



EVAM ME SUTTAṀ

This is how I heard it

by Patrick Kearney

Week three: Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta

Introduction

This is how I heard it. Once the Blessed One was living at Sāvathī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapindika’s Park. At that time a pernicious view had arisen in a bhikkhu named Sāti, the fisherman’s son, in this way: “As I understand the *dhamma* taught by the Blessed One, it is this same consciousness (*viññāṇa*) that runs (*sandhāvati*) and wanders (*saṃsarati*), not another.”

Several bhikkhus, having heard about this, went to Bhikkhu Sāti and asked him, “Friend Sāti, is it true that such a pernicious view has arisen in you?” “Exactly so, friends. As I understand the *dhamma* taught by the Blessed One, it is this same consciousness that runs and wanders, not another.”

Then those bhikkhus, wanting to detach him from that pernicious view, pressed and questioned and cross-questioned him: “Friend Sāti, do not say so. Do not misrepresent the Blessed One; it is not good to misrepresent the Blessed One. The Blessed One would not speak in this way. For in many discourses the Blessed One has stated that consciousness is dependently arisen (*paṭiccasamuppanna viññāṇa*), since without a condition (*paccaya*) consciousness does not come into being.” Yet although pressed and questioned and cross-questioned by those bhikkhus in this way, Bhikkhu Sāti, the fisherman’s son, still obstinately adhered to that pernicious view and continued to insist upon it. Since the bhikkhus were unable to detach him from that pernicious view they went to the Blessed One, greeted him respectfully, sat down at one side and told him all that had occurred, adding, “Bhante, since we could not detach Bhikkhu Sāti, the fisherman’s son, from this pernicious view, we have reported this matter to the Blessed One.”

Then the Blessed One addressed a certain bhikkhu: “Come, bhikkhu. Tell Bhikkhu Sāti, the fisherman’s son, in my name, that the Teacher calls him.” “Yes, bhante,” he replied, and he went to Bhikkhu Sāti and said: “The Teacher calls you, friend Sāti.” “Yes, friend,” he replied, and he went to the Blessed One, and after greeting him respectfully sat down at one side.

The Blessed One asked him, “Sāti is it true that the following pernicious view has arisen in you: ‘As I understand the *dhamma* taught by the Blessed One, it is this same consciousness that runs and wanders, not another?’” “Exactly so, bhante. As I understand the *dhamma* taught by the Blessed One, it is this same consciousness that runs and wanders, not another.”

“What is that consciousness, Sāti?” “Bhante, it is that which speaks and feels and experiences here and there the result of good and bad actions.”

“You foolish fellow (*mogha-purisa*), to whom have you ever known me to teach *dhamma* in that way? You foolish fellow, have I not stated in many discourses that consciousness is dependently arisen, since without a condition consciousness does not come into being? But you, you foolish fellow, have misrepresented us by your wrong grasp and injured yourself and stored up much demerit (*apuñña*); for this will lead to your harm and suffering for a long time.”

Then the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus: “Bhikkhus, what do you think? Has this Bhikkhu Sāti, the fisherman’s son, kindled even a spark of wisdom in this teaching and training?” “How could he, bhante? No, bhante.” When this was said, Bhikkhu Sāti, the fisherman’s son, sat silent, dismayed, with shoulders drooping and head down, glum, and without response. Then, knowing this, the Blessed One said, “Foolish fellow, you will be recognised by your own pernicious view. I shall question the bhikkhus on this matter.”

Then the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus. “Bhikkhus, do you understand the *dhamma* taught by me as does this Bhikkhu Sāti, the fisherman’s son, when he misrepresents us by his wrong grasp and injures himself and stores up much demerit?” “No, bhante. For in many discourses the Blessed One has stated that consciousness is dependently arisen, since without a condition consciousness does not come into being.”

“Good, bhikkhus. It is good that you understand in this way the *dhamma* taught by me. For in many discourses I have stated that consciousness is dependently arisen, since without a condition consciousness does not come into being. But this Bhikkhu Sāti, the fisherman’s son, misrepresents us by his wrong grasp and injures himself and stores up much demerit; for this will lead to the harm and suffering of this foolish fellow for a long time.

Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta, the Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving, teaches the conditionality of consciousness (*viññāṇa*). We have seen how, for the Buddha, what exists are dependently arisen phenomena (*paṭiccasamuppanna dhammas*), which arise and cease in regular patterns that are mapped by dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). We don’t see this. We think we live in a world that is an independently existing entity, and which is inhabited by independently existing beings. While we are prepared to admit impermanence - that things arise and cease - and causation - things arise and cease because of other things - we retain a fundamental and fixed view about the nature of those things. We think that things themselves are fixed, although they are subject to change. For example, I recognise that “my” circumstances, “my” body and even “my” mind is subject to change, but still I retain the fixed view that there exists an “I” *to whom these changes happen*, who himself does not change, and who therefore somehow exists in a place which is beyond the reach of dependent arising and the dependently arisen.

This view can survive even deep meditation. As I practice, I see ever more deeply into the universality of change, but I retain a fundamental sense that there is someone who is witnessing these changes, someone to whom change happens. In this discourse, Bhikkhu Sāti, the fisherman’s son, has come to this view. An experienced practitioner, he is concerned with the universal question “Who am I?” This is a question regarding identity, and identity requires permanence. To ask, “Who undergoes these changes?,” is to ask, “What remains the same throughout this process of change?” The answer that emerged for Bhikkhu Sāti was: Consciousness (*viññāṇa*), the one who knows, the one who acts (the active side of experience - see the discussion on *nāma* in last week’s notes) and who is acted upon (the passive side of experience - see the discussion on *rūpa* in last week’s notes). As he says to the Buddha, the one who “speaks and feels and experiences here and there the result of good and bad actions.”

