

## ***Dependent Origination: Seeing the Dharma***

By: Gary Buck

### **Week Seven: Insubstantiality/Emptiness and Suchness**

#### ***Experiential Homework Possibilities***

This week's inquiry is the same one we did in class. It begins with the inquiry exercise I used with my research subjects for my dissertation. You can look back at the instructions I sent last week for details. Then added to that exploration are moving back and forth between a strong narrow focus on the visual object and a more panoramic attention to the whole field of visual experience with the eyes still directed such that the visual object you used for the narrow focus remains in the center of the visual field. You could add in looking for the boundary between knower and known also with the panoramic focus in the same way it is described for the narrow focus on the visual object. Additional explorations include attending to the space between yourself and the visual object (making that space the object of your mindfulness), turning the mind back to find knowing itself (where it is located, etc.), and then dropping all directing of attention altogether. The exploration of what happens especially re the body as you move back and forth between any of these different uses of attention. It's especially in this moving back and forth between these various ways of focusing attention that the subtle energetic patterning activity I describe as characterizing the early links of Dependent Origination may become accessible.

It may be useful to reflect on the questions in the Daily Journal form that I used with my research subjects with regard to these new exercises, as well. Just having the intention to reflect on your experience after a period of practice may help to still the conceptual analysis part of the mind during the actual experiential inquiry. Reflecting on practice afterwards may also trigger new insights or thoughts about new ways to inquire into this area of practice and experience. Remember to stay open to your own curiosity and ideas you have for additional inquiries. There may be ways that are important for you to inquire into this range of experience that were not part of my process. A combination of following more traditional inquiry instructions from my teachers and allowing for my own inquiry creativity, as well, has worked well for me.

Remember that these inquiries are practices. Each time you do them they'll be different. So it's important to stay open to that freshness and to drop any tendency to expect or wish for any experience from a previous session. Gradually over time with continued use, these practices will deepen. I also encourage you to explore them next time you're on retreat, especially when your concentration feels sharp.

## ***Suggested Reading***

“Nagara Sutta: The City,” trans. Ajahn Thaisaro. In this Sutta the Buddha describes his rediscovery of the ancient teaching of Dependent Origination.

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn12/sn12.065.than.html>

Buddha Sutta Awakening 1-3, translated by Ajahn Thanissaro This is a sutta description of the Buddha’s reflections on Dependent Origination in the weeks following his Enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree in Bodhi Gaya.

[http://www.suanmokkh.org/archive/ps/ps\\_005.htm](http://www.suanmokkh.org/archive/ps/ps_005.htm)

“Acela Sutta: To the Clothless Ascetic,” trans. Ajahn Thaisaro. Here the Buddha relates Dependent Origination to *dukkha*, usually translated as “suffering,” but which Ajahn Thanissaro translates as “stress.”

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn12/sn12.017.than.html>

“Kaccayanagotta Sutta: To Kaccayana Gotta (on Right View),” trans. Ajahn Thanissaro. In this sutta, the Buddha relates Dependent Origination to right view.

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn12/sn12.015.than.html>

“Kosambi Sutta: At Kosambi (On Knowing Dependent Co-arising),” trans. Ajahn Thanissaro. In this sutta the Buddha relates insight into Dependent Origination to the stages of enlightenment.

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn12/sn12.068.than.html>

“Loka Sutta: The World,” trans. Ajahn Thanissaro. This sutta focuses on the Buddha’s description of what he calls the “world.” I’ve added a few comments of my own at the end.

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<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn12/sn12.044.than.html>.

Comment: I find it interesting that the Buddha equates the arising of the world with the links beginning with Sense Modalities. This portrayal suggests that what we call the world hasn’t fully come into being in the first four links of Dependent Origination. This makes sense to me since the split into subject and object or self and the physical world the self appears to inhabit doesn’t arise until Nama-Rupa. And yet at Nama-Rupa, its existence is interdependent with the subject that knows the world. The world doesn’t yet appear to have an existence of its own, independent of an observing subject. That doesn’t occur until the link of the Sense Modalities when the truth of underlying interdependence of subject and the objective world is obscured for the first time in the progression of the links.

“Oneness and Manyess - The Lokayatika Sutta” trans. By Ajahn Thanissaro.

In this sutta the Buddha discusses with a cosmologist of his day whether the universe is One or Manifold.

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn12/sn12.048.than.html>

“Bahiya Sutta: About Bahiya” trans. Ajahn Thanissaro. This is a good point in the course to review this important sutta from the first week.

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/ud/ud.1.10.than.html>

And an alternative translation by John Ireland.

