

The Here-and-Now-Interpretation of Dependent Origination – Paṭiccasamuppāda

An attempt to explain the arising of the self-concept in the human mind

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1. Preface

The teaching about *anattā* (egolessness, non-self, no unchanging, permanent, enduring core or essence to anything) is one of the pillars of Buddhism and is a doctrine which sets Buddhism apart from all other religions as those, in one form or another, postulate a self or soul. I have always been very interested in this teaching because it went completely against my own beliefs and experiences and I really wanted to understand it. Some years ago I came across the teachings of the late Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, a prominent Buddhist monk in Thailand of the last century. His Here-and-Now interpretation of *Paṭiccasamuppāda* or *Dependent Origination* [see Literature / 1 /] gave me a clue of how a momentary concept of ‘self’ arises in the human mind. According to his interpretation the arising of suffering equals the arising of the ideas of ‘self’, ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘mine’ in the ignorant human mind.

Now I could comprehend the arising of a momentary sense of self in the human mind to some extent and following on from that I tried to understand how the notion of a permanent self living life from the cradle to the grave develops out of the momentary selves with the help of the memory function of the mind. This concept is satisfactory to myself and, as far as I know, does not violate other Buddhist teachings.

I have introduced some of my ideas regarding *Paṭiccasamuppāda* a few years ago in my book ‘Introduction to Buddhism and to Buddhist meditation’¹ – a course for beginners. The present paper does not include the description of an illustration of *Dependent Origination*, but offers a more detailed explanation of the theory.

An example meant to help to understand how the process of *Dependent Origination* evolves in the human mind is given at the end of this paper.

Wherever possible I have used the early Buddhist suttas, the Nikāyas, as reference and tried to rely as little as possible on the commentaries. Any misinterpretation of the suttas or commentaries as well as any peculiar use of the English language (I am not a native English speaker) is solely the responsibility of the author and I sincerely apologise for any mistake that may have occurred.

The relevant quotes used for this paper are given either in the text itself or in the footnotes so that readers who do not have the Nikāyas at hand can follow up easily. Sometimes I commented inside a quotation. These comments are clearly marked in [square brackets] and blue colour. Pāli² terms and common Buddhist terms are printed in *italics*.

Any comment, suggestion, critique regarding this paper is welcome.

Preface to the 2nd edition

In the present 2nd edition some textual references have been added and chapter 4.2 Review has been revised.

I’m very grateful to Prof. Jan Nattier for her valuable advice regarding the Nikāyās, certain Pāli expressions and the topic itself.

¹ A preview of the book ‘Introduction to Buddhism and to Buddhist Meditation’ by Khun Reinhard is available at <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00H8L80RO>

² Pāli and Sanskrit are two closely related literary languages of ancient India. The Pāli Canon (*Tipitaka*) comprises some of the oldest known canonical works of Buddhism.

2. Introduction

2.1 The problem of 'I', 'me' and 'mine'

In Buddhism a person or the combination of body and mind is known as the *Five Aggregates*, composed of body, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. The untrained worldling clings to them as being 'I' or 'mine', regards each of its components or a combination of all of them as 'self'³. Because of this clinging or grasping they are known as the *Five Aggregates* afflicted by clinging. These *Five Aggregates* afflicted by clinging contact the inner and outer world by means of the sense-organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind) and as these contacts are governed by ignorance, eg, by craving, conceit and wrong views, the notions of 'mine', 'I am' and 'my self' will arise accordingly⁴. The formula of *Dependent Origination* allows to follow the development of the notion of 'I', 'me' and 'mine' in detail.

According to Buddhists this 'self'-belief is the root cause of all our misery in life. If we would not insist on being the experiencer of all that happens to our body and mind, then life would become much easier. But we, because we cling to the aggregates as being 'me', think that everything is happening to 'me' and then project this outwards onto the world which is outside. We end up living in a world which to us is very real. There is a 'me' and the world 'I' exist in, a familiar world, is a world that is somehow reassuring because of the way 'I' understand it. We do not see the endless process of change because we, with our untrained mind, do not see the aggregates. What we see is concepts and all of them seem to us to be enduring. The concepts are very real for us, so real that we deeply cling to them, that the only way we can escape from this is by developing insight. Unless we do that we think there is a 'me' experiencing a world which is more or less the reflection of 'me', has the same attributes, is enduring, self-existent, full of things we can enjoy or be repelled by: we will have *Dukkha*. *Dukkha* is a Pāli word with a broad meaning in English language like suffering, distress, misery, discontentment etc. The realization of *Dukkha* is the first of the *Four Noble Truths* in Buddhism.

We experience life as *Dukkha* because we cling mistakenly to the idea that there is a continuous existent 'self' that somehow is born at the beginning of our lives or maybe comes from something before and that is always around right throughout life, experiences all the things that are seen, heard, smelled, tasted and touched, does all the thinking. There is a 'me' and this 'me' is the same 'me' and this 'me' is always around right throughout life. It is a constant like a solid, unbroken line from birth right up until death. It is a big mistake to think this way, because if you do, then a simple process of nature that we put the label 'life' onto becomes a problem, becomes *Dukkha* end to end.

³ "Lady, how does identity view come to be?" [identity – see footnote 30 on page 10]

"Here, friend Visakha, an untaught ordinary person, who has no regard for noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, who has no regard for true men and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, regards material form as self, or self as possessed of material form, or material form as in self, or self as in material form. He regards feeling as self, or self as possessed of feeling, or feeling as in self, or self as in feeling. He regards perception as self, or self as possessed of perception, or perception as in self, or self as in perception. He regards formations as self, or self as possessed of formations, or formations as in self, or self as in formations. He regards consciousness as self, or self as possessed of consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. That is how identity view comes to be." [identity – see footnote 30 on page 10]
[Cūlavedalla Sutta, MN 44, i 300, page 397 in / 2 /]

⁴ "Now, bhikkhus, this is the way leading to the origination of identity. [identity – see footnote 30 on page 10].

One regards the eye thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.' One regards forms thus... One regards eye-consciousness thus... One regards eye-contact thus... One regards feeling thus... One regards craving thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.'" "One regards the ear, nose, tongue, body, mind thus: ..."
[Chachakka Sutta, MN 148, iii 284, page 1133 in / 2 /]

If we do not cling to this sense of being a self, we do not allow it to brew up these selfish feelings in the mind, then there will be no problems; there just will be the basic natural process of life taking place, nobody to experience it. There will be no self to turn it into a selfish process. Unfortunately the untrained worldling develops selfishness, bringing about *Dukkha*, and this has this tremendous effect on the world we live in too. Because it makes us look on the planet earth as a possession. It becomes ours, mother earth belongs to us and we do with it as we please. Something we can exploit, we can use, we can convert into the things that we, in the modern world, get our pleasure from, thus getting away from *Dukkha* by using it. Everything we need to fulfil our luxurious demands has to come from the planet we live on. Earth, water, air get polluted, resources exploited. Any damage done to the environment really comes from our inability to deal with life in a wise way.

It is obvious that we need to know how the idea of 'I', 'me', 'mine' develops in the human mind because once we know the cause, we may be able to reduce its effect and to finally avoid it altogether, thus benefiting not only ourselves but the societies we live in and the planet we live on as well.

2.2 The 2nd Noble Truth – *Dependent Origination*

The first of the *Four Noble Truths* states that there is something the Buddha called *Dukkha* in human existence; the second *Noble Truth* demonstrates the arising or the cause of *Dukkha* which is summarized in a teaching called *Dependent Origination*. Other expressions are *Dependent Arising* or *Dependent Co-Arising*, the Pāli expression is *Paṭiccasamuppāda*. When Ānanda, one of the closest disciples of the Buddha commented on *Dependent Origination*: “It is wonderful, Lord, it is marvelous how profound this dependent origination is, and how profound it appears! And yet it appears to me as clear as clear!” he was refuted by the Buddha: “Do not say that, Ānanda, do not say that! This dependent origination is profound and appears profound. It is through not understanding, not penetrating this doctrine that this generation has become like a tangled ball of string, covered as with a blight, tangled like coarse grass, unable to pass beyond states of woe, the ill destiny, ruin and the round of birth-and-death.”⁵

Evidence of the Buddha’s reply is the various forms and differing explanations of his teaching given today, the most frequently discussed ones being:

- The Three-Lives-Theory. This is an explanation covering three lifetimes, a past, the present and a future life, that is, it is used to teach rebirth.
- The Here-and-Now-Theory proclaims that *Dependent Origination* is concerned with the present life only, with the ‘here and now’, with the birth and death of the notion of ‘self’, happening countless times each day.

Both theories aim to explain how *Dukkha* arises and how to put an end to it. While the bondage to *samsara* - the round of repeated birth, aging, and death - and the release thereof seems to constitute the prime form of *Dukkha* for the adherents of the Three-Lives-Theory, the kind of *Dukkha* the advocates of the Here-and-Now-Theory are concerned with are our sorrow, pain, grief, displeasure, despair, our existential anxiety over our inevitable aging and death.

Now let’s see what we are talking about. We find instances of *Dependent Origination* (as explained by the Buddha?) at various places in the Nikāyas, unfortunately in different versions, and other schools of Buddhism and source texts in different languages like Pāli, Sinhalese, Burmese, Sanskrit or Chinese offer dis-

⁵ *Mahānidāna Sutta*, DN 15.1, page 223 in / 3 /

crepancies as well. A comparison of some versions of *Dependent Origination* is given by Bucknell [/ 4 /]. In the Nikāyas we find for example differences between the versions in the *Nidānasamyutta*⁶ and the *Mahānidāna Sutta*⁷.

Dependent Origination is usually offered in the order of arising, followed by the order of cessation of this whole mass of suffering. The underlying principle is the law of conditionality (*idappaccayatā*), developed from its most basic form expressed in the Buddhist scriptures as

“When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises.

When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.”⁸

to the usual 12-link formula of *Dependent Origination*. The law of conditionality governs the whole universe and *Paṭiccasamuppāda* expresses how this law is working in the human mind. Keeping in mind that different versions of *Dependent Origination* exist (divergence mainly occurs in number, position and content amongst the first six links of the formula), what is given below can be regarded as the Standard⁹ or Orthodox¹⁰ Version.

"And what, bhikkhus, is dependent origination?

With ignorance (①) as condition, volitional formations [come to be]; (①) = link number

with volitional formations (②) as condition, consciousness;

with consciousness (③) as condition, name-and-form; (mind-and-body ≡ name-and-form)

with name-and-form (④) as condition, the six sense bases;

with the six sense bases (⑤) as condition, contact;

with contact (⑥) as condition, feeling;

with feeling (⑦) as condition, craving;

with craving (⑧) as condition, clinging;

with clinging (⑨) as condition, existence;

with existence (⑩) as condition, birth;

with birth (⑪) as condition, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair (⑫) come to be.

Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering. This, bhikkhus, is called dependent origination.

"But with the remainderless fading away and

cessation of ignorance comes cessation of volitional formations;

with the cessation of volitional formations comes the cessation of consciousness;

with the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name-and-form;

with the cessation of name-and-form comes the cessation of the six sense bases;

with the cessation of the six sense bases comes the cessation of contact;

with the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling;

with the cessation of feeling comes the cessation of craving;

with the cessation of craving comes the cessation of clinging;

with the cessation of clinging comes the cessation of becoming;

with the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth;

with the cessation of birth, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair cease;

Such is the cessation of this whole mass of *Dukkha*.”¹¹

⁶ SN 12.1, page 533 in / 5 /

⁷ DN 15.3, ii 56, pages 223/224 in / 3 /

⁸ *Nidānasamyutta*, SN 12.37 (65), page 575 in / 5 /

⁹ The Standard Version is the most common expression of this teaching in the Nikāyas and widely used to explain the Three-Lives-Theory but the Three-Lives-Theory is not a synonym for the Standard Version.

¹⁰ P.A. Payutto in / 6 /, page 210.

¹¹ *Nidānasamyutta*, SN 12.1, pages 533/534 in / 5 /

In the *Mahānidāna Sutta*¹² and the *Mahāpadāna Sutta*¹³ Ignorance (①) and Volitional Formations (②) of the Standard Version are missing, their place being taken by a repetition of Name and Form (④) or Mind and Body.

According to Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda¹⁴ Ignorance and Formations are actually not missing but implicitly given and this position has some merit. Ignorance is a preliminary for the arising of suffering. Without Ignorance the circle of *Dependent Origination* would not be completed, not even start (wise sense-contact, a bare feeling tone and recognition would still occur of course, but the mind would not proliferate that further into liking or disliking), and the whirling round resulting from that Ignorance is Formations.

