

Difficult Links in the Formula of Dependent Origination

I. Existence as the condition for birth (*bhavapaccayā jāti*)

Existence (*bhava*) here is *kammically active existence* (*kammabhava*), the kamma capable of generating existence in the three realms of existence; the state of existence in these realms is called *rebirth existence* (*upapattibhava*), which includes birth, growth, aging, and death, the entire passive side of our existence resulting from prior kamma.

Thus to say "existence is the condition for birth" is to say that "kammically active existence is the condition for birth," or "kammically active existence is the condition for rebirth existence."

1. Sense-sphere existence (*kāmaabhava*) conditions birth

- a. Unwholesome kamma (ten courses of unwholesome action): generates birth in the three planes of misery (hells, realm of afflicted spirits, animal realm)
- b. Limited wholesome kamma (ten courses of wholesome action): generates birth in the seven fortunate planes (human world, six sense-sphere heavenly worlds)

2. Fine-material-sphere existence (*rūpabhava*) conditions birth

The four jhānas--attained, mastered, and retained up to the time of death--will lead to rebirth in one of the appx. 15 planes in the fine-material realm, which is divided into four main "tiers" corresponding to the four jhānas.

3. Immaterial-sphere existence (*arūpabhava*) conditions birth

The four formless attainments (*arūpasamāpatti*)--attained, mastered, and retained up to the time of death--will lead to rebirth in one of the four immaterial planes, which correspond to the four formless attainments.

II. Clinging is the condition for existence (*upādānapaccayā bhavo*)

There are four types of clinging: (1) sensual clinging; (2) clinging to views; (3) clinging to rules and observances; (4) clinging to a doctrine of self.

Examples:

(1) (a) Because of clinging to sensual pleasures, someone breaks the precepts, kills, steals, commits adultery, seduces minors, slanders, tells damaging lies, etc.: as a result he/she is reborn in the plane of misery. (b) Someone with the view of kamma and its fruits, because of clinging to

sensual pleasures (desire to enjoy the sense pleasures of heaven) practices giving, observes the precepts, etc.; as a result he/she is reborn in heaven.

(2) (a) Because of clinging to a wrong view ("there is no result of action"), a person violates the precepts: rebirth-existence in the plane of misery. (b) Because of clinging to a right view ("there is result of kamma"), one keeps the precepts: rebirth-existence in a happy destination.

(3) Clinging to rules and observations: in the belief that particular ascetic rules and observations lead to purification, enlightenment, or liberation, one engages in these practices, and this creates kamma leading to an appropriate form of future existence.

(4) Clinging to a doctrine of self: usually the view of a finite, temporal self annihilated at death leads to a worldly life and pursuit of sensual pleasures, hence to rebirth in a lower state of sense-sphere existence. The view of a finite self created by God can lead to moral and meditative practices that create wholesome kamma leading to a fortunate rebirth in a sense-sphere or fine-material sphere rebirth. The view of an infinite, eternal self can lead to samādhi practices and to rebirth in the fine-material or immaterial realms.

III. *Nāmarūpa* as a condition for the six sense bases

Nāma: feeling, perception, volition, contact, attention (*vedanā, saññā, cetanā, phassa, manasikāra*)

Rūpa: the four great elements and the material form dependent on the four great elements

1. Developmental perspective

Conception takes place when consciousness (*viññāṇa*) links up with the newly fertilized ovum. This is the conception that initiates the pregnancy. The consciousness comes from a being who had earlier expired.

Nāmarūpa = that psycho-physical organism that appears with the onset of pregnancy.

On this occasion:

(a) The four great elements and various types of dependent material form are the support for the body sense-base (*kāyāyatana*), which comes into existence at the moment of conception; and they are supports for the other sense-bases--the eye, ear, nose, and tongue bases--which gradually emerge as the embryo develops.

(b) *Nāma* comes into being when consciousness initiates the pregnancy. The first moment of consciousness of the new life is accompanied by the elements of *nāma*: by feeling,

perception, volition, contact, and attention. The onward-moving stream of subliminal consciousness (*bhavaṅga-sota*), out of which active processes of consciousness emerge, is called the mind base (*manāyatana*). This mind-base is not a physical organ, but a type of consciousness. It occurs in association with its own feeling, perception, etc., and thus depends upon *nāma*.

If *nāmarūpa* does not "become manifest in the mother's womb," the six sense bases will not appear, and if *nāmarūpa* is cut off in the womb, i.e., if the pregnancy is terminated in any way, the six sense bases will not be formed. In this sense we can say that the six sense bases depend upon *nāmarūpa*.

2. Analytical perspective

On any given occasion of experience, we can see that the six sense bases depend on *nāmarūpa*.

