

Dependent Origination: Medicine for Spiritual Disease

by Ajahn Buddhādāsa

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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 volunteer and the Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok (suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com)

Today's lecture will continue from the previous one. Yesterday we talked about the problem and the most harmful, dangerous problem is spiritual disease. Life is not peaceful and truly happy because of this spiritual disease. And so today we'll talk about the therapy for this spiritual illness.

The best way to deal with this spiritual disease is to understand and practice according to *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination). When we understand the facts of dependent origination and then live accordingly, the spiritual disease won't have an opportunity to occur, and any old spiritual disease will disappear.

We'd like for you to remember the Pāli word. It's very useful to start with the original term. But actually there are two terms here that are important, that we'd ask you to remember. The first has to do with everything. We're going to be talking about something today, and when this fundamental principle is applied to all things, including inanimate things, we call *idappaccayatā*. When the exact same principle is applied, however, to human beings and especially the quality of pleasure and pain (*sukha* and *dukkha*), then we call it *paṭiccasamuppāda* although in Thai it's pronounced *patitchasamupabat*.

The first can be translated 'conditionality,' and the second, 'dependent origination,' but it's best if we understand the original term correctly and remember it – *idappaccayatā* and *paṭiccasamuppāda*. I'll bet there are a few Pāli terms which you can already remember, but these are probably rather unimportant

ones. However the most important Pāli terms, the most powerful and profound, especially this *paṭiccasamuppāda*, you probably can't remember. People tend to remember the easy words, the ones that really aren't very important, but that ones that can really free us from dukkha, like *paṭiccasamuppāda*, hardly anybody cares to remember. So we ask you to make a particular effort to remember this term.

Now in this Indian word, *paṭiccasamuppāda*, which can be translated, 'dependent origination,' there is also the meaning of, 'dependent cessation.' Now this is hard for many people to understand, because they're too caught up in the word origination, but not only do things appear but the cessation of things appears. So just as there is dependent origination, there's also dependent cessation, and this is also included in the meaning of the word *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Maybe we could call it, 'dependent manifestation.' Whether it's the arising or the ceasing of things, it's all a manifestation. So it demonstrates or reveals both a dependent origination as well as revealing a dependent cessation. Because both of these happen inter-dependently, we can call it 'dependent origination,' *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

Now the importance of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is that it is the heart of Buddhism. We call it the heart of Buddhism, or of Buddha-Dhamma, because this is what can free us from 'self.' Dependent origination can liberate us from the ignorance of belief in some 'self,' which then frees us from all *dukkha*, all misery and all suffering. Further, the Buddha even said that,

"If you see paṭiccasamuppāda, you will see me [meaning 'the Buddha']."

So when you see this dependent origination, you also see the Buddha. Otherwise you haven't yet met the Buddha. So this shows the importance of *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

For example, if you were to stay in some place, whatever place, and undergo great difficulties for say, six months, but through all that hard time, you understood dependent origination, then that very difficult six months would be worth it, would be totally worthwhile. On the other hand, if you were to travel around the world for a year, for many years, if in your travels you never come to understand dependent origination, then it hasn't been very worthwhile. The time and effort has been wasted. Though we should point out a bit of difficulty in this matter. There are many places that explain dependent origination differently than the Buddha originally intended. There have been new interpretations of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, which tend now to be the most commonly taught, which put

a heavy stress on the moral Dhamma, on ethical Dhamma, which ends up in fact supporting the idea of ‘self.’

However if we want to approach dependent origination on the original terms of the Buddha, then we need to approach it as absolute Dhamma, rather than mere morality, in which there’s the wiping away of the illusion of ‘self.’ So we need to become aware of the difference between the later, more new, moral interpretations of dependent origination, and the Buddha’s original intention was not merely moral, but to liberate us totally from dukkha.

