

12 Links of Interdependent Origination

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In order to actualize this very session as a cause of enlightenment, one should engage into this session with the right motivation. By inspiring oneself from depth of our heart, thinking that “The purpose of my life is to bring as much as benefits to the numerous being up to fully enlightenment, that as long as mother beings remain in this samsara, I too will remain in this samsara to bring benefits to them. Until I achieve the realization up to the Arya being’s realization, I will never give up mother beings. And I will at least create the condition to those beings who are suffering by creating the condition of virtue, sending them dedications of merits. Even the activities in the day-to-day life such as working, family life, attending dharma discussion session, sleeping, eating and every single act in our life is to actualize the causes and conditions to liberate other beings from suffering. The quicker we actualize fully enlightenment, the quicker we can bring benefits to numberless beings. For that reason, may this session also be for that purpose. I will try to understand the meaning of the Buddha’s teaching. I will try my best to cultivate those teachings and live a life applying those teachings.”

Normally, in order to create the complete formation of karma (either virtuous or non-virtuous), apart from the object, there are 3 other factors, namely of the motivation at the beginning, then the actual action and at the end, a sense of completion.

When we are engaging in virtuous action, this final stage is to conclude with the dedication of the merit but if we start the action without a virtuous motivation, the virtuous karma won't be complete. Therefore, the motivation is important, not just during the dharma practice but also in our daily life. Even when conditions are such that we have no choice but to engage in negative action, we should at least set a virtuous motivation or hold a virtuous thought, so that our action will not result in the complete formation of negative karma. In that way, one will not experience the complete ripening results of the negativities of suffering. This is clearly illustrated in the teaching on the 12 links of dependent origination.

For the small capability being (who relies on the Initial Scope teachings), this 12 links teaching looks at how they create the negative effects of being in samsara. This teaching is also relevant to the middle capability being as the study of the 12 links in reverse order show how the elimination of one link can lead to the subsequent elimination of all links. This teaching is taught to the high capability being, by teaching how to study the 12 links in both the forward sequence (showing formation of samsara) as well as its reverse sequence (eradication of samsara). It also illustrates dependent origination of the 12 dependent arisings/links.

Question: Geshela, can you elaborate on what you mean by studying in the reverse order?

Answer:

First we need to look at the cycle of the 12 links in a forward or clockwise manner, beginning with ignorance, which produces compositional factors, which is embedded in the consciousness and so on. The reverse way (counter-clockwise direction) of analysing the 12 links is by understanding that if one avoids ignorance, then is able to avoid negative compositional factors, which in prevent contaminated consciousness and so on.

The 12 links teaching is also taught to the higher capability beings in order that they understand how samsara comes about and how it can be purified.

Therefore, this 12 links of dependent origination teachings is therefore the common teaching for practitioners of all levels.

The study of the 12 links of dependent origination helps us to understand the Four Noble Truths at a deeper level. The straightforward approach to studying the 12 links explains the first two truths from the Four Noble Truths, namely, the truth of suffering and the truth that there is a cause to suffering. The analysis of the 12 links in reverse sequence helps us to understand the next 2 of the Four Noble Truths i.e. the Truth of Cessation and the Truth of the Path i.e. by understanding and engaging in the reverse sequence of the 12 links, one can achieve liberation through engaging in the Four Noble Truths as the basis. On top of this understanding, the higher capability being cultivates compassion and bodhichitta.

When the Buddha's main disciples, Shariputra and Maudgalyana occasionally travelled to different places, they would teach the 12 links to liberate their students.

You have in front of you, the drawing of Wheel of Life. A long time ago, in order to subdue one of the kings in India, Buddha's disciples decided to send this picture to the king with an explanation on the 12 links and how samsaric existence comes, as well as the reverse way to show how to liberate oneself from the samsara. The old king reflected deeply on these two teachings single-pointed concentration meditation and was able to obtain liberation. Just by reflecting on the drawing on the Wheel of Life, he was able to gain realization on the Four Noble Truths, gain total renunciation of samsara and have an unshakeable conviction in liberation. Then by further engaging into the practice of the Five Paths, he actualized liberation. From that moment on, the Buddha's disciples saw the importance of the 12 links of dependent origination teachings. They decided that this teaching should be both in picture form as well as in written form and that's how this picture came about.