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/ud/ud.1.10.irel.html>

“Nidaanam Sutta: Aananda's Mistake,” trans. Maurice Walshe. In this sutta, the Buddha admonishes his cousin and attendant of many years, Ananda, for commenting that he understands Dependent Origination.

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn12/sn12.060x.wlsh.html>

“Atammayata” – A summary of Ajahn Buddhadasa’s teachings on this Pali language term. I believe that this summary was probably written by Ajahn Santikharo, an American disciple of Ajahn Buddhassa, but can’t find confirmation of that on this website. Ajahn Santikharo translates *atammayata* as “unconcoctability.” Ajahn Thanissaro translates the same term as “unfashioned.”

[http://www.suanmokkh.org/archive/sk/atm\\_lostword.htm](http://www.suanmokkh.org/archive/sk/atm_lostword.htm)

*Old Path White Clouds*, Ch. 18: “The Morning Star Has Risen.” Thich Nhat Han’s eloquent account of the Buddha’s enlightenment and the omniscient qualities that his own particularly deep insight into Dependent Origination afforded him. Perhaps this is the depth of Dependent Origination that the Buddha referred to when admonishing his cousin and longtime attendant, Ananda, for his remarks about having understood Dependent Origination.

“The Heart Sutra,” translated by Edward Conze. Notice that in the latter part of the sutra the phrase **“There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so forth, until we come to: There is no decay and death, no extinction of decay and death.”** This passage points to the emptiness of the 12 links of Dependent Origination with only the first and twelfth links specifically mentioned, but with the phrase “and so forth until we come to” indicating that the full sequence of 12 links is referred to. Note also that this passage is followed with the emptiness of the Four Noble Truths, a teaching that, as we have been discussing, is intimately related to Dependent Origination, as well.

<http://kr.buddhism.org/zen/sutras/conze.htm>

“Instructions on Vision in the Middle Way,” at the end of *Calm and Clear*, by Lama Mipham, translation and commentary by Tharthang Tulku. This is one of my favorite Buddhist texts. Relative to our exploration of Dependent Origination, I suggest that it describes the progress of insight from the point where the link of the six sense modalities has been peeled back exposing nama-rupa, on through the peeling back of the rest of links to the dawning of Suchness.

<http://www.seattleinsight.org/Portals/0/Documents/Study%20Materials/Calm-and-Clear-last-section-Mipham-and-Tharthang-Tulku.pdf>

Namkhai Norbu writing about the Supreme Source beyond the division into Samsara and Nirvana. See below.

### ***Book Recommendations***

*Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, edited by Alan Badiner. The whole topic of Dependent Origination is deeply related to the concept and issues of ecology in our 21<sup>st</sup> Century world. This is a book full of fun essays on this topic. I especially recommend two articles as relevant to what we've been exploring in class:

- “The Third Body,” By Joan Halifax
- “Ecology and the Experience of Sacredness,” by Jeremy Hayward

I also promised to include readings relating to Hua-Yen Buddhism. But when I looked through what I have, the readings all felt very dense and perhaps not so useful for this class. However if you have been curious about Hua-Yen Buddhism, you might try the following books with the warning that they're not an easy read:

- *Entry Into the Inconceivable: An Introduction to Hua-Yen Buddhism*, by Thomas Cleary.
- *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality: The Philosophy of Hwa Yen Buddhism*, by Garma C. C. Chang
- *Hua-Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra*, by Francis H. Cook

# Words of Wisdom

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Self-arising wisdom, the essence of all the Buddhas, exists prior to the division of samsara and nirvana and is beyond the limits of transmigration and liberation. As it transcends the four conceptual limits and is intrinsically pure, the original condition is the uncreated nature of existence that has always existed, the ultimate nature of all phenomena. It cannot be identified with a stable and eternal substance allowing the assertion "It is thus!" and is utterly free of all defects of dualistic thought, which is only capable of referring to an object other than itself. It is given the name ineffable and inconceivable "base of primordial purity" (*ye thog ka dag gi gzhi*), beyond the conceptual limits of being and non-being. As its essence is the purity of original emptiness, it transcends the limits of being an eternal substance: it has nothing concrete and no specific characteristics to display. As its nature is self-perfection, it transcends the limit of nothingness and nonbeing: the clarity of light is the pure nature of emptiness. Thus, this natural condition of primordial enlightenment, which is the immutable state of dharmakaya, does not entail subdivision into samsara and nirvana. Self-arising wisdom, primordially empty, is in a condition similar to space, and it pervades all beings without distinction, from glorious Samantabhadra down to the tiniest insect on a blade of grass. For this reason the total state of dharmakaya, the inseparability of the two truths, absolute and relative, is called "the primordial Buddha"....

Quoted from [The Supreme Source](#) by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche