

(Excerpts from Buddhism in All Aspects, transcript, editing in progress)

Chapter 1; Section: Cause and Effect

Another important principle to understand is that of cause and effect. This is very important in Buddhism. Everything that happens has its cause and has its effect. So Buddhism does not hold that suffering occurs because of some personal god out there or some action in some past life. Buddhism says that whenever there is suffering, there is an immediate cause here. This cause is our own lack of right wisdom regarding the law of *idappaccayata*. If this is the cause of all suffering, then what we need to do is have proper wisdom regarding this law of *idappaccayata*. In that way there is no problem with suffering. So we should examine in our own lives whether this problem of suffering exists all the time, occurs only from time to time, or whether it happens only when there is incorrect action according to the law of *idappaccayata*.

Suffering does not occur all the time. It is not some constant phenomenon. Suffering occurs occasionally, and so there are some times when our duty is to protect this state of being free of suffering, to prevent suffering. Then there are other times when our duty is to get free of suffering when it has already arisen, which we can do with our own wisdom through understanding the law of nature.

Another important principle which has to do with the principle of cause and effect is that in Buddhism we don't just deal with the effects but with the causes. If there is a problem, it is much better to deal with the cause.

If we deal with the effects, we never get anywhere. We are just doing crisis management. The point is to find the causes. This is a very important principle of Buddhism. Find out what the cause is and deal with that. It is as if there is a fire. You can never put out the fire if you don't find what is causing it. If you just try to put out the fire you may not succeed. So find out what the cause is and remove it, and then you get the effect you are looking for.

People say that if you take a long stick and poke, annoy and hassle a dog with it, the dog will bite onto the end of the stick. But if you take a long stick and go fooling around with a lion, the lion will come and bite the one who is holding the stick. So which are we going to be in life? Are we going to be dogs or lions? When problems come, are we just going to bite at the end of the stick or are we going to go to the source of the problem, to the cause of the problem? One of these is a rather stupid approach, and one is the approach of wisdom. The approach of the lion is the one that is the approach of the Buddha. That is to use wisdom to go to the source of the problem and eliminate that source. Then there is no longer a problem. This is the method that we learn to use by taking up the practice of the Buddha. Buddhism is a religion of cause and effect.

When we understand that everything that happens comes out of causes and then occurs, exists, proceeds, and functions, according to causes, then we will understand that Buddhism essentially uses the same basic principle as science. If something is really scientific, it uses the approach of searching out the cause in order to solve the problem.

Now in practice, we must first begin by learning, and then by learning to act upon what we have learnt. Secondly, we must test it out by putting it into practice. The third step is to receive the results according to the actions. So there are three steps: learning, acting upon that learning, and finding out what the results are. All three of these stages occur on a foundation of reasoning. So in learning what is the cause? What is the reason for learning? What are we looking for and what kind of effect do we expect to occur? Then what different effects actually happen, none of which happen without a reason. Any effect has its causes. Understanding and reasoning about these things in terms of cause and effect is fundamental to Buddhism. We must learn, we must try these things out and carefully see what the results

are. All of this needs to be seen in terms of cause and effect. This point is the heart of Buddhism.

Chapter 3 (excerpts)

In the first we expressed that in Buddhism we do not hold accept that happiness and suffering come from actions committed in supposed past lives or are creations of a God. Rather we hold that happiness and suffering depend on whether one acts correctly or incorrectly according to the law of *paticca samuppada*.

At this time we would like to the opportunity to discuss two Pali terms. Pali is the language of the original Buddhist scriptures. There are words that are quite difficult to translate into other languages, but never the less we must try and translate them. In doing so it is also important to explain and discuss them properly. In this case, *paticca samuppada*, “dependent origination” or “interdependent origination,” and then the principle of *idappaccayata*, “conditionality” are important words to be looked into.

If we are speaking in a general sense about all phenomena, whether mental or physical, animate or inanimate, having to do with human beings or not, we use the word *idappaccayata*, “conditionality.” But when we are speaking of sentient beings who experience the feelings of happiness and suffering, then we call it *paticca samuppada*. It is the same principle and the same law, but depends on how we are applying or seeing it. When we call it *idappaccayata*, it generally applies to the arising and manifestation of all things, and when we call it *paticca samuppada*, it specifically applies to the situation of sentient beings, particularly human beings.

