

**Dependent Origination**  
Barre Center for Buddhist Studies  
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**Because of not understanding, not penetrating [DO] one does not pass beyond states of woe**

*On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling among the Kurus, where there was a town of the Kurus named Kammāsadamma. Then the Venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to him:*

*“It is wonderful, venerable sir! It is amazing, venerable sir! This dependent origination is so deep and so deep in implications, yet to me it seems as clear as clear can be.”*

*“Do not say so, Ānanda! Do not say so, Ānanda! This dependent origination is deep and deep in implications. It is because of not understanding and not penetrating this Dhamma, Ānanda, that this generation has become like a tangled skein, like a knotted ball of thread, like matted reeds and rushes, and does not pass beyond states of woe, the bad destinations, the nether world, samsāra.” DN 15, SN 12.60*

## Important Things

In MN 26.19, we find the Buddha recounting his musing at the time of his awakening:

*I considered: ‘This Dhamma that I have attained is profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise. But this generation delights in attachment, takes delight in attachment, rejoices in attachment. It is hard for such a generation to see this important thing, namely, this-that, conditionality, dependent origination. And it is hard to see these important things, namely, the stilling of all fabrications, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna.’*

This "important thing" (this-that conditionality, dependent origination) is the heart of the Buddha's teaching. At MN 28.28, Sariputta quotes the Buddha as having said, “One who sees dependent origination sees the Dhamma; one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent origination.”

## Phenomenology, not Metaphysics

One of the most important things to keep in mind when exploring any of the Buddha's teachings is that he was a phenomenologist, not a metaphysicist. By "phenomenologist" I'm not referring to the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, but rather saying that the Buddha was only interested in the phenomena we experience and our responses to those experiences. By saying "not a metaphysicist" I'm pointing out that the Buddha was not interested in explaining the fundamental nature of the world. However, even though the Buddha wasn't teaching metaphysics, Buddhist Metaphysics certainly exists. But Buddhist Metaphysics is a later invention and will not be of any help in understanding dependent origination.

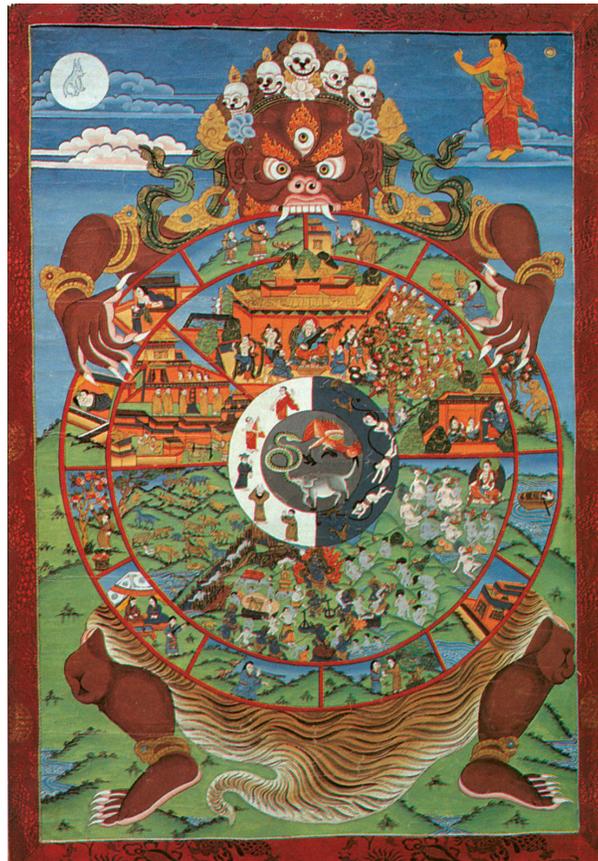
Eschewing metaphysics is actually a difficult thing to do for most people when they are studying spiritual literature. We all want to know, "What's really going on here?!?" Well, the Buddha didn't answer that sort of question. In fact he point blank refused to answer the primary metaphysical questions of his time:

Is the cosmos infinite or not?  
Is the cosmos eternal or not?  
Is the soul the same as the body or not?  
What happens to an awakened one after death?

He very consistently stuck to just teaching "dukkha and the end of dukkha" by having people explore the phenomena they experience and their responses to those experiences.