Picture 1: Wheel of Life

Wheel of Life

In this picture, the wheel is held by a scary looking being named Yama, the Lord of Death. Yama or death, in fact resides within every living being. There is no escape from death as long as we are a samsaric living being. Yama the Lord of Death is not really in the form of the being in that picture but it does indicate an experience of terror (if one has no Dharma at the time of death). The picture depicts that when Yama opens his mouth, the process of death beings. At the same time, this wheel is held up by the two feet and 2 hands of Yama, which symbolize ignorance and karma, as well as the Truth of suffering and the Truth of the causes of suffering. Within that wheel, the first outer ring illustrates the 12 links, which will be elaborated upon later.

Next you see a drawing that is half black, half white with a drawing of human beings rolling down to signify that if you create negative karma, you will be dragged down to the lower realms in the black circle.

On the white side, if you create virtuous karma, one will be gradually liberated from the six realm's sufferings and attain Buddhahood.

Now the final inner circle: There are three animals. First one is the pig that symbolizes ignorance, followed by the phoenix which represents attachment, followed by the snake, which is anger. These are the three poisons/delusions. So, now, the root of the entire wheel of samsara comes from ignorance. Whether one is born with the precious human rebirth, ignorance is still present.

Notice then the phoenix's (attachment) tail coming out from within the pig's (ignorance) mouth. This means that ignorance produces attachment and attachment produces or enhances anger. Then anger further enhances ignorance. So it goes on this way, in a circle. So with this three root causes, it produce two types of karma. One is black karma, one is white karma. Or one is negative karma (that will bring the 3 lower rebirths), one is virtue karma (that will bring the 3 higher rebirths but still in samsara). But in the centre of that, again the term we call "miyowa", invariable karma or neutral karma (which is mixed with some virtue) which produces the result of born in the god realm and demi-god realm.

So three poisons produce three types of karma, which in turn give rise to the six realms. Virtuous karma produces human form and invariable karma produces god-beings (devas) and demi-god beings (asuras). Negative karma produces the lower realms of the animal realm, hungry-ghost realm and hell realm. The three poisons created three types of karma and the 6 types of realms-beings. These 6 realm beings do not remain in one realm forever. Human beings do not remain only in human being realms. Hell beings do not remain in hell realms. All samsaric beings circle between the 6 realms. How do they circle? They circle based on the dependently existing 12 links and all of these under the control of death.

12 Links of Interdependent Origination

Buddha originally spoke of the 18 links of dependent arising. Maitreya condensed the 18 links into the 12 links we are now studying. In essence, they are no different. So what are the 18 dependent originations? They come about because the twelfth link of aging and death was split into 2 but Maitreya condensed them into one because it is not necessary that aging is experienced before the death. Some humans die soon after birth. They don't experience the process of aging. Aging can be the initial stage of the death or aging can be at the same time as the time of the death or aging may not be experienced at all and death comes. Thus, Maitreya saw no fault in condensing aging and death into one link.

