

# Week 3 – Cyclic conditionality

## *Buddhism Level 2 – Buddhist Wisdom – symbolic Dharma*

### RESOURCES REQUIRED

---

Some nice chocolates, or chocolate biscuits, cut in two. More than enough for half each.  
As many t-lights as there are people in the group, plus lighter  
The Nidana chain exercise printout

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

---

Gain overall sense of the nidana chain as an expression of paticca samuppada  
Understand nature of the conditioned relationship between the “links”  
Gain a felt understanding of vedana as hedonic tone, and a sense of the difference between vedana and the myriad of responses to it.

### MEDITATION (10 MINS + SETTLING OUT)

---

Settle in, then stabilise awareness around the breathing.  
Try to have sense of the skilfulness of your mind: is there a trace of wanting? – some kind of special experience, or for the class to start, or chasing after thoughts  
Or is there a trace of aversion? – to the thoughts you’re having, to pain in your body, to sitting here like this?  
Or is there contentment to sit here with an open heart with your experience, patient with yourself.  
Is there cloudiness of not really being able to see what’s happening, or is there a clarity about your experience?  
Sit trying to track the fluctuations of the mind state – the traces of white & black.  
Now, coming up with image for the kind of being you are: animal or mythical creature.  
Dwell in meditation with this image and fill out that experience more fully.

### INTRODUCTION TO SESSION

---

Looking at the outer rim – or really the clockwork mechanism of the wheel  
A representation of conditioned co-production, as covered in last module.  
This is the insight that tipped Buddha over into insight as he meditated.

### ***Previous class Review (10 mins)***

Together, try to come up with salient points from previous session.

- Talked of six realms as states of being and/or consciousness
- “Born” into them depending on karma – objectifications of karma vipaka

- What are characteristics of each realm & the Buddha in it?

### **Home practice review (10 mins)**

In threes, talk about the kind of realms you found yourself in

What would the image look like if they were depicted on the wheel

### **Plenary (10 mins)**

Elicit some of the realms & images. Try to see where they may fit as subrealms of the “official” six realms.

## **THE CYCLIC CHAIN OF CAUSALITY (30 MINS)**

---

Impossible task to do justice to it in one evening.

Images are more representational than symbolic

### **Exercise**

Using “Week 3 Nidana chain exercise” document – printed out double sided onto three different colour papers representing the three lives.

Each person given one sheet in correct order (needs min 12 people!) and one t-light. Light the first t-light. Probably best if tutor is “ignorance” (!) so can kick things off without too complicated instructions. Maybe best if practice it once without candles. Make sure there’s a table for people to put their candles.

#### **Instructions:**

- Hold the sheet so the smaller writing is towards you. When person before you lights your candle, read what’s written on your side of the paper and light the candle of the person to your left.

#### **Points to draw out:**

This is the way the Buddha communicated the insight that formed his Enlightenment experience. There’s something profound in here of a wisdom nature.

He was interested to find out how to end “this whole mass of ill”; in dependence upon what does jaramarana arise?

Talk them round in reverse order. “Therefore on the ceasing of ignorance, habit formations cease” and blow out candles accordingly.

Nidanas explaining mechanism esp of rebirth, but also of functioning of wheel as whole; we’re looking at the clockwork behind whole wheel here

The 3 different “lives” & alternation of karma & karma vipaka

Passing of candle flame from one to next candle as symbol of rebirth. Is the final candle flame the same as of different to the first. Neither: but in dependence upon the first arises the second.

## Summary of whole chain:

*Sentient existence consists of activities set up through spiritual ignorance; as a result, beings take rebirth as psycho-physical organisms equipped with sense-organs by means of which they establish contact with the external world and experience pleasant, painful, and neutral sensations; developing a craving for the pleasant sensations, they try to cling on to the objects that produce them, which leads to fresh conception...; in consequence of this they again have to undergo birth, old age disease and death.*