## The Wheel

The most famous teaching of the twelve links of dependent origination is probably the Tibetan wheel of life. This is a big circle that's being held by Yama, the Lord of Death.



Yama is a rather fearsome creature, you can see his fangs coming over the top of the circle in the twelve o'clock position. And then at ten and two, you see his claws. And then down at four and eight he's got his feet grasping the wheel and his tail is switching back and forth at six o'clock.

## The Bullseye

On the circle are a number of concentric rings. In the center in the bullseye position, there is a rooster, a snake and a pig, each biting the tail of the other. The rooster is greed, the snake is hatred and the pig is delusion.



## The Bullseye - version 2

Here's an alternate version with the pig (ignorance) vomiting up the bird (greed) vomiting up the snake (hatred). This accord with the teaching found in e.g. DN 15.



## Samsara

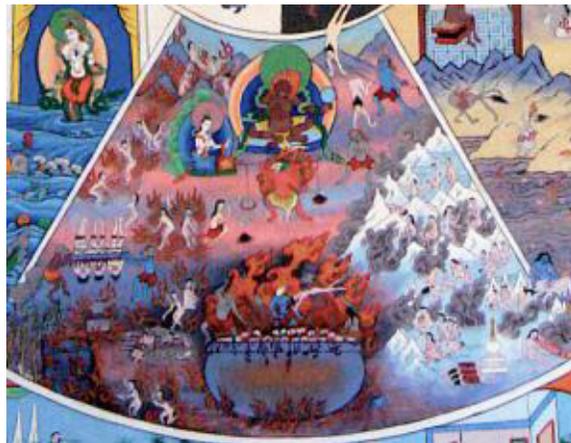
The next circle depicts various beings coming out of states of woe and coming up to nice states and then descending again to states of woe: the circle of samsara.



## The 6 Realms of Existence - Hell Realm

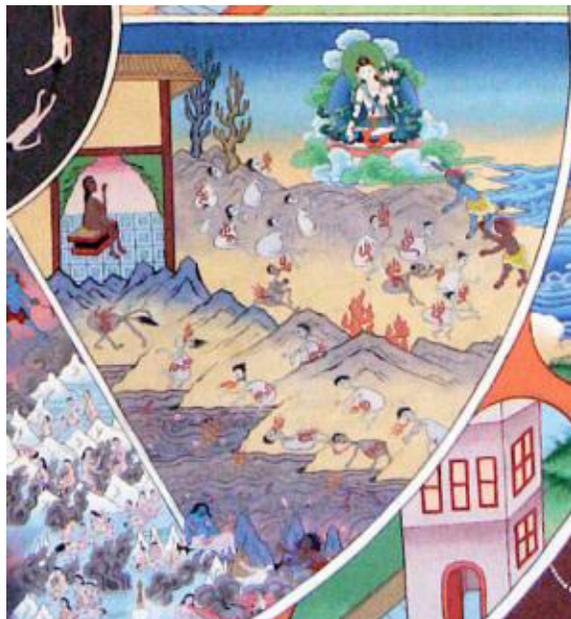
The next circle is usually the biggest one, the one where the artist has the most fun, and it depicts the six realms of existence.

The lowest section is the hell realms. They are depicted in ways that Dante would be proud of - all sorts of gruesome stuff: people boiled in oil, chewed by monsters, walking through forests where all the leaves are swords, the whole nine yards.



## The 6 Realms of Existence - Hungry Ghost Realm

Above hell is the realm of the hungry ghosts. These are beings that in their previous incarnation were very greedy and now they have been reborn in a realm where they have giant bellies and little tiny necks - and they can never get enough.



## The 6 Realms of Existence - Animal Realm

Also among the lower realms there is the animal realm, the only realm that we know directly besides our human realm. The artist has fun painting deer and rabbits and birds and all the other animals.



