

Dependent Quenching

by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu

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In the late 80s and early 90s, until his health deteriorated too much, Ajahn Buddhādāsa gave regular lectures during the monthly international retreats held at Suan Mokkh and then Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage. Usually, Ajahn spoke in Thai and Santikaro Bhikkhu interpreted into English live. Audio recordings are now available from www.suanmokkh.org and www.bia.or.th. The following is a transcription generously made by a Dhamma volunteer. If you noticed possible improvements to the text and would like to contribute, please kindly contact the Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok (suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com).

Today we'll talk about dependent origination concerning the dependent ceasing or the dependent quenching of things.

We'd like to call this *paṭicca-nirodha*. *Nirodha* means 'quenching' or 'ceasing.' The aspect of this story which is the dependent arising of things is called *paṭicca-samuppāda*; and then the dependent quenching, the quenching down, quenching down of things is called *paṭiccanirodha*.

This quenching simply means not-arising. To make something so that it doesn't arise, doesn't occur. That's what we call quenching. So quenching is the opposite of arising.

For this quenching it's best to quench this process at the very beginning. But if we are unable to catch it at the very start, then we can quench it at the next instant or the next moment. We need to talk about possibilities for quenching the process of dependent origination.

Please recall the last lecture where we pointed out that the beginning of dependent origination occurs when the inner sense organs and outer sense objects interact and then consciousness arises, and the three of these together are called 'contact.'

And so we must know how to deal with this from the moment that sense consciousness arises. That's where we have to be able cope with the situation,

from the moment that sense consciousness arises. Or we can say that we must be able to deal with it in the moment of *phassa* (contact). When these three things the sense organ, sense object and sense consciousness function together we call that contact. And in that moment of contact we must be ready to cope with the situation.

If we don't catch it at the moment of contact, if we slip or are careless, then we still have the opportunity to cope with it at the moment of *vedanā*, at the moment when feeling arises; we can still solve the situation. So if we slip or err at the moment of contact there is still a chance to deal with this at the moment of feeling. If we don't get it at feeling there's still a chance to manage things at the moment of desire (*taṇhā*). And if we miss our opportunity there then we have to stop it at the arising of *upādāna* (attachment). But the longer we take the harder and harder it gets. The best most convenient and easiest place to deal with this conditioned arising is at the moment of contact. As feeling arises it becomes more difficult. As desire arises it becomes very difficult and once attachment arises it's almost impossible.

Now the way to cope with the situation at the very beginning is to have *sati* (mindfulness) right there in the moment of contact. If mindfulness is in time at the moment of contact we're completely able to deal with this dependent arising. Now when we say to have mindfulness at the moment of contact, that means that mindfulness will bring correct understanding, *paññā* (wisdom) to the contact as well. And so when the contact is dealt with, or is managed with mindfulness and wisdom then there won't be any problems.

When we practice mindfulness with breathing, once our practice becomes successful mindfulness will be very fast. And it will be fast enough that it can be there at the moment of contact. And from mindfulness with breathing wisdom will be sufficient so that we are able to control or regulate the contact and to stop the flow of dependent arising right there.

It's necessary that there is sufficient wisdom, then when mindfulness is fast enough that mindfulness can choose, has that wisdom to choose from in order to deal with the contact. So it is necessary to study the various aspects of *paṭiccasamuppāda* and also the quenching of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, so that there is sufficient adequate understanding of these processes. Then when mindfulness is quick enough at the moment of contact it can retrieve or apply that understanding to the specific moment of contact. This can only be done if we study these matters correctly and we train with them so that the wisdom is

sufficiently complete. So we should study this both thoroughly and extensively.

So this is just like having a medicine chest full of various cures for diseases and things. We need to have a sufficiently complete medicine chest so that whenever there is a physical ailment one can choose the proper remedy. Or it is like having a sufficient supply of weapons so that when one is attacked one can choose the proper weapon for defending oneself. Or when there is work to be done to have a complete set of tools, so that one has the right tool, so that one can pick up the right tool so that one can do the job properly, in the same way we need to study and train in these matters so that wisdom is sufficiently complete and thorough. And then when mindfulness is trained so that it's fast enough, so that it's immediate, instantaneous at the moment of contact, when there is that very fast mindfulness and the sufficiently complete understanding then mindfulness will pick up the right understanding to use for this contact right here and now.

So please don't lose interest or be bored by our study of paṭiccasamuppāda; we are going to look into it in sufficient detail for you to develop the understanding that everyone needs.

If we explain this or describe it in all its completeness we must say that we explain it like this: understanding is developed through study and practice so that there is enough wisdom. Then whenever anything happens, when anything arises at the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind then mindfulness is right there, instantly, right in the moment of contact. And then mindfulness goes to wisdom and it retrieves the wisdom that is appropriate for the particular case, and then it brings this specific wisdom and applies it in this specific situation. When wisdom is applied specifically like this we give it a new name, instead of calling it *paññā* we call it *sampajañña*, which means 'wisdom which is thorough and comprehensive.' So it's a comprehensive and thorough understanding of the specific occurrence or specific contact. And so that there is enough energy, so that the mind has enough strength to do this there must be *samādhi* (concentration). All four of these are developed by the practice of *ānāpānasati*, which you are studying and practicing here. All four of these necessary tools: mindfulness, wisdom, this comprehensive wisdom in action, and *samādhi* all of these will be developed sufficiently so that you will be able to cope with these contacts as they arise.

So the stock of wisdom is called *paññā*, and then that specific wisdom which is the understanding in function, the applied understanding for the

specific case is called *sampajañña* – this comprehensive understanding. Please remember this word it is a very important one, *sampajañña*. Remember this word and it will help you a great deal. Then there is mindfulness, which is the companion of *sampajañña*, and the two together oversee or deal with the experience; and then the power, the strength of *samādhi* provides the all the energy that's necessary to deal with the situation. These four things are something that we need to know about and understand how to use. So please give adequate consideration to mindfulness, wisdom, *sampajañña*, and *samādhi*.

So when there is *sati*, mindfulness, fast enough to be right there at the moment of contact, and then from the stock of wisdom it applies the specific *sampajañña*, when this occurs at the moment of contact, then instead of this being a stupid or ignorant contact it is an intelligent contact. By intelligent we mean there is mindfulness and understanding at the moment of contact. If there isn't this wisdom then it will be an ignorant contact and it will follow the flow of dependent origination that leads to *dukkha* (suffering). But if there is mindfulness and wisdom at the contact then it will be the opposite, it will be a wise contact. And then instead of the dependent arising of suffering instead there will be dependent quenching of *dukkha*.

If the contact is wise then the *vedanā* that arises will be wise. When we talk about 'wise' feeling, what we mean is that the mind understands this feeling correctly. The mind sees this feeling is just a natural thing, it occurs naturally, in the way we have discussed. So whether it's a pleasing or unpleasing feeling the mind doesn't fall into liking or disliking the feeling. The mind isn't tricked by the feeling. This is the meaning of wise feeling. If it's ignorant contact then there's ignorant feeling. And the pleasant feeling tricks the mind into liking it. If it is an unpleasant feeling this tricks the mind into disliking it. Sometimes there isn't a very clear feeling and this leads the mind into doubt or confusion. That's what happens when there is ignorant contact, there arises these ignorant feelings where the mind doesn't understand them and then is pulled into liking, disliking, and confusion. So this is the difference between ignorant feeling and wise feeling, which depends on ignorant contact or wise contact.

