say that the potentiated kamma is what triggered the mind to arise once again. One of the major significant outcomes of this experience is the understanding that there is no underlying permanent self in any of this.

Now, let's look at this from the macro level. The universe contracts—this is the period in which the elements of its existence start to disintegrate and decay into a single point. This is like when the mental formations start to cease. Then, there is a period when nothing happens. This is like cessation. All of the potentiated kamma of every single being and experience in all the various interactions, networks, and streams are brought into one single point. At some point (we cannot say in time as time is potentiated in all of it as well), the kamma triggers an opening, leading to a new expansion period. The crux of this is in that period of nothing happening in that single point, there is not only potentiated kamma but also, at the micro level, what can be likened to a non-dual state. Therefore, when the universe expands again, just as the mind leaves cessation, there is now a duality—at the micro level there is the sense of an experiencer and

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Doubt through the experience when contact with Nibbāna arises, and at the macro level there is one particle that arises, separate from the whole. From that trigger and that sense of duality, there is now “I, me, mine, myself,” in relation to the experience at the micro level, and the consciousness that emerges from that particle, fueled by craving, has a conceit of its own that sees it separate from other particles. This is conceit at its most core level.

This is all to understand that conceit is just a reaction rooted in the idea of separateness. Please note, this is not necessarily stating that there is some “god consciousness” that emerges as the substratum of all creation and from which all arises. Instead, this “god consciousness” is potentiated kamma. In any case, what we are trying to understand is that this conceit is something to be abandoned by letting go of the idea of the separate self. The Buddha’s instruction to Bāhiya in the Bāhiya Sutta is the exact direction for ceasing conceit altogether, which leads to the total cessation of suffering. The practical instruction is to experience everything as it is, but let go of the “I” in relation to that experience. Let the mind be fully immersed in it all without the sense of “I.” Just this is the end of suffering. This is the state of mind for the arahant—as MN 1 states, and paraphrasing here, the mind of the arahant (or a Buddha) doesn’t relate to the elements, experiences, or any object in relation to itself or the I. It is one stream of experience as it is, without the projection of concepts or ideas, therefore no more “I-making,” which is the function of conceit and the tensing up contained in the underlying tendency

Dependent Origination

towards conceit. Whenever this tensing up arises and you notice it, in that very moment the conceit is paused, halted, frozen. One just relaxes into it and lets the conceit dissolve so that there is only the experience. Naturally, no craving can arise from this and therefore no clinging, becoming, or birth of personalized action, and therefore no more suffering.

When the sense of “I am” experiencing this arises, see it as a manifestation of conceit. Release the mind’s attention to that and relax back into the experience itself rather than the subject of the experience, i.e., the sense of self. Remaining in this, there is nothing more to do but to understand the experience as it is and let it dissolve when it will without holding on to its disappearance. Remember that it’s not the conventional usage of the words “I, me, mine, myself,” and so on that is the conceit, whether it is in the mind, verbalized, or perceived in that way. The underlying tendency towards conceit is the inclination to see everything as something separate that is to be owned, possessed, pushed away, or related to from the sense of “I,” which then leads to full-blown craving or aversion or identification, and it manifests as a subtle tension that can be recognized and relaxed. You can still use the conventional and transactional words of “I, me, mine, myself,” and so on even when conceit is destroyed. It is just that now the inclination to possess and so on from a sense of separate self never emerges. In the context of the Four Noble Truths, the underlying tendency towards conceit is the First Noble Truth of Dukkha. The Second Noble Truth of Samudaya is the

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Doubt through attention to an object from the subjective sense of a personal, separate self. The Third Noble Truth of Nirodha is the release from it and relaxing back into a state of just the experience as experience without the karmic expression of the "I." The Fourth Noble Truth of Magga is the utilization of the Eightfold Path to come to this experience, namely Right Effort, which is the heart of the path. In the context of Right Effort, using the 6Rs, one:

- Recognizes the underlying tendency towards conceit whenever the mind relates to an experience from the sense of separate self and therefore understands Dukkha
- Releases the attention to this sense of self and therefore abandons Samudaya
- Relaxes the tightness and tension associated from this sense of separation and experiences relief and the sky-mind that is Nirodha
- Re-smiles if required to uplift the mind or remains in the spaciousness of the mundane Nibbāna
- Returns to a wholesome object or remains in the sky-mind
- Repeats whenever necessary, therefore cultivating Magga

Bhavarāgānusaya

Bhavarāgānusaya is the underlying tendency towards the craving for existence. Recall that rāga means desire or passion for something, and bhava refers to existence or habitual tendencies. In this context, it is the inclination of the mind towards a specific existence or outcome. This particular anusaya contains the seeds of both bhavataṇhā (craving for existence) and vibhavataṇhā (craving for non-existence).