<i>Mahānidāna Sutta</i>	<i>Mahāpadāna Sutta</i>
“Mind and Body (④) conditions Consciousness (③), Consciousness (③) conditions Mind and Body (④), Mind and Body (④) conditions Contact (⑥) ...”	“Mind and Body (④) conditions Consciousness (③), Consciousness (③) conditions Mind and Body (④), Mind and Body (④) conditions the Six-Sense-Bases (⑤)”

In the *Mahānidāna Sutta* the Six-Sense-Bases are omitted while they are present in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta*. The latter thus corresponds to the sequence in the Standard Version (Mind and Body (④) conditions the Six-Sense-Bases (⑤)).

In both suttas an interaction or a loop between Mind and Body and Consciousness is established. At the same place in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* it is explicitly stated that the chain of causation goes no further back than this loop: “This consciousness turns back at mind-and-body, it does not go any further.”¹⁵ This loop will be of interest for further explanations in this paper.

In another variation of *Dependent Origination* the sequence starts with the Six-Sense-Bases (⑤), omitting the first four elements and ends with Craving (⑧) (in a later verse it is continued to element ⑫ as usual¹⁶). Very different is a succession that starts at Craving (⑧), loops back to Consciousness (③), continues with Name and Form (④), loops back to Formations (②), jumps to Existence (⑩) and continues to Birth (⑪) and Ageing and Death (⑫)¹⁷.

Another, unique adaptation of *Dependent Origination* not discussed here is given in the *Upanisa Sutta*¹⁸ some-times dubbed ‘Transcendental Dependent Arising’ [see Bhikkhu Bodhi / 8 /].

¹² DN 15.3, ii 56, pages 223/224 in / 3 /

¹³ DN 14.2.19, ii 32, page 211 in / 3 /

¹⁴ Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda in / 7 /, page 77

¹⁵ “Then, monks, the Bodhisatta Vipassi thought: ‘This consciousness turns back at mind-and-body, it does not go any further. To this extent there is birth and decay, there is death and falling into other states and being reborn, namely: Mind-and-body conditions consciousness and consciousness conditions mind-and-body, mind-and-body conditions the six sense-bases ...’ [Mahāpadāna Sutta, DN 14.2.19, ii 33, page 211 in / 3 /] ([return to page 23](#))

¹⁶ “And what, bhikkhus, is the origin of suffering? In dependence on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as condition, feeling [comes to be]; with feeling as condition, craving. This is the origin of suffering.” [Nidānasamyutta, Dukkha Sutta, SN 12.43, page 580 in / 5 /]

¹⁷ “If, bhikkhus, there is lust for the nutriment edible food, if there is delight, if there is craving, consciousness becomes established there and comes to growth. Wherever consciousness becomes established and comes to growth, there is a descent of name-and-form. Where there is a descent of name-and-form, there is the growth of volitional formations. Where there is the growth of volitional formations, there is the production of future renewed existence. Where there is the production of future renewed existence, there is future birth, aging, and death. Where there is future birth, aging, and death, I say that is accompanied by sorrow, anguish, and despair.” [Nidānasamyutta, Atthirāga Sutta, SN 12.64, page 600 in / 5 /]

¹⁸ Nidānasamyutta, Upanisa Sutta, SN 12.23, page 555/556 in / 5 /

In this Introduction six different versions of *Dependent Origination* have been mentioned and even more are available in the early Buddhist scriptures and commentaries [see Bucknell / 4 /]. It may be that the Buddha taught different versions on different occasions to different people according to their capabilities or to stress a certain purpose or topic, but it is well possible that during the first 400 years of exclusively verbal transmission of the Buddha's teachings (and during the following 2,000 years in written form as well) some of the texts got distorted, especially when one keeps in mind, that this teaching is profound and one can assume that not all the monks and nuns chanting this teaching did completely understand it. Even during the lifetime of the Buddha he had to correct the wrong views and understanding of his disciples (see [footnote 24](#) on page 9).

The many different versions of *Dependent Origination* allow for a number of possible explanations which can be justified with textual references available in the Nikāyas. To what extent, if at all, is it possible or allowed to support an explanation based on Version A with textual references of Version B and/or Version C or with references not even directly concerned with *Dependent Origination*? For example is it acceptable to make use of the Standard Version but assume that there is an interaction between Consciousness and Name and Form as described in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* (see above)? Exactly this is the approach in this paper.

Here the Standard-Version of *Paṭiccasamupāda* is used for the explanation but a loop between Consciousness (③) and Name and Form (④) as described in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* is assumed as this interaction between Consciousness and Name and Form is not only found in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* but at other places in the Nikāyas as well (for instance see [footnote 25](#) on page 9).

It was my intention to stick as closely as possible to the linear causal formula as given on page 5 but I had to realise that assuming certain interactions and loops is unavoidable when it comes to the practical application of this teaching. Others must have had similar experiences as is confirmed by a comment in the introduction to the *Nidānavagga*¹⁹. What is introduced here is therefore just one possible explanation based largely on the early available Buddhist suttas and on some modern commentaries.

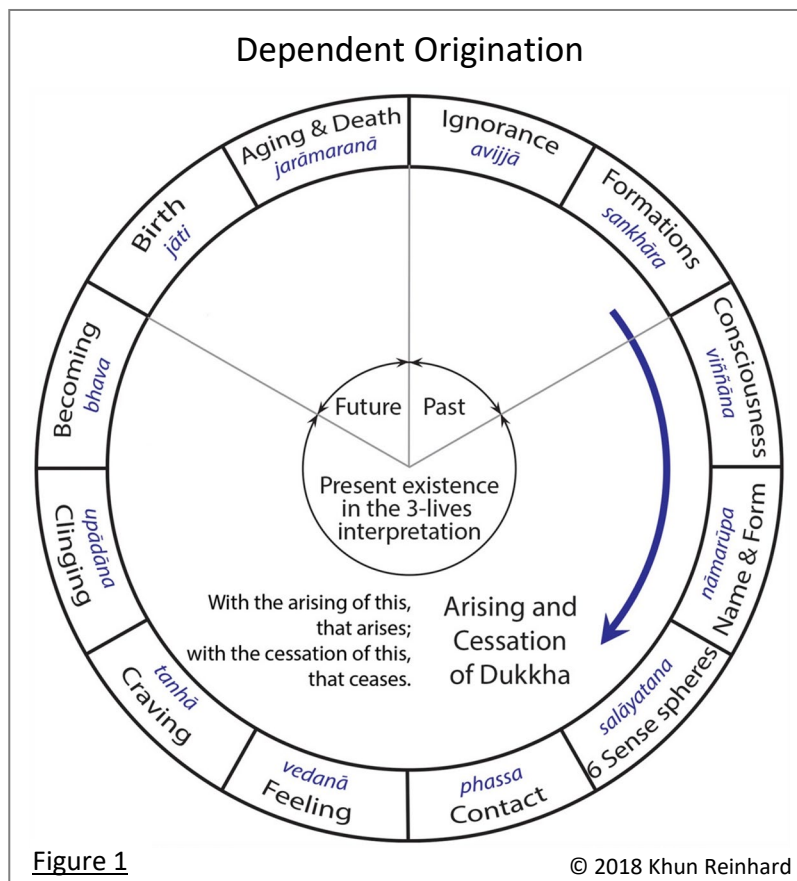
At first a brief idea about the traditional or orthodox Three-Lives-Theory as found in the commentaries to the Nikāyas is given. This theory is not unanimously accepted as an original teaching of the historical Buddha, yet many intelligent people strongly believe in it. This is followed by a more detailed explanation of the Here-and-Now-Theory including my personal view of the series of related events.

¹⁹ “[...] that the sequence of factors should not be regarded as a linear causal process in which each preceding Factor gives rise to its successor through the simple exercise of efficient causality. The relationship among the factors is always one of complex conditionality rather than linear causation.”

[Introduction to the *Nidānavagga*, SN, pages 522/523 in / 5 /] ([return to page 19](#))

3. The Three-Lives-Interpretation of *Dependent Origination*

The Three-Lives model of *Dependent Origination* is also known as the *Cycle of Birth and Death* or the *Wheel of Samsara* or the *Wheel of Life* or the *Wheel of Becoming*, illustrated as a circle²⁰ with neither beginning nor ending as depicted in [Figure 1](#).



Ignorance and Formations (or Mental Formations or Volition/ Volitional Impulses) represent the previous life, the elements from Consciousness to Becoming denote the present life and Birth and Aging and Death including sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, despair etc. characterize the future existence.

Not possessing the right wisdom the ignorant person engages in many kinds of mental concoctions and volitional, karmic relevant actions, [*karma* is intentional action of body speech and mind, not fate or destiny], thus creating karmic results (*vipāka* in Pāli) leading to renewed birth with a certain state of mind (consciousness) and body in a thus deserved environment. Our present action in this life, again or still governed by ignorance, is of karmic relevance as well and as a result we have to be reborn again and again... The process will only stop once we have developed sufficient wisdom to commit only karmically neutral actions which do not lead to another rebirth – this takes Buddha-like qualities. [More information about karma for example in my article *Karma and Merit in (Thai) Buddhism*; see link on page 37].

²⁰ Actually the circular form does nowhere appear, a link like ‘with aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair (12) as condition ignorance (1) comes to be’ does not exist in the Nikāyas. In the Nikāyas we only find the linear version as given on page 5 in the order of arising and in the order of cessation. While the Here-and-Now-Theory does not need a closed circle – the sequence starts anew with every meaningful sense contact and ends with the fading away of that experience – the Three-Lives-Theory can hardly function without. ([return to page 29](#))

It is doubtful that the Buddha meant *Dependent Origination* to be interpreted as covering three lifetimes.

- *Dependent Origination* appears many times in different versions in the Nikāyas yet the Buddha nowhere taught a three-lives version. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu is straightforward when he writes: “To explain *Patīccasamupāda* in a way that it covers three life times is wrong. It is not according to the principles of the Pali Scriptures. It is wrong both according to the letter and the spirit of the Scriptures.”²¹ He as P.A. Payutto²² trace the origin (maybe more precise: the spreading) of the Three-Lives-Theory back to the Visuddhimagga of Ven. Buddhaghosa.
- The Buddha never mentioned ‘re-birth’ (which in Pāli should be *punajāti* or *punabbhavābhiniḅbatti*²³) in connection with *Dependent Origination*. He always used the term ‘birth’ (*jāti*).
- How can the teaching of ‘non-self’ (*anattā*) and the idea of rebirth fit together. People speak of a ‘stream of consciousness’ but the Buddha rejected this idea put forward by Bhikkhu Sati, son of a fisherman, strongly in the *Mahātanhāsankhaya Sutta*²⁴. It needs something identical to justify the expression ‘re-birth’ but that would violate the ‘non-self’ principle or, if there is not something identical, then it is not ‘re-birth’ but the birth of something new and different.
- Consciousness and Mind and Body are mutually interdependent²⁵. One cannot exist without the other. There is no consciousness without a body and no functioning body without consciousness²⁶. This maybe the reason why Theravāda Buddhists assert that re-birth is immediate.
- “A person realizing Nibbana (an *arahant*) during this present life has reached the end of suffering in this very life – he or she does not need to die first in order to experience this state; he/she will not be reborn [but according to the Three-Lives-Theory he/she should experience Birth and Aging, Death, ... again]. The complete cycle of *Dependent Origination* in relation to the arising (or

²¹ Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu in / 1 /, page 63

²² “The interpretation of *Dependent Origination* in the context of several lifetimes originates in the *Visuddhimagga*, composed by Venerable Buddhaghosa in the 5th century A.D.” [P.A. Payutto in / 6 /, page 275]

²³ “In the suttas, the terms for rebirth are chiefly *punabbhava* (q.v.), ‘renewed existence’, and *abhiniḅbatti* ‘arising’; or both combined as *punabbhavābhiniḅbatti*.” [Buddhist Dictionary / 9 /, *patisandhi*, page 120]

²⁴ “Exactly so, venerable sir. As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, it is this same consciousness that runs and wanders through the round of rebirths, not another.”

“What is that consciousness, Sati?”

“Venerable sir, it is that which speaks and feels and experiences here and there the result of good and bad actions.”

“Misguided man, to whom have you ever known me to teach the Dhamma in that way? Misguided man, in many discourses have I not stated consciousness to be dependently arisen, since without a condition there is no origination of consciousness? But you, misguided man, have misrepresented us by your wrong grasp and injured yourself and stored up much demerit; for this will lead to your harm and suffering for a long time.”