Now, the most important, the most efficient understanding is the knowledge of not-self. To realize clearly that these eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, none of them are 'self.' None of these things are 'I' or 'mine.' And so that when some object makes contact with the senses and then consciousness arises – the understanding that consciousness is not-self, it's neither 'I' nor 'mine' –

and to see this is just something that arises naturally. And then when *phassa*, contact, occurs, this needs to be seen as not-self. It's just something that naturally happens when interaction between the senses, the sense objects and then consciousness arises and we have contact. And then the natural result of contact is feeling, it has nothing to do with a 'self,' a 'soul,' it is neither 'I' nor 'mine.' The essence of the matter is to have this understanding, that the sense organs, the sense objects, the sense contact, the sense consciousness and feeling, none of this is a 'self,' it is neither 'I' nor 'mine.' This understanding, this wisdom will solve the problems.

And so when there is mindfulness and it retrieves wisdom so that there is *sampajañña*, a ready and specific comprehension, then that contact is wise, it's not a foolish comprehension. When the contact is wise the feelings that arise are wise; they're understood as they actually are according to nature. And this means that they don't deceive the mind into falling in love, or falling into aversion anger, or falling into confusion. The pleasant feelings if they are ignorant will deceive the mind into falling in love. If it's unpleasant the mind is pulled in to aversion or hatred. And if it's an uncertain ignorant feeling then the mind will fall into confusion. And this is the arising of *taṇhā*, ignorant want or desire. But if there is wise feeling then this ignorant desire doesn't occur. Instead there is just a wise wanting which takes the form of what we call 'aspiration.' It's a wise want that is completely cognizant of natural law.

When there is wise want instead of ignorant want or desire then *upādāna* (attachment) doesn't arise. And when there is none of this blind want then there is no arising of the sense of 'I,' of 'mine' that we call 'attachment.' Instead when there is this wise want or aspiration there arises the knowledge or understanding of what needs to be done to deal with this situation. So the ignorant feeling, ignorant want leads to attachment, to the 'I' and 'mine' feeling. But if there's wise feeling, wise want then we know what we need to do in response to this situation and there is no attachment.

So when *upādāna* doesn't arise, when this ignorant concept, this foolishness of 'I' and 'mine' doesn't arise, then instead there is just wisdom, *paññā*. Understanding what to do right here and now in this situation. And then when *upādāna*, attachment, doesn't arise, when the attachment to self doesn't arise then there isn't the existence of self. And when the existence of self doesn't arise then the birth of self doesn't occur. And so this is how this process can go in the way that doesn't lead to suffering; the way that is not suffering where

there is wise feeling, wise want, wisdom and the existence and birth of self don't occur.

So when anything happens to the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind, when some sense object comes in, if there is true understanding of *paṭiccasamuppāda* then we're able to take advantage of whatever it is. One can receive benefits, can benefit from whatever has come into the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind. But if there isn't this understanding of dependent origination then whatever it is will just give us pain and suffering. This is the importance of understanding dependent origination. Whether or not we understand this determines whether the objects that stimulate our senses will give us benefits or suffering.

So when contact is ignorant it leads to *taṇhā*, desire. This *taṇhā* can never be wise; *taṇhā* is always ignorant and blind. So when we say 'desire,' the way we mean it, it can never be right, it will always be wrong; and by wrong we mean it's a mistake that leads inevitably to attachment and suffering. But when there is mindfulness at the moment of contact wisdom comes in, *sampajañña* functions then there's wise contact and this leads to aspiration. Aspiration can be both right and wrong, but when there is mindfulness and wisdom then this aspiration will be right, correct; 'correct' means that it won't make the mistake of letting suffering occur. This is the difference between the two ways; the way of dependent arising and the way of dependent quenching.

Please don't forget our warning that this must be studied as a science not as a philosophy. To merely speculate about these things, to argue about them logically or based on our opinions will be of little value and may cause a lot of trouble. Instead just deal with the reality, look carefully at the reality of these dependent arisings. It's happening here and now and so we can study it scientifically in our own experience. It's not enough just to guess at this, to hypothesize and so on. Please study this directly in experience and then you will have a true understanding of *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

Even if you study this from a psychological point of view, please make sure that it is truly a scientific psychology and not just the pseudo-science of mere psychological theories and opinions.