Bhikkhu Sāti is clearly influenced by the Buddha’s teaching of rebirth. If there is rebirth, there must be someone or something that is reborn; and that, ultimately, *I am*. Because if there is no-one who is reborn, then who experiences the result of good or bad actions? The Buddha rejects the notion that some-*one* is reborn; but then there must be some-*thing*, and this clearly is consciousness. Bhikkhu Sāti says, “it is this *same* consciousness that runs and wanders, not another.” Remaining the same long enough to be reborn, consciousness is permanent, and therefore “my” ultimate identity must be found in consciousness. It all makes sense. Certainly this logic would make perfect sense to the sages of the Upanisads, for whom this ultimate consciousness, and this ultimate identity, is called *ātman* (self).

But it does not make sense to the Buddha, who declares, “have I not stated in many discourses that consciousness is dependently arisen (*paṭiccasamuppanna viññāṇa*), since without a condition (*paccaya*) consciousness does not come into being?” It is not “this same consciousness” that runs and wanders at all, for at any moment - at this moment - the consciousness which we experience, and with which we identify, has arisen because of a condition, and it ceases because of a condition. This consciousness experienced now is *not* the same consciousness experienced when I began reading this sentence. That consciousness arose and ceased because of conditions; as did the consciousness that read the end of the last sentence; and the beginning of this one; and so on. There is a continuity of consciousness - a “stream” of consciousness (*viññāṇa-sota*) - that flows from the past through the present to the future; but this stream consists of many *dhammas* of consciousness that arise and cease in dependence upon conditions. There is no “same” consciousness that flows. And so the discourse begins with an examination of the conditionality of consciousness.

Consciousness, conditionality and identity

Bhikkhus, consciousness is reckoned (*saṅkhā*) by the particular condition (*paccaya*) dependent upon which it arises. When consciousness arises dependent on eye and forms, it is reckoned as eye-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on ear and sounds, it is reckoned as ear-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on nose and odours, it is reckoned as nose-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on tongue and flavours, it is reckoned as tongue-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on body and tangibles, it is reckoned as body-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on mind and phenomena (*dhammas*), it is reckoned as mind-consciousness.

The Buddha says, “Consciousness is reckoned (*saṅkhā*) by the particular condition (*paccaya*) dependent upon which it arises.” Notice the importance of “reckoning” or “calculation” (*saṅkhā*). We conceptualise the raw experience that makes up our world. Our minds do not simply mirror the sense data that comes streaming in through the six senses, but works it, shapes it in complex ways to construct out of it a sense of “me” and “my world.” We conceptualise or “reckon” our world, and we do so in terms of “What is this *to me*?” Is this pleasant or painful? Useful or useless? Good or bad? Mine or not mine? Me or not me? How we conceptualise our experience conditions how we perceive it (perception *is* a reckoning) and relate to it, and normally our reckoning *assumes* myself, and calculates in such a way as to benefit this assumed self - “What is this to me?” But while the Buddha does not reject reckoning as such, he is re-educating it, training his students to reckon or calculate any given experience in terms of “the particular condition dependent upon which it arises.”

He begins by pointing out that consciousness arises as part of immediate experience, and all experience comes through the six senses of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. He is directing our attention to the fact that seeing is distinctly different from hearing; hearing is distinctly different from smelling; and so on. Normally we miss these distinctions. Looking at me speak, you think you “see” me speaking, but you don’t. You see forms by means of eye-consciousness, and hear sounds by means of ear-consciousness, and they are distinctly different. The notion or reckoning “This is him, speaking” is constructed within the mind by means of mind-consciousness. So the Buddha is training his students to see separately and therefore distinctly - to *vi-passati*, the verb from which we get the noun *vipassanā*, usually translated as “insight” but literally meaning “seeing (*passanā*) separately (*vi*).” When we do not see separately, and therefore distinctly, we assume unity, the one who is seeing and hearing (the self), and the one who is seen and heard (the other). When we see separately we see that each moment of consciousness is distinct and discrete, and so impermanent, arising and ceasing. When we fail to see separately we assume permanence, that over time the same one is seeing and hearing, or over time the same one is being seen and heard. And assuming permanence, we assume self (*ātman*).

Just as fire is reckoned by the particular condition dependent on which it burns - when fire burns dependent on logs, it is reckoned as a log fire; when fire burns dependent on sticks, it is reckoned as a stick fire; when fire burns dependent on grass, it is reckoned as a grass fire; when fire burns dependent on cowdung, it is reckoned as a cowdung fire; when fire burns dependent on chaff, it is reckoned as a chaff fire; when fire burns dependent on rubbish, it is reckoned as a rubbish fire - so too, consciousness is reckoned by the particular condition dependent on which it arises. When consciousness arises dependent on eye and forms, it is reckoned as eye-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on nose and odours, it is reckoned as nose-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on tongue and flavours, it is reckoned as tongue-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on body and tangibles, it is reckoned as body-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on mind and phenomena, it is reckoned as mind-consciousness.

What is a fire? A thing? Or a process? A fire is always in motion, never still. Furthermore, a fire is “fed” by its “fuel,” and what feeds a fire is what defines it. If what feeds a fire is gas, then the fire *is* (reckoned as) a “gas fire.” If what feeds a fire is the bush, then the fire *is* (reckoned as) a “bushfire.” And so on. A fire’s identity *is* “the particular condition dependent upon which it burns,” its “fuel,” what “feeds” it.

In Pāli, the word for “fuel” is *upādāna*, which is also the word for “clinging” or “attachment.” A fire is defined by what fuels it, its *upādāna*; by what it clings to, its *upādāna*. We are defined by what feeds us, by what we cling to. This sutta is about both desire and identity, because for the Buddha, desire *is* identity. We *are* what we desire; we become our defining desires. Our lives have direction, and that direction is governed by our desires and aversions (aversion being the shadow side of desire, always present along with desire). The Buddha says, “What one is desiring gives rise to its appropriate identity (*atta-bhāva*), whether favourable or unfavourable.” (A 3.411) A life spent desiring money gives rise to a different identity than a life spent desiring *dhamma*, that which is true, is real.