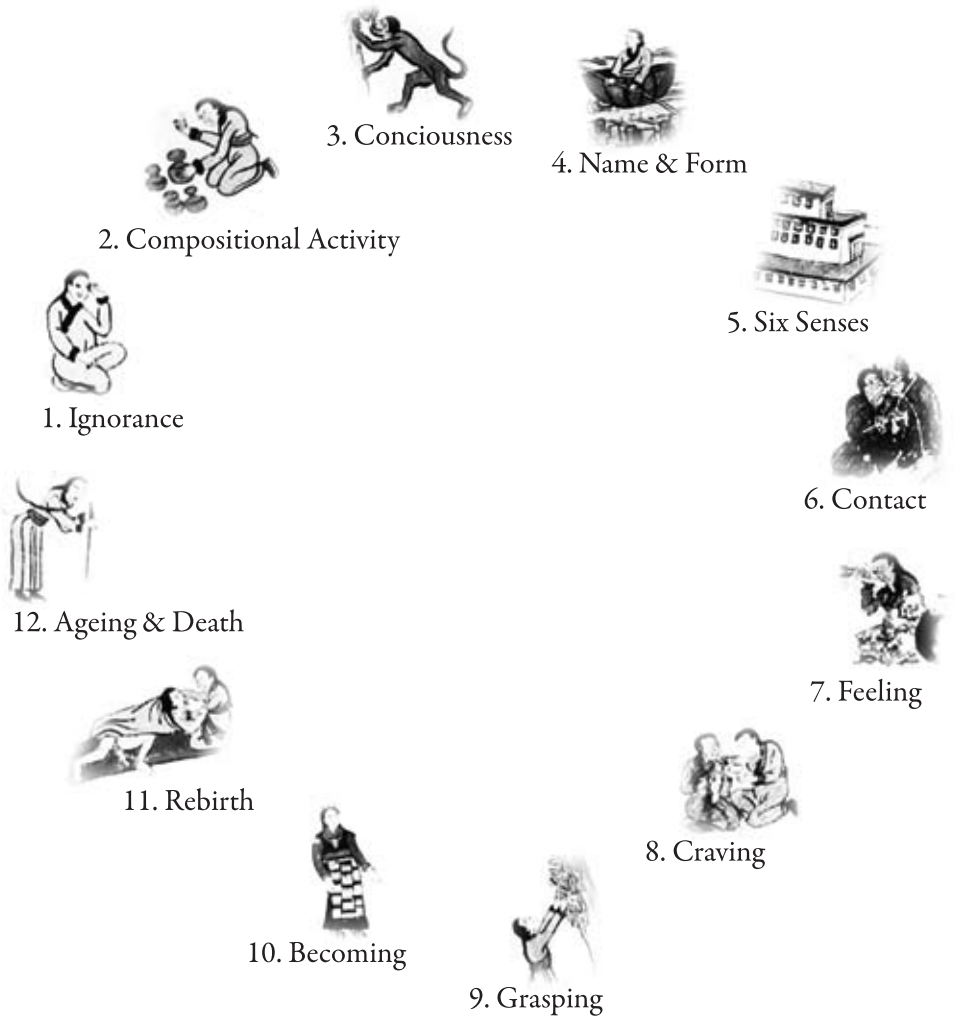
Further, in the sutra (which expounded the 18 links), Buddha stated that aging is the 12th link, death is the 13th and the 14th is the moaning that follows after death. You know. "Ai yaaa... Ai yooo..." All those things that people utter when grieving over the loss of a loved one. Number 15 is the expression of sadness. Then number 16, the experience of suffering of those people left behind who experience sadness. A person's consciousness even after death is able to see and perceive. After somebody dies, if you cry, if you feel sad, the deceased person's consciousness can sense that we are crying and due to that, the attachment in that deceased person's consciousness will increase and find it very difficult to accept the fact that death has separated that deceased person from the family and loved ones. When this happens, rebirth becomes difficult and if this attachment lingers too long, then after 49 days, there is a danger of taking rebirth in the wondering spirits (preta realm). Many of the deceased.

beings who see the suffering of the living ones and due to that, the deceased being also experiences suffering. So that is number 16.

Due to this great suffering which leaves such a strong and painful imprint in the heart of both the living one and the deceased, it gives rise to link number 18 which is confusion. The deceased one becomes confused and doesn't know where to choose rebirth. Even if Lamas have been called in to perform jangwa pujas or recite sutras, the deceased person's consciousness remains confused. Instead of hearing the sutra, it only hears the loved one crying. Because they already experience so much confusion, they are even confused about choosing which path. Then, again, there is a danger of falling into becoming a wandering spirit. Then the living ones also, due to so much moaning, expressing sadness, feeling sad, also end up confused. They don't know what to do, they don't want to eat, don't want to talk to people, remain locked inside the house, don't want to see sun, don't want to see moon, don't want to eat instant noodle (laughter). So Buddha spoke of the many beings who experience these 18 links of dependent existing. Maitreya condensed it into 12 because the 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th links can be experienced within the life at the time of aging or even at the time of death. That how 18 links were condensed into 12 links.

To summarise, the 12 links can be categorised into 3 broad headings of delusions, action/karma and sufferings. The delusions are ignorance (1st link), craving (8th link) and grasping (9th link). The action/karma links are the 2nd (the potter) and 10th link (potential existence). The other links like consciousness, name and form, contact, feeling etc are sufferings.