[*Mahātanhāsankhaya Sutta*, MN 38, i 258, page 350 in / 2 /] (return to page 7)

²⁵ “Well then, friend, I will make up a simile for you, for some intelligent people here understand the meaning of a statement by means of a simile. Just as two sheaves of reeds might stand leaning against each other, so too, with name- and-form as condition, consciousness [comes to be]; with consciousness as condition name-and-form [comes to be]. With name-and-form as condition, the six sense bases [come to be]; with the six sense bases as condition, contact... Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

“If, friend, one were to remove one of those sheaves of reeds, the other would fall, and if one were to remove the other sheaf, the first would fall. So too, with the cessation of name-and-form comes cessation of consciousness; with the cessation of consciousness comes cessation of name-and-form. With the cessation of name-and-form comes cessation of the six sense bases; with the cessation of the six sense bases, cessation of contact ... Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.” [Nidānasamyutta, *Naḷakalāpī Sutta*, SN 12.67, pages 608/609 in / 5 /]

(return to page 7) (return to page 14) (return to footnote 57)

²⁶ “Bhikkhus, though someone might say: ‘Apart from form, apart from feeling, apart from perception, apart from volitional formations, I will make known the coming and going of consciousness, its passing away and rebirth, its growth, increase, and expansion - that is impossible.’”

[*Khandhasamyutta*, SN 22.54, page 892 in / 5 /] (return to page 16)

ceasing) of suffering occurs in the present time; one need not trace back to a previous life or wait for a future life.”²⁷

On the other hand there are passages in the early Buddhist scriptures suggesting that the Buddha taught rebirth, for example.:

- The scriptures suggest that for the Buddha the concepts of ‘non-self’ and ‘re-birth’ have been compatible as it seems he had been able to remember ‘his’ previous lives²⁸. People believing in the Three-Lives-Theory will take these passages literally while those adhering to the Here-and-Now-Theory regard them as metaphorical.
- The explanations of the Buddha regarding Aging and Death and Birth, eg, in the *Nidānasamyutta* suggest that he was talking about physical birth and death²⁹.

Anyway, it is difficult to tell what is the ‘right’ interpretation of *Dependent Origination*, especially for someone who cannot read the early Buddhist texts written in Pāli, Sanskrit or some Chinese language. I have to rely on translations of these early texts and their commentaries into English or German language and, for this reason, cannot take part in a scholastic debate of how to translate a certain term in a certain sutta which may change the meaning in favour of this (Three-Lives) or of that (Here-and-Now) view.³⁰

People with a keen interest in the topic as well as in the controversy may visit the websites:

1. <http://www.nanavira.org/notes-on-dhamma/paticcasamuppada>
2. <https://www.buddhismwithoutboundaries.com/showthread.php?193-Paticcasamuppada-II-In-which-Bhikkhu-Bodhi-Debates-at-Nanavira%27s-Ghost-and-Mettiko-Bhikkhu-rebuts/page1> to page6 (accessed May 20, 2017)

The first link leads to a paper by the late Bhikkhu Ñāṇavīra, questioning the traditional Three-Lives-Theory of *Dependent Origination*. The second link leads to a website which starts by publishing a reply of Bhikkhu Bodhi, a prominent adherent of the Three-Lives-Theory, to Ñāṇavīra’s thesis followed by a discussion in the forum which gives an interesting overview about the pros and cons of these two theories.

²⁷ P.A. Payutto in / 6 /, page 225, modified by the author.

²⁸ “When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the recollection of past lives. I recollected my manifold past lives, that is, one birth, two births, three births, four births, five births, ten births, twenty births, thirty births, forty births, fifty births, a hundred births, a thousand births, a hundred thousand births, many aeons of world-contraction, many aeons of world-expansion, many aeons of world-contraction and expansion: ‘There I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my life-term; and passing away from there, I reappeared elsewhere; and there too I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my life-term; and passing away from there, I reappeared here.’ Thus with their aspects and particulars I recollected my manifold past lives.”

[eg *Bhayabherava Sutta*, MN 4.27, i 22, p. 105 / *Kandaraka Sutta*, MN 51.24, i 347, p.451; both in / 2 /]

²⁹ “And what, bhikkhus, is aging-and-death? The aging of the various beings in the various orders of beings, their growing old, brokenness of teeth, greyness of hair, wrinkling of skin, decline of vitality, degeneration of the faculties: this is called aging. The passing away of the various beings from the various orders of beings, their perishing, breakup, disappearance, mortality, death, completion of time, the breakup of the aggregates, the laying down of the carcass: this is called death. Thus this aging and this death are together called aging-and-death.

“And what, bhikkhus, is birth? The birth of the various beings into the various orders of beings, their being born, descent [into the womb added by the translator ?], production, the manifestation of the aggregates, the obtaining of the sense bases. This is called birth. [*Vibhaṅga Sutta*, SN 12.2, page 534 in / 5 /]

³⁰ An example regarding the difficulties with translation can be seen in [footnotes 3 and 4](#) on page 3. The same translator changed the translation from ‘personal’ (view) in the 1995 edition of the *Majjhima Nikāya* to ‘identity’ (view) in the 2009 edition of the same book.

4. The Here-and-Now-Interpretation of *Paṭiccasamuppāda*

Based on the same links and formula as the Three-Lives-Theory we can use [Figure 1](#) to describe the arising and cessation of *Dukkha* with the Here-and-Now model of *Dependent Origination* (forget about the innermost circle and the separation in Past, Present, Future). A prominent protagonist of the Here-and-Now interpretation of *Dependent Origination* was Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu [see / 1 /, / 14 /]. To him the arising of *Dukkha* corresponds to the arising of the self-concept in the human mind – both are happening many times each day in a mind governed by ignorance.

At first glance there are two main causes for *Dukkha* to arise:

- The proximate cause is Craving³¹ or unwholesome (ignorant) Desire;
- The root cause is Ignorance³²;

but as depicted in [Figure 1](#) there is actually a whole pattern of events involved, consisting of twelve elements which, taking just a quick look, arise in the given sequence and in dependence on each other, without having a beginning or ending.

Generally there is not just a single cause. We may speak of a main or leading cause and supporting factors like the seed can be regarded as the leading cause for the growing of a tree but without supporting factors like earth, water, sunshine, etc. a tree would not develop from that seed. For example in the formula “With Ignorance as a condition Mental Formations come to be” Ignorance is regarded to be the main condition but there may be other, supporting factors as well.

According to the *Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta*³³ the Buddha said: “One who sees dependent origination sees the *Dhamma*³⁴; one who sees the *Dhamma* sees dependent origination.” Those who do not see the *Dhamma* are ignorant of the *Dhamma* and therefore prone to suffering. Ignorance is the starting point for the arising of *Dukkha*, is the first link of *Dependent Origination*, but not the first cause as Ignorance is depending on the taints (*āsavas* in Pāli), one of those being Ignorance itself.³⁵ We have a loop here, loop no.1, (not the only one in the process of *Dependent Origination*): ignorance is a condition for the taints, the taints – which include the taint of ignorance – are in turn a condition for ignorance.

P.A. Payutto [/ 10 /, page 18] explains: “Putting ignorance at the beginning does not imply that it is the First Cause, or Genesis, of all things. Ignorance is put at the beginning for the sake of clarity, by intercepting the cycle and establishing a starting point where it is considered most practical. We are in fact cautioned against assuming ignorance to be a First Cause with the following description of the conditioned arising of ignorance – ignorance arises with the arising of the outflows, and ceases with their ces-

³¹ “Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination.”

[Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, SN V. 56.10, page 1844 in / 5 /] ([return to page 24](#))

³² Craving (*tanhā*) or unwholesome desire is generated and sustained by ignorance while wholesome desire (*chanda*) is generated from wise reflection. It takes ignorance in order for craving to be craving.

³³ *Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta*, MN 28.38, i 191, page 284 in / 2 /

³⁴ Dhamma in Pāli or Dharma in Sanskrit means in brief: natural phenomenon or the teaching of the Buddha.

³⁵ “And what are the taints, what is the origin of the taints, what is the cessation of the taints, what is the way leading to the cessation of the taints? There are these three taints: the taint of sensual desire [kamāsava], the taint of being [bhavāsava], and the taint of ignorance [avijjāsava]. With the arising of ignorance there is the arising of the taints. With the cessation of ignorance there is the cessation of the taints. The way leading to the cessation of the taints is just this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

[*Sammāditthi Sutta*, MN 9.70, i 55, page 144 in / 2 /] ([return to page 23](#))

sation.” The Abhidhamma mentions four instead of three *āsavas*, described by P.A. Payutto as follows: “These outflows are four in number, namely: the concern with the gratification of the desires of the five senses; attachment to views and beliefs, for example that the body is the self or belonging to self; desire for various states of being and the aspiration to attain and maintain them; and ignorance of the way things are.” [/ 10 / , page 44].

4.1 From Ignorance to Feeling – element no. ① to element no. ⑦

Now let us see how the ego gets born, how *Dukkha* arises and how to avoid the arising of suffering. Some parts of the description are based on exemplifications of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhus teachings by Tan Dhammavidu³⁶.

It needs to be stressed, that *Dukkha* in connection with *Dependent Origination* is spiritual *Dukkha*. It is not bodily suffering or mental illness. Bodily suffering like head- or toothache or pain due to operations or injuries are part of being alive and to some extent unavoidable, but spiritual suffering like anger, hatred, envy, jealousy, worry, doubt ... could be avoided, at least reduced and that is what the teaching of the Buddha is all about.

(1) Ignorance (*avijjā*)

Ignorance in the sense here has nothing to do with a lack of intelligence. It means to be ignorant of the *Four Noble Truths*; it means not knowing *Dukkha* or suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path to end suffering. It includes not knowing about Impermanence, the ever changing nature of life, not knowing about non-self. If we do not know what *Dukkha* is and we do not know what causes it, we do not know what sort of behaviour responds to its arising into our lives, we do not know what life is like without it and we have no idea how to behave in such a way that we can get rid of it, then we have got a problem. This is called Ignorance in Buddhist circles. We could be as clever as Albert Einstein but we still would have this problem, we are still ignorant as far as Buddhists are concerned.

Jonathan Watts / 11 / gives two more definitions of Ignorance:

- “Ignorance is the attachment to erroneous world views, two of the most principle being belief that things are separate, fixed, enduring, OR completely lacking any reality.
- In more psychological terms, ignorance is confused thinking based on conjecture and imagination, and conditioned by beliefs, fear, and accumulated character traits.”

Ignorance is the prerequisite for the arising of suffering, the root cause. Without ignorance there would be no craving, there would be no *Dukkha*. If we could replace ignorance by wisdom – it would be the end of the story.

³⁶ Variations of this topic have been used frequently by Tan Dhammavidu, an English monk, during his talks to retreatants at the International Dharma Hermitage of Wat Suan Mokkh, Thailand. The author has listened repeatedly to them between May 2004 and February 2007.

(2) Formations, determinations (*saṅkhāra*)

There are three kinds of formations. Body formation, speech formation, thought formation.³⁷

Body formation – in-breath and out-breath determine, are necessary conditions for the body

Speech formation – thinking and pondering determine, are necessary conditions for speech

Mind formation – perception and feeling determine, are necessary conditions for the mind

“The general term ‘formation’ may be applied, with the qualifications required by the context. This term may refer either to the act of ‘forming’ or to the passive state of ‘having been formed’ or to both.”

(Buddhist Dictionary / 9 /, *saṅkhāra*).

In the context of *Dependent Origination* we can see both, the active and passive meaning of *saṅkhāra*:

Passive. The mental formations are conditioned by Ignorance in a way that leads to suffering – this is the basic condition for the process of *Dependent Origination*. With the cessation of Ignorance the Formations (bodily, verbal and mental) actually do not cease literally, they are still there – the Buddha did not die on the spot at the moment of enlightenment; he kept on breathing, thinking (teaching) and feeling for another 45 years – but these Formations are now conditioned by wisdom, no longer conditioned in a way that leads to suffering.

Active. “With volitional formations as condition, consciousness comes to be.” Of the three formations the mental formations is what we are really concerned with in the formula of *Dependent Origination*. Mental Formations gives rise at first to mental and, maybe, subsequently to further verbal and bodily activities. *Karma*, being intentional activity of mind, speech and body has its place here as well but does not necessarily involve the Three-Life-Theory.³⁸

According to P.A. Payutto [/ 10 /, page 55] Mental Formations or volitional impulses comprise: “mental activities, wilful intent, intention and decision, and their generation of actions; the organization of the thinking process in accordance with accumulated habits, abilities, preferences, and beliefs; the conditioning of the mind and the thinking process.”

Instead of seeing and experiencing life as it is, the ignorant person is seeing life, situations, themselves and others according to their views, opinions, likes and dislikes, beliefs, fears, etc. “The result is confused

³⁷ “Lady, how many formations are there?”

“There are these three formations, friend Visakha: the bodily formation, the verbal formation, and the mental formation.”

“But, lady, what is the bodily formation? What is the verbal formation? What is the mental formation?”