There’s a story which is rather amusing and well worth remembering. However it’s in symbolic language, so make sure you listen carefully. In this story there was a *deva* (a celestial being) – kind of like angels in the West – who was looking for the end of the world, was looking for the world’s end. And this deva could fly very fast, faster than an arrow, faster than a speeding bullet. And so he was going around, all over the place as fast as he could for many years, trying to get to the end of the world. And after many years, he still hadn’t got there. He would, you know, go from here, all the way that way, looking for the end of the world.

And so one day he came to the Buddha and he said,

“For all these years, I’ve been speeding around as fast as I could with these wonderful magic powers, and I still haven’t gotten to the end of the world.”

And the Buddha’s reply was like, like this was some ordinary kind of guy, he said,

“You crazy fool. You’ll never find the end of the world that way, because it’s in here; it’s within us. You can find the end of the world within yourself. The end of the world, the end of all the problems of worldly existence, the end of dukkha, the spiritual disease, is found within oneself. In the living being, that’s the place where one finds the end of the world.”

And so if we go running around looking for dependent origination out there someplace, we never find it. The place to discover dependent origination is within oneself. This is a story that’s well worth remembering.

We can use the word, ‘this living, fathom long body.’ This body is about six feet, more or less, about a fathom long, and the stress is that it’s alive, in this living body, the body in which there is consciousness. The Buddha stressed that this is where the world can be found, the origin of the world is found in here. The

cessation, the total end of the world, is found in this living, fathom long body. And the way to get to the final end of the world, all of these are found in this living, fathom long body.

These words, ‘this living body,’ or ‘living being,’ – in the original Pāli, it specifies, this body in which there is *saññā* (perception) and there is mind or heart. So the living being is where there is the perception, the experience of mind and then the mind itself, that which perceives, which experiences. In this living being, where there is perception and mind, in this perceiving and experiencing, and in this mind – this is where we find the world, the origin of the world, the total end of the world, and the way to find the end of the world.

In a dead body or a corpse, there is no longer any perception and mind. So it’s not possible to find these things in the dead body or in things which aren’t alive. Now all of us sitting here are still alive, there is still perception and there is the mind, and so all of us are able and ought to study and investigate dependent origination right here, in these living bodies and minds. So now let’s start to study *paṭiccasamuppāda* within ourselves, right now.

The ABC’s of dependent origination are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, and the forms, sounds, odors, tastes, touches and mental objects. The inner senses or sensibles, in Pāli they’re called ‘[the inner] *āyatana*,’ and the outer things that are sensed, experienced – ‘the outer *āyatana*’ – when they come together, for example, the eye interacts with a form, or the ear interacts with sound, that’s the starting point, or you can say the ABC’s, of our study of dependent origination.

Now don’t overlook the word ‘dependent.’ The inner sense sensibles and the outer sensibles have to depend on each other. If there isn’t any depending, then you can’t call it dependent origination. For the eye in the form to arise, there needs to be this mutual depending – the eye on the form, the form on the eye. When the two come together in this interdependence, then you have dependent origination. That’s just that – the eye and the form, arising interdependently, that is dependent origination.

So if they’re still separate, they haven’t come into this mutual dependence, they’re still separate, there’s no dependent origination. Now once they’re depending on each other, once the inner sensible and the outer sensible are – for example, the eyes and a form – are depending on each other, then consciousness

arises. Depending on this dependence, consciousness occurs. This is also dependent origination.

So where is this happening? It's happening right inside each of you. It's not happening outside somewhere or in corpses, but it's happening right now in each of you. And it's happening every day of your lives. So why can't you see it? It's happening right there inside of you right now. You need to look until you see it, because this is going on for your entire life. Why doesn't anyone see it?

Do you know how many times it happens each day? Where there's the eye and the form interdepending, or the ear and sounds, or the nose and odors? Have you ever bothered to count how many times it happens? Probably not – you probably never even tried. So nobody even has a clue how many times this is happening, because you've all been ignoring this. So many it's time now to stop ignoring it and start to pay attention. How many times, just in a day, are the eyes and forms dependently originating, the ear and sounds, the nose and odors, the tongue and tastes, and so on. It's time to begin to study this, right there, inside yourself.

