

# THE MEANING OF LIFE



Buddhist Perspectives  
on Cause and Effect

HIS HOLINESS  
THE DALAI LAMA

Translated by Jeffrey Hopkins

FOREWORD BY RICHARD GERE

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*The Meaning of Life*



THE MEANING OF LIFE  
*Buddhist Perspectives on Cause & Effect*

Tenzin Gyatso  
*The Fourteenth Dalai Lama*

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REVISED EDITION

*Translated and Edited by*  
Jeffrey Hopkins

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## Foreword

THE GERE FOUNDATION is delighted to sponsor Wisdom's publication of *The Meaning of Life* by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Winner of the 1989 Nobel Prize for Peace, the Dalai Lama is universally regarded as one of the great spiritual friends of our time. He is the product of an unbroken lineage extending back to the historical Buddha. His forty years as a spiritual teacher and political leader are unique. A brilliant scholar, his words and experience go far beyond the academic. His teachings are rooted in a life tried and tested, a life dedicated to peace, human rights, social change, and the total transformation of the human mind and heart. These can only be achieved through a fearless nonviolence guided by both a transcendent wisdom and an unshakable universal altruism. "My religion is kindness," he has often said.

Since the Chinese invasion of independent Tibet in 1950, and his harrowing escape to India in 1959, His Holiness has worked tirelessly to free his people from a brutal and systematic genocide that has left 1,200,000 Tibetans dead (a fifth of the pre-invasion population). The unfaltering patience and compassion he has shown for those who continue to destroy his country are finally beginning to bear fruit, and the restoration of Tibetan independence is within sight. The ability to adhere to, embody, and generate Buddhist principles under extreme adversity is the mark of a true bodhisattva.

This book is a wondrous opportunity for us all to make contact with such a man and his teachings. Readers will derive much benefit from contemplating and meditating on them. The Gere Foundation

is proud to be associated with His Holiness and his message of universal responsibility and peace, and pleased to support Wisdom Publications in its efforts to promote these ideals. May this book bring happiness and the causes of future happiness to all beings.

Richard Gere  
New York

## *Introduction*

**W**HY ARE WE in this situation? Where are we going? Do our lives have any meaning? How should we make use of our lives? How does Buddhism view the position of beings in the world and the ways humans can make their lives meaningful?

These questions about the meaning of life are addressed in a famous Buddhist painting of a wheel with twenty-one parts that outlines the process of rebirth. The diagram, said to be designed by the Buddha himself, depicts an inner psychological cosmology that has had great influence throughout Asia. It is much like a map of the world or the periodic table of chemical elements, but it is a map of an internal process and its external effects.

In Tibet, this painting is at the doorway of practically every temple. It vividly describes how we become trapped in a counter-productive maelstrom of suffering and how this process can be reversed, showing how Buddhists place themselves in an ever-changing universe of cause and effect. By illuminating the causes behind our situation of limitation and pain, the wheel of cyclic existence reveals how, through practicing antidotes to these causes, we can overcome the painful and limiting situations that are their effects. It shows the altruistic purpose that can make life meaningful. The unsettling description of the steps of entrapment is a call to action, for it shows how the prison of selfishness can be turned into a source of help and happiness for both oneself and others.

## THE PICTURE

### *The Buddha and the Moon*

At the top right of the painting as we face it, the Buddha is standing with his left hand in a teaching pose and with the index finger of the right hand pointing to a moon on the other side at the top left. The moon symbolizes liberation. Buddha is pointing out that freedom from pain is possible. (Notice that there is a rabbit drawn on the moon. Whereas many non-Asians see a “man in the moon,” Asians see the outline of a rabbit; thus, its appearance on the moon in the painting is merely a depiction of the topography of the moon.) That in the topmost part of the picture Buddha is indicating that liberation is possible sets an optimistic tone for the whole painting. The intent of the painting is not to communicate mere knowledge of a process but to put this knowledge to use in redirecting and uplifting our lives.

The word *buddha* itself makes an important point about the nature of affliction and liberation. The term *buddha* is a past participle of the Sanskrit verbal root *budh*, which means “to awaken” or “to spread,” and thus (when put in the context of the doctrines of Buddhism) the verbal root means “to awaken from the sleep of ignorance and spread one’s intelligence to everything that can be known”—to overcome ignorance and become omniscient. The general way of making a past participle in Sanskrit is to add *ta*, like the English “ed” in “showed” or “t” in “built.” Since to say *Bud-ta* would be non-euphonic, the *t* is voiced to become a *d*. This is how the word *buddha* comes to mean one who *has become* enlightened, that is to say, one who has overcome the sleep of ignorance and has spread his or her intelligence to everything that can be known. The significance of the fact that the word *buddha* is a past participle—“one who has become enlightened”—is that buddhas are necessarily beings who previously were not buddhas. They are persons who were asleep and have awakened; at some point, their intelligence did not encompass everything that could be known. They were, like us,

trapped in a state of cyclic existence, going from lifetime to lifetime through the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death.

The Buddha, whose teaching we still have, is considered to be one among many buddhas of our era. Among them, however, he was the only one to make an open display of twelve particular deeds, including his miraculous birth from his mother's side. It is said that he was actually enlightened eons ago and emanated a form called a supreme emanation body, appearing to take birth in a royal family in an Indian kingdom around 563 B.C.<sup>1</sup> He left the princely life and went into retreat in 534, became enlightened in 528, and died in 483 B.C., in his eightieth year, having taught for forty-five years.

Prior to his enlightenment the Buddha was an ordinary being, just like any of us; there is no one who is enlightened from the start. Each of us is or has been in a state of cyclic existence, passing through the processes of birth, aging, sickness, and death over and over again due to our own actions, which are largely motivated by afflictive emotions—emotions with which we afflict ourselves. For instance, when we get angry and our face turns red and contorted, we afflict even our external appearance.

These afflictive emotions, negative influences peripheral to the basic pure nature of the mind, are based on an ignorant misapprehension of the status of phenomena. Not knowing how things actually exist, we superimpose onto phenomena an over-concretized status that they actually do not have. The object doesn't have to be important in the larger scale of life, it can be very small. It can be candy, a slice of pizza, whatever. Before becoming lustful or hateful, ourselves and the object are misapprehended in such a way that a veritable mess of emotions is generated.

### *The Monster Holding the Wheel*

The wheel in the center of the painting is in the grasp of a frightful monster. This signifies that the entire process of cyclic existence is caught within transience. Everything in our type of life is characterized

by impermanence. Whatever is built will fall down, whatever and whoever come together will separate.

*The Hub of the Wheel: The Three Animals*

The wheel itself shows us how to recognize our own condition. The twenty-one parts of the diagram address the fundamental question of how and why we are we born into self-defeating situations. What motivates virtuous and nonvirtuous actions? What are the various types of lives? What is the chain of causation?