Let us quickly reexamine what the craving for existence entails. On one hand, it is the craving for another state of existence, either at the macro level (a different realm or life) or at the micro level (a different experience or state of mind). Fundamentally, this is what happens because all experiences in saṃsāra are projections of the mind. As the Buddha states, mind is the forerunner of all states, implying that saṃsāra is a reflection of the mind and vice versa. We cannot prove or disprove an objective reality, but we can observe that our subjective experiences are always changing, particularly in terms of mental states.

When we encounter an unpleasant sensation, it feeds information to the mind. The sensory data and the perception that it is unpleasant are stored in the mind. There is a tendency to perceive it outside of the mind because that is how we typically engage with the world when the mind is rooted in conceit. Therefore, bhava and

māna are closely related. The higher fetters of craving for form realms, craving for formless realms, and restlessness are all rooted in conceit. Whenever there is a subject-object disparity or division, there is conceit. This subject-object division stems from conceit. When there is still a sense of “I” in relation to another or any object of the mind or physical sense bases, restlessness can arise when something or someone agitates the sense of self. This restlessness is rooted in the fictional future, while the remorse paired with it in the list of fetters is rooted in the fictional past. Both these time zones exist in the mind and create turmoil whenever the mind identifies with them. with a personal sense of separate self. Conceit also gives rise to the craving for the form and formless states of existence. Whenever the mind identifies with a current state or experience from the sense of self, the desire to continue that state if it is pleasant or to find a better state if it is unpleasant can arise.

The underlying tendency towards craving for existence can arise with any quality of vedanā. When any of the sense bases make contact with their respective objects, this feeds back into formations that can be rooted in greed, hatred, or delusion, or any combination of the three. These formations, conditioned by ignorance, give rise to consciousness that can be defiled by any of the sixteen upakkilesas, which then condition the mentality-materiality so that the instruments or faculties of contact, feeling, perception, intention, and attention in mentality, and the six sense bases in materiality, are geared towards craving for a particular type of existence. Thus, when

Dependent Origination

the process of contact arises, the feeling conditioned by that contact is also conditioned by the defiled consciousness in that contact. If the experience is pleasant, the mind will want it to remain pleasant, and the craving for existence will underlie that feeling. Likewise, for the unpleasant, where if the mind doesn't like it, the craving for a different existence or state will underlie that feeling. Tied to the former, there can also arise the underlying tendency towards craving, and tied to the latter, there can also arise the underlying tendency towards aversion. In tandem with this underlying tendency, there can also arise the tendencies towards views (where one may have an opinion about the experience), ignorance (where lack of mindfulness and attention sway the mind towards further craving or aversion), doubt (where one isn't sure of the wholesome response in relation to the experience), and conceit (where one identifies with the experience from a sense of separate self).

Consider a scenario where you are meeting someone you really like and are considering developing a romantic partnership with. You're looking forward to meeting them, and here the underlying tendency towards craving for existence can arise. You're not with that person now, but your mind is proliferating all kinds of thoughts and imaginary situations and scenarios of what could happen on the date. There is a slight grasping and perhaps even the underlying tendency towards craving in general, leading to tension that manifests into full-blown craving, clinging, becoming, and the birth of several mental, verbal, and bodily actions leading up to the date

that may cause suffering in the short term or perhaps in the far-off future. In any case, this proliferation of obsessive thoughts is set alight by the underlying tendencies, specifically towards craving for existence.