Now there are six pairs – the eye and forms, and so on, six pairs. Which of the six pairs is most important? Of the six, it's the last pair that is most important. That's why it's last. The mind and thoughts – this is, of all the pairs, the one to see the dependent origination of. It's most important is, the mind and thoughts, the thoughts of the mind. Now when the first five pairs have performed their function, they send all the data to the last pair. All the information of the first five senses gets sent to the final one, the mind. And so the whole world is collected right here in the mind, and the experiences, the objects of mind, the things the mind senses.

Now when the inner sensible and the outer sensible interact or are depending on each other, then a third arises which is consciousness – eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, and so on – six kinds of consciousness. Now these three are mutually interdependent All three of them are depending on each other, and when these three are depending on each other like this, then another thing happens, what we call 'contact' (*phassa*). 'Contact' – where these three, inter-dependent functioning of the three is 'contact.' This can't be avoided; once these three are going, then there's contact. How many times then, is there contact in a day, whether eye-contact, ear-contact, or whatever?

Even in Thailand, most people explain contact incorrectly. Over and over again you hear people saying that contact is the eye, and the form, the ear and the sound. They only mention two things, but you should never ignore the fact that contact is three things – the eye, the form, and eye-consciousness, the nose, the odor, and nose-consciousness. Contact is always these three things, dependent upon each other. We need to observe this in order to understand this very, very dangerous event, which we call ‘contact.’

Further there’s more depending – this process keeps unfolding. Now depending on contact, there occurs feeling. So depending on contact, occurs what we call, ‘feeling’ (*vedanā*). Now further, depending on feeling, it can be pleasant feelings, unpleasant, or whatever, but depending on feelings, then there occurs the value or meaning of ‘positive’ & ‘negative.’ When there are these feelings, then there occurs, value is given to this, meaning. This positive & negative evaluation always depends on feeling. Without any feeling, there would be no opportunity for this positive & negative meaning to happen in the mind.

Now if this positive & negative, this liking & disliking, didn’t occur, the whole thing would end right there – there would just be contact, and things would end. But because of this positiveness & negativeness in the feeling, this giving meaning, pleasant meaning, unpleasant meaning, to the feeling, then depending on this, this positive/negative evaluation, then there arises the next thing, which is *taṇhā*. *Taṇhā* is an important word – it means ‘craving,’ or ‘desire.’ And so this desire arises depending on the positive & negative feelings.

Now if all of this has been happening without wisdom – without true, natural understanding – then this *taṇhā*, this desire, occurs. Because when we use the word *taṇhā*, ‘desire,’ it always means an ignorant reaction of the mind. The mind is functioning in a stupid way. This is always implied in the term ‘desire,’ or *taṇhā*. So if there’s this fundamental ignorance involved in the whole process, then feeling leads to desire. However if from the start, there was a correct, natural understanding, of all this, then desire wouldn’t happen. When there’s the contact, and the feeling, and then there would just be what you could call, ‘clean desire,’ or a ‘clean wanting.’ *Taṇhā*, desire, is always kind of dirty – it’s tainted with selfishness – but when there’s true wisdom, then you can call it a ‘clean want,’ just wanting to do what’s right, what’s truly, naturally right. And this we prefer to call ‘aspiration.’ So there’s an important difference here whether this is happening in a stupid way, or whether it’s happening in a truly intelligent, or clean way. If it’s a matter of desire, craving, then there’s going to be trouble.

Problems are going to happen; there will be *dukkha*. But if it's a matter of aspiration, then there won't be any trouble. Nothing will go wrong and the mind is safe from *dukkha*.