12 Links of Interdependent Origination



Picture 2: The 12 links

The 12 links are as follows:

- ❧ The first image is that of old blind man representing ignorance (one of the root delusions);
- ❧ The second image is that of a potter moulding a pot and this we call compositional activity i.e. karmic action.
- ❧ The third image shows a monkey jumping from the tree which represents consciousness. To re-cap, ignorance produces karma, karma leaves a imprint in one's consciousness and why the jumping monkey used to represent consciousness? Because our consciousness is very unstable, rarely still and every single moment the consciousness can jump from one point to another, to every corner of the world.
- ❧ The fourth image of a man and a rowing boat is the representation for name and form. The man in the boat symbolizes name and the boat symbolizes form.
- ❧ The fifth image is that of a completely built house but is empty inside. This image represents the 6 senses.
- ❧ The sixth image shows a man and a woman embracing each other to represent contact.
- ❧ The seventh image presents feeling and it shows a person poking an arrow into his eye, giving rise to the feeling of pain.
- ❧ The eighth image relates to craving and is represented by a drunken man.

- ❧ The ninth image relates to grasping, as indicated by a monkey plucking a fruit.
- ❧ The tenth image is called “becoming” or potential existence, as illustrated by a pregnant woman giving birth to a child.
- ❧ The eleventh image shows rebirth, a baby being born.
- ❧ The twelfth image shows some vultures looking at a person walking by. Vultures feed on corpses.

This illustrates how the ignorance leads to the up to the end of the suffering of the aging and death.

Now I will go through the 12 links based on the Lam Rim text. The 1st link of ignorance. Ignorance is like the father of all the faults. Ignorance is the producer of entire samsara. So ignorance is the blind consciousness which is opposite from the wisdom mind. Why blind? Blind in not being able to see or realize the reality of the existence, not realizing the true nature of the I. The consciousness which fails to realize the truth of the lack of inherent existence is called ignorance. The consciousness which is confused about the non-existent I.

The ignorance is the consciousness which is unaware of reality. It is in the aspect of total darkness. It can't see any truth and it only engages into faults and only lead to suffering.

In the Indian Pandit Asanga's Compendium of Knowledge stated that there are two types confusion or ignorance. One is the ignorance of cause and effect i.e. of karma. And the second one,

is the ignorance of meaning of reality i.e. not realizing the absence of inherent existence of the “I”.

Through the first type of ignorance (of karma), you engage into the non-virtuous karma, you accumulate compositional factors (karmic imprints) for rebirth in the miserable lower realms.

Through the second type of ignorance (of reality), you accumulate the compositional activities of rebirth in the higher realms but you are still trapped in samsara. Even when accumulating merits, one can continue to be led by the ignorance. You might feel that it does not make sense that the accumulation of virtues is also introduced by ignorance but in fact, until we are able to accumulate virtues with the correct understanding of reality, then whatever one does involves ignorance. Therefore, even higher rebirths, all the enjoyment one finds within the human realm, within the god realm all come from ignorance. And which ignorance is that? The ignorance of reality; the ignorance in realizing the meaning of reality; the ignorance which does not realize the selflessness of “I” and selflessness of phenomena. Due to that ignorance and its imprints, compositional activities or compositional karma arises. That karma you call virtuous karma produces either higher rebirth like a human rebirth where happy moments and temporary sense pleasures are experienced (but notice that this momentary happiness does not last). This is because the root is a delusion, namely ignorance. The ignorance which fails to realize the absence of the inherently existing “I”. Add to that, the ignorance which fails to realize cause and effect (law of karma). These produce the accumulation of non-virtuous action and that in turn produces the result of hell, hungry ghost and animal realms.

So these two types of ignorance produce these different compositional karma or the connective actions of karma. Further, there are two kinds of karma. The non-meritorious karma, which brings about miserable, lower rebirth and meritorious karma, which brings about higher rebirth. The higher rebirth realms, are further divided into two types:

- (i) karma which give rise to rebirths into the Desire Realm such as human rebirth and
- (ii) invariable karma (neutral karma mixed with virtuous karma) which give rise to rebirth into the god realm or demi-god realms.

Virtuous deeds like avoiding the 10 non-virtues produce the result of birth in the human realm with its sense pleasures, including meeting dharma in your life which is also due to the meritorious karma in the past, having good family, good job, even one moment of happiness, all are results of meritorious karma. However, one needs to know that even such virtuous karma is introduced by ignorance as long as these deeds were done without realizing the reality of self and phenomena i.e. without realizing emptiness.

