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Chapter 1

Dependent Origination-Introduction

Dependent Origination *Paṭiccasamuppāda* means originating in dependence. What the origination depends on can be many sources for many originations and they are generally understood as causes.

Similarly, everything in the universe including the universe itself is dependently originated. The Buddha is credited with the honor of this discovery because until then no one had any verifiable clue, except various theories, as to the origin of anything in general and living beings in particular. The Buddha's discovery of origination of existence in dependence was therefore in stark contrast to those theories.

The doctrine of Dependent Origination of existence consists of twelve links. They are based on a fundamental truth known as the specific conditionality *idappaccayatā*.

In Ud1.1 the Buddha expressed the fundamental truth of the specific conditionality first and then the twelve links incorporating the truth.

“When this is, this is; when this arises, this arises.”
“Iti imasmim sati idaṃ hoti, imassuppādā idaṃ uppajjati”

“That is: ignorance conditions (paccaya) intentional formations, intentional formations condition consciousness, consciousness conditions name and form, name and form condition the six sense bases, the six sense bases condition contact, contact conditions feeling, feeling conditions craving, craving conditions grasping, grasping conditions continued existence, continued existence conditions rebirth, rebirth conditions old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair.

That is how this entire mass of unsatisfactoriness originates.”

The twelve links are explanatory of the truth of specific conditionality. Therefore, “when this is” in relation to twelve links means “when ignorance is”. And “this is” means “intentional formations are”. Similarly “when this arises” means “when ignorance arises” and “this arises” means “intentional formations arise”.

Said simply, it means that when ignorance is there, there are intentional formations. And when ignorance arises, intentional formations arise and so on. The first link of ignorance is the not-knowing of the Four Noble Truths (SN12.2). That is; 1) unsatisfactoriness in existence (*dukkha*), 2) its cause (*samudaya*), 3) cessation of unsatisfactoriness (*nirodha*) and 4) the path for cessation (*maggā*).

The last link of old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair are the unsatisfactory states associated with existence. Taken as a whole therefore, the twelve

links portray how the mass of unsatisfactoriness originates as a coexistence with ignorance of the Four Noble Truths.

Dependent Origination is a universal truth that applies to all three realms of existence. They are the sensual realm, form realm and formless realm. It means that irrespective of where the existence is, what originates from the operation of the twelve links is a mass of unsatisfactoriness. In the sensual realm existence is identified as a sentient being that apparently exists.

And in Ud1.2, the Buddha expressed the fundamental truth in the opposite direction and then the twelve links incorporating the truth.

“When this is not, this is not, when this ceases, this ceases.”

“Iti imasmim asati idam na hoti, imassa nirodhā idam nirujjhati”

“That is: When ignorance ceases (nirodhā), intentional formations cease. When intentional formations cease, consciousness ceases. When consciousness ceases, name and form cease. When name and form cease, the six sense bases cease. When the six sense bases cease, contact ceases. When contact ceases, feeling ceases. When feeling ceases, craving ceases. When craving ceases, grasping ceases. When grasping ceases, continued existence ceases. When continued existence ceases, rebirth ceases. When rebirth ceases, old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair cease.

That is how this entire mass of unsatisfactoriness ceases.”

Similar to the first set of twelve links, a coexistence can be observed among these twelve links as well. For example, “when this is not” means “when ignorance is not there”. Since absence of ignorance means wisdom, it can be rephrased as “when wisdom is there”. And “this is not” means “intentional formations are not there”. And “when this ceases” means “when ignorance ceases” and “this ceases” means “intentional formations cease”. Again taken as a whole, these twelve links portray how the entire mass of unsatisfactoriness ceases as a coexistence with wisdom.

The twelve links simply illustrate how existence unfolds moment by moment when sentient beings carry out intentional actions with craving due to ignorance. As such, what is conventionally called a sentient being (*satta*) is only an existence without anything substantial such as for example a self which explains his rationale for referring to what originates and ceases as a mass of unsatisfactoriness. This means that the existence is not a creation of a super powerful creator but rather it is just a coexistence with ignorance of the Four Noble Truths.

In *Satta Sutta* (SN23.2), the Buddha explains to Venerable Rādhā, what the sentient being really is by comparing the sentient being to sandcastles that children make. Sandcastles of children exist only as long as the children cherish them, fancy them,

treasure them, and treat them as their own with greed, desire, fondness, thirst, passion, and craving for them because sandcastles on their own have no substantiality. That is to say that the existence of sandcastles lasts only till the children have desire and fondness etc., for sandcastles because as soon as they lose their desire, they scatter, destroy, and demolish them with their hands and feet and make them unplayable.

In this analogy the most important point the Buddha makes is that the children hold the existence of sandcastles by the thread of desire. The reason why the children allow the sandcastles to exist by holding onto the thread of desire is their ignorance of the fact that sandcastles are without any substantiality. And as soon as the children give up the thread of desire, they scatter them.

Similarly, the so called being exists only as long as it strongly clings to desire, greed, relishing, and craving for the five grasping aggregates (*pañcupādānakkhandhā*) of form, feeling, perception, intention and consciousness under ignorance. They are called grasping aggregates because they are prone to be grasped when contact (*phassa*) between sense stimuli and the six senses takes place. This means that just like the sandcastles of children, the sentient being too exists by the thread of desire for the five grasping aggregates only till they understand the reality of its own existence and let go of the thread of desire. This explains that the existence is a product of craving which is the second strand of ignorance and the cessation happens through overcoming ignorance.

The simile of sandcastles further illustrates that just like the sandcastles exist in the mental world of the children, sentient being too exists in its own mental world created out of the conventional physical world that they live in. That is to say that when the external world comes into contact with the six senses, the sentient beings develop craving for it through the grasping aggregates that represent it. This makes sense because the external sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and thoughts cannot be physically grasped at all times. But sentient beings are ignorant of the fact that craving binds them to the cycle of births and deaths *samsāra* indefinitely.

With this introduction, let us now turn to *Mahānidāna Sutta* (DN15) to understand contact and how Dependent Origination unfolds.

Chapter 2

An Analysis of *Mahānidāna Sutta*-DN15

The background for this important Sutta is the comment made by Venerable Ānanda that Dependent Origination, although deep and appears deep, it seems to him as plain as can be.

The Buddha then warns Venerable Ānanda not say so and says it is deep and appears deep. He Further adds that it is because of not understanding and not penetrating this teaching that this population has become tangled like string, knotted like a ball of thread, and matted like rushes and reeds. And the population does not escape the places of loss, the bad places, the underworld and transmigration because of that.

The Buddha begins the Sutta with old age and death which is the last of the twelve links of Dependent Origination and goes back up to consciousness - the third link - building a conditionality between each pair of links. Then he establishes a reciprocal relationship between consciousness and name & form.

“When asked, ‘Is there a specific condition for name and form?’ you should answer, ‘There is.’ If they say, ‘What is a condition for name and form?’ you should answer, ‘Consciousness is a condition for name and form.’

When asked, ‘Is there a specific condition for consciousness?’ you should answer, ‘There is.’ If they say, ‘What is a condition for consciousness?’ you should answer, ‘Name and form are conditions for consciousness.’”

Then the Buddha concludes with the statement *“That is how the entire mass of unsatisfactoriness originates”*. This is how he concluded the Ud1.1 and Ud1.2 too, discussed above. The only difference between DN15 and Ud1.1 is that DN15 is much more explanatory because its purpose is to show Venerable Ānanda how deep Dependent Origination really is. Except for that difference, DN15 too exhibits the same essential principal of specific conditionality as Ud1.1.

Having established the reciprocity, the Buddha begins with the last link and goes back up to feeling explaining in greater detail what each link means with special emphasis on the coexistence. For example, continued existence and rebirth coexist with each other as shown by the following.

“‘Continued existence is a condition for rebirth’—that’s what I said. And this is a way to understand how this is so. Suppose there were totally and utterly no continued existence for anyone anywhere.

That is, continued existence in the sensual realm, the form realm, or the formless realm. When there's no continued existence at all, with the cessation of continued existence, would rebirth still be found?"

"No, sir."

"That's why this is the cause, source, origin, and reason of rebirth, namely continued existence."

This means that to the extent that there is continued existence, there is rebirth which is a coexistence between continued existence and rebirth. This however, does not mean that existence and rebirth happen at the same time. It means that if there is an existence, there is a rebirth like a shadow that does not go away.

Having established the coexistence between all links up to the link of feeling in a similar way, he builds a relationship between feeling, craving, seeking and gaining which ends up in unskillful things such as stinginess, safeguarding and finally divisive speech and lies.

"'Feeling is a condition for craving'-That is what I said. And this is a way to understand how this is so. Suppose there were totally and utterly no feeling for anyone anywhere. That is, feeling born of contact through the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. When there is no feeling at all, with the cessation of feeling, would craving still be found?"

"No, sir."

"That is why this is the cause, source, origin, and reason of craving, namely feeling."

So it is, Ānanda, that feeling is a cause of craving. Craving is a cause of seeking. Seeking is a cause of gaining material possessions. Gaining material possessions is a cause of assessing. Assessing is a cause of desire and lust. Desire and lust is a cause of attachment. Attachment is a cause of ownership. Ownership is a cause of stinginess. Stinginess is a cause of safeguarding.

Owing to safeguarding, many bad, unskillful things come to be: taking up the rod and the sword, quarrels, arguments, and disputes, accusations, divisive speech, and lies."

Then the Buddha establishes a connection between seeking and craving and concludes with *"Thus, Ānanda, these two dhammā, being a duality, converge into a unity in feeling"*.

The *dhammā* are the seeking and craving. They are called *dhammā* because the seeking and craving happen mutually. For example, the *dhamma* of seeking happens due to *dhamma* of craving and *dhamma* of craving happens due to *dhamma* of seeking which is why they are called a duality. In other words, where there is craving, there

is seeking and where there is seeking, there is craving which is a coexistence with each other.

It converges into a unity in feeling means that the duality of seeking and craving is due to the single cause which is feeling. If there is no feeling whatsoever, that is, feeling born of contact through the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind then there is no craving and seeking because it is because of the feeling that the sentient beings crave and seek to gain. And it also means that feeling, craving and seeking coexists with each other. That is to say that where there is feeling, there is craving and seeking.

And craving is the cause of unsatisfactoriness which is the Second Noble Truth and also the second strand of ignorance. This means that sentient beings seek sense stimuli, gain them divisively speak and lie about them etc., because of craving that coexists with feeling but under ignorance. That is to say that feeling, craving and their actions associated with seeking and ignorance coexist.

The Buddha then explains how feeling arises.

“‘Contact is a condition for feeling’ - That is what I said. And this is a way to understand how this is so. Suppose there were totally and utterly no contact for anyone anywhere. That is, contact through the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. When there’s no contact at all, with the cessation of contact, would feeling still be found?”

“No, sir.”

“That is why this is the cause, source, origin, and condition of feeling, namely contact”.

Therefore, contact is the cause of feeling to which the duality of seeking and craving converge. It means that contact is even more primary than craving which is the cause of unsatisfactoriness in existence. In other words, contact is the point from which the feeling that conditions craving, seeking, gaining divisive speech and lies originate which means they all coexist.

Here, however, a question is likely to arise as to the status of seeking, gaining divisive speech and lies etc., within the overall scheme of the twelve links because the Buddha has not included them as links. But as is clear, they cannot be external to the twelve links and logically speaking they are the intentional actions associated with seeking that constitute the existence itself because they are what the uneducated ordinary people do on a daily basis as part of their existence. Besides, seeking cannot happen without intention.

In this special Sutta addressed in particular to Venerable Ānanda, the Buddha has avoided the first two links found in the standard version which is the one given in UD1.1 above. The first two links are ignorance and intentional formations. Ignorance

is the not-knowing of the Four Noble Truths and intentional formations are the intentions carried out by body, speech and mind.

Suttas such as *Parivīmamsana Sutta* (SN 12.51), explains three types of such intentional actions carried out by the sentient beings. They are meritorious (*puññabhisankhāra*) de-meritorious (*apuññabhisankhāra*) and imperturbable (*āneñjābhisankhāra*).