The middle of the wheel depicts the basic problem. In the very center is a pig, symbolizing ignorance that drives the entire process. The pig stands for the root ignorance, which isn't just an inability to apprehend the truth but an active misapprehension of the status of oneself and all other objects—one's own mind or body, other people, and so forth. It is the conception or assumption that phenomena exist in a far more concrete way than they actually do.

Based on this misapprehension of the status of persons and things, we are drawn into afflictive desire and hatred, symbolized by a rooster and a snake respectively. In many drawings of the wheel, those two are depicted as coming out of the pig's mouth in order to indicate that lust and hatred depend on ignorance for their existence; without ignorance they are impossible. Both the rooster and the snake grasp the pig's tail in their mouths to indicate that they, in turn, promote even more ignorance—confusion, bewilderment, and cloudiness. Not knowing the real nature of phenomena, we are driven to generate desire for what we like and hatred for what we do not like and for what blocks our desires. These three—ignorance, desire, and hatred—are called the three poisons; they pervert out mental outlook.

FIGURE 1: *The Three Poisons*

Desire

Hatred

Ignorance (the root of the other two)

### *Half-Circles Around the Hub*

The light and dark half-circles just outside the hub indicate virtuous and nonvirtuous actions that are motivated by the triad of ignorance, desire, and hatred. In the dark half-circle are persons engaged in counterproductive actions; they face downward in order to indicate that negative actions lead to lower states. In the light half-circle, persons engaged in positive actions face upward to indicate that virtuous actions lead to higher, or more favorable, states.

### *Six Sectors Surrounding the Half-Circles*

The types of states to which productive and counterproductive actions lead are depicted by six sectors drawn around the half-circles of actions. All six are caught within cyclic existence. Thus, even though the wheel is basically divided into two parts—with three sectors on the top representing the three happy transmigrations and three sectors on the bottom representing the three bad transmigrations—all are equally caught within the round of cyclic existence.

FIGURE 2: *The Six Transmigrations*

(Read from bottom to top)

6	Gods	}	Happy
5	Demigods		
4	Humans		
3	Animals	}	Bad
2	Hungry ghosts		
1	Hell beings		

The sector at the very top comprises gods. These gods lead long and enjoyable lives, but when the force of the virtuous actions that caused them to be born in that state are exhausted, they suffer

## 6 *The Meaning of Life*

through being reborn in lower levels. They are especially afflicted by knowledge near the time of their death that their high state is ending and that a low, painful state is about to start due to the fact that they have spent their time in enjoyment without engaging in virtuous activities.

To the right of the gods is the realm of demigods. Their name could also be translated as “non-gods,” not because they’re not gods, but because they’re minor compared to gods.<sup>2</sup> Notice that a tree with plenty of fruit has grown up in their land, and that a demigod with a knife is trying to reach up to cut off a piece of fruit, but the upper part of the tree—the fruited part—is in the gods’ land, and he cannot reach it. The gods enjoy the fruit that grows up from the land of demigods, just as industrialized countries take ore and so forth out of third world countries, or as certain multinational corporations live off the backs of poor people working for them. Because their own wealth mainly benefits only others, demigods are particularly afflicted by jealousy and the consequent suffering of attacking and being wounded by the gods.

The sector of humans is on the top left side. Humans undergo the sufferings of hunger, thirst, heat, cold, separation from friends, being plagued by enemies, searching for but not finding that which is desired, and having to undergo what is undesired. Also, there are the general sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death. The painting contains figures involved in a range of human activities from butchering animals to living a monastic life. It seems to me that the range indicates that education can take place in a human lifetime. Thus, even if gods’ lives are loftier and more fortunate, they don’t have the fortune of the improvement that many humans can undergo. Humans often have a mixture of pleasure and pain such that we are not always overwhelmed by pain but suffer enough so that we are motivated to find a way to improve our situation.

On the bottom half of the wheel, we see on the left side the realm of animals, who are particularly afflicted by being used for others’



purposes and by their general incapacity for speech. Opposite them is the realm of hungry ghosts, who are particularly troubled by hunger and thirst. Hungry ghosts are constantly looking for food and drink, but they are unable not only to find food, but even to hear the word “food.” They have huge stomachs but very tiny throats such that only the smallest amounts can enter; even that becomes unbearable as it scalds its way down the throat.

The sector at the very bottom depicts the hells—the eight hot hells, the eight cold hells, and neighboring hells. Neighboring hells are related to the others as follows: A person dwelling in a hot hell, boiling in molten iron, eventually exhausts the karma that caused him or her to be born there. That person emerges from there and, upon seeing a lovely lake, for instance, rushes into it, only to sink into a mass of rotten corpses. The point is that we find it hard to learn that the very process of attraction and repulsion—which gets us into hellish trouble in the first place—ought to be avoided entirely.

The Indian scholar-adept Kamalashila, who visited Tibet in the eighth century, says that the sufferings of the six realms of beings are to be viewed not just as occurring in those types of rebirth but also in human lives:<sup>3</sup>

Humans also experience the sufferings of hell-beings and so forth. Those who are afflicted here by having their limbs cut off, being impaled, hanged, and so forth by thieves and the like, suffer like hell-beings. Those who are poor and deprived and are pained by hunger and thirst suffer like hungry ghosts. Those in servitude and so forth, whose bodies are controlled by others and who are oppressed, suffer from being struck, bound, and so forth, like animals.

My first teacher of Tibetan Buddhism, a Kalmyck Mongolian scholar-adept who had lived through the brutal Communist

takeover of the Soviet Union, spent thirty-five years in Tibet, foresaw the Communist takeover there, and emigrated to the United States. He used to say that the Americans were the gods and the Russians were the demigods. In this way, we can view these realms of beings as representing types of beings in cyclic existence but also periods in one's own or others' lives—as short as five minutes, or months, or even a whole lifetime.

## TWELVE LINKS OF DEPENDENT-ARISING

In this way, motivated by ignorance—symbolized by the three animals in the center—we engage in virtuous and nonvirtuous actions—symbolized by the two half circles—which leads to rebirth in the six realms of cyclic existence. What is the process, what are the stages of cause and effect?

The twelve parts of the fourth level of the wheel, the outside rim, present the process in detail. These are called twelve links, or twelve branches, because they comprise the causal sequence of lives in cyclic existence. Let us mention them before describing them in detail:

The dependent-arising of cyclic existence begins with (1) ignorance, which motivates (2) an action. At the conclusion of the action a predisposition is established within consciousness, called (3a) the cause-consciousness. This leads—after what can be a long time—to the taking of rebirth, which is called (3b) the effect-consciousness. The beginning of a new lifetime is called (4) name and form. The next stage, the development of the embryo, is called (5) sense spheres. From the formation of the body, (6) contact is developed; from contact, there is (7) feeling; from feeling, (8) attachment; from attachment, (9) grasping; from grasping, there develops at the end of the lifetime a stage called (10) existence, which in fact is the moment just before the new lifetime; the new lifetime begins with (11) birth and then continues with (12) aging and death.