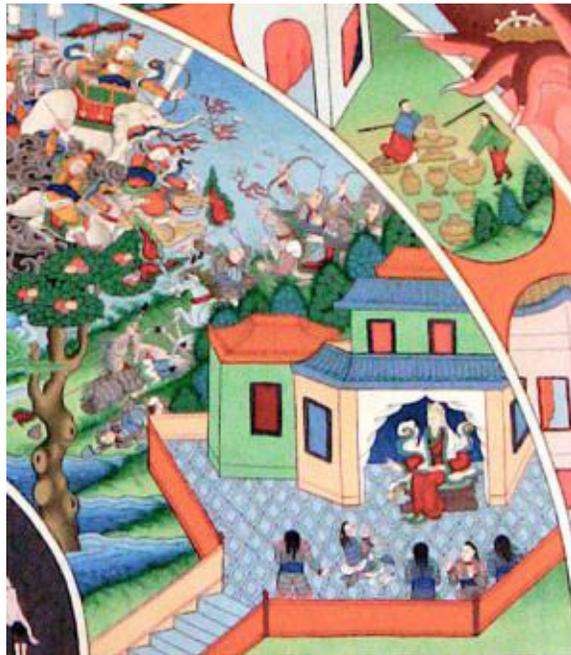
## The 6 Realms of Existence - Human Realm

Then there's the human realm, our realm, and the artist paints people doing various things: farming, weaving, eating, sleeping - all the various ways we occupy ourselves in this realm.



## The 6 Realms of Existence - Asura Realm

Among the higher realms is also the realm of the warring gods, the Asuras. These are beings that are fighting all the time. It appears that they own a five sided building just south of Washington, DC.



## The 6 Realms of Existence - God Realms

And then at the top are the various god realms. There are the 26 heavenly realms, and the devas there are all depicted in the usual ways we expect heavenly beings to be living: eating banquets of ambrosia, sitting on clouds playing lutes (rather than harps), enjoying themselves.



## The Dependent Origination Ring

But the most important ring is the outermost ring. And in that ring the twelve links of dependent origination are depicted.









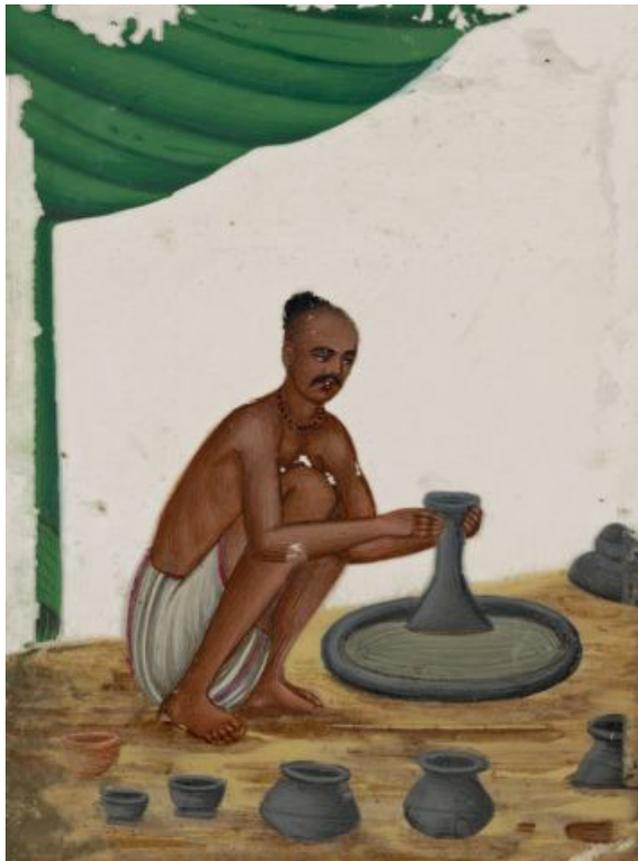
## Ignorance - avijja

Up at the top, in the one o'clock position, is ignorance, *avijja*, depicted as an old blind person trying to make their way through the forest, difficult to know where to go, what to do.



## Sankhāra

Dependent on ignorance are sankhāras. These concoctions, or fabrications, are things that are manufactured, created. They are made, but they also have a hint of not quite true - like: "he came home last night really late and he concocted some story about a flat tire." So these sankhāras are not quite really the deepest truth of what's going on because they're dependent on ignorance. The sankhāras are depicted at two o'clock as a potter sitting at a wheel making pots.



