

The Twelve Nidanas ¹

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Ignorance - Avidya (Skt), Ma-rig-pa (Tb)

This nidana represents the very beginning of the formation of 'I' and 'other'. 'I' and 'other' arise together and with dependence on each other. The formation and relationship between 'I' and 'other' occurring in an atmosphere of ignorance leads to the ever-recurring conceptual phantoms that rule the life of being in samsara (ocean of suffering).

The formation of the seed of 'I' and 'other' begins with the sense of overcrowdedness of the energies and textures of mind-body materials "stirred up by basic intelligence"³. The sense of claustrophobia leads to a double-take/panic, momentarily freezing everything. However, basic intelligence and unconditional space are still there. Being aware of the contrast between space and frozen space causes more panic and bewilderment.

The key factor in the formation of ignorance is the dazed absorption in the state of bewilderment. Bewilderment is described by Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche as an indulgence in something intangible. That something intangible seems to be the blanking out of primordial intelligence by the panic. This indulgence in the intangible has been called, by Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, the samsaric equivalent of samadhi.

This nidana marks the beginning of self-consciousness. The frozen space is perceived as 'other' and separate from the unity of experience. The very formation of a frozen 'other' implies the existence of an 'I'. The split becomes realized when the dazed bewilderment about the 'other' is taken as fait-accomplis. So then, on the one hand there is a sense of an 'I' who is, on the other hand, bewildered about the 'other'. Consequently there is a sense of having lost touch with that 'other', which now is colored as an incomprehensible, ineffable something. All of samsara could be said to be based on this "basic twist of ego" where every experience is imbued with a sense of inefableness, or 'not knowing' quality, and consequently disowned. Having disowned, one can now move towards the experience as something to be explored, its existence confirmed. The relationship between 'I' and 'other' can now be seen as something meaningful and substantial.

The whole process is awkward and fraught with threat as there is still a sense of too much unconditional space. Having identified with bewilderment, there arises the fear of losing one's sense of 'I' and 'other'. One feels insecure. To continue one's sense of groundedness in the dichotomy of 'I' and 'other' we move on to the next nidana.

1- Twelve links in the chain of the causation of samsara. The twelve nidanas are usually depicted in Tibetan Thankas as the 'Wheel of Life' drawn with twelve scenes forming a circle. In the center of the circle, passion, aggression and ignorance, usually depicted by a chicken, snake and a pig respectively, represent the basic pull--push--ignore dynamic intrinsic of a dualistic 'I' and 'other' relationship. As the ego and its projections need constant maintenance, the nidanas constantly spin.

2- The sources for this preliminary study were: Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche's "The Wheel of Life" *Garuda II*. (1974). Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche *Abhidharma* (1975). Goodman, 'Situational Patterning: Pratityasamutpada' *Crystal Mirror*. I have relied heavily on a general understanding of the Buddhadharma combined with direct insight into the topic. Written in 1978.

3- All quotations came from Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche's article on the nidanas published in *Garuda II*

Impulsive Accumulation - Samskara (Skt), Du-byed (Tb).

The first nidana is the ground or the atmosphere in which karma can exist. This nidana marks the actual beginning of karma. The cycle of cause and effect as it relates to our existence begins here.

This nidana represents further reaching out for more ground. This seems to happen by constantly taking notice of arising psycho-physical states that have been imbued with the sense of unknowable, therefore seen as separate, and then accepting them as part of our world. We accumulate the solidified mental states as territory.

Consciousness - Vijnana (Skt), Rnam-par-shes-pa (Tb).

From the sense of accumulating, there arises a more definite sense of the accumulator. The accumulator is consciousness--a definite sense of an 'I' that accumulates the 'other'.

The psycho-physical states that are being continuously supplied by samskara is experienced as a steady stream that is associated as an identity.

This nidana marks the beginning of being in the present as an individual.

Name and Form - Nama-rupa (Skt), Ming-gzugs (Tb).

Here one's accumulated psycho-physical states are grouped into complexes which are then projected unto the world in the form of various attitudes or stances taken towards the world. Having taken a stance, the world is viewed in that way, and whatever can be viewed in the world as coinciding with that attitude is then labeled in accordance with that attitude.

That which has been perceived is seen as separate, and now, having been given a label, also becomes familiar. This process is reassuring to our existence in that the familiar quality can now always be evoked by linking the name, given to that particular aspect of the world, with the attitude common to that name.

The Six Senses (and Sense Objects) - Sad-ayatana (Skt), Skye-mched-drug (Tb).

This nidana represents the consolidation of one's base of operation, which is, our sense senses and their respective sense objects. We consolidate by experiencing possession of the six senses and sense objects. The experience of possession begins by projecting unto the six senses and their respective sense objects, the quality of intangibility or 'not knowing'. One further confirms the separation by exploring the senses and their sense objects. The very act of exploring gives the experience a sense of meaning and substance. This sense of meaningfulness is not only treasured as our possession but it also becomes our handle on the six senses and sense objects. One can now experience the six senses and sense objects meaningfully and substantially.