FIGURE 3: *The Twelve-Linked Dependent-Arising*

- I ignorance<sup>4</sup>
- 2 compositional action<sup>5</sup>
- 3 consciousness<sup>6</sup>
  - a. cause-consciousness
  - b. effect-consciousness
- 4 name and form<sup>7</sup>
- 5 sense spheres<sup>8</sup>
- 6 contact<sup>9</sup>
- 7 feeling<sup>10</sup>
- 8 attachment<sup>11</sup>
- 9 grasping<sup>12</sup>
- 10 existence<sup>13</sup>
- 11 birth<sup>14</sup>
- 12 aging and death<sup>15</sup>

### *Ignorance*

The first link is indicated by an old, blind person hobbling with a cane, which symbolizes ignorance. Why? The person is old because the ignorance driving the process of cyclic existence is beginningless; the person is blind because ignorance is obscured with respect to the true nature of persons and other phenomena. The person hobbles with a cane because ignorance, no matter how much suffering it creates, has no valid foundation, it isn't based on the truth and, therefore, can be undermined by wisdom.

There are two types of ignorance: a basic form and a secondary form that is involved only in nonvirtuous, or negative, actions. The first is a consciousness that misconceives the status of persons and other phenomena. It imagines that persons and other phenomena have a concreteness beyond that which they actually have, thereby inducing all afflictive emotions. It is called a consciousness that conceives inherent existence.

Thus, the basic ignorance is not just the absence of knowledge of the real status of phenomena but the active conception of the opposite—that is, the conception of inherent existence whereas in actuality phenomena do not inherently exist. We perceive things as though they were able to cover the parts of which they are constituted, whereas there is nothing that covers all those parts. For example, because a collection of four legs and a top is able to hold up objects, we are deceived into thinking that there is something called a *table* that encompasses those elements. Although phenomena do not exist inherently, or from their own side, or by way of their own character, we conceive them to do so. This is ignorance.

Here in the twelve links of dependent-arising, ignorance refers to the misconception of the person, specifically oneself, as inherently existent, and to the misconception that phenomena that are part of one's continuum, such as mind and body, inherently exist. The person is actually only designated in dependence upon a collection of mind and body; he or she is understood to be merely nominally existent. Still, this view of a nominally existent person does not make the person as if dead or turn the person into the body on which a surgeon operates. When a surgeon cuts open the body and doesn't find any I, any person, he or she might think there is only matter. Obviously, this is not the Buddhist position, even if Buddhists say that persons only nominally exist. Why would we develop compassion for others if they were just dead wood?

The basic form of ignorance is a consciousness that conceives a nominally existent person—a person who actually exists only as designated in dependence upon mind and body—to inherently exist, to occupy a spot in a concrete way, and then conceives of mind and body as inherently existent mine—things owned by the I. The other form of ignorance—the type that is involved only in nonvirtuous, or negative, actions—is a misconception about the effects of actions. In this case, there is also obscuration with respect to even the coarse relationships of actions and their effects—not

understanding that if a certain action is performed, a certain result will follow, and developing misconceptions such as that only pleasure will arise from theft. This means that if we really knew what it would be like to undergo the future effects of a nonvirtuous action, we wouldn't do it. We wouldn't commit murder, steal, engage in sexual misconduct, lie, talk divisively, speak harshly, chatter senselessly, and so forth.

### *Action*

The second link, action, is symbolized by a potter making a pot. If we take our present lifetime as an example, the first link, "ignorance," refers to the ignorance in a former lifetime that motivated the one action serving as the main karma projecting this rebirth. It does not refer to the ignorance that occurs throughout a lifetime, but to the one period—even just a few moments—that motivates a single significant action leading to another lifetime.

For example, if we were in a bad transmigration (that is, if we were not in a human lifetime, which is considered a happy transmigration) the action that mainly generated it could have been an act of murder. In that case, the period of ignorance would be the time in which the murder was planned, carried out, and completed. This period of misconception and obscuration would be the ignorance motivating that particular action. The conceptions of oneself as an inherently existent I and of one's own mind and body as inherently existently mine are a cluster, a continuum, of ignorant consciousnesses involved with one action. That action may take only a few minutes; if one is planning a murder, it may take longer. Also, there would be additional ignorance in the form of lack of knowledge of and misapprehension of the effects of murder.

The main action projecting rebirth as a human has to be a virtuous action—restraining oneself from misconduct. Since this action establishes an entire lifetime in a happy transmigration—that is, as a god, demigod, or human—the action must be meritorious because,

as Chandrakīrti says: “A cause of high status / Is none other than proper ethics.”<sup>16</sup>

Although there are also causes other than ethics, in order to achieve a lifetime in one of the three happy transmigrations, called “high status,”<sup>17</sup> it is necessary that the projecting cause of that lifetime be an action of ethics. As the late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Tibetan scholar-yogi *Ḍzong-ka-bā* explains: “This means that...a definite relation with ethics is necessary. If ethics are forsaken, there is no way that these can be accomplished.”<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, ignorance is involved in that one has the misconceptions that:

- ◆ oneself, the forsaker of misconduct, inherently exists
- ◆ the forsaking inherently exists
- ◆ the sentient being in relation to whom that misconduct is enacted inherently exists.

Although the action is virtuous, it is involved with ignorance that superimposes on these factors a sense that they exist from their own side.

To be a complete “path of action” capable of impelling one toward a good or a bad transmigration, an action must have five factors:

- ◆ intention
- ◆ thought that identifies the object properly
- ◆ preparation for the enactment
- ◆ successful completion
- ◆ nonreversal of intention before the action is completed.

If you planned to kill one person but killed another, that action would be nonvirtuous, and its effects would be negative, but it would not serve as a complete path of action leading to a whole life. What’s missing is the actual carrying out of the action with respect to the person you intended to kill. Further, the action must be completed without reversal of the original intention. For example, if the

person did not die immediately, and you thought, “This is terrible; I shouldn’t have done it,” there would not be a complete path of action even if the person died later. Still, the deed would have horrible consequences.

### *Consciousness*

The third link, consciousness, is symbolized by a monkey. In the twelve links of dependent-arising, consciousness is of two types—cause and effect.

*Cause-consciousness.* When the action has been completed, its potency<sup>19</sup> infuses the consciousness that exists at that time. This brief period of mind, the cause-consciousness, occurs immediately upon the completion of the action. This consciousness is a neutral entity capable of being infused with virtuous or nonvirtuous predispositions; because it is neutral, it can be stained with any type of predisposition. If one mixes together two strong-smelling substances, such as garlic and sandalwood, the two odors will affect each other, producing a garlic-sandalwood mixture. However, if one places something with a strong odor next to something neutral—for example, sesame seed—the neutral substance picks up the odor of the strong one. In this way, the action leaves its own imprint on the consciousness.