“In-breathing and out-breathing, friend Visakha, are the bodily formation; applied thought and sustained thought are the verbal formation; perception and feeling are the mental formation.”

[Cūlavedalla Sutta, MN 44.13-15, i 301, page 399 in / 2 /]

³⁸ “*Karma* means ‘action’ or ‘doing’; whatever one does, says, or thinks is a *karma*. These intentional actions of body, speech and mind bring about a fruit or result (*vipāka*) either within the present life or in the context of a future birth. ‘In the context of a future birth’ is common belief and there are various occasions in the Nikāyas which seem to support this view – this is the worldly or moral level of the teaching. On the transcendental level, leading to the end of all suffering, there is ceaseless change everywhere, no enduring ‘self’, ‘I’, ‘me’ or ‘mine’ exists. As there is no ‘self’ there is no ‘creator’ or ‘doer’ of *karma* and, of course, there is no ‘receiver’ of the fruit. All there is, is a karmic relevant action (no ‘doer’) followed by its fruit (no ‘receiver’) happening within and to the *Five Aggregates*. There is just cause and effect, endlessly, both happening in the here and now. I do not do a bad deed today but receive the result next week or in 10 years – the fruit isn’t stored somewhere in the meantime. All *karma* is mental as verbal and bodily action is preceded by a mental action and I will experience the result at first mentally as well. The bad deed done right now has an immediate effect on ‘me’ (for example I may feel remorse, feel unhappy) and with this altered state of mind ‘I’ will do another deed with another immediate effect and so on and so on. There is a continuous flow of *karma* and *vipāka* – ‘I’ change from moment to moment due to physical and other natural laws and due to the *Law of karma*. *Karma*, followed by *vipāka* is generated and experienced more or less continually in the here and now.”

[Khun Reinhard, *Karma and Merit in (Thai) Buddhism*; see link on page 37]

thinking, [...] conditioned by beliefs, fears and character. This confused thinking and related intensions will condition the basic state of mind or consciousness. [...] The context within which we see, hear or cognize will be conditioned by our thinking and intentions: we see what we want to see and ignore other objects [selective awareness]; we accept which supports our ideas and reject opposing ones.” [Modified according to / 10 /, page 57]. Thus it is said: With Mental or Volitional Formations as condition Consciousness comes to be.

(3) (Sense-) Consciousness (*viññāna*)

Consciousness is always a specific consciousness that is, it is conscious of something; it is not an abstract, free floating consciousness, existing on its own. Consciousness is dependent on Name and Form and Name and Form is dependent on Consciousness as described by Venerable Sāriputta in the simile of the two sheaves of reeds (see footnote 25, page 9). They are mutually interdependent. When one is pulled out of position, the other is bound to fall. They are not one, and neither are they two. Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda [/ 7 / Vol. 1, eg, page 21] compares this interdependency, this duality of Consciousness and Name and Form to a vortex or whirlpool – thus representing another loop, loop no. 2, in the process of *Dependent Origination*.

About Consciousness

“Consciousness (*viññāna* in Pāli) is one of the five groups of existence (aggregates; *khandha* in Pāli). [...] It is inseparably linked with the three other mental groups (feeling, perception and [mental] formations) and furnishes the bare cognition of the object, while the other three contribute more specific functions. [...]

Just like the other groups of existence, consciousness is a flux and does not constitute an abiding mind-substance; nor is it a transmigrating entity or soul. The three characteristics, impermanence, suffering and no-self, are frequently applied to it in the texts.” [Buddhist Dictionary / 9 /].

“Strictly speaking, however, feeling, perception, and the mental activities and consciousness are inseparable parts of the same process. But they differ from one another in their individual characteristics of feeling, perceiving, composing and cognizing so that they are distinguished as four separate *khandas*. When these *khandas* are judged according to their psychological value, feeling and perception are seen to be the passive and receptive coefficients of *viññāna* while the *sankharas* [mental activities or formations] are its active state. *Viññāna* is their leader, being the original cause without which they do not appear. [...] Thus *viññāna* is the essential part which involves the other three mental aggregates, and for the purpose of analysing the main phases of consciousness and of showing the objective relation of various conceptions of individuality, they are logically distinguished by their characteristics as four aggregates, in the sense of groups or collections.” [Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practise / 12 /, page 352].

The object of Consciousness is Name and Form and its essential function is the discrimination between the three basic feeling tones – pleasant, painful or unpleasant, and neither pleasant nor unpleasant – the first aspect of *nāma* in Name and Form.

Consciousness sometimes is said to be the ‘Knower’ but actually all it knows is that a sense-contact is happening – nothing more. There are six kinds of consciousness, namely eye-, ear-, nose-, tongue-, body-, mind-consciousness. In contrast to Western philosophy, which speaks of five senses, Eastern thinking additionally acknowledges the mind as the sixth sense. Two examples may help to explain the Buddhist view of consciousness:

- a) You are looking at a red flower. The eye sees the flower and eye-consciousness is aware of it, thus 'seeing' happens, but that is all consciousness can do. It does not know that it is a flower or that it is of red colour. These labels are stuck on it by perception or recognition which are other functions of the mind, and which sometimes are called 'cohorts' of consciousness (see the textbox **About Consciousness** on the previous page).
- b) You are reading a book and at the same time the birds are chirping in the trees, cars are running in the street. But you are only aware of your reading, not of the noises even though the sound waves are hitting your eardrum. There is only eye-consciousness and, may be, some mind-consciousness but no ear-consciousness. Consciousness is impermanent and non-self. It is not a self-entity as people like to view it.

(4) Name and Form (*nāma-rūpa*)

"And what is name-and-form?

- Feeling (*vedanā*) [pleasant, unpleasant, neutral];
- Perception (*saññā*) [shape, colour, smell, and so on];
- Intention (*cetanā*) [significance or purpose];
- Contact (*phassa*) [engagement in experience];
- Attention (*manasikāra*) [(intentional) direction of emphasis]. These five are called name.

The four great elements (earth, water, fire, and air) and the form dependent on the four great elements: This is called form. This name and this form are together called name-and-form."³⁹

Name suggests *nāma*'s function of naming, but this does not mean that a conventional name is given to something. "Primarily, recognition is not by 'name' in the conventional and linguistic sense, but by means of feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention. [...] It is with the help of these five [aspects or capacities of Name] that we recognize the four elements, earth, water, fire and air in terms of hard and soft, hot or cold, and so forth. That is why it is called *rūpasaññā* (perception of form). Those five factors are called Name only in a formal sense."⁴⁰

"We know the four great primaries and form only through the constituents of the name group, eg, 'form' gets a verbal impression through recognition given by the constituents of 'name' (such as feeling and perception) and 'name' gets a resistance impression by the impact offered by 'form'."⁴¹

"Name and form themselves are inter-related. It is not something compact. There is no 'form' without 'name' and there is no 'name' without 'form'. [They are inextricably intertwined.] That is why we identified it with the cryptic 'tangle-within' (*antajatā*). [Another loop, loop no. 3]. Likewise, we identified the inter-relation between consciousness and name and form with the 'tangle-without' (*bahijātā*) [loop no. 2]."⁴²

Sometimes the terms 'Mind and Body' or 'Mentality and Materiality' are used instead of 'Name and Form'. As the expression 'Mind' can be regarded to designate the four immaterial aggregates (feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness), the term 'Mind and Body' can be misleading. Bhikkhu Ñāṇavīra [/ 13 /] writes: "When *nāma* is understood as 'mind' or 'mentality' it will inevitably include *viññāna* or consciousness. This is entirely without justification in the Suttas." Bucknell [/ 4 /, page 325] writes: "These observations by WATSUJI, YINSHUN, and REAT indicate that *nāma-rūpa*, far from signifying "mind-and-body" or something similar, is a collective term for the six types of sense object." and adds in

³⁹ modified according to Nidānasamyutta, SN 12.2, page 535 in / 5 /

⁴⁰ modified according to / 7 / Vol. 1, page 40

⁴¹ modified according to / 7 / Vol. 1, page 87/89

⁴² / 7 / Vol. 1, page 103

a footnote on page 326: “It thus supports the proposition that *nāma-rūpa* represents a classification of sense objects into mental (sensed via the sixth sense-base) and physical (sensed via the other five bases).” To my understanding this will result in two levels of sense-contact as Ajahn Buddhādāsa has suggested (see the description of Contact below).

Form is both internal to the person (as the body with its senses) and external (as the physical world). Consciousness, body, and mind are always interdependent. No sentient body without consciousness, no consciousness without a living body (see [footnote 26](#) on page 9) “Consciousness is leading the body and the mind to function in a certain way. If for example the mental state is negative, cognition, bodily gestures and behaviour will be influenced accordingly. With anger there is the cognition of unpleasant sensations, the mind is depressed and bodily, eg facial features, are sullen and aggressive.”⁴³ “With the arising of Consciousness, Mind and Body will and must arise. [...] And as volitional impulses [[Mental Formations](#)] condition Consciousness, they also condition Mind and Body.”⁴⁴ Mind and body must function through awareness of the ‘outside’ world. The sense spheres will be activated to provide the necessary input. Thus it is said: With Name and Form as condition the Six Sense-Spheres come to be.

(5) Six Sense-Spheres (*salāyatana*)

The Six Sense-Spheres are made up by the internal six sense-organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind) and the external six sense-objects (form, sound, odour, taste, touch, and thought). But every sense impression takes place on the body surface and in the mind: For example we see this piece of paper/this screen about 0.5m away from us, but seeing happens actually on the body surface in the eye, upside down and the mind will put it back on its feet. This is why the ‘external’ sense-objects can be regarded as being part of form.

Does Consciousness arise with the Six Sense Spheres (⑤) or with Mental Formations (②)?

The *Madhupindika Sutta* states: “Dependent on the eye and form eye-consciousness arises.”⁴⁵ Or generalized: Dependent on the internal sense-organs and the external sense-objects the respective consciousness arises, but “the fact that a sense object becomes manifest to a sense base does not invariably result in consciousness. Other accompanying factors, such as receptivity, determination, and interest must also be present.”^{46, 47} For example someone reading an interesting book will be only aware of the book's content but unaware of noises in the street even though the sound-waves are hitting the person's eardrum. The attention is with the eye, not with the ear and thus eye-consciousness and eye-contact are experienced. In deep sleep sound may reach the ear but no hearing takes place because ear-consciousness is not active.

According to the *Madhupindika Sutta* Consciousness arises with the meeting of a sense-organ and the re-

⁴³ modified according to / 10 /, page 62

⁴⁴ modified according to / 10 /, page 61

⁴⁵ “Dependent on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as condition there is feeling. What one feels, that one perceives. What one perceives, that one thinks about. What one thinks about, that one mentally proliferates. With what one has mentally proliferated as the source, perceptions and notions tinged by mental proliferation beset a man with respect to past, future, and present forms cognizable through the eye.” (accordingly for the other sense-spheres). ([return to page 18](#)) ([return to page 23](#)) [Madhupindika Sutta, The Honeyball, MN 18.16, i 112, page 203 in / 2 /] ([return to page 33](#))

⁴⁶ P.A. Payutto in / 6 /, page 47

⁴⁷ “If internally the eye is intact and external forms come into its range, but there is no corresponding, [conscious] engagement [[attention](#)], then there is no manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness. But when internally the eye is intact and external forms come into its range and there is the corresponding [conscious] engagement [[attention](#)], then there is the manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness.” [Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta, MN 28, i191, page 283 in / 2 /]

spective sense-object, but the Standard Formula of *Dependent Origination* says: “With volitional formations as condition, consciousness comes to be” (see page 5). Does Consciousness arise with Formations or with the meeting of sense-organ and sense-object as condition or both? P.A. Payutto explains “When consciousness arises, for example when one sees a visual object, in fact, one is seeing only specific attributes or facets of that object in question. In other words, one sees only those aspects or angles that one gives importance to, depending on the mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) which condition the arising of consciousness (*viññāna*).”⁴⁸ One can say that Ignorance and Formations provide a potential for Consciousness to arise in a certain state or let’s say mood (eg angry or happy and an ensuing selective awareness) while the meeting of eye and form produce the actual eye-consciousness depending on a specific form. Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda writes: “The nature of consciousness is the very discriminating as two things. Until consciousness arises there is no idea of eye and form as two things. It is when consciousness arises that one gets the idea: ‘This is my eye and there is that form.’ That is why we say that the gap – the interstice – between the two is consciousness.”^{49, 50}

(6) Contact (*phassa*)

Influenced by our basic state of mind (our consciousness) and the intensity of the impression, one out of the vast number of sense impressions available will become noticeable for us. We pay attention to it. The coming together of the internal sense-organ (eg ear), the appropriate external sense object (sound) and the respective (ear-) consciousness is called Contact, in this example ‘ear-contact’. If the eye sees a form and eye-consciousness arises, we have eye-contact, etc.

According to Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu sense-contact has two levels. The first level is external, the primarily physical contact between the inner and outer sense-base; the second level is the mental aspect of contact. Mind-consciousness arises on the basis of the first level contact and knows the meaning or value of that contact. On the first level something with a certain shape and colour is taken note of; on the second level it then is recognized, for instance as ‘flower’. Together they make up sense-contact⁵¹.

⁴⁸ P.A. Payutto in / 6 /, page 24.

⁴⁹ / 5 / Vol. 3, pages 106/107

⁵⁰ “When this was said, another bhikkhu said to the elder bhikkhus: “The six internal bases, friends, are one end; the six external bases are the second end; consciousness is in the middle; and craving is the seamstress...”
[AN 61, Sixes, III 400/401, pages 951/952 in / 16 /]

⁵¹ “Sense contact has two levels. The first level is external, the primarily physical contact between the inner and outer media [[inner and outer sense-base](#)], for instance the eye and a visual form. We can see the form and shape, the color, the dimensions, and other physical aspects of the visual object. This can be called ‘contact by the eye’ and this kind of sense contact amounts to ‘mere’ contact. It is simply the basic sense experience of a sentient being within a sensual world. Next is the mental level or aspect of contact. Mind-consciousness arises on the basis of the physical contact and knows the meaning or value of that contact: that something with a certain shape, color, and size is called ‘flower’, ‘feces’, or whatever the case may be. Contact has these two levels: the external or physical level, and the internal or mental level.

These two stages of contact occur throughout our daily lives. The first is merely the natural encounter of the nervous system with the shape, color, physical dimension, and other qualities of a visual form (and similarly with the other senses). Next, mind-consciousness (*manoviññāna*) makes its contact and knows that the meaning of this whole experienced thing is ‘flower’, ‘feces’, ‘woman’, ‘man’ or whatever. Both levels are called contact. Together they make up sense contact, which is the moment-to-moment basis of our daily experience.

As with eyes, there is the same combination of factors constituting contact via ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind-sense. Contact has two levels in each case. As for the sixth sense, the mind-sense, an example of mere contact is the arising of a memory while naming it is the second level of contact. ”

[Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu / 14 /, page 58/59]

(7) Feeling (*vedanā*)

It is feeling that makes an object interesting for the mind. Most of the contacts during our lives do not throw up a pleasant or unpleasant sensation. These contacts result in a neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling tone and the mind is usually not interested in this kind of ‘non’-feeling and most of the time they pass by unnoticed otherwise we would go crazy because of the many contacts happening all the time. Being overwhelmed by too many contacts or sense-impressions can even happen in meditation where contacts via eye, nose and tongue are usually very limited.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu speaks of two kinds of contact (see above) which, according to my interpretation and the teaching of the *Madhupindika Sutta* (“With contact as condition, there is feeling ...”, see [footnote 45](#) on page 16), will result in two kinds of feeling.

- The first kind of feelings is caused by a ‘mere’ or basic sense-experience (eg bodily pain, seeing something pleasant), resulting in one of the three ‘bare feeling tones’: positive (pleasant), negative (unpleasant) or neutral (neither pleasant nor unpleasant).
- The second kind of feelings signifies ‘intensified feelings’ caused by the mind after recognizing and mentally concocting the initial bare feeling tone, resulting in feelings of satisfaction or delight or, if regarded as being negative, as dissatisfaction, aversion

The initial bare feeling tone triggered by a (physical) sense-contact gets a different quality after the mind has paid attention to the contacted object. For example we see someone in the distance on the pavement who somehow looks familiar. A slightly positive feeling tone arise which triggers intention (we want to find out) and attention to hold the contact so that perception can uncover more details of that person as we are walking towards each other. The slightly pleasant feeling tone may increase due to sustained interest and recognised details, maybe a little excitement creeps in, and at a certain point in time perception may recognize the person as an old friend who we haven’t seen for a long time. The mind now starts its thinking business [many kinds of memories (perception) and fantasies (mental formations) regarding the future may pop up] and suddenly we feel happy due to the meeting with our friend which is going to happen soon and the joy we anticipate. The initial ‘bare feeling tone’ that had triggered the mind to pay attention changed to an ‘intensified feeling’ of happiness after recognition and mental concoction. Following on from that a desire (Craving) to meet our friend may arise and we may start to walk quicker.

A neutral ‘bare feeling tone’ may, if at all, result in the recognition of the object triggering the sensation but most likely will not cause further mental proliferation – the Contact is not ‘meaningful’, the process of *Dependent Origination* will stop at this point until the next sense-contact arises.

The feelings here do not mean emotions like anger, grief, envy, fear, gratitude, love ...

4.2 Review

At this point, before explaining the other elements, let us review what has been said so far:

With Ignorance	as condition	Mental Formations [come to be];
with Mental Formations	as condition	Consciousness;
with Consciousness	as condition	Name and Form;
with Name and Form	as condition	Six Sense-Spheres;
with Six Sense-Spheres	as condition	Contact;
with Contact	as condition	Feeling comes to be.

That sounds straightforward but in reality it is not quite like this. When introducing Consciousness and Name and Form it has been mentioned that these two are mutually dependent and are interacting back and forth and there are other interactions, loops and feedbacks in the process as well. It is necessary to have a closer look at some of these interactions and loops in order to understand how the formula of *Dependent Origination* evolves practically in the human mind. Finally, the teaching of *Dependent Origination* needs to be seen and experienced in one's mind, not just theorized about.

The starting point for the process of *Dependent Origination* is Ignorance by definition and one can regard Ignorance as the governing principle for the arising of *Dukkha* and the arising of the self-concept, yet in real life experience the process starts with Contact – without sense-contact (like in deep, dreamless sleep or in anaesthesia) the mind would not know anything⁵² and the process of *Dependent Origination* would not take off.

Why do Contact and Feeling appear twice?

Please have a look at [Figure 2](#) on page 21. How can one explain that Contact and Feeling, already part of Name and Form (element no. ④), appear again separately as element no. ⑥ (Contact) and element no. ⑦ (Feeling) respectively? Roderick Bucknell [/ 4 /, page 322] doubts that this “[...] could be explained away by suggesting that the causal links are not to be understood as strictly ordered, but that would amount to a serious weakening of the notion of causal dependence (*idappaccayatā*), which the PS [*Paṭīcasamuppāda*] doctrine is said to exemplify.” Bhikkhu Bodhi on the other hand writes “[...] that the sequence of factors should not be regarded as a linear causal process in which each preceding Factor gives rise to its successor through the simple exercise of efficient causality.” (see [footnote 19](#) on page 7). A possible reason might be that, according to Bucknell [/ 4 /, page 338], the today known versions of *Dependent Origination* got somehow corrupted during the early oral transmission of the teaching and “that the two links *viññāna* [[Consciousness](#)] --> *nāma-rūpa* [[Name and Form](#)] and *nāma-rūpa* [[Name and Form](#)] --> *salāyatana* [[Six Sense Spheres](#)] are doctrinally suspect, that they are artifacts generated as the earlier structure was mechanically converted into a linear series.” The Six Sense Spheres (*salāyatana*) for example are not present in the *Mahānidāna Sutta* as has been mentioned on page 6 of this paper. For the proceedings here it is assumed that the elements of Name (*nāma*) stand for potentiality or for the capacity to experience while Contact (element no. ⑥) and Feeling (element no. ⑦) represent a particular event.

Regarding the sequence of the elements from Consciousness to Feeling

[Figure 2](#) on page 21 shows the sequence of the elements from Ignorance to Feeling as given in the Standard Version of *Dependent Origination*. For the sake of understanding some of their interactions are depicted graphically. The following four quotations, however, suggest that the actual sequence in time may be different from the sketch.

1. "Feeling, perception, and consciousness, friend – these states are conjoined, not disjointed, and it is impossible to separate each of these states from the others in order to describe the difference between them. For what one feels, that one perceives; and what one perceives, that one cognizes.”⁵³

⁵² “Therein, friends, in the case of those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of kamma, who maintain that pleasure and pain are created by oneself, and those who maintain that pleasure and pain are created by another, and those who maintain that pleasure and pain are created both by oneself and by another, and those who maintain that pleasure and pain have arisen fortuitously, being created neither by oneself nor by another - in each case it is impossible that they will experience [anything] without contact.”
[*Nidānasamyutta*, *Bhūmija Sutta*, SN 12.25 (38), page 560 in / 5 /]

⁵³ *Mahāvedalla Sutta*, MN 43, i293, page 389 in / 2 /

2. “[...] it would be incorrect to think that first *viññāna* [Consciousness] arises, then *nāma-rūpa* [Name and Form], then the six sense spheres, then contact. In fact, all of these necessarily arise simultaneously.”⁵⁴
3. “Though the three terms, *viññāna* as consciousness in general, *vedanā* as hedonic feeling and *saññā* as perception of specific features, may be differentiated for the purpose of analysing conscious experience, they do not denote separate things. They do not arise, each dependent on the former, in a temporal or even a logical causal sequence. Instead, they all occur together as interrelated aspects of the same thing, conscious experience in general.”⁵⁵
4. “Strictly speaking, the factors of consciousness (*viññāna*), contact (*phassa*), feeling (*vedanā*) and perception (*saññā*) are classified as ‘conascent factors’ (*sahajāta-dhammā*): they arise simultaneously.”⁵⁶

If we forget for a moment the concept of *Dependent Origination* as a closed circle (Figure 1) with interactions and loops (Figure 2), it is possible to describe the process in a relatively easily understandable way. Our starting point is an ignorant (①) human being, capable of intentional (mental) activities (②), conscious (③), complete with a mind and body (④), able to feel (⑦), and equipped with sense-organs (⑤) to contact (⑥) the inner and outer world – in short, we have the *Five Aggregates* (body, feeling, perception, mental formations, consciousness) under the sway of Ignorance – that’s, according to Buddhists, the characteristic of an unenlightened human being.

Now, let’s see what happens to this ignorant human being living in this world: Everything starts with Contact. We keep in mind, that we are talking about a human being whose consciousness and mind and body are conditioned by ignorant mental formations with sense-organs ready to function. That is, even though we say everything starts with Contact, the first five factors of *Dependent Origination* are actually already involved before a contact happens – the contact happens to someone whose body and mind is in a certain condition or state, eg bored, interested, happy, sad, relaxed or tensed.

Contact (⑥) as Feeling (⑦) is here regarded to consist of two kinds each (see pages 17/18). Now, it takes recognition, the thinking process and mind-consciousness to get from the ‘mere physical’ contact and a ‘basic feeling tone’ to the mental aspect of contact and the intensified feeling, that is, we need to loop back in the circle of *Dependent Origination* to element ④ [loop no. 4]. Figure 2 on the following page illustrates this loop with blue arrows.

Let’s imagine the eye sees a form. The coming together of this external sense-object (form) with the internal sense-organ (eye) triggers eye-consciousness to arise, resulting in eye-contact (⑥a). This is Ajahn Buddhādāsa’s external or physical or ‘mere’ contact. From this eye-contact a basic feeling tone will arise (⑦a). If it is a neutral one, the mind is not really interested, may recognize the object but will not elaborate further – next sense-contact please. An example for a neutral feeling is when you look at your table. It is a table and will be recognized as such but usually no like or dislike develops when looking at it.