*The Three Jewels, Sangharakshita, ch10*

The twelve cyclic links of conditionality				
Segment	Image	Notes	Life	Karma / vipaka
Ignorance	Blind man with stick		Past	Karma (cause)
Volitions / karma formations	Potter at wheel			
Consciousness	Monkey in tree	"relinking" consciousness	Present	Karma vipaka (result)
Mind and body	Boat with four passengers, one steering	Five "skandhas"; boat = physical form, consciousness steers		
Six sense bases	House with five windows & door	Five physical senses & mind sense		
Contact	Couple embracing	Sense organ contacting sense object		
"Feeling" or vedana	Man with arrow in eye	Pleasant, painful, neutral		Karma (cause)
Craving, thirst	Woman offering drink to man	Moving towards desirable object (or away from unpleasant one)		
Grasping	Person plucking fruit from tree			
Becoming	Pregnant woman	? Bardo experience		
Birth	Woman giving birth		Future	Karma vipaka (result)
Death	Corpse carried to pyre	"this whole mass of ill"		

## Tea break

Flag up the retreat 24-26 March. Saturday is also open day if want to bring family.

Yahoo group?

## FEELING & CRAVING (20MINS)

Let's home in on one area of great practical importance

## Vedana

Although often called “feeling” let’s stick to vedana, cos feeling has too many other confusing meanings.

= Hedonic tone of an experience – of contact – not a separate thing happening in mind; it’s like the overall attractiveness or repellence of the experience.

Like the colour of an apple is to the apple

Notice how everything “in this life” up to & incl vedana is “karma vipaka”: it’s given, nothing we can do about it in this moment

## Chocolate exercise

[Have the chocolates on the table, covered over]

So notice hedonic tone of visual contact when remove cover

- recognise chocolate

did anything arise in dependence upon it? What’s the impulse?

Take one each – notice pleasant taste vedana

Do you want another one? Desire to repeat experience – craving. Sorry can’t have another one. Sit with experience of unsatisfied craving.

Deep belief that satisfying cravings and aversions – pulling in things we want and pushing away things we don’t like – is the way to happiness & fulfillment.

## Discussion plenary

No “I” in the middle of all this doing it; it’s the mutual conditioning factors that bring it all about. We like to think “I’m doing this”, but actually in dependence on pleasant sight contact arises craving; in dependence upon craving arises grasping; in dependence upon grasping arises becoming.

## RESPONSES TO VEDANA (15 MINS)

Brainstorm the different kinds of responses to different kinds of vedana.

Examples of responses to vedana			
Sense	Vedana	Examples	Example responses
Taste	Pleasant	Nice food	Want more, frustration if ca
	Unpleasant	Unpleasant food	Revulsion, blame, criticism
Hearing: speech	Pleasant	Praise, warmth, appreciation	Warmth, appreciation, embarrassment, pride
	Unpleasant	Criticism, coldness, blame	Self-justification, self-blame, hatred, anger, withdrawal
Thoughts & ideas	Pleasant	Remembering happy time, anticipating happy time, sexual fantasy, thinking of buying treat, enjoyable planning	Disappear into that “world”, playing the story, excitement
	Unpleasant	Anticipated stressful event, remembered embarrassment, regret, trying to fix problem @ work	Worrying, anxiety, rumination, blame & criticism of other

The response to a given contact is not “given” – even though it may seem like the only reasonable way to respond is to complain, or fly off the handle etc. We tend to have our own biases.

## HOME PRACTICE

---

- Continue colouring in the Wheel of Life image.
- Once per day, sit in a chair without doing anything for five minutes. Feel the waves of volition come over you – to do something useful, to plan something, to distract oneself by reading or listening to something. Just sit and weather it, and maybe enjoy just being.
- Try to notice the various responses to vedana in your daily life. Try to trace back to the experience of vedana that brought about that response. Do you think you are more strongly governed by pleasant or unpleasant vedana? Do you have any particular characteristic responses (eg. greedy with nice food, angry with peoples’ incompetence, frustrated with own limitations...)

## RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

---

*Wheel of Life*, Kulananda, ch 11

*What is the Dharma?* Sangharakshita, ch 2 & p194 - 6

Explanations of the cyclic nidana chain in the Pali Canon:

Short summary:

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/canon/sutta/samyutta/sn-12-002-tb0.html>

Buddha retelling the story of the eve of his Awakening, how he re-discovered the long-forgotten laws of conditioned co-production:

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/canon/sutta/samyutta/sn12-065.html>