The predisposition is a potency, a power, that has been imprinted in a certain fashion (virtuous or nonvirtuous, meritorious or non-meritorious) and will lead to a future lifetime. In accordance with the strength of this potency, people die at various ages—some people live a long time, and some do not. The potency that mainly led to this lifetime may have been established in any previous lifetime—*any* lifetime, even a million lifetimes or a million eons ago. Then, at the end of the lifetime just previous, the potency for this lifetime was nourished by certain factors (to be discussed later), such as our wishes for the type of life we would like. As a sign that we nourish such potencies, consider the fact that when someone asks, “If there is another lifetime, what would you like to be?” we immediately say,

“I’d like to be a...” This shows that we are already nourishing certain kinds of potencies.

*Effect-consciousness.* The potency nourished in this way is fully activated at the end of the previous lifetime. Between any two lifetimes there is an intermediate state, which can be as short as one moment or as long as forty-nine days. Still, any one life in the intermediate state lasts only seven days; thus, if you remain in the intermediate state for forty-nine days, you take seven different births in the intermediate state.

It is said that during the intermediate state you are seeking a place to take rebirth, wandering in places where beings are copulating, but if you do not have a particular impetus, a potency to take a certain kind of rebirth, there is no way that you can enter a specific female’s womb. For example, you may be in an area in which dogs are copulating, but if you do not have an activated potency to be born as a dog, you cannot go into the dog’s womb; if the potency that has been activated is of this type, you are forced to enter whether you want to or not. If you are to be reborn as a male, you are strongly attracted to the female, the mother, and feel hatred for the father. However, it is said that someone who is to be born as a male enters the father’s mouth or top of the head and emerges from his phallus into the womb.<sup>20</sup> If you are to be born as a female, you are attracted to the father and merge with the mother.

Leaving the intermediate state, you enter the womb of your new mother (if you are taking womb birth). That is the first moment of the new lifetime. It is called the “effect-consciousness”; the term refers to that one moment of consciousness—the beginning of the new life.

In this presentation of the twelve links of dependent-arising (see Figure 4), the first two and a half links—these being ignorance, action, and cause-consciousness—can occur in any lifetime in the past and are called “projecting causes” because they provide the main impetus for an entire lifetime.



FIGURE 4: *How the twelve links are taught in the Rice Seedling Sūtra*<sup>22</sup>

Life A	1 ignorance 2 compositional action 3 consciousness a. cause-consciousness b. effect-consciousness	] projecting causes
Life B	4 name and form 5 sense-spheres 6 contact 7 feeling 8 attachment 9 grasping 10 existence	] projected effects
Life C	11 birth 12 aging and death	] actualizing causes
		] actualized effects

*Life A precedes life B at any time, and life B precedes life C with no interval.*

Effect-consciousness and the fourth through tenth links—from name and form through existence—occur in this lifetime; they are called “projected effects”<sup>21</sup> because they constitute the lifetime established by the projecting causes. The creation of a particular life is due to karma, and ignorance underlies the entire process. This being the case, the way to improve lives in cyclic existence is to learn about the relationships between actions and their effects so that we can create more productive situations. The way to gain liberation is to develop wisdom that realizes the actual status of phenomena so that the afflictive emotions that drive cyclic existence cannot get started.

The twelve links, considered in order, produce three lifetimes. In life A, a specific occasion of ignorance motivates an action estab-

lishing a predisposition in the consciousness; that consciousness is the cause-consciousness. It produces a new lifetime, life B, consisting of the effect-consciousness, name and form (that is, mind and body), the sense spheres (the development of the sense organs), contact, feeling, attachment, grasping, and existence. Existence is the final moment of life B, when a predisposition formerly established in the consciousness has reached maturity and is fully capable of producing a next birth, life C, which has birth and aging and death. The first two-and-a-half links are called *projecting causes*. They impel a lifetime; the predisposition established by the original action motivated by ignorance impels it. What it projects are the next four-and-a-half links, which are called *projected effects*. The next three links are called *actualizing causes*. They nourish another predisposition to the point where another life, indicated by the last two links called *actualized effects*, will appear.

### *Name and Form*

The next picture is of a person in a boat, which symbolizes “name and form.” *Name* refers to the mental consciousness and the mental factors that accompany it, and *form* refers to the body—both of these are located at the point of rebirth, conception. Form, at the first moment of conception, is the egg of the mother and sperm of the father, described in Buddhist texts as the blood of the mother and the semen of the father. The body at that time is extremely small, like a bit of thin jelly. Then it begins to elongate and turns into a substance like yogurt; it continues to elongate, forms the rudiments of a head, and develops bumps that turn into limbs. We are used to our present body, and it seems as though we will always be as we are, but in a short time we will once again have this squishy kind of body. Also, we had such a body not very long ago, but are unable to remember.

### *Six Sense Spheres*

The next picture, an empty house with six windows, symbolizes the six internal sense spheres—the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mental “sense powers,” which open the way for the production of the six consciousnesses, giving them power with respect to their respective objects. Here, the term mainly refers to the different moments of the initial completion of the internal sense spheres in the womb; they do not come to full development at the same time. Through the growth of the body in the mother’s womb, the senses develop. At a certain point, the capacity to touch develops; at other points the capacity to taste, to smell, to hear, and to see develop.

In general, there are twelve sense spheres—six internal and six external, which are the six sense powers and the six types of objects.

FIGURE 5: *The Twelve Sense Spheres*

<b>Six Sense Powers</b>	<b>Six Objects</b>
1 eye sense power	visible forms (colors and shapes)
2 ear sense power	sounds
3 nose sense power	odors
4 tongue sense power	tastes
5 body sense power	touches
6 mental sense power	other phenomena

Here in the twelve links, reference is made only to the six internal sense spheres and their serial development in the womb, since the six objects are always present. The internal sense spheres are not the gross organs themselves, but subtle matter within them. For instance, the faculty of taste is not just the tongue, but the subtle matter within the tongue that allows you to taste, since there are people with tongues who cannot taste and others with eyes who cannot see. Thus, there is subtle matter in the eye and the other sense organs,

which, upon maturation, allows us to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. Through the development of each of these, there is sensation in the womb. The child moves and kicks, and if the child is experiencing pain, the mother often knows.

### *Contact*

The next link, “contact,” is depicted by a man and woman touching or kissing. Roughly speaking, the picture symbolizes the coming together of an object, a sense organ, and a moment of consciousness. Hence contact, in the twelve links, refers to contact with a sense-object and the subsequent discrimination of the object as attractive, unattractive, or neutral. Sense-objects are always present, and thus when a sense organ—the subtle matter that allows you to see, hear, and so forth—develops, an eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, or body consciousness will be produced.