Now as far as we know, modern science talks only about positive and negative. We're not sure about this, but that's all we've heard. But in Buddhism, there's positive or *sukha*, which is kind of well-being, pleasure, pleasantness, and then there's negative or *dukkha*, non-well-being, or pain, painfulness. But then there's a third which is, *adukkhamasukha*, neither *dukkha*, neither painful nor pleasant, neither non-well-being nor well-being – a third one where you can't say whether it's pleasant or unpleasant. So there are these three. We don't know if modern science has an equivalent to this third one.

So there are these three kinds of feeling, *vedanā*. Positive feeling leads to positive desire, wanting to have, wanting to get. Then negative feeling leads to negative desire. Instead of wanting to pull it in, you want to push it away or you want to kill it, obliterate it. And then the feeling which is neither positive nor negative, leads to kind of confusion, which is a kind of desire. There's towards this neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling...The mind wants something, but it doesn't know what it wants. There's desire, but there's uncertainty about exactly what it wants. The mind gets confused.

So each kind of feeling leads to a particular kind of desire – the kind of wanting to have, to get, wanting to push away, to get rid of, and then kind of, wanting but not knowing what one wants, you know, wondering, 'What's in this for me?' You're hoping there's something good in this, but you don't know what, and so there's uncertainty or confusion. So positive feeling increases *rāga* (lust and greed). Negative feeling increases *dosa* (hatred and anger). And then the neither positive nor negative, or neither negative nor positive feeling, increases *moha* (delusion), this not knowing really what's going on. And so this is the problem of the feelings, that the feelings increase these different kinds of messed up mind – greed, hatred, and delusion. This is why it's so important to understand the feelings, to see the problems that they stir up. And each kind of feeling stirs up its own kind of problem, and they're all equally troublesome. You can't just point your finger at one and put all the blame on that. It's any kind of feeling is as bad as the rest.

So with the positive feeling there's a pulling in; with the negative feeling, there's a pushing away. And with the neither negative nor positive feeling, the mind doesn't know whether it should pull or whether it should push, and there's

this uncertainty, this indecision, this confusion. The mind is involved with the thing, but it doesn't know whether to pull or to push. And so this really disturbs the mind, disturbs the nervous system. This is no game. This uncertainty, is really, really disturbing the nerves. And so the *arahant* (the awakened being) isn't disturbed any more by this uncertainty. So each of these three kinds bites in its own particular way.

You should look – which of the three bites you the most? Is it the pulling in, or the pushing away, or the uncertainty, not knowing what to do? Which bites the mind the most? If you study it, you'll see that it's this hesitation – never knowing quite what to do. I mean, there are the times when you're wanting or you're wanting to get rid of, but so much of our life, there's this hesitation in everything we do. It's not quite knowing what to do, always doubting whether this is the right thing to do, this uncertainty, this constant hesitancy in everything we do, or in much of what we do. This really disturbs the mind. When there's this hesitation...how can we be peaceful and clear?

This hesitancy and uncertainty really disturbs us. Like today, one doesn't know what to do. How often does that happen to you? Today, you don't know what to do. Or for a month, there's this doubt, uncertainty. We don't know what to do for a month, or with the year, or even our whole life. One really doesn't know what to do with one's life, you know, because there's no positive to jump on or negative to try to blast away. There's this not really knowing what to do, this hesitancy, uncertainty, and doubt. This disturbs our mind tremendously.

So we've got some work to do, and then we start to have doubts, 'Oh, maybe this isn't right. Maybe this isn't what I should be doing.' And then so we want to throw that work away, and go off and find something else to do. And then, before long, more doubts about the new thing, the new work. 'Oh, is this really right for me? Is this what I'm meant to do? Is this of really any value?' And we go on from one thing to the next, with these doubts. 'Is this right? Is this of any real use?' Our minds constantly bothered by this uncertainty and hesitancy, never really knowing what to do.