Although the Buddha is not specific about the types of actions in this Sutta, the activities involved in seeking and gaining can be grouped under the three headings as meritorious, de-meritorious and imperturbable actions carried out by body, speech and mind. It therefore appears that the Buddha's avoidance of the first two links is intentional. That is to say that he replaces the first two links with the bigger picture of existence that results from craving without saying they are intentions carried out due to ignorance.

As we noted, the unity of feeling that the Buddha established as the single cause of craving for acting intentionally to seek and gain, is conditioned by contact. Therefore, let us try to understand how contact comes to be as the source of feeling.

“It was said: ‘With name & form as condition there is contact. How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If those features, traits, signs, and brief descriptions (ākāra, liṅga, nimitta, uddesa) through which there is a description of the name group (nāmakāya) were all absent, would designation-contact (adhivacanasamphasso) be discerned for the form group (rūpakāya)?

Certainly not, venerable sir.

If those features, traits, signs, and brief descriptions (ākāra, liṅga, nimitta, uddesa) through which there is a description of the form group were all absent, would impingement-contact (paṭighasamphasso) be discerned in the name group?

Certainly not, venerable sir.”

Ākāra, liṅga, nimitta, uddesa translated respectively as features, traits, signs, and brief descriptions are found in both *nāmakāya* and *rūpakāya* respectively translated as name group and form group. And they are the distinctive marks, attributes and characteristics that describe both name and form groups. Here again we find a reciprocal relationship between name group and form group. That is that name group must have certain features and traits etc., for designating the form group with a name. And form group too must have certain features and traits etc., for impinging on the name group. Designating is naming and impinging is impacting.

This brings us to the question, what is the name group *nāmakāya* and what is the form group *rūpakāya*? Let us try to find out with a practical example.

The Carnation has certain distinctive marks, attributes or characteristic features, such as shape and color representing its overall appearance. It also has a particular distinctive scent.

Therefore, features, traits, signs and descriptions are the distinctive marks, attributes or characteristics with which the Carnation is identified and described when it falls within the vision path of the eye. These distinctive marks and attributes etc., often overlap with each other.

But just because the Carnation with its features, traits, signs and descriptions are there a contact cannot happen. Contact, according to the Buddha's interpretation is like a two-way street. As such, for contact to happen it needs a two-way movement - an impinging by the form group in the name group and a designating the form group by the name group. And this is where the features, traits, signs, and brief descriptions of the name group come in.

For example, when someone says "Wow, this Carnation is beautiful" upon seeing it, it is a result of a combination of factors.

First, a mental image of the flower consisting of all features, traits and signs of the Carnation reflects in the mind. Description as beautiful or ugly depends on that reflection.

When the mental image occurs, a corresponding response for example as "Wow, a beautiful Carnation" spontaneously takes place. And it is accompanied by a pleasant feeling and a positive perception with a subtle intention to pick it while attention is focused on the Carnation.

The mental image is the aggregate of form derived (*upadaya*) from the Carnation with various features, traits, signs and descriptions which are made up of the four great elements. It is called the form derived because it is the representation of the form – Carnation - with which the physical Carnation makes an impact. The form derived from the Carnation is also the form group *rūpakāya* that impinges with an impact while at the same time representing the form - Carnation.

It is very important to understand this point because it is the impact that garners a respond from the name group. There is also a practical aspect to this and it is the fact that the beautiful Carnation cannot be carried by hand at all times. But the form derived as representative of it can be carried in mind at all times.

Feeling, perception, intention and attention are the features, traits, signs and descriptions that represent name group *nāmakāya* because they accompany the designating as for example "Wow, a beautiful Carnation". The name that name group represents can be the proper name or any other identification. They are also the aggregates prone to be grasped along with the aggregate of form derived because they are the representatives of the sense stimuli of Carnation with a name and a form.

The form group consists of the aggregate of form derived from the six sense stimuli – sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and mental bases - that accompanies the impinging. Name group¹ consists of the aggregates of feeling, perception, intention and attention that accompanies the designating the six sense stimuli.

Therefore, name in name & form is both the proper name or whatever name given to the sense stimulus for the purpose of identification and as well as the aggregates of feeling, perception, intention and attention that accompany naming. Form in name & form is both the aggregate of form derived from the sense stimulus and as well as the sense stimulus.

As a rough guide, when name & form is used along with consciousness as in “consciousness and name & form” it refers to the five grasping aggregates that represent the sense stimuli because consciousness cannot hold the sense stimuli physically. And when “name & form” is used without consciousness, on most situations, it refers to sense stimuli of form with a name. But the context might suggest that they refer to grasping aggregates that represent name & form of sense stimuli.

Having explained the basic process of contact which conditions feeling, the Buddha continues to further instill in Venerable Ānanda the importance of both impinging and designating for contact to happen.

“If those features, traits, signs, and descriptions through which there is a description of the name group and the form group were all absent, would either designation-contact or impingement-contact be discerned?”

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

Features, traits, signs, and descriptions that describe the name group and the form group respectively are the feeling, perception, intention and attention and the derived form. And in the absence of both name group and form group contact cannot happen. It is noteworthy that the contact is thus split into two vital components as impinging contact and designating contact without which contact as commonly used in most other Suttas cannot happen.

“If those features, traits, signs, and descriptions through which there is a description of name and form were all absent, would contact be discerned?”

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for contact, namely, name & form.”

Again, it is noteworthy that the Buddha quickly switches from name group and form group to name & form which is the sense stimuli to drive home the point made in the previous question. That is that without the impinging aggregate of form derived and designating aggregates of feeling, perception, intention and attention contact between

the six senses and sense stimuli cannot happen. This makes sense because sense stimuli, although they are available in abundance, do not make physical contacts with the senses. And if a contact does happen that is always through the grasping aggregates.

This why it is possible for a sense stimuli to arouse grasping aggregates by mere mention of the name without the stimuli being present physically. For example, the name “Lemon” can even generate saliva in the mouth without the Lemon being present. This is the oppressive ability of a sense stimulus when it is established in the consciousness with its accompanying grasping aggregates².

In other words, when there is no form group and name group of aggregates there is no contact, although sense stimuli with various names & shapes are available in the world in abundance.

In the next question, the Buddha introduces consciousness to contact using examples which have divided the Buddhist community.

“Consciousness is a condition for name and form. How that is so, Ananda, should be understood in this way: If consciousness were not to descend into the mother’s womb, would name & form take shape in the womb?”

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

As we discussed name & form is both the sense stimuli and the name group and form group of aggregates. Consciousness is a condition for name and form means that the aggregates of form group and the aggregates of name group cannot arise without consciousness. And by extension, it means that there cannot be contact in the absence of consciousness not knowing the aggregates.

In other words, there should always be the combination of three for contact to happen. And the three are consciousness, the grasping aggregates representing the name & form of sense stimuli and a sense organ.

The community is divided because the Buddha has packed a lot of baggage into this paragraph. For example, the circumstances between consciousness entering a mother’s womb and consciousness being a condition for name & form are lengthy. And to unravel it, we need to go back to the reciprocity between consciousness and name & form that he established earlier in the Sutta.

And as the following indicates, the reciprocity means that the sentient beings are stuck in contact because their consciousness moves in and out of name & form of sense stimuli without a discernible reprieve between two consecutive movements. This is why in *Assutavā Sutta* (SN12.61), consciousness is compared to a monkey that moves from branch to branch.

“When asked, ‘Is there a specific condition for contact?’ you should answer, ‘There is. ‘If they say, ‘What is a condition for contact?’ you should answer, ‘Name and form are conditions for contact.’

When asked, ‘Is there a specific condition for name and form?’ you should answer, ‘There is. ‘If they say, ‘What is a condition for name and form?’ you should answer, ‘Consciousness is a condition for name and form.’

When asked, ‘Is there a specific condition for consciousness?’ you should answer, ‘There is. ‘If they say, ‘What is a condition for consciousness?’ you should answer, ‘Name and form are conditions for consciousness.’”

Name & form are the grasping aggregates. They are conditions for contact because without an impinging with a form group representing the features, traits, signs and descriptions of sense stimuli which is spontaneously designated by the name group contact cannot happen.

Consciousness is a condition for name & form groups of grasping aggregates representing the sense stimuli because they need to be known by consciousness with craving in the background. This means that sense stimuli must entice the consciousness. And name & form groups of aggregates are conditions for consciousness because they represent the features and traits etc., of sense stimuli that arouse craving through feeling. This is the reciprocity between them.

This means that the sentient beings are stuck in contact between their senses and grasping aggregates that represent sense stimuli. In other words, the consciousness of sentient beings is always attached to or established in the sense stimuli by the handle of the grasping aggregates due to craving which is contact.

It is contact because consciousness does not arise only with the grasping aggregates. Consciousness needs a sense organ too. The combination of the three is contact. Therefore, when a relationship between consciousness and name & form is spoken without mentioning a particular sense organ, it means that there is mind representing all six senses.

If we now further illustrate, the sentient beings are constantly engaged in intentional activities such as seeking, gaining safeguarding and lying etc., because contact always give them a feeling to crave and act upon. These activities are the usual intentional activities that every uneducated ordinary person carries out in an existence with craving.

If there is no contact, then there is no feeling to condition craving. And if there is no craving, there cannot be the intentional activities such as seeking, gaining safeguarding and lying etc., too.

This brings us to the question, what is existence? And the answer is, existence is what continues to exist with the passage of time as the sentient beings are busy with their contact. That is to say that the sentient beings are always engaged with intention because they always have a feeling for craving and seeking to converge to. And this is the specific conditionality between ignorance and existence because when intention operates in them, they are ignorant of the Four Noble Truths.

Therefore, consciousness conditioning name & form means contact because consciousness does not arise in isolation. It always requires a base which is one of the six senses to arise. Contacts momentarily arise and cease while sentient beings grasp the aggregate of feeling in particular and engage in seeking because feeling conditions craving. This is the existence. And consciousness entering a mother's womb means existence conditioning a rebirth (*bhavapaccayā jāti*) because contact does not stop at death.

The Buddha then summarizes his explanations to Venerable Ānanda using nine links instead of the standard twelve links.

“So: name and form are conditions for consciousness. Consciousness is a condition for name and form. Name and form are conditions for contact. Contact is a condition for feeling. Feeling is a condition for craving. Craving is a condition for grasping. Grasping is a condition for continued existence. Continued existence is a condition for rebirth. Rebirth is a condition for old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and despair to come to be.

That is how this entire mass of suffering originates.”

And if we now arrange the links with missing links added and in accordance with the specific conditionality, we get the following.

The sentient beings carry out intentional activities associated with seeking due to ignorance of the Four Noble Truths.

That is; When ignorance is, intentional formations are. When intentional formations are, consciousness is because intention is in the name group which is part of contact. When consciousness is, name & form of aggregates representing the names & forms of sense stimuli are. When name & form of aggregates representing the names & forms of sense stimuli are, mind as the forerunner and chief of all six senses is. When mind is, contact is which is the meeting of consciousness, the grasping aggregates and mind. When contact is, feeling is. When feeling is, craving is. When craving is, grasping is. When grasping is, existence is because so called being that grasps exists. When existence is, rebirth is because existence continues in spite of death. When rebirth is, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair are because of the impermanence of everything that is grasped.

Since craving and seeking always converge to feeling their consciousness frequently moves from one contact to another because without consciousness, a contact to condition feeling cannot happen. This frequent movement is the result of craving which has the three characteristics of being repetitive, delightful & lustful and seeking pleasure here and there. Due to craving, frequent concentration on the gratification that feeling provides happens and it is grasping. This means that the sentient beings always have a feeling to develop craving for the sense stimuli and to act intentionally to seek and gain them. Feeling is singled out here because it is the most prominent among the aggregates. The passage of time that occurs unbeknown to the sentient beings as this process goes on is existence. The passage of time means the toll of impermanence such as old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair. Existence continues in spite of death because seeking and craving does not stop converging to feeling. In other words, contact continues to condition feeling. As such, existence continues in spite of death immediately paving the way for a rebirth. Rebirth in other words, is just the continuation of contact without a discernible break between two contacts. This means that the existence is simply a consciousness seeking one set of name & form of aggregates after another with craving under ignorance.