There are three factors that cause a consciousness:

1 *A former moment of consciousness* makes an eye consciousness, for instance, into an experiential entity. It is called “the immediately preceding condition.”<sup>23</sup>

2 The *eye sense power* allows an eye consciousness to experience and know color and shape. A person can have consciousness but, without a functioning eye sense power, cannot see color and shape. The sense power is called “the dominant condition.”<sup>24</sup>

3 The *object* does not produce the experiential entity itself, but affects consciousness, and in that sense it is a cause of consciousness. Without a patch of blue presented to your eye consciousness, it would not see blue. Thus, an eye consciousness perceives a particular object through the object’s role as a cause of the eye consciousness; the object is called an “observed-object condition.”<sup>25</sup>

Not even the sense organ can act as the *substantial* cause<sup>26</sup> of mind. It affects mind greatly, but the experiential entity depends upon a former experiential entity. When a meditator looks into his or her own mind and feels its continuum, he or she develops a strong realization that mind comes from mind, not from matter.

Mind also does not come from an eternal being; the eternal is permanent and cannot act. Furthermore, mind does not come from nothing, because nothing cannot do anything either. Mind comes from mind. The present mind comes from a former continuum of mind; even when we are in deep sleep or knocked unconscious, there still is a subtle consciousness working.

Though mind comes from mind, there is a long period in the womb when there is no eye consciousness because the eye sense power has not developed. The first moment of eye consciousness of this lifetime cannot come from the last moment of consciousness of the last lifetime since even before the person died the eye consciousness ceased. Moreover, the ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, and body consciousness disappeared, but the person was still alive. The external breath ceased, but the internal breath had not ceased yet.

A certain yogi who had died during one of my trips to India would have been pronounced dead had he died in the States; still, he remained in the mind of clear light for thirteen days, staying warm at the heart center—the center of consciousness—for those thirteen days. Then, some blood or mucus came out of his nose and ears and the position of his body changed. For ordinary people who die without ravaging illness, the period of clear light is said to be three days. In the United States, however, people are carted off to the funeral parlor before (in the Buddhist view) they have fully died. To be moved during this period is said to be harmful to a yogi, who can remain longer in the clear light, but for ordinary people it is said that it does not make much difference because their minds are out of control.

Following the end of a person's previous lifetime, a mental consciousness travels in the intermediate state; it then takes rebirth in the mother's womb, and, after the visual sense organ develops, acts as the former moment of the first eye consciousness. Thus, the experiential entity of any consciousness comes from a former moment of consciousness.

Where does the first moment of the mental consciousness of this lifetime come from? It comes from the mental consciousness of the intermediate state. Where does that come from? It comes from the mind of death. With that mind of death travel all the potencies that have been accumulated in former lifetimes. This deep mind is a repository for everything we have done. It carries these potencies until they are activated; it is the ground of all the predispositions deposited by our actions—none is lost.

### *Feeling*

The seventh link, feeling, is depicted as an arrow or stick in the eye, a dramatic picture of the centrality of feeling in our daily life. The intensity indicates how pleasure and pain control our activities. While I was staying in a Tibetan and Mongolian monastery in New Jersey in the mid-sixties, a professor of philosophy visited with a small group of students. He asked the abbot, "What do you think students are more interested in, sex or philosophy?" The lama thought about it for a moment and responded, "Sex."

As mentioned above, during the development of the fetus, we gradually develop the impression, through contact, that objects are attractive, unattractive, or neutral. From these discriminations arise feelings of pleasure, pain, or neutrality as the individual internal sense spheres develop. Here in the twelve links of dependent-arising, "feeling" ranges from the first moments of pleasurable, painful, and neutral feeling in the womb to the development of the capacity for orgasm, but it also refers to periods of feeling throughout the lifetime that serve as objects of the next link.

### *Attachment*

Attachment is symbolized by a group of persons partying. This image refers to our desire to hold onto pleasure, to separate ourselves from pain, and our desire for neutral feeling not to diminish. Although we feel attachment even in the womb, the emphasis in the twelve links is on the specific acts of attachment that nourish the karmic potency that will produce the next lifetime. For example, perhaps you frequently thought that you would like to be a certain type of dog, cat, or bird; this attachment activates predispositions for this type of rebirth. (I also wonder whether particularly strong dislike of a person or a group can cause one to be reborn like that person or in that group; one can imagine a situation where, for example, one is reborn in the country of one's enemies from a previous lifetime and even develops hatred for one's previous compatriots due to the attachment involved in excessive discrimination.)

### *Grasping*

The picture depicting the ninth link, grasping, shows a person grabbing at a piece of fruit on a tree. Grasping is an increase of attachment and includes strong clinging to pleasant forms, sounds, odors, tastes, and touches as well as to bad views and systems of behavior associated with those views.

It is possible, at any point in one's life, to have attachment and grasping that serve to potentialize a karma from the past, but near the end of a lifetime these two links are particularly influential in shaping the next lifetime. Therefore, it is said that our attitude near the time of death is very important. If you are lying in bed and everyone around you is moaning and weeping, or if, as they come in to shake your hand, they bend over to kiss you with tears in their eyes, you can develop strong attachment, wishing to hold onto a situation you cannot hold on to. How much better it would be if people were honest and said, "You are going to die. We wanted to come in and say good-

bye to you. No matter how close we have been, lives are lived as in bus stations; we meet people for a while but can't stay with them forever, and now we are going to separate. I wanted to say good-bye. Best wishes to you." If a person could take it, how wonderful! Otherwise, the dying person develops tremendous desire to stay where she or he cannot stay, and this can result in being reborn as a hungry ghost.

As we are dying, we may think, "I'd like to be born as a great general"; "I'd like to be born as an opera singer"; "I'd like to be born as a monastic"; "I'd like to be born as someone who can help other sentient beings." The last two are marvelous!

### *Existence*

"Existence" refers to a fully activated karmic potency, ready to give rise to the next lifetime. It occurs during the last moment of the present lifetime. It is depicted by a couple copulating or by a pregnant woman, symbolizing that the karma nourished by attachment and grasping is fully potentialized and ready to produce the next lifetime.

Existence, the tenth link, is the fully potentialized karmic potency in a person's last moment that will produce yet another lifetime. The cause, the potency, is given the name of the effect, the existence of the new life; the effect is the existence of the new lifetime; and the fully nourished potency—the cause—is given the name "existence."

### *Birth*

New life is called "birth," the eleventh link. The picture shows a woman giving birth, even though the eleventh link refers to the point of conception, not emergence from the womb.

### *Aging and Death*

The last link, aging and death, is symbolized by adults carrying burdens. One type of aging begins from the moment of conception, and the other begins with physical deterioration.