Idappaccayata: The Law of Conditionality

In Buddhism we do not have the word “create.” Nor do we have the word creator. Instead we talk about how things happen. For example, if you ask who or what created the world, Buddhism does not have a response. We do not think the question has been properly asked. But if one asks what the world arises from or how the world came about, then we say that it happened due to *idappaccayata*, which means, “because this exists, this arises; through the arising of this, this happens.” In this way, we talk about *idappaccayata*, the conditionality of things.

If you hold only to the scientific theories that say the earth was a fragment that broke off from the sun and was created under the influences of stellar gases or the nebula, or whatever explanation that can be given in even more detailed terms, it still comes down to this: it all happened through the law of *idappaccayata*. So we talk about that which makes something happen, arise, or occur. We do not talk about some creator and we do not talk about some creation.

If we say that the earth comes from the sun, some people will ask where does the sun come from? We reply that the sun must have come from something. There was one thing because it existed, and then there was the sun. In general, we say that it all depends on and all comes from *idappaccayata*. You can go back further and further, tracing back how everything has come out of something previous to it, or go into the future to see that everything arises in the same way.

Once the earth was formed, then water, plants, animals, human beings, and all the other things we can discover on this planet arose through *idappaccayata*. You can see how everything that occurred, whatever it was that arose, was born or happened, did so because of something else. So no matter how far we might go into the future or back into the past, everything can be traced back to *idappaccayata*. This is the fundamental law that we can investigate. This is how we suggest that you understand this word *idappaccayata*.

Idappaccayata-Paticca-Samuppada: Buddhism's Impersonal God

So then in Buddhism we understand that everything arises through the law of *idappaccayata*. Now if people ask whether or not Buddhism has a God, we have to answer carefully. We can say "yes," but have to specifically say that the God we have is different from that which a person would normally consider a God to be. What we have in Buddhism is an impersonal God, and this impersonal God is nothing other than the law of *idappaccayata* itself. This law of *idappaccayata* can be considered to be the Buddhist God. It is an impersonal God. Most Buddhists, however, will not answer in this way. They would just simply say that we have no God to speak of. We just understand that there is this law of *idappaccayata*.

If we are speaking in general terms, we talk about *idappaccayata*, but if we narrow the field and speak specifically of things which have a mental life, have feelings, can experience through consciousness, then we speak of *idappaccayata-paticca-samuppada*. This word is a bit long, so we just say *paticca samuppada*. It is still long, but shorter than *idappaccayata-paticca samuppada*. This is specifically about how suffering arises or disappears in sentient beings. The law of *paticca samuppada* is the application of *idappaccayata* specifically to the experience of living creatures. When we are talking about the arising of and experiences of sentient beings, we call it dependent origination.

Now quite often these two words are mixed up and used interchangeably. Often people do not make a clear distinction between *idappaccayata* and *paticca samuppada*. Forgive us for mentioning names, but as far as we can tell in Sri Lanka and Burma, they have got these words mixed up. They have failed to make a clear distinction between them. So sometimes we hear people talking about how the sun came into existence because of *paticca samuppada*. This leads to unnecessary confusion. Yet it is quite easy to make a clear distinction between them. The same kind of confusion, of course, happens in Thailand as well. So to make it easier to understand, why not settle on the following distinction: when we are talking about all physical and mental things, human or non-human, we talk about *idappaccayata*, the physical law of nature; but when specifically talking about sentient beings which have experiences, especially when it comes to *dukkha*, then we talk about *paticca samuppada*. If we can make this clear distinction, then these words will not lead to confusion.

So all the physical, material aspects of the world, all inanimate things, come from the law of *idappaccayata*. But whatever comes from experience, the feelings of happiness, pain, pleasure, and misery, these come through *paticca samuppada*. Whether human beings, animals or plants (supposing plants, too, have consciousness and sensitivity to experience *dukkha*), they happen through *paticca samuppada*. So it is quite simple and clear: physical things, things that are outside of sentient experience, all have to do with the law of *idappaccayata*, but things that are sensible and have consciousness, experience *dukkha* through the law of *paticca samuppada*.