On the flipside, once you're on the date, you're having a terrible time. All your expectations are smashed by the way the conversation is going – you find you're not compatible with this person. You're now dreading your time with this person, and all hopes and ideas of a beautiful future are dashed against the rocks of a boring and uncomfortable date. Now, this unpleasant experience is making you wish you could leave or end the date as soon as possible. Here, too, the underlying tendency towards craving for existence is triggered by the experience, and now the mind wants a different existence from the current state of this date. As you smile, nod, and try to be polite, in your mind you're thinking of ways to excuse yourself from the conversation and amicably end the date. Tied to this, the underlying tendency towards aversion arises. Now the mind enters into full-blown aversion and clinging, where it associates this date as a failure. From this, the habitual tendencies of aborting the date arise. The birth of action to end the date causes the other person to be curt and even insulted, and a small spat may arise. This is suffering.

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Craving for Existence through Right Effort

The underlying tendency towards craving for existence relies heavily on the movement of conceit and the belief in a personal self. Once we abandon the belief in a personal self, we are able to see through the nature of reality as an impersonal process. This belief no longer filters our perceptions or concepts, thus no longer causing us to have wrong view. However, the conceit still remains. This conceit is the basis for the craving for a certain kind of existence because there is still a sense of separate self that is intrinsically functioning in the mind as an image-making process of “me, mine, myself,” and the world that is “out there,” which results in a dichotomy of subject and object. The object is the state of existence the “I” or the subject is in, which the mind takes as either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. If it is pleasant, the mind sees it as something pleasing to the “me,” and if it is unpleasant, the mind sees it as something displeasing to the “me.” If it is neutral, the mind identifies it as “mine,” or even “myself.” The collapse of conceit is the direct destruction of the craving for existence.

To destroy conceit, the beginning of that is to understand impermanence. Impermanence, or *aniccā*, is the nature of all conditioned phenomena. Being conditioned, such phenomena change in accordance with the changing of the conditions that gave

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Craving for Existence
rise to them. Aniccā also means instability. The mind is always searching for stability. It is always looking for something to land upon. This is the root of conceit, an innate desire to find stability in what is an unstable reality. The key to experiencing the total destruction of conceit, and therefore the entrance into Nibbāna as a living reality, is to be okay with the instability.

Whenever the mind seeks stability, it will resolve to holding on to views, belief systems, and ideas until those are challenged. When challenged, the mind feels threatened and conceit arises to grasp with all its strength to those ideas until something clicks and a new set of beliefs takes the place of the old. Now, the conceit has something else to find as stable. For some, these beliefs or views are religious, spiritual, political, ecological, existential, and so on, even the view of what one is as a self. For other forms of stability, the mind seeks comfort in relationships, navigated through the conditioning of how one's caregivers showed affection and love. It may then seek the approval of others or validation from a community. It may find solace in being a leader of one's community or even just a member. It may be as simple as looking for time off for a vacation. Internally, one may seek out solace in the mind through the practice of meditation and entering the jhānas. These are all the movements of conceit, the desire to find stability, but they all stem from ignorance or the lack of mindfulness of the present moment as being unstable itself. These are also the activities set on by the process and inclination of the underlying tendency towards craving for existence.

Dependent Origination

Seeing this, the mind starts to realize that all that is unstable is just a function of the conditioned world. Therefore, it starts to seek solace in something permanent and stable, which is Nibbāna. This too is a desire of conceit. Even the Dhamma becomes something the mind finds as the ultimate solace and reifies as a thing to be sought, kept, held on to, and made into a view that is undefeatable. This conceit results in the mind seeking out that dimension of Nibbāna, which is permanent and stable, all the time, and one may even relish in and fight or defend the Dhamma.

Therefore, the process of letting go of conceit bit by bit, which ultimately leads to the destruction of the craving for existence and its corresponding underlying tendency, is to first abandon wrong view and enter into the Right View and then let go of any attachment or identification with even that Right View. One understands the desire for renewed existence as a process to be transformed into the stability of the living reality of Nibbāna. This is the introduction to the Dhamma. One then makes an effort to let this go, traversing through the jhānas, allowing the mind to abandon the sensual attachments and identification with the idea of stability in the sensual experiences. One layer of craving for existence is peeled away – the seeking out for sensual states. Then, as one enters into Nibbāna, another layer is gone – the seeking out for higher mental states. However, there is still the subtlest layer of conceit, which is the desire to defend or relish in the view of the Dhamma itself. This is abandoned when one is able to see even the emptiness of the Dhamma. One is able to see

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Craving for Existence
the Dhamma as a model or a process that also arises and passes away.
With this final layer of conceit abandoned, one also abandons the
craving for existence and its corresponding underlying tendency.