And this means that existence continues unless the relationship between consciousness and name & form is broken. Said another way craving and seeking based on the feeling that contact conditions must stop for the existence to cease.

The community is divided because they have not invested sufficient time and effort to correctly understand the discourse on great causation – *Mahānidāna Sutta*. As such, some consider the third and fourth links - consciousness and name & form – as rebirth. And this consideration also leads to the twelve links being divided into three lives which is not compatible with the context in which the Buddha continues his explanation of contact to Venerable Ānanda. Moreover, such a division makes the teaching not in accordance with the six qualities of the teaching³. For example, if ignorance is allocated to the immediate past existence, how can the disciple know the presence of ignorance in the here and now? That is to say that the disciple must be able to know the presence of craving which is the second strand of ignorance in the here and now⁴ for example as “I am having sensual desire”. Only then he is considered to be practicing the right way with wise attention, mindfulness and awareness at all times. It is this knowing in the here and now that takes the disciple through the other qualities of the teaching to the liberation that is described as a personal experience by the wise *paccattam veditabbo viññūhi*.

In brief, there is no denial of the fact that consciousness descending into a womb marks the milestone known as rebirth, but it is due to a misunderstanding of the context that the third and fourth links are regarded by many as rebirth. I sincerely hope that the explanation given above dispels that misunderstanding.

A further item of controversy surrounding this Sutta is the fact that the Buddha omits the pair “*name & form conditions six senses*” which is found in the standard version and goes straight to contact bypassing the six senses. But again as should be clear from the above discussion, those who make distorted claims about that omission fail to understand that consciousness need a sense organ to arise. They also do not realize that all twelve links of Dependent Origination deal with the mental side of existence and not a combination of mental and physical. Although there is a physical aspect to existence, it is maintained by solid and soft food the consumption of which also results in contact between tongue and the food (SN12.64).

Therefore, for the frequent seeking to happen through contact, only mind is needed. In other words, consciousness and name & form (of aggregates) means contact because consciousness always arises in relation to one of the six senses of which mind is the forerunner and chief.

In fact, we do not need to go far to substantiate it because this is what is meant by the first verse of Dhammapada.

Mind is the forerunner of all phenomena. Mind is their chief; they are all mind made”
“Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā, Mano setṭhā manomayā.”

This means that mind as the chief makes the phenomenon of existence of the sentient being. That is because, although consciousness arises in the six senses as part of contact, the senses of eye, ear, nose, tongue and the body cannot process sensory data. The processing is a task done only by the mind and it does it in respect of all other five senses and the mind itself. Mind is also a sense organ in the same way as the other five are. This means that when it comes to contact too, mind is unique in that the relationship between consciousness and name & form can be narrowed down to mind contact. It is this uniqueness of the mind that gives it the titles “ the forerunner, the chief and maker of all”.

This means that the existence is just a mental world of existence. In fact, the Buddha speaks about such mental worlds in Suttas such as *Samiddhilokapañhā Sutta* (SN35.68).

“Where there is the eye, sights, eye consciousness, and phenomena to be known by eye consciousness, there is the world or what is known as the world.

Where there is the ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ...

Where there is the mind, ideas, mind consciousness, and phenomena to be known by mind consciousness, there is the world or what is known as the world.”

The sentient beings therefore are constantly in a mental world of existence in relation to the external world just through the grasping aggregates with mind as the forerunner and chief maker of phenomena.

If we now explain why the Buddha quite abruptly speaks about consciousness descending into a womb, it is because he has compassion, and he wants Venerable Ānanda to understand that the relationship between consciousness and name & form is contact because consciousness does not arise in isolation. Contact is existence because it provides feeling for craving and seeking. And this existence continues into a new existence with the relationship between consciousness and name & form intact. And only giving up craving for sense stimuli when they come into contact with the six senses can free his consciousness so that it does not descend into a womb for the existence or the contact to continue through rebirth. Freeing the consciousness means not succumbing to the tricks of the magician of consciousness.

And the Buddha uses the following examples to illustrate the importance of consciousness to contact.

*“If, after descending into the womb, consciousness were to depart, would name & form be generated into this present state of existence **itthatta**?”*

Certainly not, venerable sir.”

The Buddha’s use of words “*would name & form be generated ...*” is the reason for some to regard name & form as what is born because they interpret consciousness as the mind and name & form as the physical body. But as I have explained, name & form is both the sense stimuli and the grasping aggregates. As such, the name & form in this instance is sense stimuli which is the physical fetus in the womb that is grasped by the handle of name & form of grasping aggregates with consciousness knowing. Said another way, the fetus lasts in the womb only till contact which is the combination of the three - mind consciousness and name & form of grasping aggregates representative of the fetus and mind – continues in the womb. That means the five grasping aggregates is the same as consciousness and name & form relationship.

In other words, the physical fetus generates or grows in the womb because the consciousness of the fetus continues to grasp it (the fetus) through the grasping aggregates with craving. This grasping can, in fact, be understood as the internal tangle (*antojata*). That means that the state of existence of sentient being gets energy to sustain not only from external sense stimuli but also from the six internal sense organs. The external tangle (*bahijaṭā*) is the craving for the external sense stimuli that results in grasping aggregates or the consciousness and name & form relationship in respect of them.

Consciousness departing therefore means that contact has ended while in the womb. But if the consciousness departs or contact ends even while in the womb it means that the existence has ended. This means that consciousness is needed for contact without which existence cannot continue even when it is in the womb which is the fact that the Buddha is trying to convince.

The Buddha continues;

“If the consciousness of a young boy or girl were to be cut off, would name & form grow up, develop, and reach maturity?”

Certainly not, venerable sir.

Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for name & form, namely, consciousness.”

Cutting off of consciousness means death. Here again the Buddha’s emphasis is on the necessity of consciousness for contact so that the existence of the boy or girl of name & form continues while in the womb or at a young age.

The boy or the girl is the name & form just like the fetus represented by grasping aggregates through contact. The death happens because the four great elements out of which the name & form - girl or boy - is made up are impermanent. But this death is not the final death of the cycle of births and deaths *samsāra* because the relationship between consciousness and name & form or contact is not broken by a cessation of craving. This is clear because the Buddha does not speak about a cessation of craving.

The Buddha then confirms how rebirth happens saying that the origin of unsatisfactory rebirth is due to consciousness getting established in sense stimuli through name group & form group of grasping aggregates which is the same as the continuation of the relationship between consciousness and name & form or contact.

*“It was said: ‘With name & form as condition there is consciousness.’ How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If consciousness were not to become established (*patiṭṭham*) in name and form, would the coming to be of the origin of unsatisfactoriness - of rebirth, old age, and death in the future - be found?”*

No Sir,

That is why this is the cause, source, origin, and condition of consciousness, namely name and form. This is the extent to which one may be reborn, grow old, die, pass away, or reappear.”

This final statement of the Buddha in general and the use of the word *patiṭṭham* in particular confirms that the consciousness establishing in sense stimuli is the existence.

For example, as I have repeatedly explained, “*with name & form as condition there is consciousness*” means that if there is name group and form group of grasping aggregates, there is consciousness or contact. Since it is true for the opposite, that is if there is consciousness, there are name group and form group of grasping aggregates, it is again a reference to the contact.

Consciousness establishing (*patitṭham*) in name & form also means the same. It means consciousness getting a foothold in names and forms of sense stimuli through their representative grasping aggregates due to craving that feeling conditions.

And the consciousness and name & form relationship or consciousness getting a foothold is the existence which continues in spite of death with the inevitable consequences of rebirth, ageing illnesses etc. It should be remembered that consciousness too is a grasping aggregate. And as said above, consciousness arises only in dependence which means whenever the grasping aggregate of consciousness is, there is a meeting of three – mind consciousness, mind and thoughts which is mind contact. And mind contact does not pause at death and recommence sometime later but continues uninterruptedly with death and rebirth being nonevents.

Therefore, with this final example, the Buddha drives his point home. The point is that in the absence of craving, consciousness does not continue to know the form group and name group that represent names & forms or sense stimuli whether internal or external in which case there is no contact. When there is no contact there is no existence because in that case there is no feeling for craving and intentional seeking to converge to.

However, absence of craving and by extension contact does not mean a complete disappearance of names & forms of sense stimuli.

The Buddha then explains the other by products of the existence of state of being or name & form together with consciousness.

“This is how far the scope of language, terminology and description extends; (adhivacanapatho, niruttipatho, paññattipatho) how far the sphere of wisdom extends; how far the cycle of rebirths continues (vaṭṭam vattati) so that this state of existence (itthatta) is to be found; namely, name and form together with consciousness.”

Language (*adhivacana*) is a convention, which arises due to the need for sharing and communicating one's experiences with others. Those who are naturally gifted with the ability to speak, use various languages to express their experiences while those who are not so fortunate, use sign language. This shows how extensively language is used as a by-product of existence of state of being which is consciousness and name & form relationship or contact.

Terminology (*nirutti*) is what a language consists of because it needs names and terms to make definitions in order that an experience can be adequately described (*paññatti*).

The Buddha's point here again is that as long as the grasping aggregate of consciousness stays with the grasping aggregates representative of name & form - internal and external sense stimuli - which is contact, there is an existence or a state

of being (*itthatta*). Said another way, as long as craving and seeking converge to feeling there will be the rounds of contact (*vaṭṭa*) the accumulation of which is existence. And language, terminology and descriptions prevail only to that extent.

In other words, language, terminology, and descriptions are not necessary if there are no states of being –consciousness as conditioned by name & form of grasping aggregates or simply consciousness establishing in the names & forms of sense stimuli through their representative grasping aggregates with craving.

Then, the Buddha says that there is a flip side too. And it is developing wisdom (*pañña*) to understand the reality of the existence of the state of being which is name & form together with consciousness and the cycle of rebirths and deaths that result from it. The reality of the existence of the state of being is that it is devoid of anything substantial such as a real self because it is what continues to exist as intentional activities of seeking are carried due to craving under ignorance.

The Buddha concludes with “*this is how the entire mass of unsatisfactoriness originates*” because as is explanatory from this discussion, the existence lacks any substantiality except the craving that binds the grasping aggregate of consciousness to the names and forms of sense stimuli through the grasping aggregates that represent them.

This ends my analysis of the discourse on great causation the understanding of which is crucial in understanding the doctrine of Dependent Origination. As the Buddha himself stated at the beginning, it is due to not-understanding this important Sutta, that the sentient beings then and now are tangled like in a string, knotted like a ball of thread, and matted like rushes and reeds without an escape from the places of loss, the bad places, the underworld and transmigration.

Chapter 3

Putting them altogether.

As is clear from the foregoing, the twelve links portray existence at a glance at any moment of existence in any of the three realms in relation to the mind contact which is the unification of mind consciousness, name & form of aggregates and mind. These represent the third, fourth and the fifth links of the twelve links respectively. As such, mind contact encompasses all twelve links in accordance with the principle of specific conditionality.

This means that ignorance which is the first link can never be allocated to a past existence because it cannot be separated from the momentary contact to which all other links are momentarily connected. Ignorance has been with uneducated ordinary persons since beginningless times⁵. It has to stay with them until they overcome it by wisdom.

Intention *cetanā*

Intention is the second link immediately after ignorance. It is associated with seeking by body, speech and mind, to gain sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and ideas that cause pleasant feelings when they come into contact with their six senses. If the contact results in an unpleasant feeling mental states such as anger, hatred envy etc., toward others as well as oneself result from it. If the feeling is neutral, it just passes by without any action being taken.

According to *Nibbedhika Sutta* (AN6.63), intention is action (*kamma*) in the sense that intention results in consequences (*vipāka*). This means that intention comes with a cost which is the consequence of prolonging the existence because the doer of actions need to be there to face consequences although not in the same form as when the action is committed.

“It is intention that I call actions. For after making an intention one acts by way of body, speech, and mind.

And what is the source of actions?

Contact is their source.

And what is the diversity of actions?

There are actions that lead to rebirth in hell, the animal realm, the ghost realm, the human world, and the world of the gods. This is called the diversity of actions.

And what is the result of actions? The result of actions is threefold, I say: in this very life, on rebirth in the next life, or at some later time. This is called the result of actions”.