Some of the pots are very beautiful, some are misshapen, some are broken. So too are our creations. Sankhāra here in dependent origination is often translated as "karmic formations," and it does include our karmic intentions, some of which are good and some of which are broken and messed up. But as

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mentioned above, sankhāra in dependent origination is really more than just "karmic intentions" - it's referring to all the things of creation and is specifically implying that all these manufactured things are not quite the whole story since they arise out of ignorance.

\* In the teaching of the 5 khaṇḍas sankhāra refers to thoughts, emotions, memories & intentions - all mental activities other than vedanā, saññā and viññāṇa.

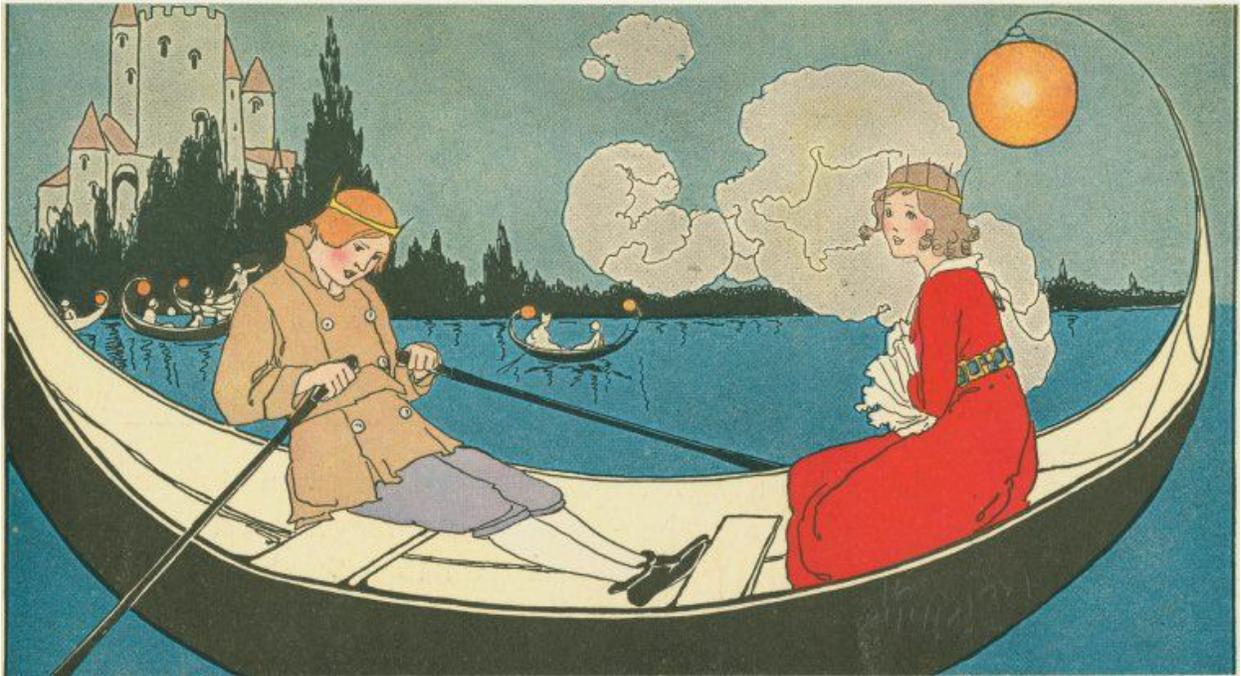
## Consciousness - viññāṇa

Dependent upon sankhāra is consciousness - viññāṇa. Our consciousness is dependent upon there being an object of consciousness and these objects are concoctions, fabrications, created things. They can be mental states, or stories we are telling ourselves, or physical things all of which are part of creation. Consciousness is depicted at three o'clock as a monkey swinging through the trees grabbing first one limb and then the next. You might have encountered this monkey mind at some point in the recent past!



## Name and Form - nāmarūpa

At four o'clock, dependent on consciousness, there's mind and body - nāmarūpa. Mind and body is depicted as two people in a boat. One is standing up and poling the boat along, one is lying prone and is just along for the ride.



One of them is mind, one of them is body; which is which? This is actually an important insight to gain, it's the first of the sixteen insight knowledges: the delineation of mind and body - understanding what is mind and what is body, how they interact, and most importantly which one is in charge. This is an topic to contemplate. Get yourself concentrated and then investigate your mind and investigate your body. See how they interact and figure out who's in charge. Who's deciding which way the boat goes? The answer is left as an exercise for the reader.