Using this understanding as a framework and referring back to
the previous example of looking forward to a date, let's explore how
we can recognize and transform the underlying tendency towards
craving for existence into the mundane sky-mind that is Nibbāna.
You notice that there is an antsy feeling to everything you're doing.
You recognize your mind is creating all sorts of scenarios regarding
the date. As you prepare for the date, your mind emanates a
proliferative generation of thoughts. You see this and, in the seeing
itself, these thoughts subside. There then is a space of clear, empty,
nothingness. You may scan for any traces of this underlying
tendency towards craving for existence by noticing any tightness or
tension in the head and relaxing them. In that space, there is now the
experience of mundane Nibbāna. You are now back in the presence
of things as they actually are, where no worries of the future or
regrets of the past arise.

Now there is no seeking for another state. Right here, right now
is the present moment, from where there is no seeking. In this, there
may still be some trace of conceit as one starts to identify with the
present moment, but for the time being, you have abandoned the
craving for existence in reference to the date in the future moments.
If you go a step further, you abandon even the identification with the
present moment and see through its impermanence as well, leading

Dependent Origination

the mind into a flow state that traverses in the space of the sky-mind. Likewise, when you are on the date itself, if you're able to relax into the moment, you may find that there is less or even no agitation in relation to the nature of the date. You may even find that your mind spontaneously responds with some clarity and joy that transforms the boring nature of the experience into something fresh. In that, you may still see that there is incompatibility. At the very least, you're able to be open about this and leave the date on a high note of joy and happiness.

From the understanding of the Four Noble Truths, we can see how to transform the underlying tendency towards craving for existence into total acceptance where one resides as close to an unconditioned state as possible. The First Noble Truth of Dukkha is the underlying tendency towards craving for existence, which one is able to recognize and therefore understand. One then abandons the Second Noble Truth of Samudaya, which is the identification with the experience that leads to the craving for existence. Doing so, one experiences relief in the Third Noble Truth of Nirodha, where the tension of the underlying tendency towards craving for existence is relaxed and ceased. Through this practice, one has therefore cultivated the Fourth Noble Truth of Magga. Using the 6Rs, one:

- Recognizes the underlying tendency towards craving for existence as Dukkha

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Craving for Existence

- Releases the undue attention to the underlying tendency and disidentifies with the experience, thereby releasing conceit, which is the Samudaya
- Relaxes the tightness and tension associated with the underlying tendency, and experiences Nirodha
- Re-smiles to uplift the mind
- Returns to a wholesome object or remains in the sky-mind of mundane Nibbāna
- Repeats whenever the tendency arises again, thus cultivating Magga

Avijjānusaya

Avijjānusaya is the underlying tendency towards ignorance. The word avijjā literally means "no knowledge." This refers to the lack of knowledge of the Dhamma, specifically the Four Noble Truths. Avijjā can manifest as a fetter that ties one to the cycle of birth and death that is Saṃsāra. It can manifest as an āsava or a virus that infects the mind, commonly also referred to as a taint, which is known as avijjāsava or the virus (or taint) of ignorance and which starts one cycle of dependent origination arising. It can also manifest as the link of ignorance in the chain of dependent origination, which conditions the formations that arise. Finally, it can manifest as the underlying tendency towards ignorance. There is the ignorance of the Dhamma because one doesn't know it or hasn't been introduced to it. Then, there is the ignorance of the Dhamma when one has been introduced to it but the mind has not fully penetrated through to it.