However, it is noteworthy that the Buddha has used the word *saṅkhārā* as the second link and in Suttas such as *Upādānapariṣavatta Sutta* (SN22.56) too, intention (*cetanā*) is explained as *saṅkhārā*.

“Katame ca, bhikkhave, saṅkhārā? Chayime, bhikkhave, cetanākāyā rūpasāñcetanā, saddasañcetanā, gandhasāñcetanā, rasasañcetanā, phoṭṭhabbasāñcetanā, dhammasāñcetanā.”

“What are intentions?”

There are these six classes of intention:

Intention regarding sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and thoughts.

Intention originates from contact. When contact ceases intention ceases.”

To understand the Buddha’s rationale, therefore, we need to take input from other sources in particular from the Dhammapada where we find the mention “All formations are impermanent”, “*Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*”.

All means everything, and everything is impermanent because they all come into existence due to causes and when the causes cease, their existence too ceases.

Both the above Suttas agree that contact is the source of intention. This is because intention is in the name group that, together with form group make up contact. And the entire process of contact is an impermanent formation (*saṅkhārā*) because it is the meeting of three – consciousness, name & form of grasping aggregates and mind. And most importantly the internal and external sense stimuli that come in to contact through the grasping aggregates too are impermanent formations (*saṅkhārā*) because they too exist simultaneous with a process that provides nutriment for their existence.

For example, the corporeality of the body that sentient beings call “my body” is maintained by solid and soft food. Similarly, all other external stimuli, whether sentient or non sentient, too depend on various sources of nutriment for their survival.

Intention also is considered a nutriment that maintain sentient beings who are already born and help those to be born. As a nutriment it provides the nutriment of mental energy for the existence to continue because actions give the sentient beings a sense of accomplishment over others. But it comes with a cost because intention as action *kamma* binds the sentient beings to the existence that continues.

Consciousness and contact too are nutriment of mental energy that maintain those who are born and help those to be born. They cannot be separated from each other because the form and name group of grasping aggregates must be known by consciousness for contact to happen.

As said earlier, solid and soft food provide the physical energy while at the same time providing the mental energy as well. This is because consumption of solid and soft

food involve contact between the tongue and the food and contact happens with consciousness knowing and intention in the name group.

For example, contact is the meeting of consciousness, the name & form of grasping aggregates and mind. When feeling arises as part of contact, craving and intentional seeking converge to feeling. Seeking results in meritorious, demeritorious and imperturbable actions which are formations (*saṅkhārā*). This is the frequent concentration on the gratification that feeling provides which is grasping.

The intentional actions results in prolonging the existence because the sense of accomplishment that accompanies craving results in more contacts for feeling. And at the same time the actions bear consequences to come. The intention for actions accompanied by craving therefore is the primary driver for existence to go round and round the accumulation of which is the existence because the process of contact provides physical and mental energy. And intentional actions are carried out with ignorance of the Four Noble Truths.

It is to reflect this significance, that intention is right next to ignorance. And it is also why the twelve links cannot be broken down in to past, present and future.

And it is also to reflect the fact that formation (*saṅkhārā*) of intention results in formation (*saṅkhārā*) of existence that the second link is translated as intentional formation (*saṅkhārā*).

Craving *Taṇhā*

Craving is of three types as craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence and craving for extermination.

Sensual pleasures are the pleasures derived from sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations (*rūpa, sadda, gandha, rasa, phoṭṭhabba*) when the corresponding sense organs come into contact with them.

Craving for sensual pleasures therefore is the craving for the pleasant feeling that the contacts between five external names and forms - sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations – and eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body condition along with other aggregates including consciousness.

Craving for existence (*bhava taṇhā*), is the craving or the will to exist because every sentient being likes to live and nobody wants to die. In *Taṇhā Sutta* (AN10.62), the Buddha says that a first point of craving for continued existence is not evident, before which there was no craving for continued existence, and afterwards it came to be.

However, some people, as opposed to the orthodox acceptance, even wish to end their existences perhaps hoping that they can escape from the momentary experiences particularly of those, which are unpleasant and consequentially the continuation

beyond the current life too will cease. This is craving for extermination of existence (*vibhavataṇhā*).

But this is not craving for Nibbāna since it cannot be reached simply by such wishful thinking. It is very striking that even the craving for extermination of existence leads to unsatisfactoriness, but the simple reason is that it is a craving for a feeling that a contact conditions with consciousness knowing.

The Three Characteristics

The Buddha has qualified the three types of craving with three characteristics. The first, *ponobbhavikā* is translated as that which leads to renewed existence via rebirth. The existence as I have explained above is accumulation of rounds of contacts as the time passes by. Therefore, *ponobbhavikā* can more accurately be understood as grasping which is the frequent concentration on the gratification that feeling provides because it is what makes the contacts go round and round during a period of time between a birth and a death.

Craving taken even in an ordinary sense means the craving to continue the current experience. That is that sentient beings expect the pleasant experiences to continue and unpleasant ones to discontinue. All their mental workings are designed to ensure that continuity or discontinuity.

For example, if a child is given a chocolate, it will expect more of the same because the feeling of taste is so pleasant. *Ponobbhavikā* is this characteristic inherent in all three types of craving, that makes sentient beings want to repeat their enjoyment again and again. Wanting to repeat, however, is the continuation of craving for the pleasant feeling.

The second is *nandirāgasahagatā*, where *nandi* and *rāga* mean delight and lust respectively. Craving is always accompanied by delight and lust because it is the delight and lust for the sense stimuli that is the cause of craving and seeking in the first place.

The third characteristic of craving is *tatratatrābhīnandinī* translated as seeking pleasure here and there. This characteristic of craving shows that craving does not have a proper place but it goes wherever existence goes. That is to say that wherever the experience takes place sentient beings develop craving if feeling is pleasant. In the case of the child, delight and lust for chocolates will prevail no matter where or in what condition it is in.

In a similar way, those born in the animal realm will find delight in experiences of that realm and those born in form and formless realms will find delight in experiences of those realms although they can cause dismay to others. For example, seeing a crow picking on a rotten carcass can be a disgusting sight for humans but for the crow it is its most delightful meal.

These three characteristics accompany each of the three types of craving. For example, sentient beings expect the pleasant feelings that names and forms which are sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and thoughts condition to repeat wherever they are because of the delight and lust they have for them.

Grasping *Upādāna*

Grasping, is an intensified form of craving according to *Upādāna Sutta* (SN12.52). Craving gets intensified when sentient beings frequently concentrate on the gratification provided by things that are prone to be grasped. The reason for frequent concentration is the three characteristics of craving. For example, when a past pleasant experience is remembered, an inner urge takes place to do it again and again irrespective of the location because of the desire and lust. This happens with unpleasant experiences too where someone may go through mental agony over a past incident irrespective of the location.

It is like adding dry grass, cow dung, or wood to a bonfire that is already burning with ten, twenty, thirty, or forty loads of wood so that it would burn for a long time fueled and sustained by the dry grass, cow dung, or wood.

And *Upādāna Sutta* (SN 45.173), another Sutta with the same name as above, explains four types of such graspings.

“And what, bhikkhus, is grasping? There are these four kinds of grasping: grasping to sensual pleasures (kāmuṇāpādāna), grasping to views (diṭṭhupādāna), grasping to precepts and observances (sīlabbatupādāna), grasping to a theory of self (attavādupādāna). This is called grasping.”

Grasping to sensual pleasures (*kāmuṇāpādāna*) means frequent thinking of the gratification that sensual pleasures provide.

A view *diṭṭhi* is an opinion, a belief, a view, or a theory which someone holds onto dearly after it has entered the mind as a thought. Although at first it is only a thought, frequent thinking about it on one’s own accord or at the insistence of someone dear makes the belief or view or the theory to become thickly integrated with existence.

For example, one may live strongly believing that a creator god exists and everything in the universe operates according to the wish of that creator god.

During the time of the Buddha people debated on ten views which are known as the ten indeterminate points⁶. People also hold various views about the past and future. Views about a creator god, life after death and astrological assumptions etc., also fall under this category. Views in the broadest sense represent all the views other than the right view *sammaditṭhi*.

In addition, sentient beings frequently carry out various precepts and observances *sīlabbata* dictated to them mostly by cultural and religious traditions with a strong

conviction of their efficacy. Even today, some people in some parts of the world apparently practice extreme cases of ascetic practices such as conducting themselves as dogs and cows. Some people wear those so-called protective amulets and bathe in supposedly sacred rivers in the belief that such practices can protect them from impending calamities and make them immune to sicknesses.

The root of all these practices perhaps can be traced to their being brain washed by the adults at a very young age. Whatever the initial reason, the frequent thinking about them make their craving for them grow. In other words, they become more convinced the more they think about them.

Further, sentient beings have a belief that an entity – self - exists in them in respect of the four great elements out of which the living being is made up. During the time of the Buddha people debated whether the self that exists is permanent or completely gets destroyed at death. That debate of a self *attavādupādāna* is the fourth type of grasping. Similar to the other three, frequent thinking makes it appear more convincing which is why it is called a grasping.

However, it appears that this notion of self is a creation of consciousness as magician because as Dependent Origination shows there is no such self in existence except ignorance.

Substantiality view *Sakkāyadiṭṭhi*

Let us now pause for a moment to understand why sentient beings crave for the feeling and insist on seeking over and over again, thereby gluing them more to the existence. And the reason is the fact that they are deluded as to the reality of existence which, as already explained, is empty of any substance as everything is in a momentary flux because impermanence is operating relentlessly.

Delusion *moha*, according to *Aññatitthiya Sutta* (AN 3.68), is caused by unwise attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*).

This means that delusion facilitated by unwise attention⁷ obscures the reality of existence. As a result, sentient beings seek and act to get a sense of accomplishment.

But the question arises as to who actually gets that sense of accomplishment if everything is in a flux. This is exactly what the sentient beings do not understand and as a result they insist on an abiding self in respect of the five grasping aggregates. And substantiality view is that wrong insistence, *sakkāyadiṭṭhi Sutta* (SN22.155).

As shown by the above analysis, grasping aggregates is the connection between the six senses and internal or external sense stimuli. For example, a sight does not pierce through the eye when it contacts the eye. Or a sound does not pierce through the ear. But they all make a dent in the mind so to speak by form group's impinging which is responded to by the name group. Form and name group together is contact which is

the meeting of mind consciousness, the aggregates and mind. And the insistence happens because the notion of self that consciousness as the magician creates does not want to miss out on the gratification that the various features, traits, signs and descriptions of the sense stimuli provides through aggregate of feeling. As such, the sentient beings have got accustomed to regard the grasping aggregates as real and substantial since beginningless times.

According to , *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* (MN44) they regard the five aggregates as self in twenty ways. That is regarding each aggregate as self, self as having the aggregate, aggregate in self, or self in aggregate.

This means that all forms of references to the self, such as “I am” etc., are mere imaginations *maññati*, *Ānanda Sutta* (SN22.83). For example, if a young woman who is fond of adornments, checks her own reflection in a clean bright mirror or a clear bowl of water and says, “I am” looking good, it is because of the sense of belonging in the aggregates that she regards as self, that the notion “I am” happens.

This means that when the body is there, due to the sense of belonging in the body that the aggregates represents, intention about the body arises and it gives them pleasure and pain *Cetanā Sutta* (AN 4.171). The same situation applies to speech and mind too. In other words, in the absence of knowing about the body, speech and mind pleasure or pain does not arise in relation to them because in that case, there is no contact known by consciousness.

The young woman does not stop with just one look at the reflection because craving has the characteristics of being repetitive, delightful & lustful and it seeks pleasure here and there. And frequent checking only serves to reinforce her conviction that a self exists and it results in more grasping.

“I am” looking good, is how the experience of the pleasant feeling is cherished and expressed in words. It is accompanied by ego or self-conceit *asmimāna* too because it involves viewing the aggregates from a substantial point view with craving and sharing the experience with others. It is this self-conceit that makes sentient beings seek supremacy in all aspects of existence. This means that “I am” too is a linguistic necessity that further binds the sentient beings to the aggregates.

As we discussed above, it is not only the grasping aggregates that are regarded as real and substantial but the entire formation of contact too are regarded as real and substantial.