Examining insight practice

Seeing arising and cessation

“Bhikkhus, do you see: ‘This has come to be’?” “Yes, bhante.” “Do you see: ‘Its origination occurs with that as nutriment (*āhāra*)’?” “Yes, bhante.” “Do you see: ‘With the cessation of that nutriment, what has come to be is subject to cessation’?” “Yes, bhante.”

Doubt regarding arising and cessation

“Bhikkhus, does doubt (*vicikicchā*) arise when one is uncertain regarding: ‘Has this come to be, or not’?” “Yes, bhante.” “Does doubt arise when one is uncertain regarding: ‘Does its origination occur with that as nutriment, or not’?” “Yes, bhante.” “Does doubt arise when one is uncertain regarding: ‘With the cessation of that nutriment, is what has come to be subject to cessation, or not’?” “Yes, bhante.”

Abandoning doubt

“Bhikkhus, is doubt abandoned in one who sees realistically with perfect wisdom (*yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya*): ‘This has come to be’?” “Yes, bhante.” “Is doubt abandoned in one who sees realistically with perfect wisdom: ‘Its origination occurs with that as nutriment’?” “Yes, bhante.” “Is doubt abandoned in one who sees realistically with perfect wisdom: ‘With the cessation of that nutriment, what has come to be is subject to cessation’?” “Yes, bhante.”

Confidence in insight

“Bhikkhus, are you free from doubt concerning: ‘This has come to be’?” “Yes, bhante.” “Are you free from doubt concerning: ‘Its origination occurs with that as nutriment’?” “Yes, bhante.” “Are you free from doubt concerning: ‘With the cessation of that nutriment, what has come to be is subject to cessation’?” “Yes, bhante.”

What is well seen

“Bhikkhus, has it been well seen (*suditṭha*) by you, realistically with perfect wisdom: ‘This has come to be’?” “Yes, bhante.” “Has it been well seen by you, realistically with perfect wisdom: ‘Its origination occurs with that as nutriment’?” “Yes, bhante.” “Has it been well seen by you, realistically with perfect wisdom: ‘With the cessation of that nutriment, what has come to be is subject to cessation’?” “Yes, bhante.”

Is view a possession?

“Bhikkhus, purified and bright as this view (*diṭṭhi*) is, if you adhere to it, cherish it, treasure it, and treat it as a possession, would you then understand the *dhamma* that has been taught as similar to a raft, being for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping?” “No, bhante.”

“Bhikkhus, purified and bright as this view is, if you do *not* adhere to it, cherish it, treasure it, and treat it as a possession, would you then understand the *dhamma* that has been taught as similar to a raft, being for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping?” “Yes, bhante.”

Here we switch from the theoretical to the practical. The Buddha is examining his students about their *vipassanā* meditation experience, what they *see* when they systematically investigate their own experience. “Do you see, ‘This has come to be?’ ” He is not asking what *is*, implying by his question that there exists a static or permanent entity, but what “has come to be.” He assumes dynamic process, the discontinuity of experience. First, identify what has come to be; identify this experience right here and right now.

Next he asks, “Do you see, ‘Its arising occurs with that as nutriment’?” Process must be fed; if there is process, there must be something feeding process, for otherwise it would cease. So the Buddha is not just asking, “What is there?” He is asking, “What’s happening to make this be there?” And of course, if there is arising there is cessation; if each experience has a beginning, it must have an end. So he next asks, “Do you see, ‘With the cessation of that nutriment, what has come to be is subject to cessation’?”

This investigation uncovers dependent arising and the dependently arisen. When we investigate the particularities of our experience, we see that each experience arises and ceases in dependence on some other experience - each experience is a dependently arisen phenomenon (*paṭiccasamuppanna dhamma*). We then discover particular trajectories of dependently arisen phenomena - specific conditionality (*idappaccayatā*). And at some point, we infer the universality of these patterns of arising and cessation - dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*).

The Buddha then discusses doubt (*vicikicchā*), one of the five hindrances to the cultivation of concentration and insight. Doubt is abandoned to the extent that one *sees*, and what one sees is dependent arising and the dependently arisen. So doubt and its absence is intimately linked to our understanding of dependent arising. Doubt is abandoned by seeing “realistically with perfect wisdom” (*yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya*) dependent arising, and confidence naturally arises from that. Confidence comes from insight, so there is a close link between confidence/faith (*saddhā*) and wisdom (*paññā*). Dependent arising is “well seen” (*suditṭha*) through insight meditation, so the Buddha introduces the notion of right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*), for insight meditation concerns the cultivation of the path factor of right view. This naturally leads into a discussion of our relationship to right view by means of the simile of the raft. The point here is that right view is not a possession. We don’t *have* right view, because right view, like wrong view, arises and ceases dependent upon conditions. Dependent arising excludes the possibility of possession, just as it excludes the possibility of identity.

The four nutriments

“Bhikkhus, there are these four kinds of nutriment (*āhāra*) for the maintenance (*thiti*) of beings that already have come to be and for the entry of those seeking birth. What four? They are: physical food (*kabalīṅkāra*) as nutriment, gross or subtle; contact (*phassa*) as the second; mental volition (*manosañcetanā*) as the third; and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) as the fourth.

“Now, bhikkhus, what do these four kinds of nutriment have as their ground (*nidāna*) and their origin (*samudaya*), from what are they born (*jāti*) and produced (*pabhava*)? These four kinds of nutriment have craving (*taṇhā*) as their ground and their origin; they are born and produced from craving.

“What does this craving have as its ground and its origin, from what is it born and produced? Craving has feeling (*vedanā*) as its ground and its origin; it is born and produced from feeling.

“What does this feeling have as its ground and its origin ...? Feeling has contact (*phassa*) as its ground and its origin ...

“What does this contact have as its ground and its origin ...? Contact has six sense fields (*saḷāyatana*) as its ground and its origin ...

“What do these six sense fields have as their ground and their origin ...? Six sense fields have name-&-form (*nāma-rūpa*) as their ground and their origin ...

“What does this name-&-form have as its ground and origin ...? Name-&-form has consciousness (*viññāṇa*) as its ground and origin ...

“What does this consciousness have as its ground and its origin ...? Consciousness has formations (*saṅkhārā*) as its ground and origin ...

“What do these formations have as their ground and their origin, from what are they born and produced? Formations have ignorance (*avijjā*) as their ground and their origin; they are born and produced from ignorance.

Forward mode of arising

“So, bhikkhus, ignorance conditions formations; formations condition consciousness; consciousness conditions name-&-form; name-&-form conditions six sense fields; six sense fields condition contact; contact conditions feeling; feeling conditions craving; craving conditions clinging; clinging conditions becoming; becoming conditions birth; birth conditions ageing-&-death; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair come to be. Thus is the arising of this entire mass of suffering.

The concept of nutriments (*āhāra*) - that which feeds a process - has already been introduced, and here the Buddha moves to a more detailed discussion. The four nutriments or four foods constitute another version of dependent arising. A nutriment (*āhāra*) is what feeds a process. The Buddha points out that these nutriments are “for the maintenance (*thiti*) of beings that already have come to be and for the entry of those seeking birth.” They are major conditions for personal continuity, and so are associated with identity and rebirth. There are four nutriments: physical food (*kabalīṅkāra*), contact (*phassa*), mental volition (*manosañcetanā*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

What is the body from the perspective of dependent arising? The body is an on-going process which, like any other process, must be fed to be maintained. If it is not fed, it comes to an end - the process runs out of steam. So the first nutriment is physical food. The other three are non-physical. Contact, mental volition and consciousness feed our sense of a permanent or continuous identity, an identity that undergoes change and development through time. This section connects with the teaching on the nature of fire. What is the nutriment of fire? Fuel (*upādāna*), which in Pāli puns

with clinging (*upādāna*). What is the nutriment of nutriment? What feeds nutriment? Craving (*taṇhā*). In the “standard” version of dependent arising, the twelfefold formula, craving conditions clinging. Here, craving conditions nutriment, but of course nutriment and clinging are two different ways of referring to the same process. At the root of it all is craving, the restless desire for something else to be happening.

Consciousness is a nutriment because consciousness is a major contributor to the sense of an on-going identity. Our discourse began with Bhikkhu Sāti’s identification with consciousness, and we can see here that his view is wrong and pernicious because his identification with (the nutriment of) consciousness has been conditioned by craving. Bhikkhu Sāti’s view traps him in craving, because he craves the stability and sense of identity that comes from resting in the notion that *I am* the one who “speaks and feels and experiences here and there the result of good and bad actions.”

Finally, notice how in the section of the four nutriments, consciousness as nutriment (*viññāṇa-āhāra*) is used as the basis of a trajectory of specific conditionality that leads back to craving, feeling, contact, six sense fields, name-&-form, consciousness (again!), formations and ignorance. This shows how the fundamental paradigm of dependent arising (*x-conditions-y*) can be used in many different ways, with specific conditionality traced out in any number of different trajectories. And with consciousness occurring twice in this trajectory (conditioned by formations, and then conditioned by craving) we can see how feedback loops can occur, and notice how consciousness in particular seems to be part of these feedback loops. Last week in Mahānidāna Sutta we looked at the feedback loop between consciousness and name-&-form, and between name-&-form and consciousness. The four nutriments section is followed by a recapitulation of the “standard” twelfefold formula of dependent arising, showing how the four nutriments version constitutes another possible variation, and how all variations are linked by patterns of specific conditionality.

Reverse mode examination of arising

“ ‘Birth conditions ageing-&-death: so it was said. Now, bhikkhus, does birth condition ageing-&-death, or not? How does it seem to you here?’ “ ‘Birth conditions ageing-&-death, bhante. This is how it seems to us here: ‘Birth conditions ageing-&-death.’ “

“ ‘Becoming conditions birth: so it was said. Does becoming condition birth, or not? How does it seem to you here?’ “ ‘Becoming conditions birth. This is how it seems to us here: ‘Becoming conditions birth.’ “

“ ‘Clinging conditions becoming: so it was said. Does clinging condition becoming, or not? How does it seem to you here?’ “ ‘Clinging conditions becoming. This is how it seems to us here: ‘Clinging conditions becoming.’ “

“ ‘Craving conditions clinging: so it was said. Does craving condition clinging, or not? How does it seem to you here?’ “ ‘Craving conditions clinging. This is how it seems to us here: ‘Craving conditions clinging.’ “

“ ‘Feeling conditions craving: so it was said. Does feeling condition craving, or not? How does it seem to you here?’ “ ‘Feeling conditions craving. This is how it seems to us here: ‘Feeling conditions craving.’ “

“ ‘Contact conditions feeling: so it was said. Does contact condition feeling, or not? How does it seem to you here?’ “ ‘Contact conditions feeling. This is how it seems to us here: ‘Contact conditions feeling.’ “

“ ‘Six sense fields conditions contact: so it was said. Do six sense fields condition contact, or not? How does it seem to you here?’ “Six sense fields conditions contact. This is how it seems to us here: ‘Six sense fields conditions contact.’ “

“ ‘Name-&-form condition six sense fields: so it was said. Does name-&-form condition six sense fields, or not? How does it seem to you here?’ “Name-&-form conditions six sense fields. This is how it seems to us here: ‘Name-&-form conditions six sense fields.’ “

“ ‘Consciousness conditions name-&-form: so it was said. Does consciousness condition name-&-form, or not? How does it seem to you here?’ “Consciousness conditions name-&-form. This is how it seems to us here: ‘Consciousness conditions name-&-form.’ “

“ ‘Formations condition consciousness: so it was said. Do formations condition consciousness, or not? How does it seem to you here?’ “Formations condition consciousness. This is how it seems to us here: ‘Formations condition consciousness.’ “

“ ‘Ignorance conditions formations: so it was said. Does ignorance condition formations, or not? How does it seem to you here?’ “Ignorance conditions formations. This is how it seems to us here: ‘Ignorance conditions formations.’ “

Here we have another examination of specific conditionality (*idappaccayatā*) as we had in the dialogue between the Buddha and Ānanda. This is given in the context of Bhikkhu Sāti’s mistaken view and the Buddha’s examination of his students’ meditation experience in terms of nutriment, what feeds any given experience. While the dialogue is ritualised, what is being presented here is a living exchange based on a mutual recognition of experience. “This is my experience of how the meditation process works; how about you?”

Meditation practice is a community activity, for without community we have only isolated individuals locked within their unique, private, subjective experiences; we do not have a contemplative tradition. A tradition of meditation practitioners requires agreement within a community on both method and language. Where such agreement exists, there can be communication; and where communication exists, there can be lineage, the transmission of a contemplative tradition. The method here can be summed up as: for any given experienced phenomenon y , look for x , that which is required for its arising, and without which it would cease. The language can be summed up as: Do not speak in terms of identity (Who experiences y ?), but of dependent arising (What conditions y ?). This section reinforces the understanding that these formulas of dependent arising, all of which are expressions of the deep structure x -conditions- y , are meant to guide *practice*.

Recapitulating arising

Good, bhikkhus. So you say, and so do I:

When this is, that is; because this arises, that arises.

When this is not, that is not; because this ceases, that ceases.

That is, ignorance conditions formations; formations condition consciousness; consciousness conditions name-&-form; name-&-form conditions six sense fields; six sense fields condition contact; contact conditions feeling; feeling conditions craving; craving conditions clinging; clinging conditions becoming; becoming conditions birth; birth conditions ageing-&-death; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair come to be. Thus is the arising of this entire mass of suffering.

This section steps back from particular trajectories of specific conditionality and returns to the underlying principle of dependent arising: “When this is, that is ...” From there we move to the “standard” twelvefold formula of arising, and we have already seen how this connects with the

four nutriments formula, how that formula connects with the practice of insight meditation, and how that connects with our tendency to cling to consciousness. So we can see how the *connections* themselves are what is central to dependent arising, rather than any particular formula which expresses a specific trajectory of connection. The section begins with an expression of agreement within a community: “So you say, and so do I.” Practice and doctrine arise within community, and without agreement on certain ways of conceptualising and doing things, there can be no basis for communication, and so no basis for teaching. This leads us to the next section, which repeats for cessation what has been said for arising.

Forward mode of cessation

“But from the complete fading away and cessation of ignorance, formations cease; from the cessation of formations, consciousness ceases; from the cessation of consciousness, name-&-form ceases; from the cessation of name-&-form, six sense fields cease; from the cessation of six sense fields, contact ceases; from the cessation of contact, feeling ceases; from the cessation of feeling, craving ceases; from the cessation of craving, clinging ceases; from the cessation of clinging, becoming ceases; from the cessation of becoming, birth ceases; from the cessation of birth, ageing-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair cease. Thus is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering.

Reverse mode examination of cessation

“ ‘From the cessation of birth, ageing-&-death ceases:’ so it was said. Now, bhikkhus, does ageing-&-death cease with the cessation of birth, or not? How does it seem to you here?” “From the cessation of birth, ageing-&-death ceases, bhante. This is how it seems to us here: ‘From the cessation of birth, ageing-&-death ceases.’ “

“From the cessation of becoming, birth ceases:’ so it was said. Does birth cease with the cessation of becoming, or not? How does it seem to you here?” “From the cessation of becoming, birth ceases. This is how it seems to us here: ‘From the cessation of becoming, birth ceases.’ “

“From the cessation of clinging, becoming ceases:’ so it was said. Does becoming cease with the cessation of clinging, or not? How does it seem to you here?” “From the cessation of clinging, becoming ceases. This is how it seems to us here: ‘From the cessation of clinging, becoming ceases.’ “

“From the cessation of craving, clinging ceases:’ so it was said. Does clinging cease with the cessation of craving, or not? How does it seem to you here?” “From the cessation of craving, clinging ceases. This is how it seems to us here: ‘From the cessation of craving, clinging ceases.’ “

“From the cessation of feeling, craving ceases:’ so it was said. Does craving cease with the cessation of feeling, or not? How does it seem to you here?” “From the cessation of feeling, craving ceases. This is how it seems to us here: ‘From the cessation of feeling, craving ceases.’ “

“From the cessation of contact, feeling ceases:’ so it was said. Does feeling cease with the cessation of contact, or not? How does it seem to you here?” “From the cessation of contact, feeling ceases. This is how it seems to us here: ‘From the cessation of contact, feeling ceases.’ “

“From the cessation of six sense fields, contact ceases:’ so it was said. Does contact cease with the cessation of six sense fields, or not? How does it seem to you here?” “From the cessation of six sense fields, contact ceases. This is how it seems to us here: ‘From the cessation of six sense fields, contact ceases.’ “

“From the cessation of name-&-form, six sense fields cease:’ so it was said. Do six sense fields cease with the cessation of name-&-form, or not? How does it seem to you here?” “From the cessation of

name-&-form, six sense fields cease. This is how it seems to us here: ‘From the cessation of name-&-form, six sense fields cease.’ “

“From the cessation of consciousness, name-&-form ceases:’ so it was said. Does name-&-form cease with the cessation of consciousness, or not? How does it seem to you here?” “From the cessation of consciousness, name-&-form ceases. This is how it seems to us here: ‘From the cessation of consciousness, name-&-form ceases.’ “

“From the cessation of formations, consciousness ceases:’ so it was said. Does consciousness cease with the cessation of formations, or not? How does it seem to you here?” “From the cessation of formations, consciousness ceases. This is how it seems to us here: ‘From the cessation of formations, consciousness ceases.’ “

“From the cessation of ignorance, formations cease:’ so it was said. Do formations cease with the cessation of consciousness, or not? How does it seem to you here?” “From the cessation of ignorance, formations cease. This is how it seems to us here: ‘From the cessation of ignorance, formations cease.’ “

Recapitulating cessation

“Good, bhikkhus. So you say, and so do I:

When this is, that is; because this arises, that arises.

When this is not, that is not; because this ceases, that ceases.

That is, from the cessation of ignorance, formations cease; from the cessation of formations, consciousness ceases; from the cessation of consciousness, name-&-form ceases; from the cessation of name-&-form, six sense fields cease; from the cessation of six sense fields, contact ceases; from the cessation of contact, feeling ceases; from the cessation of feeling, craving ceases; from the cessation of craving, clinging ceases; from the cessation of clinging, becoming ceases; from the cessation of becoming, birth ceases; from the cessation of birth, ageing-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair cease. Thus is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering.

Again we have repetition, and repetition is emphasis. What is repeated is important. And what is important here? That the specific condition of *this, now*, must be seen; and this event now must be followed up in terms of trajectory-over-time, where the specific condition of *this, now* is followed by the specific condition of *that, now*.

And notice the rhetoric: *x conditions y. Is this true? Do you see this, in this specific instance?* This section, like its counterpart for arising, is emphasising that the individual’s insight is central. It is easy to get the impression from the stylised, even ritualised, manner of expression that the bhikkhus are just being yes-men, but we must look beneath the oral conventions to see what is being expressed. The formulas are expressions of insight arising from practice, and each individual must do that practice for themselves. Take warning, the sutta is saying, from the example of Bhikkhu Sāti: Unless you are impeccable in your practice, you can still end up hopelessly trapped in the net of craving you are trying to escape from by doing the practice. This emphasis on individual practice leads us to our next section.

Knowing and seeing for oneself

Time and identity

“Bhikkhus, knowing (*jānantā*) and seeing (*passantā*) in this way, would you run back to the past:

‘Were we in the past? Were we not in the past? What were we in the past? How were we in the past?

Having been what, what did we become in the past?’” “No, bhante.”

“Knowing and seeing in this way, would you run forward to the future: ‘Shall we be in the future? Shall we not be in the future? What shall we be in the future? How shall we be in the future? Having been what, what shall we become in the future?’” “No, bhante.”

“Knowing and seeing in this way, would you now be inwardly perplexed about the present: ‘Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where will it go?’” “No, bhante.”

Faith and authority

“Bhikkhus, knowing and seeing in this way, would you say: ‘The Teacher (*satṭhar*) is respected by us. We speak as we do out of respect for the Teacher?’” “No, bhante.”

“Knowing and seeing in this way, would you say: ‘The Contemplative (*samaṇa*) says this, and so do (other) contemplatives, but we do not say this?’” “No, bhante.”

“Knowing and seeing in this way, would you acknowledge another teacher?” “No, bhante.”

“Knowing and seeing in this way, would you return to the observances, tumultuous debates and auspicious signs of ordinary contemplatives (*samaṇa*) and priests (*brāhmaṇa*), taking them as the core (of the spiritual life)?” “No, bhante.”

Independence

“Do you speak only of what you have known, seen, and understood for yourselves?” “Yes, bhante.”

“Good, bhikkhus. So you have been guided by me with this *dhamma*, which is directly visible (*sandiṭṭhika*), timeless (*akālika*), verifiable (*ehi-passika*), leading onwards (*opaneyyika*), to be individually experienced by the wise (*paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhi*). For it was with reference to this that it has been said: ‘Bhikkhus, this *dhamma* is directly visible, timeless, verifiable, leading onwards, to be individually experienced by the wise.’”

“Knowing and seeing in this way ...” Here we have an examination of the implications of practice (“seeing”) and insight (“knowing”) in terms of a cluster of interrelated themes. The first is time and identity. When we know and see dependent arising and the dependently arising, we naturally abandon our obsession about time, and therefore about identity. Again, we can see how for the Buddha, time and identity are closely linked. Neither are problems within themselves; the problem is our *obsession* with them. Both time and identity are constructs, and in our obsessive delusion we assume them to be real, rather than know and see them as dependently arisen constructs.

From here we move to issues of faith and authority. The natural result of insight is independence. One who knows and sees does not “speak as we do” out of respect for authority (embodied as “the Teacher”); but nor, with this insight, would she abandon this teacher and acknowledge another, for she now understands what the “core” is, and coming to this understanding through the guidance of the Teacher (and “Teacher” means the Buddha), she now has an unshakeable faith in this *dhamma-vinaya* (teaching and training). And the core of the spiritual life is *dhamma* - truth, or the real. One who has experienced the core cannot “return” to other observances, because insight has that effect - one cannot go back. It’s like the Santa Clause effect. Once we *know* there is no Santa, Christmas can never be the same again. We might want it to be; we might pretend it is; but we can never go back, because we are no longer the person we once were.

This discussion links a number of themes - faith, insight, independence, *dhamma*, and so on. Again, links or connections are central. The *dhamma* as teaching is, as we discussed last year, like a vast relational database, where any given aspect is linked to every other given aspect through the trajectories of specific conditionality. Patterns are central, and for the Buddha, understanding *is* understanding patterns and the trajectories that link and construct patterns.

The wandering-on develops over time

Bhikkhus, the conception of an embryo in a womb takes place through the union of three things. Here, there is the union of the mother and father, but it is not the mother's season, and the *gandhabba* is not present - in this case there is no conception of an embryo in a womb. Here, there is the union of the mother and father, and it is the mother's season, but the *gandhabba* is not present - in this case too there is no conception of an embryo in a womb. But when there is the union of the mother and father, and it is the mother's season, and the *gandhabba* is present, through the union of these three things the conception of an embryo in a womb takes place.