(a) *The five physical sense bases as dependent on material form*

The five physical sense bases, strictly speaking, are the sensitive types of matter (*pasādarūpa*) within the gross physical sense organs. These sensitive types of matter all depend on the other types of matter--the four primary elements and other types of dependent matter--for their existence. Thus the sensitive matter of the eye coexists with the four primary elements, with life-faculty, with color, scent, taste, etc. And so for the other sensitive types of matter. In this way, the six sense bases depend on material form.

(b) *The mind base as dependent on material form*

In human existence, consciousness occurs in dependence on a body, which is made up of the four elements and other types of matter. Thus the mind base depends on material form.

(c) *The five physical sense bases as dependent on nāma*

On an occasion of seeing (for instance), the factors of *nāma* (feeling, perception, etc.) depend on the eye; it is not the case that the eye depends on the factors of *nāma*. However, we might say that the eye can function as an eye only in dependence on feeling, perception, volition, contact, and attention, and in this sense the eye (and other physical sense bases) are dependent on *nāma*.

(d) *The mind base as dependent on nāma*

This explanation is the same as 1(b) above, except that it pertains to the course of an existence, and not to the period of embryonic development.

IV. Consciousness as a condition for *nāmarūpa*

1. Developmental perspective

Conception takes place when consciousness (*viññāṇa*) links up with the newly fertilized ovum. The consciousness comes from a being who had earlier expired; *nāmarūpa* is the psycho-physical organism that appears with the onset of pregnancy. *Nāmarūpa* becomes manifest in dependence on this consciousness. Throughout the period of gestation and throughout the course of life, *nāmarūpa* can continue only so long as consciousness continues. (Refer to *Mahānidāna Sutta* handout.)

2. Analytical perspective

On any occasion of experience, consciousness is a condition for *nāmarūpa*: It is a condition for *nāma* in so far as the five factors of *nāma* (feeling, perception, etc.) depend on consciousness and cannot occur without consciousness. It is a function for *rūpa* because the form of this body only functions as a body when there is consciousness (even in sleep and in meditative absorption, there is consciousness, though not awareness of the external world). Inanimate matter is still *rūpa*, of course, but it is not part of *nāmarūpa*.

[Note: According to a number of suttas, *nāmarūpa* is a condition for consciousness. This can be understood from the same two perspectives:

1. From the developmental perspective

In order for consciousness to initiate the new life, it must "get a footing in *nāmarūpa*." In the case of a human life, this means it must link up with a fertilized ovum, which provides the material basis (the *rūpa*), and when consciousness arises based on the ovum, it will be accompanied by a feeling, a perception, a volition, a contact, and attention (the *nāma*). Then, throughout the process of embryonic development, consciousness will always depend upon the "viability" of the embryo, that is, upon *nāmarūpa* as its supporting condition.

2. From the analytical perspective

On any occasion of experience, consciousness depends on *nāmarūpa*. In human life, consciousness arises based on the physical body a particular sense faculty, the nervous system, and brain, all of which are material (*rūpa*); consciousness is always accompanied by mental adjuncts, feeling, perception, etc. (*nāma*). The relationship between *nāma* and consciousness is that of conscence (*sahajāta*) and mutuality (*aññamañña*); between *rūpa* and consciousness the relationships are more complex, since *rūpa* arises earlier than consciousness and changes more slowly, but as a general principle we can say they are interdependent.]

V. Saṅkhārā as a condition for consciousness

Saṅkhārā = unwholesome and mundane wholesome volitions (*akusala-lokiyakusala cetanā*)

1. During the course of life, saṅkhārā are an immediate condition for all kammically active states of consciousness. That is, all states of consciousness that create kamma are accompanied by a volition (*cetanā*), either unwholesome (*akusala*) or mundane wholesome (*lokiya-kusala*). In the language of the Abhidhamma, from this perspective the saṅkhārā is a "conascent condition" (*sahajātapaccaya*) and "a mutuality condition" (*aññamaññapaccaya*).
2. At death, one saṅkhārā will take on the role of generating rebirth into the new existence. It does so by serving as a condition for the rebirth-consciousness. It is the saṅkhārā which takes on the role of generating the rebirth-consciousness that is spoken of as the condition for consciousness. It is a condition for consciousness as a "decisive-support condition" (*upanissayapaccaya*) and an "kamma condition" (*kammappaccaya*).

VI. Ignorance as a condition for saṅkhārā

1. Ignorance is a "conascent condition" (*sahajātapaccaya*), "a mutuality condition" (*aññamaññapaccaya*), and "a root condition" (*hetupaccaya*) for the volitions in unwholesome states of consciousness. These volitions are saṅkhārā conditioned by ignorance.
2. Ignorance is an underlying tendency (*anusaya*) for the volitions in mundane wholesome states of consciousness. These volitions are also saṅkhārā conditioned by ignorance.