If we are even more specific in how we talk about things, should someone ask us where God comes from, we would simply reply that the personal god comes from the law of *idappaccayata*, because with the exception of the impersonal God, everything comes about through *idappaccayata*. That means a personal God comes from *idappaccayata*. The impersonal God, however, does not occur through *idappaccayata*. It is the sole exception to this law. An impersonal god does not arise because of the law of *idappaccayata* because the law of *idappaccayata* is an impersonal god, the impersonal god itself.

When we ask where joy and suffering come from, we say from the impersonal god, the law of *idappaccayata-paticca samuppada*. But there are other people who say that suffering and joy come from a personal God. But if they are going to talk about a personal God, we Buddhists do not really know what they are talking about or where such a thing could be. But we see that all joy and suffering come from this impersonal God, and this impersonal God in Buddhism is the law of *idappaccayata*. It is very important to be clear on

this distinction between a personal God and an impersonal one. Otherwise it would be quite confusing. In short Buddhism, does not have a personal God, there is only the impersonal God of *idappaccayata* or *paticca samuppada*. If we understand this point, then we will be able to continue.

In Idappaccayata, There is Just Arising, Continuing, and Passing away

When we come to the questions of happiness (*sukha*) and *dukkha*, we do not say that they arise due to action in so-called past lives, as some people assert. Neither do we affirm that happiness and *dukkha* arise because of the activity of some personal God. However, we also realize that it is incorrect to say that happiness and suffering do not have causes and do not have conditions. They do not just happen because of blind luck or coincidence either. We say they arise because of *paticca samuppada*. Remember that *paticca samuppada* is the same basic law as *idappaccayata*. However, it is used to refer specifically to the experiences of living beings, which are felt as either *sukha* or *dukkha*, happiness or suffering.

So if asked what *idappaccayata* is, we say it is that it is that which makes everything arise, continue, and then pass away. In relation to happiness and *dukkha*, it is called *paticca samuppada*. Happiness and *dukkha* arise, continue to change, and then they pass away.

So the words "arising," "continuing" or "existing," and "passing away" are quite important. These are the conditions of all things within this world. All things arise, continue, and pass away. This is the nature of all things. This arising, continuing, and passing away happens exclusively through the law of *idappaccayata*; and within this law, there is no room for words like "creator," "creating," or "creation." Within the law of *idappaccayata*, there are just conditions of arising, continuing, and passing away. There is no creator. There is just the process of becoming. It is a stream of becoming. This is what *idappaccayata* is about. So make sure you understand these three aspects of *idappaccayata*: arising, continuing and passing away.

"God" Arose from Idappaccayata

In India, before the Buddha's time, nobody had ever heard of the words *idappaccayata* and *paticca samuppada*. The Buddha was the first to use these two words. Before the Buddha's time, most people said things happened because of God, that there was a God responsible for making everything happen. Then there were others who said things just happened. They claimed that there were no causes or conditions behind things. So on one hand, we have those who said that everything happened because of God, and on the other hand, there were those who said there was no cause, reason, or sense behind things. Since neither of these groups knew anything about *idappaccayata* and *paticca samuppada*, we can say that these words were not heard in the world until the Buddha arose. Once there was the Buddha, then only did these words become known.

When people began to observe more carefully, they noticed that there were actions called *karma* (Sanskrit) or *kamma* (Pali), and reactions to those actions. Please be careful, the word *kamma* does not mean "fortune" or "the results," it just means "action." The fruit of the action is another word, another thing. When they started to notice these actions and reactions, *kamma* and the results of *kamma*, they attributed that law of *kamma* to God. They said that God was the one who regulated and oversaw all actions and the results of all actions. So this Law of *Kamma* was not really free within itself. It was not an independent law. It was dependent on God. This version of *kamma* is not *idappaccayata*. But we understand *kamma* as just actions and reactions - because of this, there is this, and because of that, there is that - going on continually in an endless flow and process. This law of *kamma* is the same as *idappaccayata*.

Now when we suggest or present this understanding of *idappaccayata*, there are certain people who speak unfairly, untruthfully, and take advantage of the situation. They say that this law of *idappaccayata* was created by God. There are those who affirm and insist that God created *idappaccayata*, but we say “no,” it is not like that all. It is through *idappaccayata* that there is a personal God. Then the great debates and arguments follow, some extremely heated. But it does not have to be this way. Just look for yourself which way it is. Is there a personal God that creates *idappaccayata* or does *idappaccayata* create a personal god? If you look into this yourself and only deal with what you can verify in your own experience, instead of mere speculation and runaway philosophy, then you will see which of these two conditions is verifiable and which is just belief and opinion.

God is merely a concept in the human mind. Way back when primitive people looked around them, they attributed what they could not understand to some holy power or mysterious force which they called God. So we can say that God is a mere concept that arose in the minds of human beings at a certain stage of their evolution. You can see quite obviously that God comes from the law of *idappaccayata*. There are certain causes that led to this concept of God, and so this makes it quite apparent where God comes from. Everything comes from *idappaccayata*.

During the evolution of humanity there came a time when they developed to the point where they saw in all things a kind of consciousness, some form of mind. They then claimed that there was a very important power that controlled this consciousness. This was the beginning of animism. Then behind what controlled all this consciousness or spirits in things, they believed was still another important power, another mind. This they called God. This concept of god arose from *idappaccayata*.

So in Buddhism, we hold that everything, including God, comes from *idappaccayata*. Now of course you are completely free to agree or disagree. Think about this yourself, investigate it yourself and come to your own conclusions. But this is just what Buddhism believes, that everything comes from the law of *idappaccayata*. Even God comes about by means of this law.

Avijja: Ignorance Regarding Idappaccayata

Now let us take a look at ourselves. If we look at ourselves, we can see that the concept of self or soul also arises through *idappaccayata*. This idea that we are a self, soul or ego, and the idea of individual existence arises through *idappaccayata*.

The idea of self or soul is also opposed to the law of *idappaccayata*. We cannot have both. If one still believes in a self or a soul, it means one has not understood this law. But if one sees how this law operates, then one cannot think of or believe in a self or soul. Therefore, in Buddhism, we have the word *anatta* which means not-self or not-soul, that everything just happens through *idappaccayata*.

In Buddhism we have a special word for the condition of not knowing or not understanding *idappaccayata*. This word is *avijja* which means not knowing that which should be known. *Avijja* is usually translated as “ignorance,” but this specifically means not knowing that which should be known. That which should be known is, of course, *idappaccayata*. We should also understand this *avijja*.

Avijja, ignorance regarding *idappaccayata*, is the foundation for superstitious beliefs, ideas, practices, all of which are unreasonable and have no basis in reality. Their basis is found in emotional thoughts and beliefs, and in opinions of people who do not understand *idappaccayata*. Superstition is looked down upon in Buddhism and considered foolish and silly. We should understand that all superstition is the result of *avijja*, not knowing and understanding the law of *idappaccayata*.

Superstition: Ignorance of the Law of Idappaccayata

People long ago who lived in forests and caves thought or understood that there were spirits in everything: in the rocks, in the trees, in the rivers, in the sun, moon and stars. They saw spirits or angels in all these things and started to worship them in order to curry their favor. As their understanding developed, they conceived of gods who were no longer these individual spirits but were higher levels of power. The belief in many gods, as held by the ancient Greeks and Romans, eventually developed into the belief in one God.

All along, men have been worshipping these powers or these spirits that they believed existed and who took control everything. All of these beliefs are what we call superstition. They all just arose because those people back in the forests and caves did not understand *idappaccayata*. They were ignorant of this law of conditionality.

But now it is possible for those who can see *idappaccayata* to let go of all those beliefs. Abandoning superstition is the trend civilization ought to follow. People should evolve from the not-knowing of *idappaccayata* to the understanding of it. Through the seeing of the law of *idappaccayata*, there will be correct understanding. There will be no superstition remaining.

You can see for yourself that this law is eternal. It is infinite. It is unlimited. You just will not be able to find any exception to this law. It applies to everything.

Introduction to the 12 Links of Paticca Samuppada

Now we will look at the way *paticca samuppada* works. *Paticca samuppada* begins with *avijja* about the law of *idappaccayata*. Because of the power of this ignorance, there is what in Pali is called *sankhara* which means “to make complete,” or “to make ready.” I like to translate this word as “concoction” or “to concoct.” Because of the power of ignorance, there is the concocting of things, and so concocted or compounded things are in this way.