The mother then carries the embryo in her womb for nine or ten months with much anxiety, as a heavy burden. Then, at the end of nine or ten months, the mother gives birth with much anxiety, as a heavy burden. Then, when the child is born, she nourishes it with her own blood; for the mother's breast-milk is called blood in the Noble One's (*ariya*) training.

When he grows up and his faculties mature, the child plays at such games as toy ploughs, tipcat, somersaults, toy windmills, toy measures, toy cars, and a toy bow and arrow.

When he grows up and his faculties mature (still further), the youth enjoys himself provided and endowed with the five cords of sensual pleasure (*kāma-guṇa*), with forms knowable by the eye that are wished for, desired, agreeable and likeable, associated with sensual desire and provocative of passion; with sounds knowable by the ear ... with odours knowable by the nose ... with flavours knowable by the tongue ... with tangibles knowable by the body that are wished for, desired, agreeable and likeable, associated with sensual desire and provocative of passion.

As in Mahānidāna Sutta, we come to an examination of cosmology, of beings being born into specific realms, as a way of discussing issues regarding identity-over-time. And we are reminded that questions of rebirth and of identity-over-time refer to *the same process*. The only difference, from the (first person) perspective of *dhamma*, is that of the unit of time.

Conception arises dependently, when three conditions coincide. As we saw in Buddhaghosa's discussion of dependent arising in Week One, in the formula "When this is, that is ...," "this" is not just one *dhamma*. It refers to a totality of *dhammas*, where the absence of any one of them would prevent the arising of the result ("that"). In insight meditation practice, we look for one *dhamma* - what conditions *this*? - but the *dhamma* we find is just one out of many that are operating. But when we investigate, one *dhamma* will stand out, and so we have the basic instruction to look for what aspect of our experience is "predominant." Finding the predominant experience will lead us into the complex net of conditions and conditioning.

Finally, notice how, as in Mahānidāna Sutta, we are tracing the maturity over time of a human being. In Mahānidāna Sutta the perspective taken is that of the maturing of consciousness over time and the relationship, at any time, between consciousness and name-&-form. Here, the perspective is that of the entangling nature of craving, because this sutta is about craving. The child is entangled with his toys and games, lost in his craving for them; the adult is entangled with "the five cords of sensual pleasure," lost in his craving for them, just like the child is caught up in his games and toys. From the Buddha's point of view, it's the same relationship, one based on an inability to break free of desire and passion - that is, of craving (*taṇhā*).

The wandering-on arises now

On seeing a form with the eye, he is passionate (*sārajjati*) for it if it is pleasing; he is angry (*byāpajjati*) with it if it is displeasing. He lives with attention to body (*kāya-sati*) unestablished, with a limited mind, and he does not understand realistically (*yāthabhūtaṃ nappajānāti*) the deliverance of mind (*cetovimutti*) and deliverance by wisdom (*paññā vimutti*) wherein those evil unwholesome states (*dhammas*) cease without remainder. Engaged as he is in favouring and opposing, whatever feeling he

feels - whether pleasant or painful or neither-pleasant-nor-painful - he delights (*abhinandati*) in that feeling, welcomes it, and remains holding on to it. As he does so, delight (*nandī*) arises in him. Now, delight in feelings (*vedanāsu nandī*) is clinging (*upādāna*). Becoming is conditioned by his clinging; becoming conditions birth; birth conditions ageing-&-death; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair come to be. Thus is the arising of this entire mass of suffering.

On hearing a sound with the ear ... On smelling an odour with the nose ... On tasting a flavour with the tongue ... On touching a tangible with the body ...

On knowing a phenomenon (*dhamma*) with the mind, he is passionate for it if it is pleasing; he is angry with it if it is displeasing. He lives with attention to body unestablished, with a limited mind, and he does not understand realistically the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom wherein those evil unwholesome states cease without remainder. Engaged as he is in favouring and opposing, whatever feeling he feels - whether pleasant or painful or neither-pleasant-nor-painful - he delights in that feeling, welcomes it, and remains holding on to it. As he does so, delight arises in him. Now delight in feelings is clinging. Becoming is conditioned by his clinging; becoming conditions birth; birth conditions ageing-&-death; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair come to be. Thus is the arising of this entire mass of suffering.

The sutta is switching from the diachronic to the synchronic, from process-over-time to the constructed and conditioned nature of this, now. Here, after looking at process-over-time in terms of the conception, growth and maturity of a human being, and seeing how the being is progressively caught up in craving, the discourse takes a cross-section which shows us how this process works at any given time - how it works *now*. How does craving work, now.

At any given moment - at *this* moment - a dependently arisen phenomenon arises, and we react to it depending on whether we find it pleasing or displeasing. If we discern it as pleasing, we are "passionate" for it; if we find it displeasing, we are "angry" with it. This is an expansion of "feeling conditions craving," the conditional relationship between our evaluation of any given experience and our affective response to it.

Here "delight" (*nandī*) implies a quality of excitement, even panic, in the mind which is part of desire. Like when we are standing in a queue boarding a bus and we realise we might not be able to get on - bound by our desire we feel agitated, and have an urge to shove the person in front out of our way. "Passion" (*rāga*) literally means "colour." It indicates the colouring of the mind, like when we "see red," and so implies obsession, the inability to see beyond something and so to let it go. More than just having a good time, it involves a state of emotional investment and obsession that is characterised by an inability to let go of the search for a good, or bad, time. So for the Buddha, passion and delight are associated with lack of freedom, and therefore with *dukkha*. In the four noble truths, the Buddha defines craving as "bound up with passion and delight (*nandī-rāga-sahagatā*). So this passage is an expansion of the conditional relationship between craving and clinging; and in the context of the four nutriments, clinging (*upādāna*) is what feeds (*upādāna*) the whole process of the arising of suffering.