The substantiality view *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* is the first of the ten fetters which keeps living beings tethered to the cycle of births and deaths - *Samsāra*.

Continued Existence *Bhava* and Rebirth *Jāti*

Existence is what continues simultaneous with the formation (*saṅkhāra*) of contact as the time passes by. As we noted from the above discussion, frequent revisits of the experience involves more intentional activities of seeking and gaining, making the craving grow and at the same time giving the sentient being more aggregates to grasp because each revisit constitutes a contact. Over a lifetime the aggregates grasped amount to a great number. The Buddha has famously used the term *pañcupādānakkhandhā* to reflect that great number of grasping aggregates that accumulate over a lifetime and called it unsatisfactory (*dukkha*).

In *Paṭhamabhava Sutta* (AN3.76), the Buddha has explained the continuation of consciousness by comparing it to a seed. This means that existence is the consciousness. But consciousness does not arise in isolation because it needs name & form of aggregates and mind as the forerunner and chief. Therefore, as I have shown from the analysis of DN15, existence is mind contact at any given moment in any of the three realms.

“Ānanda, if there were no actions ripening in the sensual realm (kāmadhātu), would the continued existence in sensual realm (kāmabhava), be discerned?”

No, Sir.

Thus, actions kammaṃ are the field, consciousness the seed and craving the moisture. The consciousness of living beings hindered by ignorance (avijjānīvaraṇaṃ) & fettered by craving is established in an inferior realm (hīnadhātu). Thus, there is the rebirth into a new state of existence (punabbhavābhiniḅbatti), in the future.

Ānanda, if there were no actions ripening in the form realm (rūpadhātu), would existence in form realm (rūpabhava), be discerned?”

No, Sir.

Thus, actions are the field, consciousness the seed and craving the moisture. The consciousness of living beings hindered by ignorance (avijjānīvaraṇaṃ) & fettered by craving is established in a middling realm (majjhimadhātu). Thus, there is the rebirth into a new state of existence (punabbhavābhiniḅbatti), in the future.

Ānanda, if there were no actions ripening in the formless realm (arūpadhātu), would existence in formless realm (arūpabhava), be discerned?”

No, lord.

Thus, actions are the field, consciousness the seed and craving the moisture. The consciousness of living beings hindered by ignorance (avijjānīvaraṇaṃ) & fettered

by craving is established in a superior realm (pañītadhātu). Thus, there is the rebirth into a new state of existence (punabbhavābhiniḅbatti), in the future.”

A field is a large extent of land. The actions are the meritorious, de-meritorious and imperturbable intentions carried out by body, speech, and mind. Actions are carried out due to craving which is a result of the substantiality view in respect of the aggregates when they arise as part of the process of contact. There is a multitude of contacts in an existence resulting also in a multitude of grasping aggregates. And it is to reflect a large number or a multitude of grasping aggregates that actions are compared to the field which is the same as the five aggregates *pañcupādānakkhandhā* grasped with craving as a result of the substantiality view.

These grasping aggregates, according to *Khandha Sutta* (SN22.48), can be divided into eleven modes as past, future, or present, internal or external, coarse or fine, inferior or superior, far or near. This does not mean however, that all aggregates in an existence are grasped. What comes under this vast category are only those which are accompanied by the defilement of craving and are prone to being grasped with the substantiality view.

Consciousness is compared to a seed because just like how a seed grows, consciousness too grows because of frequent concentration. And craving is compared to moisture because moisture is the most vital nutrient for the seed of consciousness to grow. That is to say that when the aggregates are viewed as substantial, craving to get more of the same feeling, too grows. This results in more seeking and gaining etc., through contacts which are known by consciousness, as the time passes by unbeknown.

And since ignorance is not an excuse, the existence which is the consciousness and name & form relationship that is sustained by craving, continues into a new birth in spite of the death.

The rebirth is commensurate with where the multitude or the large field of intentions carried out in the existence ripen. That is to say that, if the intentions carried out are of a nature to ripen in the form realm, consciousness and name & form of grasping aggregates which is mind contact goes to the form realm. This is because mind contact has been inclining toward the form realm over a long period. Said another way, the five grasping aggregates accumulated over a life time are such that they go to the form realm. This means that one can, while in the sensual realm, purposefully carve out a rebirth either in form or formless realms.

For example, a musician spends his or her entire life doing something related to music such as singing, teaching music, listening to music and even writing books on music. The reason why he or she is so much into music is because music gives them the most happiness – pleasant feeling - although they get involved in various other tasks too during the existence. Their existence can therefore be compared to the field of music

where their seed of consciousness or contact grows with the moisture of craving for music.

And when the death inevitably arrives, the five grasping aggregates are already ready to remain the sensual realm of existence. This, in other words, is consciousness and name & form relationship or existence accompanied by ignorance which survives the death by being reborn in the inferior sensual realm among the musicians.

The existence in sensual realm is inferior. And existence in form realm is middling while existence in formless realm is superior.

It is noteworthy, however, that irrespective of where the actions ripen, the actions are carried out due to ignorance. This means that even if it is possible to plan for a rebirth in the superior formless realm, it too is accompanied by ignorance. As such, it is unsatisfactory⁸ irrespective of where it occurs because rebirth is accompanied by old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair.

In *Dutiya Mahānāma Sutta* (SN55.22), the Buddha explains this relationship with another beautiful simile.

“A noble disciple who has four things slants, slopes, and inclines towards extinguishment.

What four?

It is when a noble disciple has experiential confidence in the Buddha ...the teaching ...the Saṅgha.

And they have the ethical conduct loved by the noble ones ... leading to immersion.

Suppose there was a tree that slants, slopes, and inclines to the east. If it was cut off at the root, where would it fall?”

“Sir, it would fall in the direction that it slants, slopes, and inclines.”

“In the same way, a noble disciple who has four things slants, slopes, and inclines towards extinguishment.”

Just like the tree falls in the direction where it slants, slopes and inclines, the musician’s consciousness and name & form of grasping aggregates and mind slants, slopes and inclines into the sensual realm at death. And this inclining of consciousness happens without a break at death which means rebirth is immediate⁹ because consciousness does not stop arising even for a fraction of a second.

Sampasādanīya Sutta (DN28) explains it as a person’s stream of consciousness, unbroken on both sides, established in both this world and the next. And *Hāliddikāni Sutta* (SN 22.3) explains it as a shackling of consciousness to greed for four aggregates of form, feeling, perception and intention. When consciousness is so

shackled, it goes from shelter to shelter which simply is the cycle of births and deaths with shackling as the base.

The grasping aggregate of consciousness getting shackled to the other four grasping aggregates in other words is existence. It is similar to saying consciousness getting established in sense stimuli through the grasping aggregates.

Death and rebirth can therefore be understood as momentary nonevents within the existence that continues because they do not affect the continuation. Death is inevitable because the four great elements of which the corporeal body is made up are impermanent. And rebirth too is inevitable because it provides an opportunity for the intentional actions that have not ripened in the existence that is momentarily paused by the death to ripen through contacts.

By way summarizing, if I now analyze the existence in relation to the specific conditionality of Dependent Origination, the twelve links can be understood as the following.

That is; due to ignorance which has no known beginning, sentient beings make intentions. These intentions, due to their being a component of name group of grasping aggregates that coexists with the form group of grasping aggregate, is part of the process of contact. Contact is the meeting of consciousness, the name & form of grasping aggregates and mind as the forerunner and chief. These are the third, fourth and fifth links. Sentient beings react to feeling with craving to seek and gain. Seeking with intention and gaining is grasping. This momentary process takes place in the mind of a sentient being that exists in one the three realms. Death happens due to impermanence of all formations irrespective of the realm. But the mind contact continues in to a rebirth immediately because the relationship between consciousness and the grasping aggregates does not stop. And the unsatisfactory states such as old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair continues.

Conclusion

The twelve links are not linear because as can be seen from the above, there is a sort of going round and round so to speak. That is to say that when ignorance is present, there is intentional seeking which is momentarily linked to consciousness, the grasping aggregates, mind, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, existence, rebirth and unsatisfactory states such as age, death and sorrow etc.

The sentient beings roam in the beginningless cycle of births and deaths *samsāra* because they are deluded as to the reality of existence which is a Dependent Origination of the mind as the forerunner and chief. Mind is the forerunner because it processes sensory data on behalf of all six senses including the mind. When mind processes sensory data, mind consciousness, as the magician creates substantiality view in respect of the form group and name group of grasping aggregates that the mind processes. And existence is this grasping.

Existence is called a phenomenon *dhamma* of the mind because the sensory data that come in to contact with the mind for processing are phenomena *dhamma* in the same way that what come in to contact with eye are sights. And the Buddha has stated that all phenomena are not self (*Sabbe dhammā anatta*) because what comes into the mind as phenomena are formations (*saṅkhārā*) which are unsatisfactory (*dukkha*). For example, all sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations are unsatisfactory formations because they arise in dependence on causes and they cease when the causes no longer exist.

Therefore, wisdom is understanding this reality of existence so that the cycle of rebirths and deaths can be stopped. This is why in *Mahāvedalla Sutta* (MN43), Venerable Sāriputta says that consciousness needs to be completely understood while wisdom needs to be developed. By developing wisdom as to the reality of mind contact, one can decide for himself or herself how far the existence of the cycle of rebirths and deaths continues.

Wisdom comes with the practice of wise attention, mindfulness and awareness at all times. In fact mindfulness needs to be sharp enough not to miss a single contact because as we have noted contact which is a meeting of three is constantly recurring.

When wisdom is developed, the mind is liberated and stilled and the role of consciousness as the magician that creates the mental world of existence comes to an end which marks the completion of the Noble Path. Ignorance is no more. Along with it, the substantiality view and the other fetters end. Grasping aggregates become just aggregates. The existence ends and the unconditioned realized. And the mind consciousness that lasts until death does not respond to sense stimuli in the same way as it did before and it becomes unresponsive consciousness *anidassana viññāṇa* which completely ceases at death due to lack of support.

And since it is not the case with uneducated ordinary people, the unsatisfactory existence continues. Therefore, to cease the roaming, one needs to understand Dependent Origination itself and be dispassionate about the futility of existence that lacks any substantiality. The Noble Path which is designed to let go of all fetters beginning with the substantiality view, becomes the rationale choice of who understands it thus.

In fact, the sequence of the Noble Path can be understood as the exact opposite of Dependent Origination. That is to say that if existence originates in dependence, the Noble Path ceases it. For example, the first path factor of right view is the exact opposite of ignorance. And the second path factor of right intention which includes intentions of renunciation, non-ill will and harmlessness is the exact opposite of intention which is the second link. The next three path factors facilitate sense restraint which represent ethics and the next three facilitate effort in the stilling of all formations to bring forth wisdom.

As evident from the forgoing, Dependent Origination is the quintessence of Buddha's teaching. Just like all the rafters of the roof find their ending at the ridgepole, the essence of all the Suttas that the Buddha has preached in his teaching career of forty-five years slant toward the Dependent Origination of unsatisfactory existence and its cessation. This is also evident from *Vakkali Sutta* (SN 22.87) wherein, the Buddha has said:

“One who sees the teaching (dhamma), sees me. One who sees me sees the teaching (dhamma),”

And in *Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta* (MN28), the Buddha has said:

“One who sees Dependent Origination sees the teaching (dhamma), one who sees the teaching (dhamma), sees Dependent Origination”.

Appendix

Nāmarūpa Sutta (SN12.58)

At Sāvattḥī.

“There are things that are prone to being fettered. When you concentrate on the gratification provided by these things, name and form descend¹⁰ (avakkanti). Name and form are conditions for the six sense fields. ... That is how this entire mass of unsatisfactoriness originates.

Suppose there was a great tree. And its roots going downwards and across all draw the sap upwards. Fueled and sustained by that, the great tree would stand for a long time.

In the same way, there are things that are prone to being fettered. When you concentrate on the gratification provided by these things, name and form descend. ...

There are things that are prone to being fettered. When you concentrate on the drawbacks of these things, name and form do not descend. When name and form cease, the six sense fields cease. ...That is how this entire mass of unsatisfactoriness ceases.