### *The Import*

Those are the twelve links of cause and effect in pictorial form. With the rooster, snake, and pig at the center, the painting graphically indicates that desire, hatred, and ignorance are at the core of the process—the root problem being ignorance. These lead to favorable and unfavorable actions. Those favorable and unfavorable actions lead to birth in the six realms of cyclic existence. The process by which this takes place is the twelve links of dependent-arising, which, according to this system of explanation, takes place in three lifetimes: the first two and a half links in a past lifetime; the second half of the third link plus seven in the present lifetime; and the last two in the immediately following lifetime.

The process becomes more complex as detail is pursued. Just as in this lifetime attachment and grasping (the eighth and ninth links) nourish a karmic potency to produce the next lifetime, so in the lifetime immediately before this one another set of attachment and grasping—not explicitly indicated in the twelve—nourished a potency established by an action (the second link) that was motivated by ignorance (the first link) and deposited on the causal consciousness (the first half of the third link). That potency became actualized in the present lifetime, and during the present lifetime another potency established by an action that was motivated by ignorance is being actualized, later to turn into the next lifetime.

At present we engage in ignorance; on the basis of that ignorance we perform actions; on the basis of those actions we establish potencies on our consciousness—cause-consciousnesses. We begin many complete actions, which will form paths to other good and bad transmigrations. Thus, while one round of twelve links is playing out, others are starting. A potency established in the present lifetime may lead to the next lifetime or to a lifetime four hundred eons from now, whereas the potency that led to this lifetime may have come from an action thirty thousand years ago. In our next lifetime, we will engage in still more ignorance.

The order is definite for a particular lifetime, but different rounds of dependent-arising occur simultaneously. If you break the series into three groups and ask the general question, “Which of these groups came first?” it is true that, with respect to a certain lifetime, ignorance came first, action came second, and cause-consciousness came third. But with respect to these three groups, when you are in the lifetime that explicitly begins with name and form, you are also engaging in ignorance and also experiencing the birth and the aging and death. During the earlier lifetime, while you engaged in the ignorance that motivated the action leading to the present lifetime, you were also experiencing the birth, aging, and death—as well as the name and form, and so forth—of another round.

The motivation for this present lifetime came from one act motivated by ignorance in a former lifetime; this action is called the “projecting,” or “impelling,” cause. Ignorance, action, and cause-consciousness—specifically, action—drive the lifetime. They established the general outlines of this lifetime—whether we are born as a human or in another transmigration. Then many other actions, called fulfilling actions, filled in the picture—whether we are female or male, attractive or unattractive, born into a poor family or into a rich one, how long we will live, and so forth. One cannot say that everything is predetermined, but we are attracted to a *particular* situation.

When we see that, basically, one action led to this lifetime and that during this lifetime we engage in a great many actions based on ignorance, we realize that we are establishing potencies for a great number of lifetimes. If we want to end this process, the weak point is attachment, since even if we have billions of potencies to take billions of rebirths, if those potencies remain un nourished and unactivated, we will not take rebirth. It would be like having a room full of rice seeds and not planting them. If we can stop attachment and grasping, we can stop the process of rebirth. No matter how many potencies we had, we would no longer be born in cyclic existence; we would be freed.

To make attachment impossible, we have to overcome the igno-

rance that is its root. It is through our not knowing the actual status of phenomena and through conceiving their opposite that attachment is possible. Buddhists do not just suppress attachment (although there are many times when this is necessary and there are practices geared for this) but understand something that undermines attachment. Desire and hatred become not suppressed but impossible. There is something we can know that will make attachment inoperative. The basis of desire and hatred is unfounded; it rests on the shaky foundation of ignorance.

Where does ignorance come from? It comes from former ignorance. We cannot assign it a beginning in time, but we can lay out a lifetime, determine its principal causes, and speak of its beginning in ignorance. Nāgārjuna makes these points in his *Precious Garland*, where he presents the twelve links of dependent-arising in three groups—ignorance, action, and the production of suffering—which are called the three thorough afflictions:

As long as the aggregates are conceived,  
 So long thereby does the conception of I exist.  
 Further, when the conception of I exists,  
 There is action, and from it there also is birth.<sup>27</sup>

As long as the mental and physical aggregates are misconceived as inherently existing, the I also is misconceived to have the same status, as a result of which there is karma; from karma, birth occurs. To restate: The conception that the mental and physical aggregates inherently exist serves as the foundation of the misconception that the I inherently exists; the latter leads to contaminated virtuous and nonvirtuous actions, which themselves induce birth.

FIGURE 6: *The Three Thorough Afflictions*

- 1 Ignorance
- 2 Action
- 3 The production of suffering

Among the twelve links of dependent-arising, ignorance, attachment, and grasping are grouped together as the first of these three, ignorance. An action establishes a predisposition within the consciousness, and that predisposition, when it is brought to the point at which it is ready to produce a life, is called existence. Thus these two links—action and existence—are called by the name of the second of the three thorough afflictions, action. Nāgārjuna calls seven links—from effect-consciousness (in this system cause-consciousness is omitted) through aging and death—the production of suffering.

Nāgārjuna says that three groups cause one another, appearing like the whirling of a firebrand:

With these three pathways causing each other  
 Without a beginning, a middle, or an end,  
 This wheel of cyclic existence  
 Turns like the wheel of a firebrand.<sup>28</sup>

If you take a stick on fire at one end and turn it quickly at night, someone watching at a distance will see a wheel of fire. Similarly, the movement of these factors is seen as cyclic existence. In sequence, ignorance gives rise to action, and action gives rise to suffering, but they each cause each other. For instance, suffering also causes ignorance; we respond to suffering in an ignorant way; thus, in this sense, suffering is a cause of ignorance, which causes action. Action causes ignorance in that due to actions one tends to accumulate more wrong views, which produce still more ignorance in the future.

When we consider the process of cyclic existence, we see that we are drawn into good and bad situations, drawn into suffering, over and over again, that we are battered and bruised. How much crying do we do in one lifetime? If the tears of one lifetime were accumulated in one place, how large a container would we need? Over many lifetimes we cry an ocean of tears. If we piled up the skeletons used

by one person, we would have a mountain as large as Mount Everest. This is the condition of sentient beings.

For a Buddhist, time is not defined by dates and places of birth and death. As a Buddhist, you cannot say that there is any place in the world where you were not born. You cannot say, “These are people I have never known.” You cannot say, “I didn’t live at that time.” Though you may not remember, you feel that you have been present throughout time and space.

The condition of life is not that we have only one life confined by this time, confined by this space. We have met many times; we have been through many different relationships. Value is not put just on temporary experience. Through meditation on dependent-arising, we generate an understanding of our own place in cyclic existence. Once we have understood our own place, we can extend that understanding to others and thereby come to feel deep compassion.