This process, of being trapped in favouring and opposing, obsessed with the object of desire or aversion, is arising now; and it can cease, now. But if it does not cease, now, it continues through time as birth conditioning ageing-&-death. How do we prevent this? By practising the path, which we find in the next section.

Cultivating the path

Acquiring faith

"Here, bhikkhus, a *tathāgata* appears in the world, accomplished (*arahaṃ*), fully awakened (*sammāsambuddha*), endowed with knowledge and conduct (*vijjācaraṇasampanna*), well-gone

(*sugata*), knower of the world (*lokavidū*), unsurpassed trainer of people with the potential for training (*anuttara purisadammasārathi*), teacher of gods and people (*satthā devamanussāna*), awakened (*buddha*) and blessed (*bhagavan*). He declares this world with its gods, its Māras and its Brahmās, this generation with its contemplatives and priests, its princes and peoples, which he has himself realised with direct knowledge. He teaches the *dhamma* good in the beginning, good in the middle and good in the end, with the right meaning and phrasing, and he reveals a holy life that is utterly perfect and pure.

“A householder or householder’s son or one born into some other clan hears that *dhamma*. On hearing that *dhamma* he acquires faith in the *Tathāgata*. Possessing that faith, he ... shaves off his hair and beard, puts on the brown robe, and goes out from home into homelessness.

Practising ethics

“Having gone out and possessing the bhikkhu’s training and way of life, abandoning the killing of living beings, he abstains from killing living beings ...

Restraining the sense faculties

“... On seeing a form with the eye, he does not grasp at its sign and detailed features ...

Acting with clear understanding

“He becomes one who acts with clear understanding (*sampajāna-kārī*) ...

Abandoning the hindrances

“Possessing this aggregate of noble ethics, and this noble restraint of the sense faculties, and possessing this noble attention and clear understanding (*sati-sampajañña*), he resorts to a secluded resting place ... sits down, crosses his legs, straightens his body, and establishes his attention (*sati*). Abandoning desire for the world (*abhiijham loke*), he purifies his mind from desire. Abandoning ill will and hatred (*byāpāda-padosa*), he lives with a mind free from ill will ... Abandoning stiffness and torpor (*thīna-middha*), he lives free from stiffness and torpor ... Abandoning restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), he lives undisturbed with a mind inwardly peaceful ... Abandoning doubt (*vicikiccha*), he lives having gone beyond doubt ...

Cultivating *jhāna*

“Having thus abandoned these five hindrances, imperfections of the mind that weaken wisdom ... he enters upon and abides in the first *jhāna* ... With the stilling of applied and sustained application, he enters upon and abides in the second *jhāna* ... With the fading away as well of rapture ... he enters upon and abides in the third *jhāna* ... With the abandoning of pleasure and pain ... he enters upon and abides in the fourth *jhāna* ... which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of attention due to equanimity.

Here we return to linear process over time. In this instance, it is the gradual training that takes the mind from the gross to the subtle and prepares it for insight. It involves faith (*saddhā*) - which is not incompatible with insight - ethics, restraining the sense faculties, acting with clear understanding, abandoning the hindrances and cultivating *jhāna*, or meditative absorption.

The wandering-on ceases now

“On seeing a form with the eye, he is not passionate for it if it is pleasing; he is not angry at it if it is displeasing. He lives with attention to body established, with an immeasurable mind, and he understands realistically the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom wherein those evil unwholesome states cease without remainder. Having abandoned favouring and opposing, whatever feeling he feels - whether pleasant or painful or neither-pleasant-nor-painful - he does not delight in that feeling, welcome it, or remain holding to it. As he does not do so, delight in feelings ceases in him. From the cessation of his delight comes cessation of clinging; from the cessation of clinging, the cessation of becoming; from the cessation of becoming, the cessation of birth; from the cessation of

birth, ageing-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair cease. Thus is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering.

“On hearing a sound with the ear ... On smelling an odour with the nose ... On tasting a flavour with the tongue ... On touching a tangible with the body ...

On knowing a phenomenon with the mind, he is not passionate for it if it is pleasing; he is not angry at it if it is displeasing. He lives with attention to body established, with an immeasurable mind, and he understands realistically the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom wherein those evil unwholesome states cease without remainder. Having abandoned favouring and opposing, whatever feeling he feels - whether pleasant or painful or neither-pleasant-nor-painful - he does not delight in that feeling, welcome it, or remain holding to it. As he does not do so, delight in feelings ceases in him. From the cessation of his delight comes cessation of clinging; from the cessation of clinging, the cessation of becoming; from the cessation of becoming, the cessation of birth; from the cessation of birth, ageing-&-death sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair cease. Thus is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering.

From the diachronic we return to the synchronic. Gradually, over time, we develop the practice. At any point along that progression of the path we can acquire insight; and insight entails the cessation of delusion and therefore of suffering. This is because insight is always insight into the constructed and contingent nature of *this* experience, *now*; and *this* experience, *now*, is always available.

Notice how attention (*sati*) must be based *in the body*. The physicality of the practice is being emphasised. And notice how “birth, ageing-&-death sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair” all cease *now*. There is no mention here of birth ceasing sometime in the future - no reference, here, to rebirth.

Conclusion

“Bhikkhus, remember this deliverance through the destruction of craving as taught in brief by me. But Bhikkhu Sāti, the fisherman’s son, is caught up in a vast net of craving, in a trammel of craving.”

This is what the Blessed One said. The bhikkhus were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

We end with a reminder of the net of craving within which Bhikkhu Sāti is trapped. What does he crave? How is he trapped? And how can he escape? There is a Zen story about a Zen student who found a bottle with a ship constructed within it. The problem he was faced with is: How do you get the ship out of the bottle without breaking the bottle? The student grew increasingly frustrated as he tried to work this out, and finally, in despair, he rang his teacher and pleaded for the answer. The teacher replied, “Forget about the ship; just get out of the bottle!”