As for negative karma, such as engaging into any form of ten non-virtues; is creating karma to born in the three lower realms. The lighter non-virtues committed will cause one to be born into the animal realm; the heavier non-virtue into the hungry ghost

realm and the heaviest engagement of the 10 non-virtuous actions, will secure a rebirth in the hell realms. Non virtues such as killing, lying, stealing, sexual misconduct, including gossiping about others' faults, complaining about others, looking down on others, criticizing others, all these are the non-virtuous karma. And if it is a very strong and at the end you feel like "Wah, today I was able to express all these (negative) thoughts from this person to that person", then you complete the heaviest karma and will be born into the hell realms. Even without the motivation to gossip, you meet someone who is gossiping and you happily get one cup of "Teh Tarik" and sit next to him or her, then you listen to the gossip, you enjoy, then you also input one or two word, then at the end you feel "Wah, today I got the chance to hear (negative) things about this person. Only today I realize that that person is so bad. If I didn't hear this, I would never have known that person." Then you feel a kind of satisfaction at having participated in the gossip. For this, most likely a hungry-ghost rebirth will result.

Another situation could be that there was no motivation to listen to gossip but you did hear and at the end you don't feel anything in particular, that's it. You created the karma. You are most likely to be born into animal realm. So you see, it is very dangerous. Karma arises easily. If somebody is gossiping, you better run away. If somebody is talking bad things about others, the best thing is to run away. Otherwise, at the end, one will suffer. The person who is gossiping will never compensate you for your suffering. Nobody will share your suffering. Once you hear, you alone have to suffer. So the best thing is you better escape.

So these different compositional activities produce the third of the twelve links. Look at the picture of the monkey jumping and titled “Consciousness”. Through creation of various compositional activities, engaging into so many collective activities, all kinds of imprints are planted in one’s consciousness. In the sutra, the Buddha speaks about the six type of consciousness - the eye consciousness, ear consciousness, taste consciousness, touch consciousness, nose consciousness and mental consciousness. But the main, fundamental consciousness is the mental consciousness. All karmic imprints are found in mental consciousness. You do all sort of actions and the imprints are left in one’s consciousness. There is no way to run from this. Through the ignorance, the first of the twelve links, the old lady who is blind, she doesn’t know where she comes from or where she is going and from which direction and to where. She just simply uses the stick to randomly move about. This then leads to the next link of the pot-maker who makes all sorts of fashionable pots. Some are colourful, some are attractive, some are ugly, some are very expensive, some are very cheap. This is an illustration of all sorts of compositional activity. Similarly, due to one’s engagement in all sorts of compositional activities, a variety of imprints are left in the consciousness, which makes you unable to concentrate for even one second in a positive/virtuous manner. It is like one moment you are thinking this and in the next moment, you thinking that. You are like the totally crazy monkey leaping from one branch to another. Your mind is totally distracted and jumping from one point to another. You can’t handle this well. In one second, you have a thousand of different thoughts.

This mental consciousness, which stores the imprint becomes the vessel which accumulates both virtuous and non-virtuous karma which in turn causes you to experience happiness and suffering respectively.

Here it says that these latent karmic propensities infuse your consciousness. This means they leave an imprint. Then the consciousness of the lifetime in which this happens is “the consciousness of the causal period,” i.e. when the cause for a result is first created. So the twelve links of dependent origination can be divided into 4 limbs i.e. two causal limbs and two resultant limbs.

The projecting (throwing) limb consist of ignorance,

1. compositional factors and consciousness at the time the cause is created.

The actualizing limb consists of the craving, grasping and

2. becoming links.

The projected limb is made up of name & form, 6 senses,

3. contact and feeling.

The actualized/ resultant limb is rebirth, aging and death.

- 4.

The projecting limb and actualizing limb are causal limbs because they cause or set into motion, future results. As regards the other two limbs i.e. the projected limb and the actualized limb, these

are the resultant limbs because the result are experienced through these. Arising from these actual and resultant limbs, it can be seen that the twelve links of dependent origination will be experienced, in a minimum period of two lives and the longest period will be three lives, but not necessarily 2 or 3 consecutive lives because there may be interruptions during the 12 links process due to varying intensities of karma ripening. Thus, the 12 links can end up being experienced over millions of life times. For example, at the time of dying, even though one was going to experience the resultant karma of human rebirth in next life but at the time of dying, great fear or anxiety arose to the point of stopping your breath and that strong negative state of mind triggers a lower realm rebirth. Thus, instead of experiencing a human realm rebirth, one experiences a lower realm rebirth. This is now the process of the 12 links can be interrupted.

The consciousness of the lifetime in which this happen is the “consciousness of the casual period.” Casual period means the period where causes are created to project one into future results. The consciousness which is reborn into a particular realm is known as the “consciousness of the effect period”. It is talking about two lifetimes.