Contact - Sparsa (Skt), Reg-pa (Tb).

The meeting of the senses and their respective sense objects as a substantive, meaningful experience. Things are now meaningfully seen, meaningfully heard, meaningfully tasted, etc.

Feeling - Vedana (Skt), Tshor-wa (Tb).

Contact is experienced as almost too much to handle. It's nature--fundamentally sharp, shocking, unconditional, beyond categories or meaning, is not completely hidden by dull meaningfulness. It is penetratingly jarring to one's sense of identity. However, having already embarked on such a course, we welcome contact as a "delightful surprise, even as a convenience."

One welcomes contact between the six senses and their respective sense objects as the "the first real experience of this and that, which is the world outside."

The sense of welcoming contact seem to be the very essence of feeling.

Craving - Tanha (Skt), Srd-pa (Tb).

The feeling of welcoming becomes hunger for more contact to further our sense of territory. This nidana, in its transition to the next one, exemplifies most clearly the compulsive speed inherent in all the nidanas. This compulsive speed seems to be the result of the interplay between hope of securing one's sense of existence and the fear of losing it. Since at no point, in the nidana process, is there found any definite, permanent justifica-

tion for our version of existence, to stop our search for ultimate security at any point would bring us face to face with the truths of impermanence, egolessness and suffering. We would be confronted with our speed, which is pain itself, and the non-substantial quality to our achievements that is the echo of that unconditional space that seems so threatening to us.

Propelled by hope and fear, we hunger for the world of 'this and that' as yet another attempt to attain ultimate confirmation and escape its opposite.

We pay no heed to the repulsion we may feel towards our insecure motivation and the suffocating quality of our craving, and compulsively plunge into the world of grasping.

Grasping - Upadana (Skt), Len-pa (Tb).

"Wishful desire is not enough". We actually have to lay our hands on the object of our craving. We feel we need the reassurance of solid footing. And so, you "run out of this stuffy castle and roam around the grounds"... "You pick up fruits and eat them"... "It is very reassuring to hold them, even more so to bite into them without peeling them"...

However, the compulsive quality to our grasping wears thin. Impending insecurity propels us to further secure our relationship with the 'other'.

Becoming - Bhava (Skt), Srid-pa (Tb).

We begin to actively identify with the focus of our grasping. We identify, with our concepts and the meaning imbued phenomenal world, with the hope of further enriching our sense of existence. We, both consume and allow to be consumed by what is grasped. For example; we identify with--consume, and allow to be consumed by anger--thus becoming an angry person, or we could identify with a sunset, thus becoming one who enjoys a sunset, etc.

"This sensual overindulgence invites proof, and you want the evidence of being father and mother to provide a sense of legitimacy. This leads us to the next nidana".

Birth - Jati (Skt), Skye-ba (Tb).

Having become 'somebody' due to our identification with our projected substantive world, one acts in accordance with that identification. By this action, one gives birth to a new situation. As Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche said: "in a situation of murder, hate gives birth to a corpse."

One's action is a natural expression of our state of being. It is also the means by which we attempt to propel our state of being from moment to moment. The birth of a new situation provides us new possibilities for identification, which in turn can have further consequences. This is the beginning of an endless karmic cycle.

The karmic consequences of one's action in the world can be either large or small, their effect can be experienced as isolated events or as part of a host of events, given birth towards the same purpose. For instance, in the aforementioned example, the identification with hate could be a temporary one, in an otherwise benign person, and the karmic result -- the corpse, an anomaly in that person's usual pattern of existence. The identification with hate, with its subsequent results, could, alternatively, be a part of a recurring and over-all pattern of existence for that person.

The karmic chain of events, in which we may find ourselves in, manifest in six different, basic patterns. These are the six realms of being. The length of one's sojourn in any particular realm of being is dependent on how deep rooted and widespread the situational patterning is.

Old Age and Death - Jara-marana (Skt), Rga-shi (Tb).

Throughout the nidana process, one's striving for ultimate security has been dependent on the compulsive speed by which we turned away from accepting the impermanent, non-substantial and painful quality of our

substance-projected world and accomplishments. With that same compulsion, we have turned towards the continual formation and maintenance of substantive, meaningful experience.

We have continued, with this compulsive process, up to the eleventh nidana where our actions actually precipitate consequences for ourselves and others. At this point, we have reached the limit of our creative abilities. We have used the phenomenal world and ourselves as much as is possible. However, as there is no other world and no other self, we are stuck with our creations. We can only create more and maintain as much as we can.

The ever increasing obviousness of the necessity to create and to re-create, becomes irritating to the point of not being able to maintain the pretext of so much meaningfulness. With an ever increasing sense of emptiness, we find ourselves unable to manage the massive worlds we have created. Our created worlds falls apart becoming "the inspiration for the charnel ground."

At this point the cycle begins anew.