From a practical standpoint, ignorance can be understood as the lack of mindfulness. In fact, at whatever level we look at it, whether at the level of fetters, viruses, the links of dependent origination, or the underlying tendency towards ignorance, we can understand it to be a lack of mindfulness. This means that whenever the mind is befuddled by experiences and sees them as "me, mine, myself," that is a movement of conceit, dependent upon the movement of ignorance. Ignorance, when the mind is unable to see through the experience as conditioned, impermanent, liable to cause suffering,

and therefore to be seen as impersonal, is the mother of all the links and all of the underlying tendencies. By extension, then, the underlying tendency towards ignorance can be seen as the first underlying tendency that strikes up as tension and tightness due to the lack of mindfulness and is what underlies every feeling, no matter if it's qualified as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. In tandem with this underlying tendency, every other underlying tendency can also arise, but it is the underlying tendency towards ignorance that is always present, no matter what else may arise with it.

The movement of this underlying tendency is conditioned by its preceding undercurrents in the river of dependent origination. With the āsavas as the fountainhead of this process, which are in turn conditioned by previous times when the mind indulged in sensual craving, craved a particular state, or was generally lacking mindfulness and proper attention, ignorance as a link arises. This ignorance, fueled by the viruses, fuels the formations, which are for the most part rooted in delusion and which then condition the consciousness. This consciousness is besmirched by one or more of the defilements that find their roots in delusion and conditions the mentality-materiality. The faculties in mentality are geared towards the lack of mindfulness so that when a sense base makes contact with its object, the corresponding sense consciousness that has been defiled moves through the mentality-materiality and gives rise to contact. This contact gives rise to feeling.

Dependent Origination

No matter the quality of the experience, if the mind continues to be sullied and dragged by this ignorance, then the almost automatic reaction is to identify with the experience as “me, mine, myself,” which is conditioned by the underlying tendency towards ignorance. This underlying tendency towards ignorance is the misperception of seeing permanence in what is impermanent, satisfaction in what is suffering, and self in what is impersonal. This inclination manifests as taking the experience personally and the tightness and tension are projected from that micro-movement. When this happens, the other underlying tendencies can conjoin or manifest from it, leading to full-blown craving, clinging, becoming, and birth of action, heading towards suffering.

Say you are meditating on loving-kindness. You experience a wonderful glow in your heart and feel the co-arising of joy and comfort in the body. You remain here. A hindrance arises. Your mindfulness wavers and now your mind is on the sound of an annoying fan noisily spinning. Your mind is now filled with aversion. First, there was contact with the mental object due to contact with the auditory object. The ears made contact with the spinning fan, and the experience drew your attention to the noise. The underlying tendency towards ignorance is not the attention moving to the noise. Rather, it is the mind having taken the wonderful experience of loving-kindness and its co-factors as permanent, satisfactory, and belonging to self or as self. With this as the foundation for the experience, when that *vedanā* gives way to the

sound of the fan, there is great displeasure. Now, there is tension that arises due to that movement from this underlying tendency towards ignorance and aversion arises, propelled by the underlying tendency towards aversion. When the noise is experienced, the mind takes that to be permanent and belonging to self or as affecting self, and of course, it is seen as unsatisfactory. This perception (or misperception) is the action of the underlying tendency towards ignorance that is present in the experience of the sound of the spinning fan. Through Right Effort, however, the mind is able to recognize the movement of ignorance and therefore regain mindfulness and proper attention, then abandon the unwholesome state of aversion, return the attention to the loving-kindness, and stay there. The key, of course, is to remember to see the experience as conditioned, impermanent, therefore liable to cause suffering in its changeability and therefore not to be seen as self or belonging to self.

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Ignorance through Right Effort

Mindfulness is the antidote to ignorance. Mindfulness comes from the word satī. Satī literally means remembrance or memory. It comes from the Sanskrit word smṛti. Mindfulness, as great as it sounds and as ubiquitous as it is in its usage in today's world, doesn't really cover the essence of its origin word. To remember, to call to mind, to bring back one's awareness are better ways to describe this mindfulness. It is remembering to observe how the mind's attention moves from one object to another. Meta-awareness or metacognition may be better suited to understand what we mean by mindfulness. The mind is aware of its own movements. The mind's attention, the function of directing awareness onto a specific object, is observed. For this reason, we can also call mindfulness observation, or non-judgmental observation. There are no projections of qualities onto the experience. For that reason, it is a hallmark of the mind of an arahant. Such a mind is unwavering and when attention moves, so does the awareness of the attention. In other words, for a mind steeped in ignorance, attention wavers from the awareness of itself such that the awareness was on the attention during collectedness but when attention moves, the awareness dissipates. The awareness is brought back when observation of where attention is reinvigorates the awareness.