## The Six Senses - āyatanāni

Dependent on mind and body are the six senses - āyatanāni. This is depicted at five o'clock as a house with five windows and a door: the five external senses and the door representing the mind.



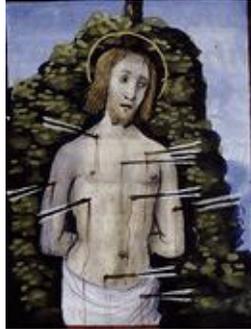
## Contact - phassa

Dependent on the senses, contact arises - phassa. Contact is depicted at six o'clock as couple embracing.



## Vedanā

Dependent upon contact is vedanā. Vedanā is depicted at seven o'clock as a man having arrows shot into his eyes. Unpleasant vedanā.



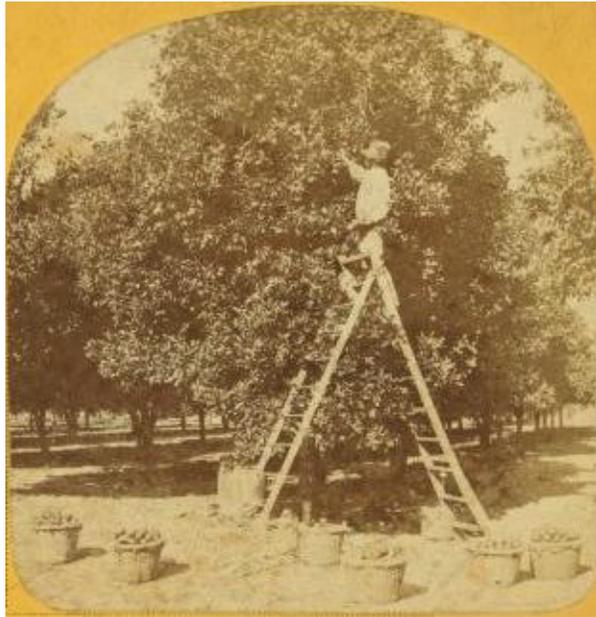
## Craving - taṇhā

Dependent upon vedanā is craving - taṇhā. Craving is shown at eight o'clock as an enormously fat person sitting at a table that's laden with lots of food.



## Clinging - upādāna

Dependent upon craving is clinging - upādāna. Clinging is depicted at nine o'clock as someone picking fruit and putting it into baskets that are so full that the new fruit simply rolls off onto the ground.



## Becoming - bhāva

Dependent upon clinging is becoming - bhāva - and that's depicted as a pregnant woman at ten o'clock.



## Birth - jāti

Dependent upon becoming is birth - jāti - and that's a mother with an infant at eleven o'clock.



## Aging and Death - maraṇa

And then dependent upon birth is death - maraṇa - and that's depicted as a corpse at twelve o'clock.



## So what exactly is going on here?

And now we've come full circle. So what exactly is going on here? Does ignorance arise dependent upon death as the circle continues? What do all the items and links actually mean? Why does birth come as the 11th item - birth usually comes first? And the links between craving, clinging, and becoming don't seem at all clear. And what's this deal about the things of creation arising due to ignorance - aren't a lot of the things of creation here before anyone shows up to be ignorant? Is there a big picture?

It's certainly not obvious what's going on here. Caroline Rhy Davids called Dependent Origination a "curious old rune."<sup>1</sup> What we'll do next is take a look at the more common interpretations of Dependent Origination.

1. in G. C. Pande [someplace]

## **Three Lives?**

This orthodox view can be found in the Visuddhimagga in Chapter XVII (Chp 17, pg 533). But as we discussed last night, even tho this is the orthodox view, there is no support for this in the suttas.

## **Moment to Moment Dependent Origination**

**Paticcasamuppada: Practical Dependent Origination by Bhikkhu Buddhadasa**

## Necessary Conditions

Dependent Origination is not a teaching about causes; it's a teaching about necessary conditions.

This arises dependent on that;  
If that does not occur, this does not occur.