Now we come to the most important dependent origination. When it's come to the point of *taṇhā*, desire, then the next dependent origination is of something really stupid. There's desire and then it's the thought, 'There is 'me' who desires. There is some 'me' who is the desirer.' There's just these natural things happening, although in ignorance rather than wisdom, until there is desire. from desire there, depending on desire, arises this real stupid idea that there must be a

‘me’ who is the one desiring. This dumb concept of the ‘me’ who desires is called *upādāna* (attachment, clinging).

Now you should be able to observe for yourself that there’s a crucial difference between desire, *taṇhā*, and the feeling of a desirer, *upādāna*. The desire is real. It’s a real thing in the mind, desire. But then this concept of the ‘me’ who desires that comes in. This is total delusion. It’s an illusion – there’s no such thing. So you need to see the difference between the desire and the delusion, the illusion that there is a ‘me’ who is the one desiring. One needs to experience this difference.

So there’s the tongue, and some food, and it tastes good. It’s delicious. This is natural. But because of the power of ignorance, we don’t see it that way. We don’t just see it as, the tongue experiences a delicious taste, but, ‘I, I taste delicious. I experience this delicious.’ Because of this fundamental stupidity, it’s taken to be ‘me,’ the deliciousness, the tongue, ‘It’s me. It’s mine.’ This is the power of *upādāna*, attachments coming in. The eye sees a form, but ignorance is, ‘I see.’ The ear hears a sound, but ignorance makes it, ‘I hear.’ And so on.

These natural activities of the living being are taken by ignorance to be, ‘me, me, I, I.’ And then we sometimes get so carried away, we’re willing to kill people. Because it’s ‘I will go and fight.’ And will even kill. When the tongue experiences a delicious flavor, there’s no urge to go killing anybody about it. But when ‘I’ experience the delicious flavor, I’m willing to go beat somebody up to get it, or to keep it. This is the very destructive power of attachment.

And the thing that’s most powerful, and therefore most dangerous, are the sexual feelings. Because these are so strong, they’re very dangerous. Really, it’s just a natural thing, that there’s some contact and then some sexual feelings, but because of our stupidity, we take it to be ‘me,’ to be ‘mine.’ And then it makes us so stupid, we fall in love, just because of this sexual feeling. We fall in love with the feeling, and then we make, we get all kinds of crazy ideas. Some people go kill themselves because of this stupid love, or they go and kill other people, or they try and run somebody’s life. And they call it love, when it’s really just they’re all just caught up, entrapped in this sexual feeling and attaching to it. It’s not the sexual feeling, but it’s this ‘me,’ this ‘I,’ that we put into everything. But the sexual feeling is particularly dangerous because it’s so strong. It’s so easy to make it ‘me.’ This is the very dangerous power of *upādāna*, of attachment.

These natural feelings of the nervous system, don't go and take them to be 'my feelings,' or 'me.' Just notice that all these feelings are just natural activity of the nervous system and leave it at that. Don't fall into this delusion that 'it's mine,' or it belongs to 'myself,' or it is 'myself,' or it's 'me.' This putting self into it is just a ghost, because the feeling tricks us, and the desire tricks us and then the attachment tricks us. We hallucinate and see ghosts – the ghost of 'self.' Or you can call it a demon if you want. It's just an hallucination, because we're tricked by the feelings, and the desires, and the attachments.

So start to use a little intelligence and don't get tricked anymore. Why continue to go through life hallucinating, seeing ghosts all over the place? It's better to learn to not be tricked. In Thai, there's the expression *phee lok*, which Thais understand immediately but it's a little more tricky when we translate it into English. *Phee* is a kind of spirit or you can say ghost or, it's just the idea that are these kind of spirits in trees, and rocks, and rivers, all over the place. Now if it's just a *phee*, just a spirit, then there's no problem. But if the spirit tricks us – *lok* is to trick, to deceive – then it's another matter. And so *phee lok* is this hallucination where the ghost is tricking us, deceiving us.