Suppose there was a great tree. Then a person comes along with a spade and basket.
...

In this way the great tree is cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated, and unable to arise in the future.

In the same way, there are things that are prone to being fettered. When you concentrate on the drawbacks of these things, name and form do not descend. When name and form cease, the six sense fields cease. ...That is how this entire mass of suffering ceases.”

We came across the following paragraph in *Upādāna Sutta* (SN12.52) earlier and it differs from SN12.58 only slightly.

“There are things that are prone to being grasped. When you concentrate on the gratification provided by these things, your craving grows.

The first difference is that SN12.58 uses “fettered” instead of “grasped”. The second difference is that SN12.58 uses “name and form descend” instead of “craving grows”. But as the following discussion will reveal, apart from these terminological differences both Suttas depict how unsatisfactory existence continues and what needs to be done to stop it.

In both Suttas, however, it appears that the Buddha has omitted the first two links of ignorance and intentional formations. But as we established at the very beginning,

with or without the first two links, Dependent Origination is based on the principle of specific conditionality which is the coexistence of all the links. This fact is clearly evident from the first sentence that says, “there are things that are prone to be grasped”.

For example, things that are prone to being grasped are the five aggregates and they always exist in the minds of sentient beings although they are ignorant of it. And they frequently concentrate on them with the intention of enjoying the pleasant feeling that was previously enjoyed with them. But frequent concentrating means frequent contacts because it involves thinking about the pleasure or pain wherein the two way movements of mind contact – the unification of mind consciousness, thoughts and mind – frequently happen. This is grasping because frequent concentration happens due to craving for the feeling that frequent contact enables.

Craving results in seeking, gaining safeguarding and lying etc., which constitute existence with the passage of time. Since these activities are performed with the substantiality view in respect of the grasping aggregates, the mental aspect of existence is momentarily fueled by the nutriment of consciousness, contact and mental intention. The physical aspect is fueled by the nutriment of solid and soft food with existence continuing in spite of death. This is because the sentient being is always mentally active as the contacts momentarily arise and cease with the grasping aggregates. This is why, in DN15, the Buddha stopped at the reciprocity between consciousness and name & form and declared “This is how the entire mass of unsatisfactoriness originates”. In other words, the entire mass of unsatisfactoriness originates due to momentary contact that is viewed as substantial due to ignorance.

This means that the omitting of the first two links, as I explained earlier too, is not an oversight on the part of the Buddha. Rather it means the coexistence – specific conditionality - of ignorance and intentions with consciousness, name & form group of grasping aggregates representative of sense stimuli and mind when sentient beings frequently concentrate on the grasping aggregates with intention.

We can now arrange the above momentary process according to the standard version of twelve links.

That is ignorance conditions intentions, intentions conditions consciousness, consciousness conditions name & form of grasping aggregates, name & form of grasping aggregates condition six senses, six senses condition contact, feeling, craving, grasping, existence, continuation of existence through rebirth and the unsatisfactory states. And that is how the entire mass of unsatisfactoriness originates.

This means that although six senses are mentioned, it is only the mind and mind consciousness that repeat contact as the forerunner.

And all the intentional activities that result from body, speech and mind as part of seeking and gaining add fuel to the fire of existence. That is to say that craving that coexists with ignorance persuades the sentient beings to frequently concentrate on the grasping aggregates which is the same as the reciprocity between consciousness and name & form of grasping aggregates (*vattam vattati*).

Name & form descend therefore means existence conditioning a rebirth because the grasping aggregates of form, feeling, perception and intention has got a foothold in consciousness which is the existence. And name & form conditions six sense fields means contact – mind consciousness, mind and thoughts about the sense stimuli which are the third, fourth and fifth links.

The twelve links portray the mind of the sentient beings at any given point in time in any of three realms of existence. That means the unification of the three - third, fourth and the fifth links representing respectively the consciousness, name & form of grasping aggregates and mind - is contact. And adding the link of six sense fields does not change the equation because if mind as the forerunner and chief of all six senses is not active the other five senses are not active as well.

Within the period between birth and death which is conventionally called existence, one accumulates intentional actions *kamma* one after the other in response to pleasant and unpleasant feelings that a multitude of contacts condition along with the other aggregates which includes consciousness. And they all happen due to ignorance of the Four Noble Truths with the result of continuing the unsatisfactory existence.

Having explained Dependent Origination briefly, the Buddha compares his explanation to a great tree that stands for a long time sustained by the sap that it draws by its roots. The great tree that stands for a long time is the existence. The roots are the three - consciousness, the grasping aggregates representative of sense stimuli or simply names & forms and six senses - that together condition contact. The sap of nutriments are the consciousness, contact and mental intention that result from contact. The sap of nutriments are also the five grasping aggregates which the Buddha characterized as unsatisfactoriness in brief, is another way to describe the nutriments. The nutriments or the grasping aggregates are conditioned by ignorance. That is to say that they take place while ignorance is operating simultaneously.

The Buddha then explains how the unsatisfactoriness in existence ceases. In a similar way that the great tree does not stand a chance of growing if its roots are cut off, the existence too ceases when the root of ignorance simultaneous with which the aggregates are grasped is cut off.

That is to say that if sentient beings concentrate on the drawbacks of getting addicted so to speak to sense stimuli through the grasping aggregates when contact conditions them, they give up craving. Then, the names and forms or sense stimuli do not get a foothold in the minds of the noble disciples through the grasping aggregates. When

there are no grasping aggregates representing the sense stimuli, the six senses cease which means that the disciple practices sense restraint. When there is sense restraint, there is no contact to condition feeling, craving and grasping. When there is no grasping, there is no existence which is the end of rebirth that conditions the unsatisfactory states of ageing, illnesses and death etc.

The *Upādānaparipavatta Sutta* (SN22.56), explains it as follows.

“Those ascetics and brahmins who have directly known form, feeling, perception, intention and consciousness in this way - its origin, its cessation, and the practice that leads to its cessation - and due to disillusionment, dispassion, and cessation regarding form, feeling, perception, intention and consciousness, are freed by not grasping: they are well freed.

Those who are well freed are consummate ones.

For consummate ones, there is no cycle of rebirths to be found.”

Athirāga Sutta (SN 12.64)

It must be pointed out at the very outset that the *Athirāga Sutta* is similar to the *Mahānidāna Sutta* discussed earlier in that both Suttas are about how craving leads to a repetition of birth with the consequences of old age and death in the future.

In fact, this Sutta can be considered another version of Dependent Origination of unsatisfactoriness because it shows how, instead of craving, the four nutriments result in a repetition of birth with the consequences of old age and death in the future.

“Bhikkus, there are these four fuels. They maintain sentient beings that have been born and help those that are about to be born. What four? Solid food, whether coarse or fine; contact is the second, mental intention the third, and consciousness the fourth. These are the four fuels that maintain sentient beings that have been born and help those that are about to be born”.

Food as a fuel is easy to understand because everyone, including Arahants need food for survival. This means that although the Arahants have given up craving for all sense stimuli including tastes, they still do require food for survival until their final death.

However, the Buddha’s inclusion of contact, consciousness and mental intention as fuel indicates that they too are as important as solid food. That is to say that food provides the physical energy to maintain the physical aspect of existence while contact, consciousness, and mental intention provide the mental energy to maintain the mental aspect of existence. And if anyone gives up craving for these four types of fuel, existence ends.

And it should be noted that even the consumption of food is associated with the sense stimuli of taste which involve contact, mental intention and consciousness because the taste and tongue unite in what is called contact with consciousness knowing the taste with craving and mental intentions springing up.

“If there is desire, relishing, and craving for solid food, consciousness becomes established there and grows. Where consciousness is established and grows, name and form descend¹¹(avakkanti). Where there is a descent of name and form, there is the growth of intentional formations. Where intentional formations grow, there is rebirth into a new state of existence in the future. Where there is rebirth into a new state of existence in the future, there is rebirth, old age, and death in the future. Where there is rebirth, old age, and death in the future, I say this is full of sorrow, anguish, and distress.

If there is desire, relishing, and craving for contact as fuel ... If there is desire, relishing, and craving for mental intention as fuel ... If there is desire, relishing, and craving for consciousness as fuel, consciousness becomes established there and grows. Where consciousness is established and grows, name and form descend

(avakkanti). Where there is a descent of name and form, there is the growth of intentional formations. Where intentional formations grow, there is rebirth into a new state of existence in the future. Where there is rebirth into a new state of existence in the future, there is rebirth, old age, and death in the future. Where there is rebirth, old age, and death in the future, I say this is full of sorrow, anguish, and distress.”

In this Sutta too, the Buddha speaks about consciousness establishing in contact, mental intention and consciousness itself if there is craving for them. As we discussed, consciousness establishing mean consciousness getting a foothold in sense stimuli through the grasping aggregates. And name & form descending *avakkanti* means the reciprocity between consciousness and name & form of grasping aggregates because consciousness cannot get a foothold unless the grasping aggregates representing the sense stimuli do not respond in a like manner.

The Buddha then explains the existence picturesquely by comparing it to a painting.

“Suppose an artist or painter had some dye, red lac, turmeric, indigo, or rose madder. And on a polished plank or a wall or a canvas they’d create the image of a woman or a man, complete in all its various parts.

In the same way, if there is desire, relishing, and craving for solid food, consciousness becomes established there and grows.”

And so on for the other three nutriments of contact, mental intention and consciousness.

This means that in a way similar to the analogy between painter and the picture, solid and soft food, contact, mental intention and consciousness that are viewed with a sense substantiality maintain the existence of sentient beings who are already born into existence and help those that are to be born.

The Buddha explains the opposite too. That is, if there is no desire, relishing and craving for contact, mental intention and consciousness, the consciousness does not establish on name group and form group of grasping aggregates representative of names & forms of sense stimuli and grow. In other words, it implies cessation of craving with no remainder which is the realization of Nibbāna where there is no more coming to be of unsatisfactoriness in the future. The Buddha uses a beautiful simile to explain this point too.

“Suppose there was a bungalow or a hall with a peaked roof, with windows on the northern, southern, or eastern side. When the sun rises and a ray of light enters through a window, where would it land?”

“On the western wall, sir.”

“If there was no western wall, where would it land?”

“On the ground, sir.”

“If there was no ground, where would it land?”

“In water, sir.”

“If there was no water, where would it land?”

“It would not land, sir.”

“In the same way, if there is no desire, relishing and craving for solid food, consciousness does not become established there and does not grow. Where consciousness is not established and does not grow, name and form do not descend. Where there is no descent of name and form, there is no formation. Where there is no formation, there is no rebirth into a new state of existence in the future. Where there is no rebirth into a new state of existence in the future, there is no rebirth, old age, and death in the future. Where there is no rebirth, old age, and death in the future, I say there is no sorrow, anguish, and distress.”

In this metaphor, the sun is the consciousness in the current existence where mind and its stimuli of thoughts are completely free of craving. Since it has no more craving remaining for sense stimuli through the grasping aggregates of name group and form group, the sun of consciousness does not land anywhere. The western wall, the ground or the water are metaphorical references to various names and forms or sense stimuli. As such, existence ends with no chance for a rebirth which means the entire final paragraph is how the Buddha depicts the mind of a liberated one.

In conclusion of the analysis of this important Sutta, we can now say with certainty that as long as the Four Noble Truths are not understood, there is a continuation of the four nutriments by means of an existence.

As a final note, the nutriments of consciousness, contact and mental intention arise from the same process of contact wherein the five grasping aggregates also arise. This indicates therefore that the Buddha has presented the same message using somewhat different terminology.

Ajāta Sutta (Iti43)

There are many misconceptions about Nibbāna with some believing that the consciousness of an Arahant survives death – a transcendental reality. But as we can understand from this Sutta, it is not such a reality.

“There is, mendicants, an unborn, unproduced, unmade, and unconditioned. If there were no unborn, unproduced, unmade, and unconditioned, then you would find no escape here from the born, produced, made, and conditioned. But since there is an unborn, unproduced, unmade, and unconditioned, an escape is found from the born, produced, made, and conditioned.”

To understand unborn, unproduced, unmade, and unconditioned *ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhataṃ*, we need to understand their opposite. That is born, produced, made and conditioned *jātaṃ bhūtaṃ kataṃ saṅkhataṃ*.

