

Conditioned Arising

A doctrine strongly related to the teaching on the four True Realities for the Spiritually Ennobled, particularly the second, is that of 'Conditioned Arising' (*paticca-samuppada*, Skt *pratitya-samutpada*; also translated as 'Dependent Origination'). The key sources for this doctrine are the *Nidana Samyutta* (S.II.1–133) and the *Mahanidana Sutta* (D.II.55–71).

The understanding of Conditioned Arising is so central to Buddhist practice and development that the Buddha's chief disciple, Sariputta, said, 'Whoever sees Conditioned Arising sees *Dhamma*, whoever sees *Dhamma* sees Conditioned Arising' (M.I.191). Moreover, the Buddha referred to it and *Nirvana* as the 'profound, difficult to see' *Dhamma* understood by him at his awakening (M.I.167), and taught that rebirth continues until such understanding is attained (D.II.55).

In its abstract form, the doctrine states: 'That being, this comes to be; from the arising of that, this arises; that being absent, this is not; from the cessation of that, this ceases' (S.II.28). This states the principle of conditionality, that all things, mental and physical, arise and exist due to the presence of certain conditions, and cease once their conditions are removed: nothing (except *Nirvana*) is independent. The doctrine thus complements the teaching that no permanent, independent self can be found.

The abstract principle expresses the general pattern found in series of conditioned and conditioning links (*nidana*), culminating in the arising of *dukkha*, with *dukkha* ending when these cease. A standard formula of twelve *nidanas* is most common, but there are also variations on this, which emphasize the contribution of other conditions.

These variations show that the 'that' of the abstract formula is not a single determining cause, but a major condition, one of several. Each is a necessary condition for the arising of 'this', but none is alone sufficient for this to happen.

Thus the Theravadin commentator Buddhaghosa says: 'Here there is no single or multiple fruit of any kind from a single cause; nor a single fruit from multiple causes . . . But one representative cause and fruit are given in this way, "with spiritual ignorance as condition are the constructing activities"' (*Vism.*542).

A key example of conditionality not involving a single determining cause is that craving is said to arise conditioned by feeling: spiritual ignorance must also be a condition for this, as an awakened person has feeling, but no craving.

The standard formula (e.g. S.II.1-2; BW.353) begins 'with spiritual ignorance as condition are the constructing activities; with the constructing activities as condition is consciousness', and then continues through a series of other conditions. The series runs: (1) spiritual ignorance→ (2) constructing activities→ (3) (discriminative) consciousness→ (4) mind-and-body/the sentient body→ (5) the six sense-bases→ (6) sensory stimulation→ (7) feeling→ (8) craving→ (9) grasping→ (10) becoming→ (11) birth→ (12) ageing, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, unhappiness and distress; 'Thus is the origin of this whole bundle of pain (*dukkha-kkhandha*)'. This sequence may be explained either from (1) through to (12) or the explanation may start at (12), then specify (11) as its crucial condition, and so on back to (1).

After the formula is given in either versions of this forward (*anuloma*) mode, it follows in 'reverse' (*patiloma*) mode. In this form, it describes how the cessation of *dukkha* is from the complete cessation of spiritual ignorance and the consequent cessation of each following *nidana* . . .

[This formula] explains how *dukkha*, the first True Reality for the Spiritually Ennobled, comes about, the originating set of conditions for this being the second True Reality. The formula in reverse mode describes the cessation of *dukkha*, namely *Nirvana*, the third True Reality (A.I.177). It is also said that the Noble Eight-factored Path, the fourth True Reality, is the way going to the cessation of each of the twelve links, and thus of *dukkha* (S.II.43 and 56-9; BW.355-6).

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