So the thing is – don't let the ghost or spirit trick you. But the easiest way to do that is just, don't see any more ghosts where they don't exist. Because for most of us, once we see the spirit, then it tricks us immediately. This upādāna is the ghost, the spirit, and once we see it, then it tricks us right away. The best way to avoid the hallucinations, is not to go seeing ghosts, not to be seeing spirits all over the place, since they don't exist anyway. It's just the body and the feelings and the nervous system that's real.

This word *phee* (spirit) means 'unreal.' When we call it 'a ghost,' we mean something that doesn't really exist. It's not real. And so when we talk of these spirits or ghosts, we mean things that don't really exist. This is the meaning of the word. Otherwise, we wouldn't call it a ghost or a spirit, especially the word ghost. But when some people go and say, 'but ghosts are real.' This is the reality of unreality. To say when we think the ghosts are real, this is the reality of illusion. It's basically stupidity. We see something that doesn't really exist. This is the seeing of illusion, of unreality. So these ghosts that you all believe in – call them spirits, or poltergeists, or 'me' – these ghosts are the reality of unreality, or the truth of falseness, which just means stupidity. It's our own foolishness.

Now this point is the point of the greatest ignorance in dependent origination, this dependent arising of upādāna, where there's the feeling of 'myself' or 'my

ego.’ It’s not just self, but it’s the self of self, or ‘my ego,’ which is being hallucinated here. Now the next stage of dependent origination is that when there is this attachment, this *upādāna* – when we translate it ‘attachment,’ we always mean attachment from foolishness; it literally means to pick something up or hold something foolishly. It’s not too engage in something with wisdom and real understanding, but to grab it foolishly, is what the *upādāna* is.

Depending on this *upādāna*, there is a kind of conception. The ghost conceives something in the mind, in just the same way that, when, in human reproduction, when the egg is fertilized, a new something is started, which we call conception. When *upādāna* conceives *bhava* or *phawa* [Thai] which we can translate as ‘existence,’ when there’s this ignorant grabbing on to and holding on to, then there’s the further ignorance of ‘this is,’ or ‘I have this,’ of being something, having something. This is called existence.

The attachment, *upādāna*, has the activity of attaching to, or grasping at, clinging to. These words describe the activity in the mind of attachment, where with, through ignorance, grasping at something that doesn’t actually exist, attaching to a self that doesn’t actually exist, grasping at ghosts. And through this, there is the conception of even more delusion. The thing grasped at is delusion. It’s an illusion that doesn’t really exist. And then this illusion grows, just the way when, in human reproduction, there is the zygote, the fertilized egg, and then it grows to a fetus, and it grows bigger and bigger. In the same way, by clinging to an illusion, it grows. And there’s this sense of, ‘I am this, I am that. I have this, I’m getting that,’ which we call *bhava* (existence), which is just hallucination. And then this leads eventually to the birth of ‘me.’ There’s this conception of, and then the illusion grows, and then finally there is a fully formed ego, ready to play some little game, to play some role. There’s this personality that one’s fully identified with. This we call *jāti* (birth), where this illusion, this hallucination now is fully born. And this is the process that makes us suffer. This is how *dukkha* is born, through this conceiving and gestating, and then birth of this ego-show, this hallucination we can call ‘ego’ or ‘me.’

The question then is, all these things that we take to be ‘mine,’ such as ‘my car, my clothes, my reputation, my influence, my wife, my husband, my children, my faith,’ all these things that are taken to be mine, are these real? Or is it just delusion this ‘my wife, my car, my reputation’? Is this something that actually exists or is it just a ghost, just this illusion, this concoction of the ignorant mind?

This is a very important question, these things we're grasping at, are they real? Or are they just hallucinations?