Due to the power of your confusion (the ignorance) about the reality of selflessness, you perceive higher realms to be happy, not understanding that they are also suffering realms. Through such misconceptions you accumulate virtuous karma and invariable karma in a manner which keeps you locked in samsara (because these karmas are being performed without full understanding of the selfless/emptiness of the I and of phenomena).

Through the ignorance which fails to understand the reality of “I”, you see or project human realms and god realms as happy realms and then you do puja or engage into dharma practice or even charity. You accumulate virtue (but not the virtue which will liberate you from samsara), so the result is to be born in the god realm.

Next we come to Name-and-Form. “Name” refers to four of the five aggregates that are nonphysical namely feeling, discrimination, compositional factors, and consciousness. Form is the physical aggregate from the five aggregates. If however, you are reborn into the Formless Realm, you have no actual form. So one who happens to be born in the Formless Realm, there is no physical form, only the seed/potential of form which makes it possible for one to accumulate causes or links and then in the next rebirth you are able to be born in the Desire Realms or the Form Realm. Thus, the “form” in the term “Name-and-Form” applies to any form, such as the fertilized ovum or any form other than the Formless Realm. So that means when you are born into Formless Realm, there is no need for the fertilized egg. From the moment you take rebirth, you are already actualizing the rebirth of Formless realm. Otherwise, the Desire Realm or Form realm, one has to be conceived in the womb for birth to occur.

If you are born from womb, four sources – the eyes, ears, nose, and tongue – are formed through the further development of “name,” (that is consciousness) and the fertilized ovum into which consciousness initially enters. The physical and mental sources, however, exist from the time of the fertilized ovum – the time of Name-and-Form.

If you are born spontaneously, there are no such stages, since your sources form simultaneously with your entering the rebirth. However, for those beings born from eggs or for those born from moisture, the explanation is similar to the explanation of those born from a womb with the exception of the word "womb." So here is differentiating within the formless realm and the other realms. Such as form realm and desire realm. In desire realm, there is a different birth. birth from the egg, birth from the moisture, birth from the womb, birth from the miraculous birth. So except the formless birth, including the birth from the moisture, and birth from the egg, all have to go to fertilize ovum.

This being the case, once you establish the Name-and Form, then you have actualized the body. When the six senses are established, the being capable of experiencing things arises.

Once the body and the six senses come into being, contact is the next link to arise. When consciousness and sensory faculties meet objects, one then beings to distinguish three types of objects – attractive, unattractive, and neutral. Contact brings about these three types of object.

Contact (link 6) gives rise to feelings, (link 7) which correspond to the earlier contact's discrimination i.e. feelings that the object is pleasant (in relation to attractive), unpleasant (in relation to the unattractive) and neutral feelings.

Feelings then produce link 8, craving. This means craving not to be separated from pleasant feelings and craving to be separated from unpleasant feelings. This means that feelings accompanied or introduced by ignorance cause craving. But when there is no ignorance, craving does not occur even if feelings are present as in the case of Arya beings, Arya Buddhisattvas, Buddhas. They have feelings unaffected by afflictions and are thus not affected by craving e.g. their feelings of bliss towards a good disciple, a good human being or good deed. In Buddha, there is no samsara, no samsaric emotions but Buddha is aware of samsara and how it affects sentient beings. Buddha doesn't experience pain but is fully cognizant of the suffering that sentient beings experienced. Even though Buddhas have unconditional equanimity towards all living beings but Buddha doesn't acknowledge differences in beings and their effort, etc. But all those feelings are different from ordinary beings because there is no craving. Craving has to be introduced by ignorance.

This being the case, contact is the experiencing of the object and feeling is the experiencing of birth or fruition of karma. So in relation to rebirth into samsara, contact experiences the object (the father and mother coming together), resulting in the feeling (the experiencing of the nerves, birth of the baby). Or in general, feeling is the result of karma.