## THE DALAI LAMA’S LECTURES

In the spring of 1984 His Holiness the Dalai Lama, recipient of the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize, spoke about dependent-arising in a series of lectures at Camden Hall, London. In five sessions over three days, he presented the basic worldview of Buddhism: how it views the position of beings in the world and how it can make their lives meaningful. An underlying theme of all five lectures and the focus of the last was the fundamental innate mind of clear light. The Dalai Lama describes the obscuration of this basically pure and innermost mind, and its manifestation in the wisdom that realizes the emptiness of inherent existence through implementation of tantric techniques. Indeed, the mind of clear light radiates through his entire presentation of the harrowing process of cyclic existence and also forms the backdrop against which the process is addressed in great detail.

The way in which dependent-arising plays itself out in the nitty-gritty of everyday life is shown in the Dalai Lama's answers to a myriad of questions from the audience. He elaborates on technical issues raised during the lectures and considers many of the difficult problems we encounter in our lives: how to deal with aggression from within and without; how to reconcile personal responsibility with the doctrine of selflessness; how to handle a loss of faith in a guru or lama; how to face a terminal illness; how to help someone who is dying; how to reconcile love for family with love for all beings; and how to integrate practice in daily life. The Dalai Lama addresses these and other issues and concerns with heartening directness.

His intelligence, wit, and kindness suffuse the lectures. His emphasis on peaceful solutions to personal, familial, national, and international problems makes a gentle though powerful argument against choosing allegiance to a particular system as a goal of life. He makes it clear that theoretical systems should be used to serve beings, and not the other way around. He calls on his listeners to use ideology for the sake of betterment.

I served as the interpreter for these lectures and have retranslated them for this book in an attempt to capture the detail and nuance often missed under the pressure of on-the-spot translation. I wish to thank Geshe Yeshe Thabkhe of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath, India, and Joshua Cutler of the Tibetan Buddhist Learning Center in Washington, New Jersey, for help with the stanzas cited in the first lecture. I also wish to express my gratitude to Steven Weinberger and David Need for reading the entire manuscript and making many helpful suggestions.

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## *Technical Note*

The names of Tibetan authors and orders are given in “essay phonetics” for the sake of easy pronunciation; for a discussion of the system used, see the technical note at the beginning of my *Meditation on Emptiness* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1983), pp. 19–22. Transliteration of Tibetan in parentheses and in the glossary is done in accordance with the system devised by Turrell V. Wylie; see “A Standard System of Tibetan Transcription,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 22 (1959): 261–67. For the names of Indian scholars and systems used in the body of the text, *ch*, *sh*, and *ṣh* are used instead of the more usual *c*, *ś*, and *ṣ*, for the sake of easy pronunciation by nonspecialists.

A list of technical terms in English, Sanskrit, and Tibetan is provided in the glossary at the end of the book.





# THE MEANING OF LIFE

*The Lectures*



## *1~ The Buddhist Worldview*

FIRST, LET ME TALK to the Buddhist practitioners in the audience about the proper motivation for listening to lectures on religion. A good motivation is important. The reason why we are discussing these matters is certainly not money, fame, or any other aspect of our livelihood during this life. There are plenty of activities that can bring these. The main reason why we have come here stems from a long-term concern.

It is a fact that everybody wants happiness and does not want suffering; there is no argument about this. But there is disagreement about how to achieve happiness and how to overcome problems. There are many types of happiness and many ways to achieve them, and there are also many types of sufferings and ways to overcome them. As Buddhists, however, we aim not merely for temporary relief and temporary benefit but for long-term results. Buddhists are concerned not only for this life but for life after life, on and on. We count not weeks or months or even years, but lives and eons.

Money has its uses, but it is limited. Among worldly powers and possessions, there are, doubtless, good things, but they are limited. However, from a Buddhist viewpoint, mental development will continue from life to life, because the nature of mind is such that if certain mental qualities are developed on a sound basis, they always remain and, not only that, can increase. In fact, once properly developed, good qualities of mind eventually increase infinitely. Therefore spiritual practice brings both long-term happiness and more inner strength day by day.

So keep your mind on the topics being discussed; listen with a

pure motivation—without sleep! My main motivation is a sincere feeling for others, and concern for others' welfare.

## BEHAVIOR AND VIEW

Meditation is needed in developing mental qualities. The mind is definitely something that can be transformed, and meditation is a means to transform it. Meditation is the activity of familiarizing your mind with something new. Basically, it means getting used to the object on which you are meditating.

Meditation is of two types—analytical and stabilizing. First, an object is analyzed, after which the mind is set one-pointedly on the same object in stabilizing meditation. Within analytical meditation, there are also two types:

- 1 something, such as impermanence, is taken as the object of the mind and is meditated upon;
- 2 a mental attitude is cultivated through meditation, as in cultivating love, in which case the mind becomes of the nature of that mental attitude.

To understand the purpose of meditation, it is helpful to divide spiritual practices into view and behavior. The main factor is behavior, for this is what decides both one's own and others' happiness in the future. In order for behavior to be pure and complete, it is necessary to have a proper view. Behavior must be well-founded in reason, and thus a proper philosophical view is necessary.

What is the main goal of Buddhist practices concerning behavior? It is to tame one's mental continuum—to become nonviolent. In Buddhism, the vehicles, or modes of practice, are generally divided into the Great Vehicle and the Hearer Vehicle. The Great Vehicle is primarily concerned with the altruistic compassion of

helping others, and the Hearer Vehicle is primarily concerned with the nonharming of others. Thus, the root of all of the Buddhist teaching is compassion. The excellent doctrine of the Buddha has its root in compassion, and the Buddha who teaches these doctrines is even said to be born from compassion. The chief quality of a buddha is great compassion; this attitude of nurturing and helping others is the reason why it is appropriate to take refuge in a buddha.

The *Saṅgha*, or virtuous community, consists of those who, practicing the doctrine properly, assist others to gain refuge. People in the Saṅgha have four special qualities: if someone harms them, they do not respond with harm; if someone displays anger to them, they do not react with anger; if someone insults them, they do not answer with insult; and if someone accuses them, they do not retaliate. This is the behavior of a monk or nun, the root of which is compassion; thus, the main qualities of the spiritual community also stem from compassion. In this way, the three refuges for a Buddhist—Buddha, doctrine, and spiritual community—all have their root in compassion. All religions are the same in having powerful systems of good advice with respect to the practice of compassion. The basic behavior of nonviolence, motivated by compassion, is needed not only in our daily lives but also nation to nation, throughout the world.

Dependent-arising is the general philosophy of all Buddhist systems even though many different interpretations are found among those systems. In Sanskrit the word for dependent-arising is *pratīyasamutpāda*. The word *pratīya* has three different meanings—meeting, relying, and depending—but all three, in terms of their basic import, mean dependence. *Samutpāda* means arising. Hence, the meaning of *pratīyasamutpāda* is that which arises in dependence upon conditions, in reliance upon conditions, through the force of conditions. On a subtle level, it is explained as the main reason why phenomena are empty of inherent existence.