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Ignorance through

This bringing together of awareness of the attention back to the attention, knowing where attention is, is the action of *sampajañña*, the knowing or comprehension that mind was no longer on its object or in other words that the awareness of attention dissipated. As soon as this is in view in the mind, through this understanding, mindfulness is regained as one observes that the mind had wavered. In that moment, ignorance is given pause. Now, after a period of a few moments to a few minutes, the three are unified, or collected together – awareness, attention, and the object. This is collectedness. This attention itself, *manasikāra* or taking something to heart, can be sullied by ignorance, in which case it is improper attention where it isn't able to discern through investigation or *dhamma vicaya* the three characteristics of reality, or it can be purified through wisdom, or *vijjā* or *pañña* where it understands and sees through the emptiness of all conditioned experience. In the latter case, such attention is called *yoniso manasikāra* or proper attention or attention rooted in reality. When one is able to continually refine this attention through the process of observing it, informed by clear comprehension of the movements of the mind, then that attention becomes steadied and collected around an object. Over a period of time, that leads to the stillness of the mind. This is cessation. In that moment, the *Nibbāna dhātu* is revealed and the mind makes contact with it. The more the mind makes contact with this element, the less ignorance is able to sink its claws.

Dependent Origination

When the mind is fully established in Nibbāna such that there is nothing but this absolute unconditioned experience where there is only the experience in the experience and no experiencer is projected onto it, it is not only the destruction of craving and suffering but also the destruction of ignorance itself. This is facilitated by the process of Right Effort, where the mind recognizes – hence regains mindfulness – a distraction or the process of making something self or as belonging to self and therefore keeps ignorance at bay. Through unmuddled mindfulness, the mind can see and arrest the movement of the underlying tendency towards ignorance where it sees a conditioned phenomenon as permanent and identifies with it, and thereby relax any tightness and tension emanating from it and rest into the space of the sky-mind of mundane Nibbāna. Eventually, as the mind becomes more adept at doing this, more fragments of ignorance – that is, the movement of the āsavas, kilesas, upakkilesas, and anusāyas – are stilled until they no longer arise anymore, which results in the unshakeable clarity and wisdom of the awakened mind.

In the context of the Four Noble Truths, the First Noble Truth is the Dukkha of the underlying tendency towards ignorance. The Second Noble Truth is the Samudaya of the undue attention wavering towards seeing something as self or belonging to self. The Third Noble Truth is the release from this wavering improper attention wherefrom one experiences Nirodha. The Fourth Noble Truth is the Right Effort that one utilizes to cultivate the Magga

Abandoning the Underlying Tendency towards Ignorance through leading to the total cessation of the underlying tendency towards ignorance. Using Right Effort, through the 6Rs, one –

- Recognizes the movement and tension of the underlying tendency towards ignorance as Dukkha
- Releases the attention from taking something as self or seeing it as permanent and therefore abandons Samudaya
- Relaxes into the space of the sky-mind of the unconditioned and experiences Nirodha
- Re-smiles if required to further uplift the mind
- Returns to a more wholesome object or rests in the unconditioned
- Repeats whenever the underlying tendency pokes its head again, thus cultivating Magga

Final Words on Craving

If we take into account rebirth at the macro-level, where there is a transfer from one life to the next, we can see that craving is what runs all the engines of Saṃsāra. It is the craving, whether in the form of grasping, repelling, or identifying, that fuels the formations rooted in greed, hatred, and delusion to arise and create a new consciousness that becomes the carrier of all the kamma from one life to the next. At an even more macro-level, we can understand craving as the reason for the beginning of one cycle of expansion of a universe. When, at the previous contraction, the universe and all that is contained in it go back into a single point of potentiated kamma, it remains there for some amount of humanly measured and perceived time, even though time as an element is no longer present. That which triggers the arising and expansion of one universe is the craving from the previous iteration of the universe. This craving then solidifies at various levels.