A positive or negative bare feeling tone arising from this eye-contact would provide kind of a ‘wake-up call’ for the mind (④). The mind would get interested [*attention in nāma-rūpa*], would recognise [*perception in nāma-rūpa*] the object causing the sensation, would look repeatedly [*intention in nāma-rūpa leading to renewed contact and attention in nāma-rūpa*] and continue with mental formations (element ②). (“That looks nice. I wonder how they have made it ...”) and mind-consciousness (*manoviññāna*) (③)

⁵⁴ N.Ross Reat in / 15 /, page 22

⁵⁵ N.Ross Reat in / 15 /, page 23

⁵⁶ P.A. Payutto in / 6 /, page 53

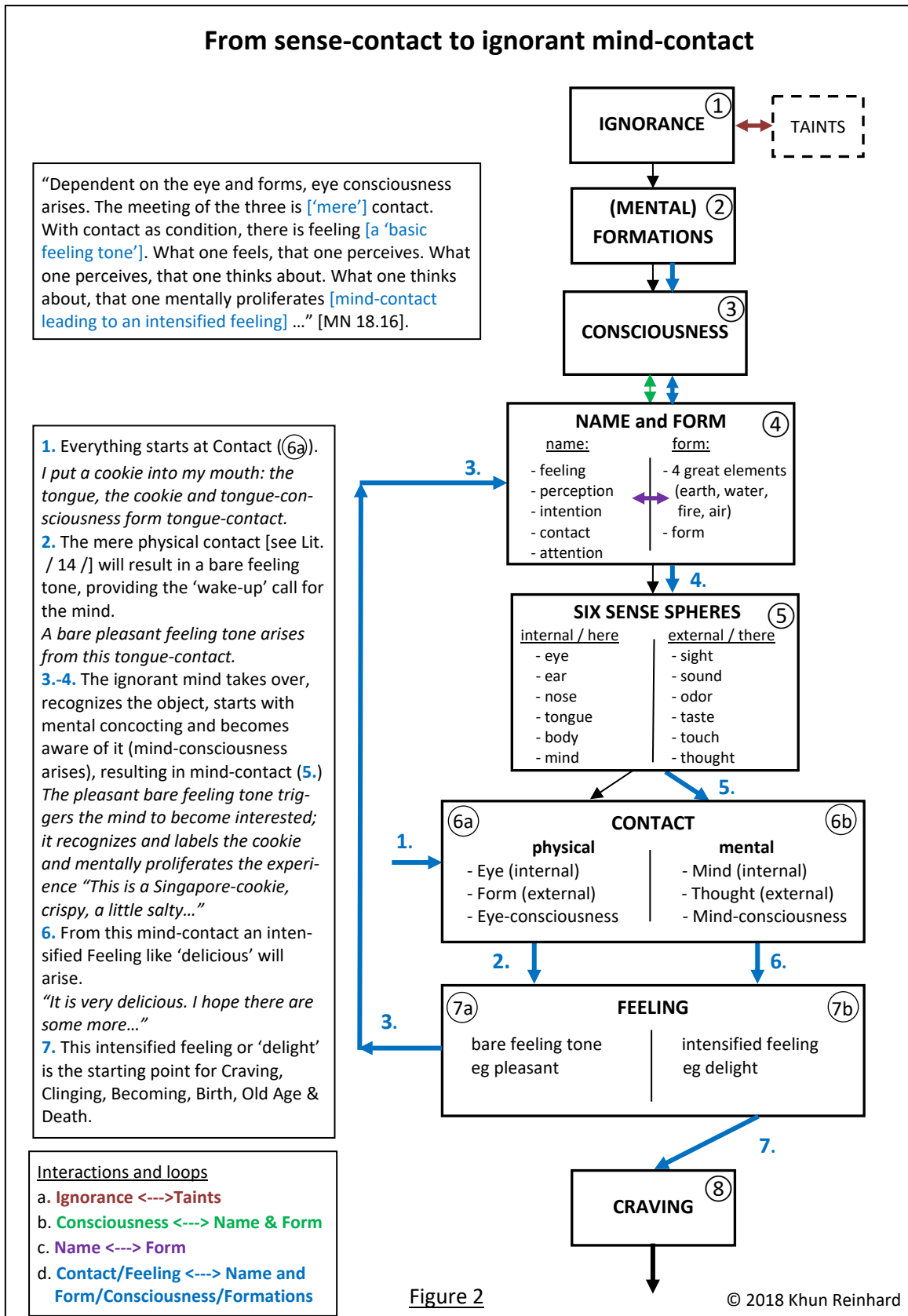


Figure 2

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It looks complicated on paper, but it may look even more complicated inside the mind.

would arise to be aware of it, discriminating between mind and mind-object.⁵⁷ Mind-contact ((6b), Ajahn Buddhādāsa's internal or mental level of contact) and a Feeling ((7b)) based on mind-contact, no longer on the initial eye-contact would arise. This Feeling now is no longer the 'bare feeling tone' arising from sense-contact but an 'intensified feeling' of satisfaction/ delight or dissatisfaction/ aversion arising after the mind has processed the initial sense-contact.

Another possibility to describe the arising of a mind receptive for suffering in the ignorant human being is given by Ajahn Buddhādāsa in his publication 'Paṭiccasamuppāda. Practical Dependent Origination.' [/ 1 /, page 33]: "Please understand that ordinarily our body and mind are not in a condition to experience suffering [meant is spiritual suffering]. There must be ignorance or something to condition it to become receptive to the possibility of suffering. And so it is said that the mind/body only now arises in this case. It means that ignorance conditions consciousness and this consciousness helps the mind/body change and arise to action and become capable of experiencing suffering. In this kind of mind/body, at this moment, the sense bases [sense-spheres] arise which are also primed to experience suffering. They are not asleep, as is usually the case, so there will be perfected contact [perfected contact means, the contact has significance leading to subsequent mental concocting] which is ready for suffering." The cycle then continues with Feeling, Craving ...

This intensified Feeling, this delight or aversion, now is our starting point for the rest of the story. It is no longer a simple, let us say pleasant feeling. It has become an intensified feeling that has meaning for us. The mind is going to delight in this feeling. Now the mind starts to settle, starts to hold on. We are always seeking pleasure because we are experiencing *Dukkha* in one form or another right throughout life, no matter how gentle or harsh, it is always there. It drives us into this habitual pattern of running away, seeking pleasure. We are always on the lookout for it. We do not let it happen to us, we go seeking it. So what chance do we have if we actually perceive something as being pleasant, as being good? The feeling is good, it is going to make us happy; craving arises instantaneously. The next step is more or less *Dukkha*. If it is an unpleasant feeling, it is not quite so straight forward, the mind initially runs away. It still craves, but to get rid of. What is arising is not nice, the pattern is again habitual. The mind runs in the opposite direction, still falls into craving.

So if we do not pay attention to sense experience, if we do not catch the feeling as it arises, the mind responds to it in this way every time. And this is not something that takes five minutes; it is not even 0.5 of a second. This is an instinctual reaction going on for so long, it happens in a flash, almost, we can say, instantaneously. A mind trained in meditation might be able to catch itself even at this point, when these strong feelings of delight or aversion arise before they develop into one of the forms of Craving.

⁵⁷ "Consciousness and mind & body are mutually dependent in the way described by Ven. Sāriputta: [see footnote 25 on page 9]. In this sense, when there is the arising of consciousness there must also be the arising of mind & body. When volitional formations condition consciousness, they also condition mind & body. But because mind & body relies on consciousness to exist, because it is linked to and is an attribute of consciousness, the distinction is made: volitional formations condition consciousness and consciousness conditions mind & body."

[P.A. Payutto in / 6 /, page 231]

Interactions, loops and related quotations in the Nikāyas

Up to this point we have altogether identified four kind of interactions and loops in the process of *Dependent Origination* which are not explicitly mentioned in the formula but seem to exist according to quotations from the Nikāyas or commentaries.

- a. Interaction between Ignorance and the Taints with Ignorance being one of the three taints (see [footnote 35](#) on page 11)
- b. Interaction between Consciousness and Name and Form (see [footnote 15](#), page 6) [the tangle without (see footnote 58, page 24)]
- c. Interaction amongst Name and Form [the tangle within (see footnote 58, page 24)]
- d. Loop between Contact/Feeling and Name and Form/Consciousness/Formations (see [footnotes 45](#) on page 16 and 57 on page 22) ([return to page 33](#))

4.3 From Craving to *Dukkha* – element no. ⑧ to element no. ⑫

(8) Craving (*tanhā*)

Ignorance is the root cause, craving is the proximate or near cause for the arising of *Dukkha* and as a result the ordinary worldling runs between pleasure and pain driven by craving, not cherishing the neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feelings in the middle⁵⁹; they are boring.

Craving is a pursuit, a dynamic activity in the mind, a mental reaching after, trying to take hold of something. And that something, the object of Craving, is the feeble phenomenon called Feeling, is the delight or aversion which arises after the mind has processed sense-data. It is just something arising in the mind, but we see it to be real and try and grab hold of it. Craving means to indulge in feelings, sensations, delusion. It happens before the object causing the Feeling is acquired. Craving is already a kind of *Dukkha*.

There are three kinds of craving (see [footnote 31](#) on page 11):

- for sensual pleasures – a pursuit of pleasure. If we experience something unpleasant we try to get away from it by trying to find something pleasurable instead. A neutral feeling is preferable to a negative one and if there is nothing obviously pleasant, we will try to seek a neutral feeling.
- for existence – to exist in happy states of mind or in circumstances that allow for an easy gratification of the senses (eg wealth).
- for non-existence – to never exist in unhappy states of mind or in circumstances that do not allow for an easy gratification of the senses (eg poverty). Craving for existence and craving for non-existence are basically two sides of the same coin.

These three cravings come together; they are not three separate things. When we crave sense pleasure, the other two are there.

Craving is a dynamic activity of the mind, a mental pursuit, followed by a mental taking hold called Clinging.

⁵⁸ The original quote appears in the Jatā (Tangle) Sutta [Devatāsamyutta, SN 1.23, page 101 in / 5 /]

"A tangle inside, a tangle outside,
This generation is entangled in a tangle.
I ask you this, o Gotama,
Who can disentangle this tangle?"

"A man established on virtue, wise,
Developing the mind and wisdom,
A bhikkhu ardent and discreet:
He can disentangle this tangle.

"Those for whom lust and hatred
Along with ignorance have been expunged,
The arahants with taints destroyed:
For them the tangle is disentangled.

"Where name-and-form ceases,
Stops without remainder,
And also impingement and perception of form:
It is here this tangle is cut."

Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda gives the following explanation of the Jatā Sutta:

In short, 'name' and 'form' are intertwined like a tangle by their respective characteristics. As far as we can see, this is the tangle within (*antojaṭṭā*). The Buddha has pointed out in detail that 'name and form' and consciousness are mutually interrelated. This is the tangle without (*bahijaṭṭā*). [/ 7 / Vol. 1, page 87]

⁵⁹ "Pleasant feeling, friends, is one end; painful feeling is the second end; neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling is in the middle; and craving is the seamstress. For craving sews one to the production of this or that state of existence." [AN 61, Sixes, III400, page 951 in / 16 /]

(9) Clinging or Grasping or Attachment (*upādāna*)

There are four kinds of clinging⁶⁰:

- to sensual pleasures
- to opinions (views)
- to personality-belief
- to rites and rituals

Craving is the condition for Clinging to arise in the mind. In order to keep it simple we need to backtrack a little bit: Contact, Feeling, Craving. We think there is a 'me' around all the time, but this is an illusion. The self-concept arises in the mind only when the mind clings to the idea that there is a 'me' experiencing. While Craving is a pursuit of the pleasant feeling arising from a source, Clinging is the taking hold, the acquisition of the source, holding on to it, lingering over it because it is pleasant and we do not want to let go of it.

Clinging, because partly it is static, represents the mind stopping – Consciousness sticks to an object, whereas Craving is a dynamic, moving process. It is when the mind stops in this way, focuses, begins to spin around with the idea that there is an experiencer here, that there are two things:

- The experienced or the object [Contact, Feeling, Craving].
- The experiencer or the subject [Clinging]⁶¹.

During Clinging manifests the subject-object-split. From every meaningful sense-contact develops the experienced or the object which causes the feeling of delight/ dissatisfaction; that which is recognized, and then, in second place, Clinging creates the subject or the experiencer experiencing the experienced; the 'me' recognizing it. The contact is the experience from which first the object (the experienced) and second the subject (the experiencer) develop (for details see the textbox **Subject-Object-Split** on the next page). Actually the origin of the subject-object-split is Name and Form and its interactions with Consciousness but during Clinging it becomes very noticeable.

This is the Buddha's discovery. He recognized that when the mind settles in this way, it invariably throws up the impression, the sense that there is a 'me' doing the experiencing.

This is so fast because sense experience is happening all the time and meaningful sense experience all too often, that of course, without the mind working fully, we are never going to see this. We will think the 'me' is always around. The Buddha's truth is that every time there is a meaningful sense experience, pleasant or unpleasant, that sense, the 'me' that is experiencing it, will actually be born from the experience. Not there before, at least not the same self, waiting to experience. It comes from any meaningful sense experience.

Any meaningful sense experience that happens in life causes the mind to change. We can be blissfully happy, having a great time and suddenly somebody says something to you (for instance "Your friend or partner had an accident") or we see something we do not want to see (like a traffic accident) and instantaneously everything changes. The subtlety is that we think it is the same 'me' experiencing both states. But actually there is this 'me' having a nice time and suddenly, when this 'me' notices something different, another 'me' arises, right in that instant as a result, as a reaction to a meaningful sense experience. This happens all the time with human beings. We think there is a continuous self who experiences life

⁶⁰ "Bhikkhus, there are these four kinds of clinging. What four? Clinging to sensual pleasures, clinging to views, clinging to rules and observances, and clinging to a doctrine of self."
[Cūlasīhanāda Sutta, MN 11, i 66, page 161 in / 2 /]

⁶¹ "It is by clinging, Ananda, that [the notion] 'I am' occurs, not without clinging. And by clinging to what does 'I am' occur, not without clinging? It is by clinging to form that 'I am' occurs, not without clinging. It is by clinging to feeling ... to perception ... to volitional formations ... to consciousness that 'I am' occurs, not without clinging."
[Khandhasamyutta, Ānanda Sutta, SN 22.83, page 928 in / 5 /]

from beginning to end, through a period of may be 80 years, but there is not. This ego-sense is always coming and going. That is what the Buddha's *Dhamma* is all about. This is where *Dukkha* comes from.