## The Key

Snp 4.11 Kalaha-vivada Sutta: Quarrels & Disputes  
[http://leighb.com/snp4\\_11.htm](http://leighb.com/snp4_11.htm)

see also SN 12.66: Exploration  
<https://suttacentral.net/en/sn12.66>

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**So how did we get from the 7 links of Snp 4.11 to the more familiar 12 links?**

*Playing with Fire: The pratīyasamutpāda from the perspective of Vedic thought*, by Joanna Jurewicz

Journal of the Pali Text Society 26 (2000) pp. 77 – 103, Buddhism: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies, Vol. I, P. Williams, 2005

**The 12 links are a mnemonic device for remembering a number of important necessary conditions**

Caroline Rhy Davids called Dependent Origination a "curious old rune."

The 12 links are NOT a linear explanation of anything; they are a collection of important necessary conditions.

## SN 12.65 - The City

"The thought occurred to me, 'I have attained this path to awakening, i. e., from the cessation of name-&-form comes the cessation of consciousness, from the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name-&-form. From the cessation of name-&-form comes the cessation of the six sense media. From the cessation of the six sense media comes the cessation of contact. From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling. From the cessation of feeling comes the cessation of craving. From the cessation of craving comes the cessation of clinging/sustenance. From the cessation of clinging/sustenance comes the cessation of becoming. From the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Thus is the cessation of this entire mass of stress. Cessation, cessation. ' Vision arose, clear knowing arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before.

...

"In the same way I saw an ancient path, an ancient road, traveled by the Rightly Self-awakened Ones of former times....I followed that path. Following it, I came to direct knowledge of fabrications, direct knowledge of the origination of fabrications, direct knowledge of the cessation of fabrications, direct knowledge of the path leading to the cessation of fabrications. Knowing that directly, I have revealed it to monks, nuns, male lay followers & female lay followers, so that this holy life has become powerful, rich, detailed, well-populated, wide-spread, proclaimed among celestial & human beings. "

SN 12.65 - The City - <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn12/sn12.065.than.html>

see also <https://suttacentral.net/en/sn12.65>

## SN 12.23 - Trancendental Dependent Origination

Knowledge of the destruction of the *āsavas* is dependent upon  
**Liberation** (*vimutti*) which is dependent upon  
**Dispassion** (*viraga*) which is dependent upon  
**Disenchantment** (*nibbida*) which is dependent upon  
**Knowing & seeing what's really happening** (*yathabhutam*) which is dependent  
 upon  
**Concentration** (*samadhi*) which is dependent upon  
**Happiness** (*sukha*) which is dependent upon  
**Tranquillity** (*passaddhi*) which is dependent upon  
**Rapture** (*piti*) which is dependent upon  
**Gladness** (*pamojja*) which is dependent upon  
**Faith, Confidence** (*saddha*) which is dependent upon  
**Old age, sickness, death** (*dukkha*) is dependent upon  
**Birth** (*jati*) which is dependent upon  
**Becoming** (*bhava*) which is dependent upon  
**Clinging** (*upadana*) which is dependent upon  
**Craving** (*tanha*) which is dependent upon  
**Feeling** (*vedana*) which is dependent upon  
**Contact** (*phassa*) which is dependent upon  
**The sixfolde sense base** (*sakayatana*) which is dependent upon  
**Mentality-materiality** (*nama-rupa*) which is dependent upon  
**Consciousness** (*viññana*) which is dependent upon  
**Concoctions** (*sankhara*) which are dependent upon  
**Ignorance** (*avijja*)

## MN 38 - Sāti, the Son of a Fisherman

Altho the 12 links have become synonymous with Dependent Origination, they are actually a small part of the teachings on Dependent Origination found in the suttas.

"Sati, what is that conscsciousness?"

"Venerable sir, it is that which feels and experiences, that which reaps the results of good and evil actions done here and there."

"Foolish man, to whom do you know me having taught the Dhamma like this! Haven't I taught, in various ways that consciousness is dependently arisen. Without a cause, there is no arising of consciousness...."

...

"Bhikkhus, knowing and seeing in this way [i.e. in terms of dependent origination], would your mind run to the past: 'Was I in the past or was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what did I become?'" "No, venerable sir." "Bhikkhus, knowing and seeing thus, would your mind run to the future: 'Will I be in the future, or will I not be in the future? What will I be in the future? How will I be in the future? Having been what, what will I become?'" "No, venerable sir." "Bhikkhus, knowing and seeing thus do you have doubts about the present: 'Am I, or am I not? What am I? How am I? Where did this being come from? Where will it go?'" "No, venerable sir."