This is the most important point of dependent origination. If you can look and see whether it's real or just illusion, then you will have understood dependent origination. So there's the question, all these things, can we live with them? Can we use them? Can we interact with them in a way that there's no attachment? Can we co-exist with husbands, wives, cars, home-bills, reputations, and everything without attaching to them? Can you have money without thinking, '*my money?*' Can you get married without thinking, '*my husband, my wife?*' All these things, can we can we have them and use them without thinking, '*my, my, my?*'

Especially life – can we live without thinking, '*my life?*' This is a very important question for all of us. Anything we attach to bites us. If we put it crudely, 'attach to something, and it bites.' All the various things that we're involved with, that come into our lives, as soon as we attach to them, as soon as we create this illusion of 'me,' of 'mine,' then the thing turns around and bites us. So the question is – can we exist with things? Can we live life without these things, without life itself, biting us? Can you live without getting bit over and over again?

So we ask you to have money without feeling it's '*my money,*' to have a husband or wife without thinking, '*my husband, my wife.*' Is this a crazy man or a nice, decent person? Is this person who feels this way crazy or sane? But in terms of Dhamma, it's very clear that if we don't attach, it doesn't bite us. Just don't grab on, and it won't bite us. So can we live with all these things without attaching so that they don't bite us? Is this crazy or is it sanity?

In the Bible, the New Testament, there's a place where St. Paul teaches the Corinthians to be married without thinking, '*my husband,*' or '*my wife,*' to possess a home and furniture and things as if one has nothing, or to go to the market and buy things and return home as if one had bought nothing. This principle is can be found even in the Bible, and so even a Christian has to practice. To be a real true Christian, one must practice this non-attachment, having a husband and wife without, '*my husband, my wife,*' having a home without it being, '*my home,*' buying things without feeling, '*I am taking them home,*' or '*they're mine to keep.*'

This is not only the highest principle of Buddhism, it's the highest principle of Christianity as well. So the world or your life might be filled with things, but

look carefully – when you’re thinking that, ‘these things are *mine*,’ how is it? And when you’re not thinking that ‘they are *mine*,’ how is that? Is there a difference and what is the difference? We’re saying that it’s not necessary to live to go around clinging to all these things in life as being ‘me,’ as being ‘mine.’

And then there is nothing heavy in life, there is no burden of life. And in fact life is no longer a burden. Most people, at times feel weary of life, like it’s always difficult; this is hard. We’ve turned life into a burden. But it’s possible to be totally free of burdens, where there’s nothing heavy or troublesome to carry around. Even life itself is no burden. And then life can be called, ‘free.’

Those of you who are artistically inclined, we’d like to tell you that in Buddhism, we have an art also. This is the art of having anything, of doing anything that is to be done, without making it a burden. What we call Buddhist art is the art of living without any burdens, without any problems or dukkha. So if you’re interested in art, we’d like you to know that Buddhism has an art as well.

Now the last point to observe, to check out is, if there’s no self, there’s no intrinsic, inherent, real self, whether you call this ‘soul’ or an ‘ego,’ if all of that is merely a ghost, an hallucination, then how can there be anything that belongs to this self, anything that is of-self or ‘mine?’ This is the important question – if there’s no ‘me,’ how could there be any ‘mine?’ if there’s no self, how can anything belong to self or be of-self? So if self doesn’t actually exist, then where is ‘my husband,’ ‘my wife,’ ‘my children,’ ‘my job,’ ‘my car,’ ‘my possessions,’ ‘my money.’ If there isn’t a ‘me’ to start with, where do you find all these ‘my husband,’ ‘my wife,’ ‘my lover,’ ‘my friends,’ ‘my mother,’ ‘my father,’ ‘my children,’ ‘my car,’ and all that? Where do you find all these things?

Now we hope that you can see this is not pessimism. If you think that what we’re saying is pessimistic, you’ve haven’t understood very much. All we’re trying to do is to point out the correct way of looking at things, that there’s a way of looking at things, of seeing them, so that nothing is a problem, so nothing gives you a hard time. So there’s nothing pessimistic about any of this. If you have to call it anything, it would be more proper to say it’s optimistic, because there is this way of seeing things where there is no problem. What could be more optimistic than that?