Through the power of this *sankhara*, there is this concocting, this potential of consciousness, or this basic mind that is the potential of mind. It is then forced to act as consciousness, which is knowing things by the means of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. The mind takes the form of sense consciousness through the power of concocting.

Through the power of this consciousness, there arises mind and body. Mind and body are one thing although they are two different words. Mind and body mean one thing: a living being. Without consciousness, body and mind could not exist, but through the power of consciousness, mind and body arise.

Then when there is the mind-body structure, the sense organs arise. These are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. Through these sense organs, it is possible to know sights, sounds, smells, and so on. This is called contact. Through having sense organs, it is possible for sense objects in the world to make contact or make an impression on the mind so that there is sense experience. So we say that through the senses (*salayatana*), there is contact or experience.

Because of this contact between the mind, the being, and the object, there is what we call *vedana*, which can be translated as “feeling.” But *vedana* does not mean “emotion” as most people in the West understand feeling. Here it means that when there is this contact and things are experienced, the experience has a feeling quality. It is this feeling quality that is called *vedana*. It arises because of the contact between the eye, sights, and the mind. Likewise with the other five senses.

Then through *vedana* there arises *tanha*. Because of feeling there arises craving, which is foolish desire based on feeling. Remember that all this started with ignorance, and so this feeling is an ignorant feeling. Craving means ignorant desire. It is found in stupidity and lack of understanding. It is wanting things foolishly. If desire is not foolish, we do not call it *tanha*. We give it a different name. But we are talking about something that has its

roots in ignorance, so then the desires that arise out of ignorance are of course ignorant. Ignorant feeling leads to craving or ignorant desire, which is called *tanha*.

If the feeling is positive, then craving will go along in a positive way. If the feeling is negative, then of course the craving goes along in a negative way. But whether it is positive or negative, there is this craving, this wanting things foolishly, blindly, in a way that is not to our true benefit.

Because of this craving, the mind then attaches to whatever is craved for, and attachment arises within the mind. Attachment grabs onto things in two ways: the first is through the concept of "I.", in other words, through clinging to things as self or as soul; the second is by attaching to things as belonging to the self, as "mine." Both kinds of attachment happen because of craving.

It is through this *upadana*, attachment, that things exist as things in our minds. That we cling to them as this and that happens through *upadana*. So you can see, if you have been watching, that self or soul never existed until this *upadana* arose. At first there was the flow of *idappaccayata*, but then through attachment there arose the concept of self, soul, or "I." Prior to *upadana*, the "I" did not exist. There was no self, but then through attachment, the self came into being. It is only through attachment that the soul or ego comes about. Because of craving (*tanha*), there is attachment (*upadana*).

Then through *upadana*, there is what we call *bhava* or existence. When there is attachment to something, then there is the existence of something. And this we call *bhava*.

When there is *bhava*, then there is what we call *jati* or birth. When there is this existence, then there is birth. What this means is that the sense of "I" has grown and developed until it is born into a complete sense of ego or "I". This now dominates the mind in all of its actions, and with it everything that is "mine." It starts just as *upadana*, the sense of "I" and "my". But then it grows until it is so big that something is born. The sense of "I" is then born, and the mind is then dominated by this ego and that which belongs to ego.

So there are these three stages that we can look at more carefully: *upadana*, *bhava*, and *jati*. An easy way to understand how they develop is to compare it to the development of the human fetus. It begins with conception. The sperm fertilizes the egg. Conception is like *upadana*, attachment. Then from conception, the embryo develops into a fetus. This developing fetus in the uterus can be compared to *bhava*. It is existing now, growing, and will continue to do so until it is complete, after which time it will be born. This phase of pregnancy can be compared to *jati*. The ego, too, is conceived, develops and is born as "I" and "my." This is how there is *upadana*, *bhava*, and *jati*.

This *jati* is a spiritual kind of birth. We are not talking about the physical birth which happens just once in a lifetime. This spiritual birth happens every time there is craving. If there is craving, the birth of the "I" and the ego is certain. This can happen many times a day - dozens of times, maybe even a hundred times, if we have a lot of craving. Every time there is craving, there will be this birth. But always remember that this is a spiritual birth within the mind. It is not a physical birth.