## Without Concepts of Existence or Non-Existence

SN 12:15 - Kaccāyanagotto Sutta

[http://leighb.com/sn12\\_15.htm](http://leighb.com/sn12_15.htm)

This world, Kaccāna, for the most part depends on a duality -- upon the notion of existence and the notion of non-existence.

...

[One with Right View] does not take a stand about 'my self'.

...

‘All exists’: Kaccāna, this is one extreme.

‘All does not exist’: this is the second extreme.

Without veering towards either of these extremes,  
a Tathagata teaches the Dhamma by the middle:

Because this exists, that exists;  
because this arises, that arises.

## **The Middle Way**

Nāgārjuna and the Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā - The Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way.

Verses from the Center : A Buddhist Vision of the Sublime, by Nagarjuna, translated by Stephen Batchelor; Riverhead Books, ISBN: 1573221627  
Includes a very helpful and wonderful 80 page introduction.

The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way by Nagarjuna, translated by Jay L. Garfield; Oxford University Press; (November 1995) ISBN: 0195093364  
After you have digested Batchelor's poetic translation, check out Garfield's scholarly translation which has a very good commentary as well.

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## Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā Chapter 18

10. You are not the same as or different from  
Conditions on which you depend;  
You are neither severed from  
Nor forever fused with them --

11. This is the deathless teaching  
Of buddhas who care for the world.

12. When buddhas don't appear  
And their followers are gone,  
The wisdom of awakening  
Bursts forth by itself.

*Verses from the Centre*; Stephen Batchelor

## Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā Chapter 24

18. Dependent Origination is emptiness  
Which, dependently configured,  
Is the middle way.  
Everything is dependently originated;  
Everything is empty.

*Verses from the Centre*; Stephen Batchelor

18. Whatever is dependently co-arisen  
That is explained to be emptiness.  
That, being a dependent designation,  
Is itself the middle way.

Nagarjuna; Garfield, Jay L. (1995-11-09). *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* (p. 69). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.

## Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā Chapter 25

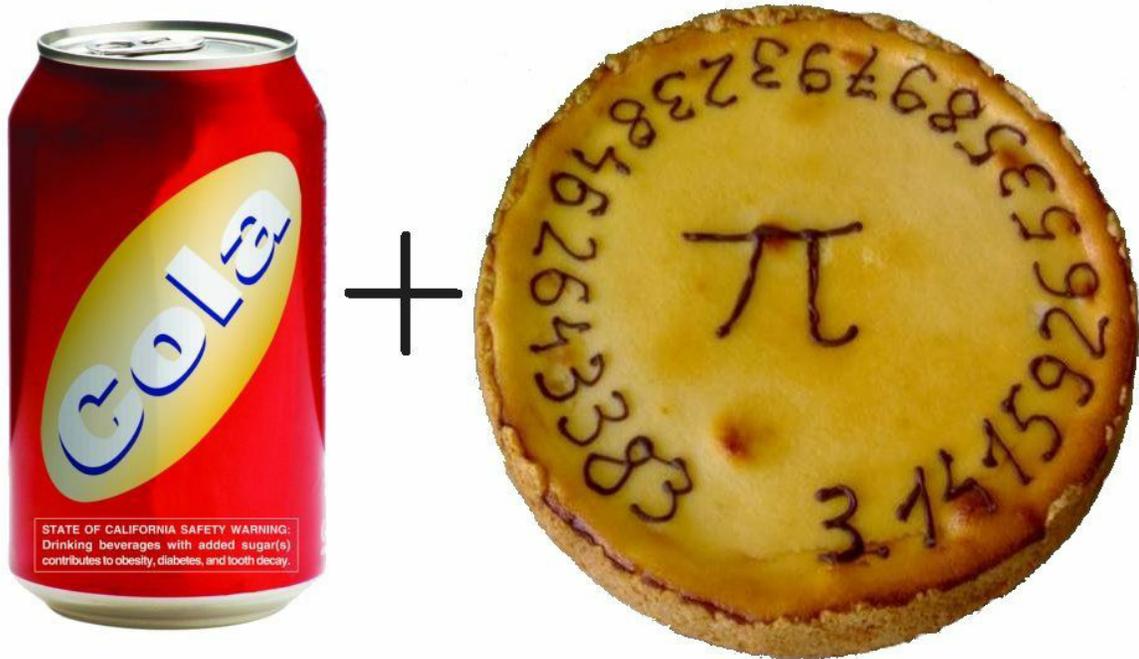
19. There is not the slightest difference  
Between cyclic existence and nirvāna.  
There is not the slightest difference  
Between nirvāna and cyclic existence.