In order to reflect on the fact that things—the subjects upon which a meditator reflects—are empty of inherent existence because

dependently arisen, it is necessary to identify the subjects of this reflection: the phenomena that produce pleasure and pain, help and harm, and so forth. If one does not understand cause and effect well, it is extremely difficult to realize that these phenomena are empty of inherent existence due to being dependently arisen. One must develop an understanding of cause and effect—that certain causes help and harm in certain ways. Hence, the Buddha set forth a presentation of dependent-arising in connection with the cause and effect of actions in the process of life in cyclic existence so that penetrating understanding of the process of cause and effect could be gained.

Thus, there is one level of dependent-arising that is concerned with causality, in this case the twelve branches, or links, of dependent-arising of life in cyclic existence: ignorance, action consciousness, name and form, the six sense spheres, contact, feeling, attachment, grasping, existence, birth, and aging and death. Then there is a second, deeper level of dependent-arising that applies to all objects; this is the establishment of phenomena dependent upon their parts. There is no phenomenon that does not have parts, and thus every phenomenon is imputed dependent upon its parts.

There is a third, even deeper level, which is the fact that phenomena are merely imputed by terms and conceptuality in dependence upon their bases of imputation. When objects are sought among their bases of imputation, nothing can be found to be the imputed object itself, and thus phenomena are merely dependently arisen—merely imputed in dependence upon bases of imputation. While the first level of dependent-arising refers to the arising of compounded phenomena in dependence upon causes and conditions and thus applies only to impermanent, caused phenomena, the other two levels apply to both permanent and impermanent phenomena.

When the Buddha set forth the twelve links of dependent-arising, he spoke from a vast perspective and with great import. He taught the twelve links in detail in the *Rice Seedling Sūtra*.<sup>1</sup> As in other dis-

courses, the Buddha teaches by responding to questions. In this sūtra, the Buddha speaks of dependent-arising in three ways:

- 1 Due to the existence of this, that arises.
- 2 Due to the production of this, that is produced.
- 3 It is thus: due to ignorance there is compositional action; due to compositional action there is consciousness; due to consciousness there is name and form; due to name and form there are the six sense spheres; due to the six sense spheres there is contact; due to contact there is feeling; due to feeling there is attachment; due to attachment there is grasping; due to grasping there is the potentialized level of karma called “existence”; due to existence there is birth; and due to birth there is aging and death.

When the Buddha says, “Due to the existence of this, that arises,” he indicates that the phenomena of cyclic existence arise not through the force of supervision by a permanent deity but due to specific conditions. Merely due to the presence of certain causes and conditions, specific effects arise.

When the Buddha says, “Due to the production of this, that is produced,” he indicates that an unproduced, permanent phenomenon such as the general nature<sup>2</sup> propounded by the Sāṃkhya system<sup>3</sup> cannot create effects. Rather, the phenomena of cyclic existence arise from conditions that are impermanent by nature.

Then the question arises: If the phenomena of cyclic existence are produced from impermanent conditions, could they be produced from just any impermanent conditions? No. Thus, in the third phase, the Buddha indicates that the phenomena of cyclic existence are not produced from just any impermanent causes and conditions but rather from specific ones that have the potential to give rise to specific phenomena.

Setting forth the dependent-arising of suffering, Buddha shows

that suffering has ignorance—obscuration—as its root cause. This impure, faulty seed produces an activity that deposits in the mind a potency that will generate suffering by producing a new life in cyclic existence. It eventually has as its fruit the last link of dependent-arising, the suffering of aging and death.

With regard to the twelve links of dependent-arising, there are basically two modes of explanation, one in terms of thoroughly afflicted phenomena and the other in terms of pure phenomena. In the Buddha's root teaching of the four noble truths,<sup>4</sup> there are two sets of cause and effect: one set for the afflicted class of phenomena and another for the pure class. Just so, here in the twelve links of dependent-arising there are procedures in terms of both afflicted phenomena and pure phenomena. Among the four noble truths, true sufferings—the first truth—are effects in the afflicted class of phenomena, and true sources—the second truth—are their causes. In the pure class of phenomena, true cessations, the third truth, are effects in the pure class, and true paths, the fourth truth, are their causes. Similarly, when it is explained in the twelve links of dependent-arising that action is *produced* and so forth due to the condition of ignorance, the explanation is in terms of the afflicted procedure; when it is explained that action *ceases* and so forth due to the *cessa-tion* of ignorance, it is in terms of the procedure of the pure class. The first is the procedure of the production of suffering, and the second is the procedure of the cessation of suffering.

The twelve links of dependent-arising are thus laid out in terms of a process of affliction and in terms of a process of purification, and each of these is presented in forward and reverse orders. Thus, in the forward process, it is explained that:

due to the condition of ignorance, action arises;

due to the condition of action, consciousness arises;

due to the condition of consciousness, name and form arise;



due to the condition of name and form, the six sense spheres arise;

due to the condition of the six sense spheres, contact arises;

due to the condition of contact, feeling arises;

due to the condition of feeling, attachment arises;

due to the condition of attachment, grasping arises;

due to the condition of grasping, the potentialized level of karma called existence arises;

due to the condition of existence, birth arises;

due to the condition of birth, aging and death arise.

Because this mode describes how suffering is produced, it is an explanation of the sources<sup>5</sup> that produce suffering. In reverse order it is explained that:

the unwanted sufferings of aging and death are produced in dependence upon birth;

birth is produced in dependence upon the potentialized level of action called “existence”;

existence is produced in dependence upon grasping;

grasping is produced in dependence upon attachment;

attachment is produced in dependence upon feeling;

feeling is produced in dependence upon contact;

contact is produced in dependence upon the six sense spheres;

the six sense spheres are produced in dependence upon name and form;

name and form are produced in dependence upon consciousness;  
consciousness is produced in dependence upon action;  
action is produced in dependence upon ignorance.

Here emphasis is on the first of the four noble truths, true sufferings themselves, which are the effects. Then, in terms of the process of purification, it is explained that:

when ignorance ceases, action ceases;  
when action ceases, consciousness ceases;  
when consciousness ceases, name and form cease;  
when name and form cease, the six sense spheres cease;  
when the six sense spheres cease, contact ceases;  
when contact ceases, feeling ceases;  
when feeling ceases, attachment ceases;  
when attachment ceases, grasping ceases;  
when grasping ceases, the potentialized level of karma called  
“existence” ceases;  
when the potentialized level of karma called “existence” ceases,  
birth ceases;  
when birth ceases, aging and death cease.

This explanation is given in terms of the purified class of phenomena with emphasis on the causes, the true paths, second among the four noble truths. In reverse order, it is explained that:

the cessation of aging and death arises in dependence upon the  
cessation of birth;