So we've discussed how to deal with the situation at the very beginning, at the moment of contact. Now what should we do if we slip at the moment of contact and allow ignorant feeling to arise? What is needed then is a lot of

understanding, a lot of *paññā*. If ignorant feeling arises it will take a lot of wisdom to examine that feeling and transform it into wise feeling. Wisdom needs to look at that feeling and see that this feeling, whether pleasant, unpleasant or whatever, is merely a natural phenomenon. When the nervous system is stimulated it's a natural reaction that there will be these feelings, there's nothing more to it than that. So it's just this natural reaction, there is no special meaning or significance to it; and it is surely not 'I' or 'mine.' It's just that. It's only this. It is what we can call *tathatā*. It's just what it is. If there is enough understanding of this feeling then the ignorance can disappear and it becomes wise feeling. So whether it is pleasant, unpleasant, or uncertain that feeling will lose its ability to deceive the mind. This takes a lot of wisdom.

Now what happens if feeling is completely ignorant and *taṇhā* arises, this stupid wanting, this desire arises? There is still a chance to do something about it, but it's going to be very very difficult. To deal with *taṇhā*, mindfulness must be incredibly fast, wisdom must be thorough and complete, *sampajañña* must be very specific, ready and together right there, and there has to be a lot of *samādhi*, it takes a lot of energy to do this. To solve the situation at feeling is already difficult, but to do it here in the moment of desire is very difficult, it's almost too much for us, but if there's an incredible amount of mindfulness, wisdom, *sampajañña*, wisdom in action, and *samādhi* it can be done. What we need to do is if *sati* is there and it's very quick, very clear, if wisdom can see the ugliness of this desire, to see what a foul and harmful thing desire is. If wisdom can see desire correctly then there will arise aversion to it, a fear of this desire and the pain that it will cause. If wisdom is strong enough, deep enough to do this, then the flow of *paṭiccasamuppāda* can be cut even here at *taṇhā*; but it is very very difficult, nearly impossible, but still we have to try if it has got this far.

So if desire is ended or stopped then there is no attachment coming up. When there is no attachment to self then the existence of self doesn't arise and then the birth of self doesn't occur, then there is nothing to suffer, there will be no *dukkha*. So this is *paṭiccasamuppāda* in the aspect of quenching. This is the end of *dukkha* or the quenching down of suffering. We can call it the 'quenching' or 'extinguishing' aspect of dependent origination, or we can just call it *paṭicca-nirodha* ('dependent quenching').

Now we need to look at the situation where *upādāna*, attachment, arises. We need to be able to deal with this somehow because attachment to self inevitably

will cause suffering. So if we can't stop it here it's going to lead to dukkha. So we have to find something to be able to do in this situation. What we can do is, we need to understand what the 'self' is, or what this idea of 'self' can mean. When we talk about 'self' we can do it in three ways. And to deal with attachment we need to understand all three of these ways of understanding self. The first way is called *attā*, which is one extreme of the complete full-blown self. Then the other extreme is *nirattā* which is nothingness, that there is nothing at all, it's a complete denial of the self and anything. And then the third is *anattā*, which is *the self which is not-self*. On one extreme is the self that is grasped at and believed to be a real self. On the other extreme is the self that is denied, that is annihilated. But in the middle is *anattā* which is the self which is understood to be not a self, the self which is not-self. If we understand these three ways of seeing self or relating to self then it will be much easier to cope with the arising of attachment and we maybe be able to do something about it.

If the attachment is positive it leads to the *attā* (the full self), this complete belief in a self that is really a self. If the attachment is negative it leads to this denial this no self, there's no self, there's nothing. But if there is neither positive nor negative, if there is no attachment to neither positive nor negative then there is merely the self which is not-self. See these three clearly: on one extreme is the full self; on the other extreme is no self, the extreme of there is no self at all there is nothing; and in the middle there's the self that is not-self. To understand this will allow us to be able to do a little bit, or do something about the arising of attachment.