Craving then produces grasping. Grasping refers to yearning due to the attachment to four types of views:

- (1) Holding onto what you want: yearning after objects in relation to the senses, grasping on to what you want.
- (2) Holding on to views: Holding the view of the non-existence of cause & effect, denying the view that there is no inherent existence; holding onto the view that there is no object of Refuge, no Triple Gem. No Buddha, no Dharma, no Sangha.
- (3) Holding onto extreme practices as worthwhile: Such as by jumping into a fire or stepping on the needles, poking needles into your body and setting your body on fire, believing that this is the discipline to adopt in order to actualize freedom from suffering, namely to actualize the stage of god.
- (4) Holding onto assertions that there is a self: Holding on to the wrong view of an independently existing “I”. When things go wrong, “I am in trouble”; when things go right, “I am so lucky.” That kind of thinking which believes that there is a concrete, permanent, independently self-existing “I”.

So the function/task of grasping is to hold onto these four (mistaken) views. When this happens it produces potential existence.

So the first and second (ignorance and compositional activity) are the projecting factors. Then from the third to the ninth are the projected factors. Then tenth, potential existence is the actualizing factors then birth and aging-and-death is the actualized factors.

Regarding potential existence: Remember in the beginning, after ignorance, compositional activity comes in, isn't it? That compositional activity then infused your consciousness (the third link) with a latent propensity and that, when nurtured by craving and grasping gives rise to a subsequent existence. The forth-subsequent existence is name-and-form. So once we actualize the forth link (name-and-form), then it brings about the subsequent rebirth.

Then comes the eleventh link, which is birth. Potential existence produces birth. Birth refers to the consciousness entering one of the four types of rebirth – the womb-birth, egg-birth, heat & moisture birth and miraculous-birth. Womb-birth relates to human beings; egg-birth to animals like chicken; heat and moisture birth relate to creatures like mosquitoes and miraculous birth refer to those special, realized beings like Guru Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche) who suddenly appeared from a lotus. So birth refers to the conception of the consciousness.

The moment the consciousness enters the fertilized egg, that is the time we call birth. It is not when the body of the being comes out from the womb but at the point of conception, that is already the birth. So then birth brings about the aging-and-death.

So what are the projecting factors?

- (1) Ignorance
- (2) Compositional activity (karmic imprints)
- (3) Consciousness

What are the projected factors?

- (4) Name-and-form
- (5) Six senses
- (6) Contact
- (7) Feeling

What are the actualizing factors?

- (8) Craving
- (9) Grasping
- (10) Potential existence

What are the actualized factors?

- (11) Birth
- (12) Aging-and-death

Therefore, the two karmic factors – link 2 of compositional activity and link 10 of potential existence, arise from the three afflictive links. What are the three afflictive factors?

- (1) Ignorance
- (8) Craving
- (9) Grasping

And from these, come the seven suffering factors.

- (3) Consciousness
- (4) Name-and-form
- (5) Six senses
- (6) Contact
- (7) Feeling
- (11) Birth
- (12) Aging-and-death

The past afflictions also arise out of the seven sufferings. Now you experience the seven sufferings and then again they produce the afflictions. Then the afflictions again produce the seven sufferings and that is how the wheel of cyclic existence turns without interruption.

So then Nagarjuna concludes here, Nagarjuna says in his *“HEART OF DEPENDENT-ARISING”*:

**From the three arise the two;
From the two arise the seven, and again from the seven
Arise the three. The wheel of existence
repeatedly turns.**

The reflection on the progression and cessation of the twelve links is the teaching for persons of small capacity (initial scope). The reflection on the progression and cessation of the twelve factors of the two higher realms (human and god realms) is the teaching for persons of medium capacity. The teaching for the persons of great capability is for them to assess their own situation according to these two practices of the person of small and medium capacities. They then develop love and compassion for living beings, and therefore this teaching is also the teaching of higher capable beings. Normally it is regarded as middle capable teaching, but in fact this teaching is the common teaching for the all three capability beings. It is the matter of how you relate to this teaching.

In experiencing these twelve interdependent links, the shortest period is to experience them within two lives. The longest is three

lives. But the three lives do not mean continuous/ consecutive three lives. It 12 links process can be interrupted and thus spread out over a long time.

This teaching is regarded as very important. In one way it is very simple or maybe one young monk would be able to explain and this picture is actually drawn in most monasteries side-entrance doors. It is the tradition of the vinaya. It started from the Buddha's heart disciple, Shariputra and Maudgalyana. The images how human beings circle in samsara and how we can be liberated by purifying the twelve-links of interdependent arising and how by eradicating ignorance, one can eradicate compositional karma; by eradicating compositional karma, one can eradicate contaminated consciousness; by eradicating contaminated consciousness, one can eradicate name-and-form; the six senses; contact; feeling; craving; grasping ; potential existence; birth; aging-and-death. By eradicating death that is cause by karma and delusion in the first place, means you have gained liberation.

