

Dependent Origination – The Other Twelve Steps

By Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy

The doctrine of Dependent Origination, as usually presented, consists of twelve steps describing how ignorance leads through attachment to suffering. This has been discussed at length in previous issues of this Journal. (1) Since suffering frequently leads to further ignorance when we try to escape from it by means other than cutting the roots of attachment, the twelve steps become a circular chain or web, tending to bind us ever more tightly to the wheel of birth and death. But what happens when we attempt to deal with suffering in the right way, by cutting the roots of attachment through religious training?

It turns out that there is a second half to the doctrine: another twelve steps which lead from suffering to Enlightenment. While these other twelve steps do not seem to be written about very much, I have found them to be both interesting and useful. The only place where they are described, to the best of my knowledge, is in a section of the Pali Canon of Theravada Buddhism. The reference I have used is: Mrs. Rhys Davids, translator. (1972). *The Book of the Kindred Sayings (Sanyutta-Nikaya)*, Part II (Nidana-Vagga), Chapter XII, pp. 25-27. London: The Pali Text Society.

Step I: Suffering leads to faith. It is precisely the pain caused by our clinging to impermanent things that motivates us Buddhist trainees to take the next step in training. Since one never knows whether that step will be successful until one has taken it, one must try it without certain knowledge of the results, and that, after all, is a good working definition of faith. Sometimes an act of faith in the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is, itself, the next step in our training and it is the pain of suffering which pushed us to make that leap of faith.

Step II: Faith leads to joy. Properly understood and undertaken the next step in Buddhist training does, in fact, work. This produces in the trainee an enthusiastic, happy feeling that we may call joy.

Step III: Joy leads to rapture. The translator uses the word "rapture" and I can think of no better single word for it, but there are some problems in the connotations of this term. I think that what is meant is a deepening and maturing of both the joy and the faith together into a pleasant sort of intense determination to continue in the Way. As each new step in training is taken, the faith and joy both strengthen and merge increasingly into this "rapture" until only it is discernable.

Step IV: Rapture leads to serenity. After a while the aspect of intensity within the feeling of rapture falls away and there is just an unwavering going on: training for training's sake. There is no longer faith, joy, determination, or any other definable motive for training, and if asked, one might find it difficult to explain exactly why one goes on in the Buddhist Way. But go on one does, for nothing else in the whole world seems worth doing. At the same time, one knows that there is no external circumstance that is capable of stopping one from training. This state is characterized by a quiet certainty and a far greater measure of serenity than the trainee has known before.

Step V: Serenity leads to happiness. This is not the joy of Step II; it is both deeper and less excited. It is, furthermore, quite compatible with a gentle, non-destructive,

almost sweet, kind of sadness. Both the happiness and its attendant sadness arise as a function of beginning to see more clearly things as they really are. Thus, these feelings continue at least through Step VII. As the trainee continues to train for training's sake, a subtle but important shift takes place in his or her understanding of reality. The trainee can sense, somehow, that the way of Buddhist training is the same as the way of the Eternal: that all things, whether knowingly or unknowingly, operate within the Laws of the Universe and are tending towards Enlightenment; and from this arises the type of "happiness" referred to here. Its companion, sadness, arises because, as a part of this increasing awareness, there comes the intuitive knowledge of just how painful this world system really is and how little one person can do to heal its wounds. The sadness does not conflict with the happiness because one also somehow knows that when one does one's training one is doing the best one can to bring release to this suffering world and that this, too, is in accord with the Laws of the Universe and is as it should be. Perhaps one could say that Step V is the arising of the happiness and sadness of all-acceptance.

Step VI: Concentration leads to knowledge and vision of things as they really are. This knowledge and vision are the benefit mentioned above. They are direct and immediate, not theoretical. The Buddha likened our usual understanding of reality to the sight of a man with cataracts in his eyes. Through training and meditation the cataracts are removed and things seen for what they are. This does not mean that one becomes omniscient or that there is nothing further to be understood or undertaken. Nor does it mean that old karma may not continue to act upon us, sometimes producing temporary "blind spots". It does mean that in things that are truly important, one is able to perceive what is really there.

Step VIII: True knowledge and vision lead to non-attraction. When we see things as they truly are, we see that they are impermanent, changeable, and cannot be relied upon as the foundation of our lives. When this is clearly seen and clearly known, the attractiveness of such things simply disappears, for the basis of that attraction was ignorance (this is explained in detail by the first set of twelve steps). The translator used the word "repulsion" where I have used "non-attraction", but repulsion carries the connotation of a negative sort of attachment. I am not a scholar of the Pali language, but I suspect that the original text used a word which means something like "the opposite of attraction," hence I have substituted the term "non-attraction to avoid implying that a new type of attachment is produced at this stage.

Step IX: Non-attraction leads to passionlessness. When attraction ceases, so does our reaction to it: the craving for having and keeping the things to which we are attracted. This is the undoing of the eighth step in the first chain of Dependent Origination. Since craving is the root of the passions, the cessation of craving produces passionlessness. When we speak of the passions we refer not to all emotions but rather to those violent or addictive ones which bind us more closely to our attachments. Remember that the foundations of Buddhism are compassion and love as well as tenderness, charity, benevolence, and empathy. Thus, "passionlessness" as the term is used here is not a cold, empty, unfeeling, and inhuman state; it is a state in which the full potential of our humanity is realized.

Step X: Passionlessness leads to liberation. Here we have the operation of the Third Noble Truth: the cessation of craving is the cessation of suffering. Since craving is the root of suffering (again, see the articles on the first twelve steps for a full explanation of how this takes place), it follows that with the cessation of craving comes

liberation from suffering.

Step XI: Liberation leads to the knowledge of the extinction of the intoxicants. The intoxicants are enumerated elsewhere in the translation as those things operative in the first chain of Dependent Origination. In other words, liberation has attendant upon it the knowledge that the original twelve steps are broken. They no longer have the power to bind one who is liberated from craving.

Step XII: The knowledge of extinction leads to extinction. Once the fetters are extinct and one has fully understood that they are so, then there is no basis for separation from That Which Is and at that moment we are One with the Unconditioned, the Unborn, the Undying—the Eternal.

Like the original twelve steps, this second set can be viewed both on the large scale and on a small one. On the large scale they describe in broad terms the course of training of each person towards the eventual Supreme Enlightenment of Buddhahood. On the small scale they describe a process which may occur over and over again throughout our lives as we gain freedom from particular attachments.

What I have written in this article is my interpretation of what I sense to be a very useful set of Buddhist principles. I am sure that my interpretation is not the only one and I hope that the reader will consider these principles and see how he or she can interpret them to his or her own Buddhist training.

Note

1. See Rev. Master Jiyu -Kennett, "The Law of Dependent Origination," Volume 12, nos. 9 & 10 (September-October 1981): pp.2-9; Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy, "Dependent Origination Through a Microscope," Volume 14 no. 5 (September-October 1983): pp.4-12; and Rev. Master Daishin Morgan, "Dependent Origination," Volume 11, nos. 11 & 12 (November-December 1980): pp. 28-40.