So please be very careful if you find yourself thinking, ‘Oh, this is pessimistic.’ Your assumptions might be upside down. However to be precise – Buddha-Dhamma is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. Rather Buddha-Dhamma

is the way to, eliminate and get free of both pessimism and optimism. Properly, Buddha-Dhamma is the way to be free, instead of getting caught in pessimism or optimism, one is beyond them and is free of them. So Buddha-Dhamma is in fact, freedom – freedom from all pessimism and optimism.

Now if you're interested, to study and understand dependent origination, and then live accordingly, is what will make us free. We can be free the more we understand, and then live in line with, this truth of dependent origination. By free, we are above, beyond – positive & negative, good & evil, liking & disliking, pessimism & optimism. There's this freedom where we're no longer holding on to and relying on things as being 'me,' and being 'mine.' And so one is free. We can find this freedom by studying dependent origination.

If you don't yet understand it fully, that's OK. We're starting to look at this, and remember we're studying it inside of ourselves. And so now that we're starting to study this, just keep studying. Ten days may not be enough, but the more you study, the more free you will be, or the more you understand it. And then as your understanding is put into daily practice, then one finds oneself more and more free. If you don't understand it all right now, that's fine. There's no expectation, but just keep studying, keep investigating, until one is totally free.

Now understanding dependent origination will give us two wonderful results. The first is that we finally realize that, 'Hey, there's no self.' In all of this life, there isn't a self anywhere to be found. There's just the stream or flow of dependent originations. There's just this constant process of things dependently originating and dependently ceasing. That's all. And so we have this understanding that there's no self here to hold on to, to get caught up in. So why get trapped in anything? Why bother attaching when there isn't actually anything to attach to? It's all just an illusion, and now we see through the illusion, and so all the ghosts disappear.

Second, we understand how *dukkha* happens, and we understand how the ending of *dukkha* happens. And when we understand this, then we're able to prevent the occurrence of *dukkha*. And when you stop *dukkha* from happening, then there's no *dukkha*. You ought to be satisfied with this. This is pretty good, to live without *dukkha*. Then life is at peace. Life is peaceful – it's cool; it's free. And then it can be of the most benefit and value. This ought to be enough, to be free of *dukkha*, so that life is peaceful and useful.

Because *paṭiccasamuppāda* enables us to see that self is an illusion, that everything is not-self, and because it gives us the ability to prevent all *dukkha*, this is why we say that it is the heart of Buddha-Dhamma, or you could say that dependent origination is Buddha-Dhamma. For example, if you don't yet understand dependent origination, then you don't understand Buddhism, you haven't yet really found Buddhism, even people who read lots of books on it. This is the heart of Buddha-Dhamma. And even if it's a lot of work and very difficult, if you spend six months somewhere and end up understanding dependent origination, then it's worth it, no matter how hard and how difficult, if you can understand dependent origination.

So this is the thing that, the other day, we called 'gentle healing for the spiritual disease.' The most gentle healing for spiritual disease is the understanding of dependent origination. And then it makes life cool; cool in just the right way, a really refreshing kind of coolness. It's not chilly or anything like that, just a light, refreshing cool. This is the result of dependent origination.

In order to realize the full benefits of understanding dependent origination, in order to apply this most successfully to life, one other thing is required – that is *sati* (mindfulness). One needs to perfect mindfulness, to reap the fullest benefits of understanding *paṭiccasamuppāda*. And so, in a later talk, we will discuss how to perfect mindfulness through practicing *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness with breathing in and out), but we'll have to leave this for another time.

Finally, thank you for being good listeners. You've been very good listeners. So thanks.

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Transcribed by Jessica (jess.haines8@gmail.com) in Nov.-Dec. 2015
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