So although this feeling or sense of self is something instinctual, something that's going to happen for all living things, especially human beings, although this is going to happen naturally we need to study this and see it as being not-self, that this instinctual self is not really a self. This will happen, there is no way of avoiding this instinctual self in life. But if we study then we see, 'Hey, this instinctual self isn't really a self. It's the self that is not-self.' If we can understand it in this way, avoiding the extremes of a full self, a complete self, or an eternal self or whatever, or the other extreme of no self at all, if we see it correctly then we can deal with attachment.

What's funny about all this is that this 'I' we feel all the time – everywhere we go we're aware of ourselves, of 'me,' of 'I' – what's funny is that this 'I' that we are always aware of isn't really 'I' – it is *the I that isn't really I*. If we look into this and see it clearly we will have the tools to respond to, to live with,

to deal with, this naturally occurring sense of ‘self,’ of ‘I.’

If I were to tell you that, ‘*you are the you that is not really you,*’ you would laugh, you would accuse me of lying. But this is the absolute truth – you are the you that is not really you.

This absolute truth of not-self, of the self which is not-self is the essence of Buddhism. The whole intention, the single purpose of Buddhism is to help human beings to understand the self which is not-self.

The belief or doctrine of an eternal self or soul that goes on forever and ever, that gets reborn in future lives, this is a Hindu belief, it’s not Buddhist. The belief that there is no self at all, that there is nothing, is just a nihilistic wrong understanding, which is not Buddhism at all either. But the self which is not-self, this is the teaching of Buddhism.

Hinduism seeks the eternal self. The goal of Hinduism is the eternal self. Buddhism, however, has as its goal the eternal void. The eternal or permanent or perpetual voidness of self. Voidness means completely free and empty of ‘I’ and ‘mine.’ Free and empty of ‘self.’ This voidness is the goal of Buddhism. If you are interested in understanding Buddhism it is absolutely necessary for you to study and understand this voidness. If you can understand it then it will help you solve all the problems of life.

But you must have a correct understanding of voidness. Some people think that voidness is negative; but this is incorrect. The correct understanding of voidness is neither positive nor negative. Voidness is beyond both the positive & negative – it’s void, it’s empty of both positive & negative.

If we understand Buddhism correctly then we’ll be beyond the influence of positive & negative absolutely.

So if we understand this essence of Buddhism – the reality of voidness, then it will allow us to solve the situation of when attachment arises. If we understand that everything is absolutely void of ‘self,’ void of ‘I’ and ‘mine,’ then we can cope with the situation so that suffering does not arise. So please give special attention to this matter, study it so it can benefit you supremely.

So the understanding of voidness, of the void, is what you need so that dependent origination will not cause you any problems. If you practice mindfulness with breathing completely then you will develop this necessary understanding. In mindfulness with breathing there are four main areas of study:

the body, the feelings (*vedanā*), the mind, and then *dhamma* (natural truths). In the area that studies natural truth there will arise a comprehensive and deep understanding of not-self, of voidness, and so through a complete and successful practice of *ānāpānasati* one will have the necessary understanding of the void, of voidness.

The ability, skill, and understanding that arises from the practice of *ānāpānasati* will allow you to deal with dependent arising completely. You will have everything you need so that this dependent origination of suffering will no longer trouble you. So please give this practice of mindfulness with breathing meditation proper effort, attention, and dedication. And we hope that all of you will meet with success in your practice so that you can solve the problem of life, the dilemma of suffering. In doing so you will have fulfilled your purpose of coming here as a pilgrim and your time and effort here will have been of tremendous value. So we express our happiness once again that you have come for this purpose in this way, and we will finish today's talk also.

Thank you for being good listeners in spite of the vagaries of the weather – you were able to endure rain and other difficulties.

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