Subject-Object-Split

Above it has been said, that during Clinging the subject-object-split manifests, but this separation actually starts much earlier in the process of *Dependent Origination* and may work as follows:

There are certain forces called 'taints' which regularly influx the conscious levels of the mind whenever we are not mindful of sense-contacts. The taints cause perceptual distortions as well as perverting our responses to them. For instance, in the case of seeing a movie: Ignorance of the reality of the experience allows certain fundamental reactions to manifest in the forms of physical movement, eg, body language like clenching the fists or as imaginings, as verbal exclamations ("Great") or expostulations.

These are the formations that condition nascent 'self'-consciousness, so that consciousness becomes aware of two sides to the experience (the movie and the experiencer of it), this in here, and that out there - the initial split in experience that is widened when the mind clings. Dependent on this consciousness arises Name and Form which gives significance to both sides. That is, Name and Form, already present internally, is projected outwards and represents the mental functions (feeling, perception, contact, intention, attention, making up Name, see [Figure 2](#)), acting on the physical reality (the four elements, making up Form), to create the illusion that what's transpiring on the screen is real. The sense doors now open to receive stimulating impressions from which feelings like delight or aversion arise conditioning Craving, Clinging, Becoming, and Birth of the 'me,' the enjoyer. However, it cannot last, and Birth must condition Aging and Death, followed by something like sorrow, lamentation, and so on, and so forth.

Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda describes the onset of the subject-object-split as follows: "Within the background of ignorance, preparations [formations] arise. It is these preparations [formations] that keep up the vortex between consciousness and name-and-form. The outcome of that vortical interplay is bifurcation within the six sense-spheres as internal and external." [/ 7 / Vol. 4, page 105]. "It is when consciousness arises that one gets the idea: 'This is my eye and there is that form.'" [/ 7 / Vol. 3, page 107].

The mechanics of it are interesting. The problem really arises right at the moment when a sense-contact takes place. There are immediately 'things' between which there are differences, like this thing called body and the world outside it. We cannot say there is already a self and other at the moment of sense-contact, but it is from that basis that the selfhood develops. That is like a tiny crack in the mind which then widens: Feeling, Craving, until Clinging takes place and it becomes very noticeable: subject and object. Because clinging kind of inserts pressure into the process. When we cling to some experience, we will not let go of it, this is very unnatural. Clinging to objects in order to wring the pleasure out of it is something natural to do for us. Consciousness lingers, builds around the object and that sense of self-existence comes from this. There is a 'me' because consciousness sticks. It puts pressure on this little crack that is already there in the mind. There is already a minute duality because of our ignorance of the way things function, because we see a world of concepts: this and that. But this and that is still a long way from self and other. It's only when this clinging takes place, when we hold on to an object, that this pressure is applied to the crack and it widens. Suddenly there are two 'things' when the mind clings: Subject and object. The object, the experienced 'thing' has to be meaningful for this to happen, and what the mind clings to is that meaning. It will not cling to an ever changing process of nature which is intrinsically

meaningless, why should it? It uses it, takes what it need but does not cling to it, desperately seeking pleasure from it.

Clinging always has the same result: it kicks up the separation or duality in the mind, suddenly there is a subject experiencing an object. Now the word 'me' has been used rather loosely, it is always a subject-object sense that arises and it is strong enough to be noticeable. It then grows up we could say, it develops very quickly. Interesting about this separation is that it only lasts as long as the experience that causes it.

Clinging is the basis or condition for the mind to develop more of this *Dukkha* making process – it inevitably will lead to suffering.

(10) Becoming or Existence; Coming into Existence (*bhava*)

The term 'Existence' is widely used for this element of *Paṭiccasamupāda* but 'Becoming' seems less confusing: How to label the condition between birth and death? It could be called: existence. To me existence does not condition birth but follows on from it – but that's just a problem of language and definition.

The Buddha refers to existence/ becoming as threefold, existence in the world (*loka*) of sensuality, (*kamma loka*) in the fine-material or form world (*rūpa loka*) and in the immaterial or formless world (*arūpa loka*)⁶². For those in favour of re-birth, existence means physical existence in one of these three worlds (divided into 31 states or planes of existence). But it does not take physical re-birth to move from one of these worlds to the other. An experienced meditator having attained the corresponding *jhānas* (absorption), can move from the sphere of sensuality, to the sphere of fine-materiality (having attained *rūpa-jhāna*), to the sphere of immateriality (having attained *arūpa-jhāna*) at will in the here-and-now.

During Becoming the subject and the object arise and then they develop into the 'me' and the experience the 'me' is experiencing.

Experience is momentary. This is the reality and this is what Buddhism is based on. When we stay in the present moment, watching our breathing, we are as close as we are going to be to reality, to the *Dhamma*. The Buddha spent his life in the present, always in the here-and-now. But we do not; we tend to get stuck in the past, stuck in the future, projecting, running over old, dusty, forgotten things.

Again, every experience is momentary. There is a link of conscious moments of sense experiences to the next conscious moments of sense experiences but it is not really accurate to say that there is any such thing as an experience that extends say three hours in duration. The only reality is the present moment. It is craving for existence that will take all the individual moments and stick them all together. Both, the subjective and the objective side are kind of illusions, but both have a base in reality. "Although they lack true existence, still they project an appearance of being truly existent. So there is a contradiction between the way things exist and the way they appear to us." [Dalai Lama / 17 /, page 228]. But we "... should not deny the very existence of phenomena." [/ 17 /, page 229].

This is true of all our experience. We think we live in a world which is the way we believe it is, yet the structure of reality is different from the way we think it is. There is just this: present moment, here and now, ticking rapidly by. If we are not fully experiencing as it happens, we are not really alive, we are in this half-light. Sounds like a Morse code all over the place, now jagged, now smooth, now happy, now sad. Our life experience is like this, all the meaningful experiences of our life. Craving, making use of the

⁶² "And what, bhikkhus, is existence? There are these three kinds of existence: sense-sphere existence, form-sphere existence, formless-sphere existence. This is called existence. [Vibhaṅga Sutta, SN 12.2, page 535 in / 5 /]

memory function, glues them all together, creates the illusion that there is a 'me' who has been living life. The reality is always in the present moment, you cannot experience the past, you can remember it but you remember it now, right here and now. And when you think about the future, it is happening now, you cannot go into the future. Everything is in the present.

Becoming then stitches **our** reality together for us. Ceaseless change and alternation, unpredictable situations are a horror for us. We need stable seeming circumstances to be at ease. Craving to always be happy has this effect. We try desperately to keep the unpleasant bits out by creating this illusion of stability, being the basis of happiness. There is a 'me' and there is a stable world that 'I' can control, manipulate, feel comfortable in – it is not the truth.

Stripping the layers of delusion away, like the outer layers of an onion, until eventually we get to the middle, we'll find there is nothing there possessing an intrinsic existence – voidness. That is the *Dhamma*. Voidness in Buddhist philosophy does not mean 'nothing at all', rather 'void of something'.

Anyway, there is Contact, Feeling, Craving. We can say for the sake of argument just the experience arises. Clinging provides the duality, the 'subject-object' split and Becoming then develops that into the experiencer, the 'me' and the object the 'me' is experiencing.

(11) Birth (*jāti*)

Birth in the 'Here-and-Now-Interpretation' of *Paṭiccasamuppāda* means the mental birth of the full sense of self or ego in the mind. Each time the 'I'-concept arises in the mind we speak of birth, which may occur many, many times each day. It has nothing to do with the physical birth of an infant.

The birth of the ego in the mind, which is at the same time, more accurately, the full illusion that there is a 'me' and this 'me' is somehow enduring, self-existent and experiencing a world which to 'me' is pleasant, and is the world I'm always in. I'm experiencing something pleasant so the world is pleasant and it is the same world which is somehow controllable, does not change. Yes, leaves fall off the trees but we can handle that. And occasionally winter comes and then is followed by spring and autumn but that is all part of the process. The world is a comforting place; it has this illusion of stability painted over it by the mind. This is what gets born: the illusion that there is an enduring, stable 'me' and the world I'm experiencing is the old familiar place that I'm so used to, which 'I' can be happy in.

"[...] once the 'self' is born it truly becomes like a being which will seek to preserve itself just as an animal will fight to preserve its own life. This is the tragedy of the birth of the 'self' since there develops a self-preserving energy." [Jonathan Watts in / 11 /, page 6].

Tan Dhammavidu (see footnote 63 on the next page) uses the analogy of boiling potatoes to illustrate the process of cooking up the idea that there is an enduring self experiencing life from beginning to end: When cooking potatoes, there will develop a kind of froth (foam) on top of them. While the water is boiling and in much movement, the foam on top stays quite still. The boiling water represents Craving, Clinging, Becoming – the ego-sense is cooked up. The foam represents Birth, a seemingly stable, enduring 'me' has been created. When Craving, Clinging, Becoming ends then the self-idea ends as well, it dies; the boiling stops, the foam disappears when the heat is turned off.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu [/ 14 /, page 54] compares the development of the notion of 'I' from Clinging to Becoming to Birth with the development of a foetus in the womb:

Clinging represents the fertilisation of the egg by a sperm which corresponds to a first notion of 'I'.

During Becoming the foetus (the 'I') develops.

With Birth the baby (the fully developed 'I') is born.

(12) Old Age, Sickness and Death (jarāmaranā), sorrow, lamentation... this whole mass of suffering

Just as Birth is not physical birth, Aging and Death have got nothing to do with physical death in the 'Here-and-Now-Interpretation' of *Dependent Origination*. *Paṭiccasamuppāda* deals with mental states in spiritual language, not with physical states in everyday language. Aging and Death is the breaking up, the passing away of the illusion of stability, of the illusion that there is a stable, enduring 'me' experiencing a stable, enduring world, because it can only be maintained as long as the stimulus is there. Once the stimulus is gone the illusion must go too. It begins to break up and fade away and what's waiting? That what's always waiting – *Dukkha* – sorrow, lamentation, displeasure, despair, having to associate with the unloved, being separated from the loved, wanting and not getting, pain and discomfort, boredom might be there too. Our reaction to this is always the same – immediately we start to look for something pleasurable like eating, TV, music, sex, sleeping ... to get away from it. Now it depends on the experience how much *Dukkha* follows it.

With all this one has to keep in mind what Jonathan Watts [/ 11 /, page 6] expresses as follows: "[...] that this critique of 'self' is no condemnation of any human construction of identity. This sort of clinging to the complete denial of 'self' is an annihilationism, the partner of egoism, which the Buddha also refuted. Rather it must be emphasized that this is an identity built on the faulty structures of selfishness and arrogant independence."

But as everything (except *Nibbana*) is impermanent, all these mind states, the ego, the I-concept will cease and die. With the next meaningful sense-contact then, the whole cycle (circle? See [footnote 20](#) on page 8) will start again if Ignorance is in charge.

4.4 Example: pizza-meal

The example of eating a pizza⁶³ may help to explain the complete process of *Dependent Origination* in the Here-and-Now.

The following assumptions need to be taken into account:

- All experience is momentary and the mind processes events in sequence, one after the other, but because it is so quick, we have the impression that it could process several events parallel at the same time. Assume you are listening to a noise. Your ear receives the sound and ear-consciousness is aware of it, thus hearing takes place. Then you may feel a breeze on your skin. Your body receives the touch of the wind and body-consciousness is aware of it, thus a bodily feeling takes place. But when you are aware of the bodily feeling then you are no longer aware of hearing because now there is only body-consciousness active, the previous ear-consciousness has faded away and died down – impermanence. Next you may see something in front of you. The eye is in contact with that object and eye-consciousness arises. Eye-consciousness is getting 'born', thus seeing happens and the previous body-consciousness is no longer active. You may remember something. Mind-consciousness is active and so on ...

Every mind state depends on its own consciousness. For one kind of consciousness to arise or to get 'born' the previous one has to cease or to 'die'.

⁶³ Variations of this example have been used frequently by Tan Dhammavidu, an English monk, during his talks to retreatants at the International Dharma Hermitage of Wat Suan Mokkh, Thailand. The author has listened repeatedly to them between May 2004 and February 2007.