Consider the following levels – level 0 for the substrate of the Nibbāna dhātu or the unconditioned element, level 1 for the arising of one particle just after the first movement of expansion of the universe, level 2 for when more than one particle arises, and level 3 for when there are further complexities of particles creating worlds and beings in those various worlds. Level 0 is the unconditioned principle or element that neither changes, decays, increases, nor decreases. It is at total stillness and no vibration. Level 1 is when

Final Words on Craving

craving arises due to previous iterations of kamma and is the beginning of a single vibration. This vibration causes the layering of further particles and now with consciousness present in the first particle and there being a second, there is now conceit that says “I am” between the two particles and the corresponding consciousnesses. This is level 2. At level 1, there was a consciousness that arose as the non-reflective awareness dependent upon having touched the unconditioned element. Now with level 2, there is the reflective or manifestative consciousness in each of the two particles. At level 3, dependent origination has taken full swing and now the dendrites of the āsavas latch onto every particle that then forms the worlds and the beings inhabiting those worlds.

Now craving courses through every single aspect of creation in this iteration of the universe. At level 1 the vibration reverberates to bring about level 2, and by level 3 there are many frequencies of vibrations which are the formations of every world and its inhabitants. These vibrations are the various potentiated kamma now turned kinetic. Level 0 remains unaffected as the substrate of every arising and passing away of a universe. All these various vibrations interact and are interdependent, resulting in countless various intentions, beings, and actions from those various potentiated kamma now turned kinetic. For one who is in this iteration of a universe, they go through the process of craving at what seems like a personal level. It is the dendrites of viruses of the āsavas that make it seem personal. Therefore, the conceit that is “I am” having been innately present at

Dependent Origination

level 2 now becomes part of every aspect of creation at level 3. However, when one understands this, sees through it, abandons the craving at every level – from the internalized sense of self to the projection of self onto other experiences – they become fully awakened from the dream of so-called existence. They have not only touched the unconditioned element but become an embodiment of it. What is the mind of the arahant is the same as the unconditioned element that remains independent of all levels at what we can consider as level 0. At level 0, there is no consciousness or sentience, but there is neither unconsciousness nor insentience. We can only go as far to say that there is an intelligence that is the projection of the unconditioned element, which is the impetus of all iterations of creation.

Therefore, when we look at the four possibilities of an arahant exists after death, doesn't exist after death, both exists and doesn't exist after death, or neither exists nor not exists after death, none of them can apply. The arahant no longer is a being in that their mind no longer identifies with any of the aggregates. Therefore it cannot be said that they exist after death because there isn't even a series of formations that bring about new consciousness to speak of, but it can't be said that they don't exist because they are the embodiment of the unconditioned element. However, it can't be said they both exist and don't exist or that they neither exist nor not exist because the unconditioned element is outside the purview of existence and non-existence. One can venture to say that the unconditioned is its

Final Words on Craving

own element outside of the purview of what are really the seven elements – solidity, liquidity, gaseousness, heat, space, mind, and time. The unconditioned is without any quality, mentality, time, or shape. The mind can only interpret it as timeless, unconditioned, the absolute and so on, but the reality is it is as undefinable as dividing a number by zero – it's not comprehensible, suffice it to say that the arahant's mind as the unconditioned and the unconditioned in toto outside of the purview are one and the same. If this is the case, then that would mean one is outside the designation of the four possibilities for the aforementioned rationales. The arahant is level 0 and what remains as fuel are burned out by the momentum of kamma that arises through the interactions of other vibrations until they run out and the vibrationless as the mind of the arahant sinks into the vibrationless as the unconditioned substrate, just as the waves sink back into the ocean. That is why the arahant truly sees, understands, and realizes with experience the end of the universe and limits of all notions of existence and non-existence, beset by the fuel of craving, as best stated by the Buddha in Dhammapada 154 –

Gahakāraḁa diṭṭhosi,
puna gehaṁ na kāhasi;
Sabbā te phāsukā bhaggā,
gahakūṭaṁ visaṅkhatāṁ;
Visaṅkhāragataṁ cittaṁ,
taṅhānaṁ khayamajjhagā.

House-builder you are seen!
You will build no more!
Your rafters are broken, the roof destroyed.
The mind, having gone to the Unconditioned,
Has attained the destruction of craving.

Final Words on Craving

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