So in the picture, on one side, there is Buddha showing his right hand to the space which mean "once you are out of this wheel (of samsara), then like me, then you have attained liberation." As long as you are under the chain of this lord of death, then you will constantly circle within sufferings of samsara.

Normally in the Monasteries, when the teacher teaches the twelve-link, once you teach the progression through to the cessation of the twelve factors to the miserable realm, then after that you also have to teach in reverse – the progression through the cessation of the twelve factors to the two higher realms.

So from here, one has to reflect within oneself how ignorance produces karma and how karma throws us into the experience of the 7 suffering links of samsaric existence. Further, one also needs to reflect on the projecting factor or the initial cause, how it produces the projected result, then how connect this to the actualizing factor or the throwing karma which throws us into the next rebirth.

You need to do your own homework to see how it works with your own life circle. Once you understand that, one should do some meditations on how to be free from this chain. The final conclusion is that in order to be free from this chain, one needs to combat ignorance. In order to be able to win the fight with ignorance, one has to actualize the wisdom realizing the emptiness of self and the emptiness of phenomena.

Once we attain this, ignorance is cleansed. Once ignorance is cleansed, there will be no kind of attachment or grasping. Once there is no grasping, there is no hatred; and the three delusions of ignorance, anger and attachment are purified. Once the three poisons of delusion are purified, we master our karma by not creating any more karma under the influence of ignorance. As long as one accumulates karma under the influence of ignorance, one will continue to experience rebirth within the circle of cyclic existing, within the samsara. So it is still not ultimate liberation. Therefore, we need to create virtuous actions that are free from the influence of ignorance. The only way to do this is to be free from the wrong view of self-grasping, of an inherently existing “I” which is all the time in our consciousness. Everything that we see, we see it as inherently existent by itself. We don’t see it as our mental projection. This is because we are under the influence of

ignorance. So based on this, whatever karma we accumulate, it all becomes the cause of samsara. Even if we achieve a god realm or human realm rebirth, we are still in samsara.

Therefore, our focus must be to live a life with the understanding of the twelve-links of interdependent arising; one which is free from the influence of self-grasping mind. We have to constantly remind ourselves to be mindful because whatever action we do, including dharma actions, meditation, charity, whatever we do, we need to remember that these are not inherently existing, not independent of our own (mind's) creation. So we need to remind ourselves of this all the time. Once we are able to handle this thought, we can handle the ignorant mind. Once we are able to eradicate the ignorance mind, then our dharma practice becomes pure merit and the cause of liberation. It doesn't become the cause of samsaric happiness. It becomes the cause of ultimate happiness and liberation. Once we create such virtuous action that is free from believing in inherent existence, the twelve chains of interdependent arising no longer apply.

This is the whole purpose of today's discussion, which is to live a life practicing how to overcome the twelve interdependent arising or the 12 links. Therefore, this practice is a crucial practice. It is the practice of all different practitioners of different capabilities. Very simple practitioners like us also have to practice this; Arya beings also practice this. They take this practice as very important because the essence of this practice is to cultivate wisdom realizing emptiness and purify the ignorant mind, the root of all suffering. Then one is able to attain liberation!

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How To Treat Dharma Books

Dharma books contain the teaching of the Buddha: they have the power to protect against lower rebirth and to point the way to liberation.

Therefore, they should be treated with respect – kept off the floor and places where people sit or walk and not stepped over. They should be covered or protected for transporting and kept in a high, clean place separated from other mundane materials. Other objects, including statues and stupas, should not be placed on top of Dharma books and materials. Licking the fingers to turn pages is considered bad will create negative karma.

If it is necessary to dispose of written Dharma materials, they should be burned rather than thrown in the trash. When offering Dharma texts to the fire, first recite the mantra OM AH HUNG, then visualize the letters of the texts (to be burned) absorbing into the syllable AH and the AH absorbing into you, transmitting their wisdom to your mind-stream. After that, as you continue to recite OM AH HUNG, you can offer the texts to the fire.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche has specifically advised that photos or images of holy beings, deities or other holy object not be burned. Instead, they should be placed with respect in a stupa, tree or other high, clean place. It has also been suggested to put them into a small structure like a bird house and then seal the house. In this way, the holy images do not end up on the ground.