The words “born, produced, made and conditioned” refer to the existence metaphorically. Existence is described with those words because it is born or produced or made or conditioned by ignorance of the Four Noble Truths as explained by the twelve links of Dependent Origination. That means that where there is ignorance there is an existence that is simultaneously being born or produced or made or conditioned. This is the same as saying existence originates in dependence on ignorance. Said another way, where there is ignorance, there is an existence being born or produced or made or conditioned.

However, when a noble disciple understands Dependent Origination, he also understands the futility of existence so that he gives up craving for sense stimuli. Craving is the catalyst for seeking and gaining etc. Therefore, when craving ceases, seeking ceases. When seeking ceases existence ceases. That means where there is no ignorance, there is no existence being born or produced or made or conditioned. This is the same as saying existence ceases in dependence on wisdom. Said another way, where there is no ignorance, there is no existence being born or produced or made or conditioned.

As discussed earlier, existence is similar to sandcastles that children make. Sand castles last only till children have craving for them. Similarly, existence lasts only till sentient beings have craving for the existence. Therefore, when craving ceases, existence ceases. And Nibbāna is cessation of existence *bhavanirodho nibbanam*.

Bāhiya Sutta (Ud 1.10),

A deity persuades Bāhiya to seek advice from the Buddha as he wrongly believed that he was an Arahant. Bāhiya approaches the Buddha who was on alms round at the time and requests the Dhamma to be taught to him. In response, the Buddha delivers the following.

“In that case, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: In what is seen there must be only what is seen, in what is heard there must be only what is heard, in what is sensed there must be only what is sensed, in what is cognized there must be only what is cognized. This is the way, Bāhiya, you should train yourself.

And since for you, Bāhiya, in what is seen there will be only what is seen, in what is heard there will be only what is heard, in what is sensed there will be only what is sensed, in what is cognized there will be only what is cognized, therefore, Bāhiya, you will not be with that; and since, Bāhiya, you will not be with that, therefore, Bāhiya, you will not be in that; and since, Bāhiya, you will not be in that, therefore, Bāhiya, you will not be here or hereafter or in between the two. Just this is the end of unsatisfactoriness.¹²”

In order to properly understand the meaning the Buddha conveyed to Bāhiya, we need to understand what one ordinarily does when the six senses come into contact with sense stimuli.

Seeing, hearing, cognizing and sensing are instances of contact which conditions feeling. When feeling is there uneducated ordinary persons begin to frequently seek the gratification that feeling provides due to craving. This is grasping that serves to augment existence because frequent seeking keeps them frequently occupied.

The reason for seeking is the substantiality view the sentient beings have in respect of the grasping aggregates that represent the sense stimuli. For example, when consciousness does the knowing of impinging by form group with a simultaneous designating from the name group, they think they know when in fact it is an instance of contact arising.

However, what happens unbeknown to them is that every contact with consciousness knowing is an instance of Dependent Origination. That is to say that contact represents their consciousness, name & form of grasping aggregates and mind which respectively are the third, fourth, and fifth links. When they begin seeking on the basis of craving that feeling has conditioned, they are making intentions under ignorance while at the same time augmenting their existence because seeking means gaining safeguarding, lying etc.

In other words, when seen, heard, cognized and sensed, the footing that consciousness already has on the name & form of aggregates gets further established. It is like adding more fuel to the fire of existence that is already burning. The continuation of

existence is unsatisfactory because it is accompanied by the unsatisfactory states such as ageing, illnesses and death etc.

The catalyst for this situation is that the sentient beings are deluded as to the reality of existence. That is to say that they do not know that their existence is empty of substance because it is only a reciprocity between consciousness and name & form of grasping aggregates.

For example, consciousness that does the knowing is not self because it is a mere formation (*saṅkhāra*) that arises in dependence on external sense stimuli. And the aggregates that represent the sense stimuli too are dependently arisen similar to consciousness. The sense stimuli themselves are dependently arisen. Moreover, the sense organs of eye, ear, nose, tongue and the body too are dependent on solid and soft food which means they too are formations. And the mind that processes sensory data as the forerunner and chief of all senses, too is a formation. This means that all components of existence are impermanent. Whatever is impermanent is unsatisfactory and whatever is impermanent and unsatisfactory cannot be self.

In other words, the sentient being exists solely due to craving because it is what connects the consciousness to the sense stimuli through their representative grasping aggregates. And if there is no craving, there is no consciousness to maintain the reciprocity which is the end of existence.

The existence is therefore a delusion. The delusion as to the reality of existence prevails because the uneducated ordinary people do not pay wise attention and mindfulness with awareness when consciousness arises in dependence. It then results in a lack of sense restraint fueling a seeking thus augmenting the existence.

If, on the other hand, mindfulness and awareness are practiced with wise attention established, one is able to understand the lack of a self in the experience because it is simply a coming together of three - contact. This is the present moment awareness. If and when it happens, a fantasy world does not arise in the mind as a springboard to another fantasy world in the future.

Let us now get back to the Buddha's advice.

“In what is seen there must be only what is seen, in what is heard there must be only what is heard, in what is sensed there must be only what is sensed, in what is cognized there must be only what is cognized”

This is his indirect way of saying that Bāhiya must not grasp and shackle himself to the seen, heard, sensed, and cognized because there is no self that sees, hears, senses, and cognizes in dependently arisen contact. In brief, the Buddha advises Bāhiya to maintain bare awareness or equanimity without getting caught up in the features, traits, signs, and brief descriptions of the sense stimuli that is seen, heard, cognized

or sensed because the contact is simply the impermanent process of consciousness, mind and thoughts arising dependent on stimuli which are also dependently arisen.

Let us now focus on the second part of the advice.

For example, if Bāhiya is not mindful about the present moment which is what the consciousness is about to create as the magician, he is nurturing his present existence in this so called mentally created world and at the same time he is laying the foundation for another realm for his future existence via rebirth by interpreting contact through the lens of a self. But, if he does not get shackled to the present moment when senses and stimuli come into contact by practicing wise attention, mindfulness with awareness, he is free from this world, the next world where he might be reborn, and the middle as well since, in that case, his mind is not hindered. In other words, the continuation of existence ceases for him. The middle, as is clear, is the time between now – the moment of the Buddha’s advice – and death which can be at any time.

Therefore, what is meant by “*you will not be with that*” is the non-attachment to the present moment - contact - wherein a notional mental world is created if attachment persists. What is meant by “*you will not be in that*” is the non-continuity of present existence when the contact is not nurtured by not imagining with the understanding that it is dependently originated. When there is no continuity of present existence through non-attachment to present moment, Bāhiya is not going to be in the present existence now - *you will not be here* - or in the next rebirth which must happen immediately after death - *hereafter* - or anywhere now and death of the present corporeal body - *in between the two*.

Between now and death or between now and hereafter indicates that the liberation is right here and right now, and the Buddha does not want Bāhiya to prolong liberation even by a single moment let alone a single day because between now and death in the present existence can mean a long time unless liberation is reached right now.

This means that the time spent from the time of liberation which is now - the present moment - and the imminent death is not an existence per se although the time gap represents a certain length of time which is conventionally called life or existence with the four great elements existing. Although the convention can identify the four great elements as a liberated one or an Arahant or by any other name, it is like a fire gone out with just the dead embers remaining without any potential for reigniting. *Nibbānadhātu Sutta* (Iti44) explains this liberation as *saupādisesa Nibbāna* – extinguishment with something left over¹³.

Unfortunately, Bāhiya passed away as a result of being attacked by a bull immediately after being advised. But he was declared an Arahant by the Buddha as a result of that insightful advice. If we are to elaborate as to how such a feat could have happened, it is because Bāhiya was able to immediately let go of the attachment to the five

grasping aggregates that result from contact which is the same as instant eradication of all defilements that binds the sentient beings to existence.

In other words, it is understanding the forward order of Dependent Origination of existence of a sentient being of unsatisfactoriness in which the first two Noble Truths are enshrined. This also goes to show that the Noble Eightfold Path can be very brief if and when the reality of existence is understood.

Jaṭā Sutta (SN 1.23)

This Sutta explains the freedom of mind as a snapping of the tangle within and without.

*“A tangle inside, a tangle outside,
This generation is entangled in a tangle.
I ask you this, O Gotama,
Who can disentangle this tangle?”*

*A man established on virtue, wise,
Developing the mind and wisdom,
A bhikkhu ardent and discreet:
He can disentangle this tangle.*

*Those for whom lust and hatred
Along with ignorance have been expunged,
The arahants with taints destroyed:
For them the tangle is disentangled.*

*And where name and form cease with nothing left over;
as well as impingement and perception of form:
it is there that the tangle gets snapped.”*

As we discussed, tangle within is craving for the six senses themselves. This happens when contact involving any of the six senses conditions feeling.

All uneducated ordinary people regard their corporeal body and what is called consciousness, mind, and thoughts as “This is mine, this I am, this is my self” which is the substantiality view. For example, when they see their own reflection in a mirror or a clean bowl of water, the reflection impinges the name group while consciousness knowing and name group responding as “This is me, I look good etc.”

Based on this wrong view, which is the tangle within, they regard, in the same way, the aggregates that result when the six senses and external sense stimuli come into contact too and it is the tangle without.

Name and form as we discussed is the sense stimulus and as well as the form group and name group of grasping aggregates that represent the sense stimulus. Sentient beings get connected to names and forms of sense stimuli when the name group and form group of grasping aggregates make a two way movement in what is called contact.

Therefore, cessation of name and form means pure equanimity in relation to name group and form group of grasping aggregates. This happens when the features, traits,

signs and descriptions of the forms or sense stimuli have lost their power to induce an impingement or an impact on the name group because craving for all features, traits, signs and descriptions of sense stimuli has been completely given up without remainder. This is what is meant by the tangle getting snapped.

This Sutta is one of many where the fact that name & form means the six sense stimuli and as well as the grasping aggregates is evident. This is because if it is only about the material aspect of sense stimuli, an escape from the tangle is impossible because materiality never ceases with nothing left over.

Kevaṭṭa Sutta (DN11)

By way of background, the protagonist of this Sutta is a monk who has gone to the realm of brahma to find out where the four great elements cease with nothing left over. The brahma confesses his ignorance of the answer and directs the monk back to the Buddha who answers the question by rephrasing the question first.

“Monk, this is not how the question should be asked: “Sir, where do these four primary elements cease without anything left over, namely, the elements of earth, water, fire, and air?”

This is how the question should be asked:

*Where do water and earth,
fire and air find no footing;
where do long and short,
fine and coarse, beautiful, and ugly;
where do name and form
cease with nothing left over?*

And the answer to that is:

*Consciousness that is non-responsive,
infinite, radiant all round.
Here is where water and earth,
fire and air find no footing.*

*here is where long and short,
fine and coarse, beautiful and ugly;
here's where name and form
cease with nothing left over-
with the cessation of consciousness,
that is where this ceases”.*

The Buddha's rephrasing of the question solves most of the riddle because it gives an indication as to the context in which consciousness arises.

Consciousness arises when it knows the form group representative of a name & form of a sense stimulus and the name group responding in what is called contact.

The water, earth, fire, and air represent the four great elements of which all names and forms of sense stimuli are made up of. Long, short, fine, coarse, beautiful, and ugly are how the features, traits and signs associated with names & forms of the sense stimuli are described. This means that names and forms of sense stimuli will always be there in some form or the other as long as the four great elements are there because four great elements can never be totally eliminated.

This is why the Buddha modified the question. That is to say that the forms made up of four great elements with whatever name tags will never cease without anything left over.

But the Buddha then says that the four great elements cease where consciousness is nonresponsive *anidassana*. And further, he says that names & forms of sense stimuli with their features and traits such as long, short, and fine etc., cease with cessation of consciousness.

Nonresponsive consciousness is a reference to the liberated mind that is pure. The names & forms of sense stimuli with their features and traits such as long, short, and fine etc., cease mean that name group and form group of grasping aggregates are no longer known by consciousness because liberated mind has no more craving for them.

In other words, no one can make the four great elements to cease but anyone who understands Dependent Origination in the way it is explained in this writing can shun them having given up craving for them.