- The entire process is governed by Ignorance. As a reminder: Ignorance in Buddhist terms means: not knowing the *Four Noble Truths*, not knowing about Impermanence and Non-Self.
- For practical purposes the process of *Dependent Origination* actually does not start with Ignorance but with some kind of Contact. Without contact, like in deep, dreamless sleep or in anaesthesia, the mind would not know anything.
- The example follows loop no. 4 illustrated by the blue arrows in [Figure 2](#) (page 21) and takes Buddhadhāsa's two levels of contact into account.

Now we are ready to start eating. We put a piece of pizza into our mouth. The tongue (internal sense-organ) and the pizza (external sense-object) meet each other and tongue-consciousness is aware of it. From this tongue-contact (6a) a bare positive feeling (7a) will arise. It is not 'delicious' at this point because the tongue does not know anything about delicious. The tongue is merely receptive for the five basic tastes: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, savoury or umami [Wikipedia / 18 /]. It takes the mind to turn this into delicious. This simple positive feeling attracts the attention of our mind, provides the 'wake-up-call' for the mind (4). While intention and attention hold the contact, perception uncovers the details, recognizes and labels the different spices and ingredients, comments on their taste and texture and is conscious of it (3). Recognizing and labelling are mental activities which, combined with being conscious of it, will result in mind-contact (6b). From this mind-contact again a feeling will develop, but this time it is one of delight (7b), no longer the bare positive feeling-tone arisen from the initial tongue-contact (see [Figure 2](#)). This intensified feeling of delight is now the starting point for the further development. Craving (8) for this intensified feeling arises and develops into clinging. Clinging is responsible for the split of the natural process 'eating' into an object (pizza) and a subject (the eater of the pizza). During becoming the ego sense grows stronger and birth signifies the fully developed ego like "I love this pizza."

While we are eating a piece of pizza, just to be simple, the 'self' who is eating it will actually arise from the experience but it only last as long as the chewing lasts. So we chew away and when we enjoy something, generally we are not very careful about the way we chew – get some more in there, quick ...

We can say we swallow the 'self' that is eating it when we swallow the food. With the next bite it happens again. Actually there is another 'me' involved but because we cannot see it, we think it is the same 'me' eating the second piece. So when we get to the end of the pizza, may be 40 or 50 bites, then as far as we are concerned, it is 'me' who has eaten the meal, but it is not. There are 40 or 50, let us say 'small me's' in there eating that meal. Just from the number of bites, just from the flavour and from the delight that arises from the concept 'pizza'. Lots of other things may happen during the course of a meal too: we enjoy the wine, listen to the music, talk to our friends ... all of them quite as capable of creating their own experienter. The 'self' is a fragmentary construction of the mind and, ultimately, an illusion.

As a reminder and for a better understanding it shall be stressed again, that all our experiences are momentary, in the present moment. The previous bite of pizza is already merely a memory, the 'self' that enjoyed it as well. From the bite to come we do not have any experience yet, but our mind fantasizes, anticipates, is able to indulge in the joy (most likely) of the bite to come, while our body still is chewing the current one.

The events can be summarized as follows: Every bite of pizza will create a 'small self', which is eating it. Craving for sensual pleasures, accompanied by craving for existence and clinging to the 'self'-idea will glue all these individual 'small selves' together to the 'big self' which eats the whole pizza, which experiences the meal, which, let us say, lasts one hour. The memory function of the mind plays an important role to make this happen.

Generally speaking one can say:

Craving, Clinging and Becoming are creating the self which is living life from the cradle to the grave out of all the many momentary notions of self which are created by any meaningful sense-contact.

This can only happen by using our memory function. There are basically two ways to store something in our memory:

- By repetition, like when learning a language.
- By being impressed in a positive or negative way.

When we store something away in our memory like the sight of a big tree (we are impressed by that sight), we do not only store the sight of the tree away but also some connected emotions like how and what we have felt when experiencing the sight. If we would not have felt anything, we would not have stored the experience away; it would not have been meaningful. Next time when we remember the sight of the big tree, we do not only remember the form of the tree but we remember the feelings we had in connection with that sight as well, we remember “Me as seeing the big tree”, we remember the ‘me’, the experiencer as well, we remember a situation. This provides the continuity of the self because now there is the current ‘me’ remembering a previous ‘me’ experiencing the sight of the tree. Every recognition makes use of the memory function which (apart from things we have learned by repetition, like the alphabet, languages ...) does not simply recall a fact but always a previous ‘me’ experiencing the fact. These processes usually happen on a subconscious level. Each memory, resulting out of a momentary sense-contact, reinforces and stabilizes the self-idea which actually is fragmentary and ultimately an illusion.

Back to the pizza-example:

Every bite of pizza creates a momentary self which, for some time, is accessible in the memory. Having finished the meal, I’m able to recall different bites from the beginning, the middle ... of the meal and, at the same time, I do not only remember the taste, smell, texture of these bites but the positive emotions (eg delicious = contentment) triggered by these bites, that is, I recall my own involvement while eating them, eg, the ‘small self’ which has eaten the previous piece. Actually I recall a situation (‘me’ eating a piece of pizza). In this way the ‘big self’ which has eaten the whole pizza develops out of the many momentary selves evolved out of each bite. I can recall the different shapes of the pizza (round, half, quarter) as well which enables perception to construct the complete meal and the ‘big self’ that has enjoyed it, out of merely momentary events. In the same way the idea of a self which lives life from the cradle to the grave evolves out of the major meaningful but momentary events throughout life.

Just try it now. Try to remember an event from last week or last year or from your childhood. Whatever event or situation you recall, you remember your own involvement, you remember a previous ‘me’ or ‘I’. Even if you have not been directly involved in the action itself, you recall your participation as an observer of the event – a previous ‘me’ is always part of your memory.

This is continuously happening with us. Right throughout our lives we think there is one ‘me’ who lives life but in reality the ‘self’ is a sense that arises as a reaction to any contact that is allowed to become meaningful, to become the object of Clinging.

4.5 The quenching of *Dukkha*

The formula given in the Buddhist scriptures regarding the quenching or the cessation of suffering (the 3rd *Noble Truth*) is given on page 5. There we learn that it needs nothing short of the remainderless fading away of Ignorance if we want to get rid of *Dukkha* completely. But what can we do until we reach that state? What can we do here and now to at least reduce our troubles? The arising of the problems of life, of the concepts of 'I', 'me', and 'mine', actually start with sense-contact and this is the fitting starting point for the quenching of *Dukkha* in the chain of *Paṭiccasamuppāda* as well. We need to apply a sufficient amount of mindfulness, concentration and wisdom at the moment of Contact. We have to guard the sense doors, being aware of the present sense-contact. We need to have a sufficient amount of mindfulness and concentration to be aware when a sense-organ meets the appropriate sense-object and we have to have sufficient wisdom to respond wisely to this contact. Wisdom applied in this way is called 'wisdom in action'.

If the contact is a wise contact, then the feeling arising is a wise feeling. The mind will understand feeling correctly; it will see feeling as a natural phenomenon and it will stop at the bare feeling tone of positive, negative or neutral⁶⁴. It will not allow Mental Formations to go further into liking or disliking, stirring up feelings of delight or aversion. The motto then is: When hearing just hearing, when seeing, just seeing ... without developing likes or dislikes towards the heard, seen ... and consequently without Clinging, Becoming, and Birth of 'I', 'me' and 'mine'. No hearer, no seer, no doer ... will develop; the mind stays balanced and calm – no *Dukkha* arises.

If we lack sufficient mindfulness and wisdom we will blindly react, on automatic pilot according to our habits, on a more or less subconscious level. This is called an ignorant contact leading to an ignorant feeling. Consequently the mind will fall into liking or disliking. From this follows afterwards the birth of the notion of 'I', 'me', or 'mine' and suffering.

If we have missed the opportunity to deal wisely at Contact and the resulting bare feeling tone, we can try to solve the problem after the mind has processed the initial bare feeling tone and developed intensified feelings of delight/ aversion, which is much more difficult, and we might even have a slight and difficult chance to avoid suffering when we catch ourselves at Craving/ ignorant Desire.

How can we gain a sufficient amount of mindfulness, concentration and wisdom? By developing the *Noble Eightfold Path* (the 4th *Noble Truth*). By practicing Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration, for instance by means of concentration- and *insight*- or *vipassanā* meditation, we gain mindfulness, concentration and wisdom. Developing Right Understanding and Right Aspiration is another possibility to improve wisdom. And as we are not living alone on this planet, as we are social human beings, we need to develop the moral aspect of the *Noble Eightfold Path*, need to develop Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood as well.

Finally the *Noble Eightfold Path*, developed to its fullest, will result in the end of *Dukkha*.

⁶⁴ "On seeing a form with the eye, he does not lust after it if it is pleasing; he does not dislike it if it is unpleasing. He abides with mindfulness of the body established, with an immeasurable mind, and he understands as it actually is the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom wherein those evil unwholesome states cease without remainder. Having thus abandoned favouring and opposing, whatever feeling he feels, whether pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant, he does not delight in that feeling, welcome it, or remain holding to it. As he does not do so, delight in feelings ceases in him. With the cessation of his delight comes cessation of clinging; with the cessation of clinging, cessation of being; with the cessation of being, cessation of birth; with the cessation of birth, ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair cease. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering."

[*Mahātanhāsankhaya Sutta*, *Sutta* 38, MN 38.40, i 270, page 360 in / 2 /]

5. Conclusion

According to the Buddha's own words the teaching of *Dependent Origination* is profound and, having a closer look at it, the truth of this statement is revealed. Different versions of *Dependent Origination* in the Nikāyas allow for diverse interpretations based on conflicting statements like:

- The first element of *Dependent Origination* is said to be Ignorance (①) (set aside the taints) followed by Formations (②) but in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* it says 'Mind-and-body [name and form] (④) conditions consciousness (③) and consciousness conditions mind-and-body' and 'this consciousness (③) turns back at mind-and-body (④), it does not go any further [towards Ignorance]', thus omitting Ignorance and Formations (see page 6).
- The formula of *Dependent Origination* says 'with formations (②) as condition, consciousness comes to be' but the *Madhupindika Sutta* for example states 'dependent on the eye and form (⑤) eye-consciousness (③) arises' (see footnote 45 on page 16).
- Why do Contact (⑥) and Feeling (⑦) appear twice in the formula? They are separate elements of the sequence but they are both part of Name and Form (④) as well (see page 19).
- Several interactions and loops have been identified, some with textual references in the Nikāyas (see textbox on page 23) but interactions and loops seem to contradict the strict law of conditionality or *idappaccayatā* "When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises..." and the linear causality at the basis of *Dependent Origination*.

This gives room for differing interpretations and speculations, leading to various explanations of which the version presented here is just one. The Buddha may have taught different versions but it may well be possible that during the early oral (and written) transmission the teaching got corrupted and, maybe, a hypothetically 'original' version was "as clear as clear" as Ānanda said to the Buddha and all of the above questions as well as many others including the dispute between the "Here-and-Now-Interpretation" and the "Three-Lives-Theory" simply would not have occurred with that 'original' form – but that's just hypothetical.

We have to deal with what we have. I have tried to explain the underlying basic theory of the slightly modified Standard Version (interaction between Consciousness and Name and Form instead of a linear causality) and how this teaching can be used to explain the birth of a momentary sense of self, of the notion of 'I', 'me' and 'mine' and following on from that, how the idea of a self that seems to be the same throughout life, that is living life from the cradle to the grave, evolves from there in the human mind.

The ignorant mind (it does not know about ,non-self') and subsequent mental formations form the foundation of the self-idea. The interrelation of Name and Form and Consciousness and the discriminative function of Consciousness develop a minute duality on that base, which is increased by the bifurcation of the Sense-Spheres (ear – sound) into "this here and that over there". Clinging (the mind has a strong interest, sticks to an object) and Becoming then develop "this here and that over there" into "I feel good because of that object" – a subject and an object is arisen. But this is just a momentary sense of self stemming from any meaningful sense-contact. Craving for existence together with clinging to the self-concept in collaboration with the memory function now stick all these momentary selves together to the self of which we believe it is the core of our being, which stays more or less the same throughout life.

It takes the remainderless fading away of ignorance for the complete cessation of suffering yet we need to start here-and-now and the teaching of *Dependent Origination* offers us with Contact/ Feeling or more precisely at the arising of a 'bare feeling tone' the point to tackle suffering. Do not let Mental Formations

brew up intensified feelings of delight or aversion. A sufficient amount of mindfulness and concentration enables us to finally become aware of every single sense-contact and wisdom allows us to deal wisely with that contact. By developing the *Noble Eightfold Path* we build up the required qualities of mind and perfecting this path will lead to the cessation of all suffering.

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Abbreviations

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
SN	Samyutta Nikāya

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