20. Whatever is the limit of nirvāna,  
That is the limit of cyclic existence.  
There is not even the slightest difference between them,  
Or even the subtlest thing.

Nagarjuna; Garfield, Jay L. (1995-11-09). *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* (p. 75). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.

# SODAPI

Streams  
Of  
Dependently  
Arising  
Phenonuma  
Interacting



### **Nibbana (as Described In The Suttas) - Udana 8.3**

*“There is an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unfabricated. If there were not that unborn, unbecome, unmade, unfabricated, there would not be the case that freedom from the born, become, made, fabricated, would be discerned. But precisely because there is an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unfabricated, freedom from the born, become, made, fabricated is discerned.”*

Ud 8.3 <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/ud/ud.8.03.than.html>

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### Nibbana (as Described In The Suttas) - Udana 8.3

*“There is without birth, without becoming, without making, without fabricating. If there were not without birth, without becoming, without making, without fabricating, there would not be the case that freedom from the born, become, made, fabricated, would be discerned. But precisely because there is without birth, without becoming, without making, without fabricating, freedom from the born, become, made, fabricated is discerned.”*

Ud 8.3 - trans. Leigh Brasington

## Nibbana (as Described In The Suttas) - Udana 1.10

*"Herein, Bahiya, you should train yourself thus: 'In the seen will be merely what is seen; in the heard will be merely what is heard; in the sensed will be merely what is sensed; in the cognized will be merely what is cognized.' In this way you should train yourself, Bahiya.*

*"When, Bahiya, for you in the seen is merely what is seen... in the cognized is merely what is cognized, then, Bahiya, you will not be 'with that.' When, Bahiya, you are not 'with that,' then, Bahiya, you will not be 'in that.'*

*When, Bahiya, you are not 'in that,' then, Bahiya, you will be neither here nor beyond nor in between the two. Just this is the end of suffering."*

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

## Nibbana (as Described In The Suttas) - Udana 1.10

*"Herein, Bahiya, you should train yourself thus: 'In seeing will be merely seeing; in hearing will be merely hearing; in sensing will be merely sensing; in cognizing will be merely cognizing.' In this way you should train yourself, Bahiya.*

*"When, Bahiya, for you in seeing is merely seeing... in cognizing is merely cognizing, then, Bahiya, you will not be 'with that.' When, Bahiya, you are not 'with that,' then, Bahiya, you will not be 'in that.' When, Bahiya, you are not 'in that,' then, Bahiya, you will be neither here nor beyond nor in between the two. Just this is the end of dukkha."*

Ud 1.10 - trans. Leigh Brasington

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## Nibbana (as Described In The Suttas) - DN 11

*'Where do earth, water, fire and air no footing find?  
Where are long and short, small and great, fair and foul -  
Where are "name-and-form" wholly destroyed?'*

*And the answer is:*

*'Where consciousness is signless, boundless, all-luminous,  
That's where earth, water, fire and air find no footing,  
There both long and short, small and great, fair and foul -  
There "name-and-form" are wholly destroyed.  
With the cessation of consciousness this is all destroyed.'*

Walshe, Maurice (2005-06-10). The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya (Kindle Locations 2884-2889). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

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## Nibbana (as Described In The Suttas) - DN 11

*'Where do earth, water, fire and air no footing find?  
Where are long and short, small and great, fair and foul -  
Where do "name-and-form" totally come to an end?'*

*And the answer is:*

*'Where consciousness is signless, limitless, all-illuminating,  
That's where earth, water, fire and air find no footing,  
There both long and short, small and great, fair and foul -  
There "name-and-form" totally come to an end.  
With the cessation of consciousness this is all comes to an end.'*

trans. Leigh Brasington