The Buddha has also used some other adjectives such as infinite, radiant and all round (*anantam sabbatopabham*) etc., to further complement the nature of such a mind. In fact, they can be understood as the Buddha's way of poetically illustrating the nature of the mind of the realized one although it appears as an unsolvable riddle to many.

Let us therefore analogically compare consciousness to a flashlight to understand this riddle. If a flashlight is directed into a forest, its beam is interrupted by various objects upon which the beam lands thereby preventing its full potential of radiance as well as the distance it can travel in the absence of obstacles. But, if the beam of the same flashlight is directed at the cloudless sky in the thick of the night, it illuminates all round *sabbatopabham* infinitely *anantam* reaching its full potential in terms of both radiance and distance because there are no objects to interfere with the beam of light.

In this analogy, flashlight directed into forest is like the consciousness of an uneducated ordinary person because it rests or establishes on whatever sense stimuli with enticing features etc., it encounters in its path with craving. This resting or establishing means their consciousness does not illuminate all round but finite in that it does not reach its full potential of freedom.

But the consciousness of a realized one is like the flashlight directed into the cloudless sky because it does not rest or establish on any sense stimuli as they have completely and irrevocably eliminated craving for all sense stimuli. This is because for the arahants, there is no operation of Dependent Origination. As such, their consciousness illuminates all round and reaches its full potential just like the flashlight directed into the cloudless sky.

In *Udāna Sutta* (SN 22.55), the Buddha explains a similar situation with the word *anabhisankhacca vimuttam* which is translated as freedom due to nongenerative consciousness.

Therefore, we can conclude this book knowing that the consciousness or the mind of a realized individual like Bāhiya is one that is nonresponsive to names & forms of grasping aggregates representative of sense stimuli in contrast to an uneducated ordinary person because the realized one has no craving for any sense stimuli. In other words, the consciousness of a realized one is free because it does not rest or establish on any sense stimuli with craving.

Consciousness, as said before, does not arise in isolation. Since mind is the forerunner and chief, it always arises with mind. Therefore, cessation of existence, Nibbāna, is pure mind which does not arise anymore after death. This is the teaching of all Buddhas.

Abstain from all unwholesome deeds,
perform wholesome ones,
purify your mind -
this is the teaching of the Buddhas.

*Sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ,
kusalassa upasampadā,
sacittapariyodapanam -
etaṃ buddhāna sāsanaṃ.*

The End

Let us conclude this writing with *Sattigumba Jataka* (No 503). Two baby parrots were separated from their parents when their nest got destroyed in a violent storm with one of them being adopted by hermits and the other by bandits. The baby parrot, who was adopted by the hermits, developed all the manners of behavior associated with hermits such as pleasant speech and manners. The other baby parrot developed all harsh manners of behavior associated with the bandits.

The root cause of rebirth of all humans is universal in that everyone is born with the interaction of parents. It is only after the rebirth that the baby gets conditioned by external influences, which shape the overall makeup of the living being in terms of attitude towards life. The simple reason for this conditioning is because no one cares to investigate their experiences closely enough to realize their phenomenal nature. As such, everyone gets conditioned by what they perceive as correct in their surroundings, just like the two parrots.

A breakthrough to this situation arises when a Buddha arises in the world and declares the Four Noble Truths, having fully comprehended the real nature of existence. Those who care to listen - the parrots of the noble disciples adopted by the Buddha - reach the light of wisdom like a lotus blossoming out of muddy water while others - the parrots of uneducated ordinary persons adopted by the bandits - continue to languish in the ignorance of darkness like being stuck in the mud.

May all living beings be liberated from the bondage of existence.

Abbreviations

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
Dhp	Dhammapada
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
Iti	Itivuttaka
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
NCPED	New Concise Pali English Dictionary
PTS PED	Pali Text Society Pali English Dictionary
SN	Samyutta Nikāya
Snp	Sutta Nipāta
Ud	Udāna

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¹ *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN9), lists feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention as those that constitute name.

² *Nāma Sutta* (SN1.61) says; *“Name oppresses everything. Nothing’s bigger than name. Name is the one thing that has everything under its sway.”* And Iti.63, too says; *“Beings are conscious of what can be named, they are established on the nameable. By not comprehending the nameable things, they come under the yoke of death.”*

³ The six qualities of the teaching according to *Upavāṇasandiṭṭhika Sutta* (SN 35.70) are; The teaching is well explained by the Buddha, it is visible in the here and now, immediately effective, inviting inspection, onward leading, so that it can be personally experienced by the wise.

⁴ *Upavāṇasandiṭṭhika Sutta* explains how a disciple understands the presence of desire in relation to the six qualities of teaching.

“Sir, they speak of ‘a teaching apparent in the present life’ .In what way is the teaching apparent in the present life, immediately effective, inviting inspection, relevant, so that sensible people can know it for themselves?”

“Upavāna, take a mendicant who sees a sight with their eyes. They experience both the sight and the desire for the sight. There is desire for sights in them, and they understand that. Since this is so, this is how the teaching is apparent in the present life, immediately effective, inviting inspection, relevant, so that sensible people can know it for themselves”.

⁵ Transmigration has no known beginning. No first point is found of sentient beings roaming and transmigrating, shrouded by ignorance and fettered by craving, *Āpaṇa Sutta* (SN48.50). The same message is found in Suttas such as SN 15.1, SN 15.2, SN 15.11 SN 15.19, SN 22.99, SN 22.100, and SN 56.35

⁶ The world is eternal, the world is not eternal, the world is finite, the world is infinite, the soul and the body are the same, the soul is one thing and the body another, a Realized One exists after death, a Realized One does not exist after death, a Realized One both exists and does not exist after death and a Realized One neither exists nor does not exist after death.

And the Buddha rejected them all saying;

“Each of these ten convictions is the thicket of views, the desert of views, the trick of views, the evasiveness of views, the fetter of views. They are beset with anguish, distress, and fever. They don’t lead to disillusionment, dispassion, cessation, peace, insight, awakening, and extinguishment”.

⁷ Attention (*manasikāra*), although it is in the name group, is not considered an aggregate in the same way the other aggregates are considered. But its significance comes from the fact that it plays a vital role when acting with craving. For example, if sentient beings apply their attention wisely when intentionally acting, they can avoid falling into the trap of consciousness which the Buddha has named magician.

And it is likely that the terms such as wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) and unwise attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*) stem from how it is applied.

⁸ In the *Puggala Sutta* (SN 15.10), the Buddha has explained the length of *Samsāra* by likening the collection of bones to a mountain which clearly explains how long the mistaking of consciousness for a self has prevailed as a curtain obstructing the wisdom of the Four Noble Truths.

“Bhikkhus, transmigration has no known beginning. One person roaming and transmigrating for an eon would amass a heap of bones the size of this Mount Vepulla if they were gathered together and not lost.”

Mount Vepulla is the highest of the five mountains surrounding Rājagaha.

⁹ Venerable Narada Maha Thera in “The Buddha and his Teachings”, quoting from *Abhidhamma*, lists four types of fields – *kamma* - which the dying person possibly remembers determining the type of rebirth.

They are “*garauka kamma, āsanna kamma, acinna kamma and katatta kamma*”, translated respectively as the five heinous crimes, death proximate actions, habitual actions, which are good or bad and any trivially good or bad action, which becomes the experience in the absence of the other three.

However, in *Acinteyya Sutta* (AN4.77), the Buddha lists four things that are unthinkable. They are the scope of the Buddhas, the scope of one in absorption, the results of actions *kamma* and speculation about the world.

¹⁰ The Pali word “*avakkanti*” needs to be understood in the context. The context is hidden in “*There are things that are prone to being fettered. When you concentrate on the gratification provided by these things, name and form descend. Name and form are conditions for the six sense fields. ... That is how this entire mass of unsatisfactoriness originates*”.

Therefore, to bring out the context, we need to first of all understand what things are prone to being fettered and how they happen.

For example, feeling is a thing to be fettered because it is what provides gratification through frequent concentration. But feeling has to be conditioned by contact.

Since concentration on gratification frequently happens, contact too needs to happen in the same pace to keep up with concentration. This means that consciousness, names & forms of grasping aggregates representative of sense stimuli and six senses too happen in the same pace as contact. Here again, the frequent reciprocal relationship between consciousness and name & form groups of grasping aggregates is clearly evident.

Name & form descend therefore is how the Buddha figuratively explains the reciprocity between consciousness and name & form of aggregates. It is similar to saying for example, name & form of grasping aggregates sink down to consciousness because consciousness is always occupied with them.

And name & form are conditions for six sense field again is the same relationship because contact needs three. The three here are the consciousness, grasping aggregates representing the six sense stimuli and the six sense organs of which mind is the foremost.

And six sense fields condition contact, contact conditions feeling rebirth conditions old age etc.

Therefore, the entire paragraph, *“There are things that are prone to being fettered. When you concentrate on the gratification provided by these things, name and form descend. Name and form are conditions for the six sense fields. ... That is how this entire mass of unsatisfactoriness originates”* is about frequent seeking due to craving for sense stimuli which frequently come into contact with the six senses. In other words, this is craving and seeking converging to feeling which is contact the accumulation of which is existence.

Therefore, name & form in *“name & form descend”* is the fourth link and descend does not mean a rebirth in the context used in this Sutta. And six sense fields in *“Name and form are conditions for the six sense fields”* is the fifth link.

In SN12.64, we find *“Where there is a descent of name and form, there is the growth of intentional formations. Where intentional formations grow, there is rebirth into a new state of existence in the future”*

The difference as can be seen is that after *“name & form descend/descent”*, there is *“there is the growth of intentional formations. Where intentional formations grow”* instead of *“Name and form are conditions for the six sense fields”*.

Here again as in SN12.58, there is a descent of name & form means the grasping aggregates sinking in to the consciousness through contact which is the combination of consciousness, the grasping aggregates and mind as the forerunner. This is very clear from *“there is the growth of intentional formations”* because intentions mean frequent seeking with craving which the feeling conditions.

In SN12.64, the context is very clear because the Buddha says that contact, intention and consciousness maintain sentient beings who are already born and help those to be born. If it does not mean existence, the Buddha does not need to say so. They are existence because they result from frequent concentration on the gratification that feeling provides from contact.

And the next sentence in SN12.64, “*where intentional formations grow, there is rebirth into a new state of existence in the future*” only reinforces the fact that context again is contact the accumulation of which is existence. And it is existence that conditions a rebirth.

The reason why *name and form descent/descend*” is interpreted as rebirth is not understanding the context which has the ramification of the twelve links being divided in to three lives.

In conclusion therefore, name & form descent or descend applies to the fourth link as part of contact and not a rebirth.

¹¹ Please refer to Note 12.

¹² In the *Mālukiyaputta Sutta* (SN 35.95) too, the Buddha offers the same advice to Mālukiyaputta.

¹³ *Nibbānadhātu Sutta* (Iti 44) explains the two types of liberations as *saupādisesā nibbānadhātu* extinguishment with something left over and *anupādisesā nibbānadhātu* – extinguishment with nothing left over.

“And what is the element of extinguishment with something left over? It is when a mendicant is a perfected one, with defilements ended, who has completed the spiritual journey, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, achieved their own true goal, utterly ended the fetters of rebirth, and is rightly freed through enlightenment. Their five sense faculties still remain. So long as their senses have not gone, they continue to experience the agreeable and disagreeable, to feel pleasure and pain. The ending of greed, hate, and delusion in them is called the element of extinguishment with something left over.

And what is the element of extinguishment with nothing left over? It is when a mendicant is a perfected one, with defilements ended, who has completed the spiritual journey, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, achieved their own true goal, utterly ended the fetters of rebirth, and is rightly freed through enlightenment. For them, everything that is felt, being no longer relished, will become cool right here. This is called the element of extinguishment with nothing left over. These are the two elements of extinguishment.”

It seems that both types of liberations are experienced while an Arahant is alive, that is before the death. However, in *saupādisesā nibbānadhātu* the Arahant relishes what

is felt and in *anupādisesā nibbānadhātu* the Arahant does not relish what is felt with the lack of greed, hate or delusion being common to both experiences.