

Introduction to the Doctrine of Dependent Origination

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In this issue of the Berkeley Buddhist Priory Journal we are reprinting four articles which have appeared in the *Journal of Shasta Abbey* over the past five years. Each of these articles deals with the subject from a different avenue of approach. Indeed, the Doctrine of Dependent Origination is a multi-faceted teaching which can be reflected in a limitless number of ways, and can be said to contain in elemental for the whole of Buddhist teaching.

When we include the twelve positive steps from ignorance back to knowledge as explained in the third article (which first appeared in the May-June 1985 *Journal of Shasta Abbey*), the Doctrine of Dependent Origination becomes an elaboration of the Four Noble Truths. The first two Noble Truths correspond to the traditional first twelve steps of Dependent Origination as the existence and causes of suffering; the thirds and fourth Noble Truths correspond to the second twelve steps as the cure for and extinction of suffering. This issue is a companion to our last one on the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the Fourth Noble Truth.

I believe many Buddhist trainees have some difficulty in digesting this teaching and finding it relevant to their own lives and training. Hopefully, this issue will help with that problem, as these articles bring the abstractness of the doctrine into more familiar language and ideas. We should also be aware that we acknowledge the Doctrine of Dependent Origination and practice the positive steps every time we sit down to meditate, because it is the problem of grasping – rejecting, the ninth step, which perpetuates the cycle. In refraining from these opposites, we break the cycle.

We can also speak of the Doctrine of Dependent origination in terms of our own personal koan in training. Through years of meditation as the koan is distilled down from coarser forms of attachment or grasping to subtler ones, we find our own basic-most tendency to act out of fear, greed or hate, which, when not acted upon through the stillness of zazen, leads us to discover the ignorance which brought that tendency about originally. Staying on the razor's edge in training, staying aware of the arising of the koan is the very center of the Wheel of Dependent Origination, the place where the Buddha can be found, and the living of the Eightfold Path.

I remember as a child seeing in people from my age up to adulthood an increasing tendency to be preoccupied with objects of the sense: a steady turning away from the clarity of non-grasping with which I was intimately familiar. My longing for religious practice became intense a few years later, and it is both ironic and beautiful to me now to see that even before I came into contact with Buddhism, my instincts taught me the same truths, and set me on the path of

training. This knowledge is latent within all of us: it is awakened and actualized to the extent that we act out of faith in that knowledge. This is as simple as sitting down and acknowledging within ourselves what thoughts we tend to chase, which one we are afraid of and push away, what aspects of our personality we hate, and which aspects are proud of and reluctant to change. Buddhism and its doctrines are nothing more than fingers pointing us in this direction. They are very useful as roadmaps to help us to the point where we know the way and are familiar with the path, at which time they return back to the Emptiness from which they came.

It has been a pleasure collecting the material for this Journal and slowly digesting its teaching as I have worked on it. I hope that other people will find it helpful also, and take the time to digest the teaching slowly and carefully, which is the Buddhist Way.
