

Week 3 – Conditioned co-production

Buddhism Level 2 – Buddhist Wisdom – doctrinal Dharma

CONDITIONED CO-PRODUCTION

The central Buddhist View – all other views and practices can be unpacked from it. But consequently it's very abstract & terse.

By way of an example, we looked at all “conditions” we need to set up for the desired outcome “holiday to India” to arise. And other factors must be in place that are not under our control. Eg. Plane must be there, serviced, filled with fuel, pilot must be there & awake, flight controllers must be there and alert etc. Can you say that the holiday is something apart from all the conditions that produced it?

CONDITIONED CO-PRODUCTION – DEFINITION

Pratitya samutpada – Sanskrit or paticca samuppada – Pali

Many translations incl: ‘Conditioned co-production’, ‘dependent origination’, ‘mutual causality’ and ‘mutual co-arising’.

This being, that becomes; from the arising of this, that arises;

this not being, that does not become; from the ceasing of this, that ceases

eg. Majjhima Nikaya ii.32

All phenomena constantly condition and interact with a host of other phenomena, so that nothing exists independently, as a thing-in-itself, separate from everything else.

Whoever sees paticca samuppada sees the dhamma, whoever sees the dhamma sees paticca samupadda

Majjhima Nikaya I. 191

CONDITIONED CO-PRODUCTION AS MIDDLE WAY

A very subtle doctrine – basically involves steering middle way between any dualistic poles – not the same as compromise! Has very practical implications for a spiritual path

Hopelessness & willfulness

Hopelessness – there's no possible path to my goal, pointless trying.

Willfulness – I want it and I want it now – trying to will the outcome into being.

These are attitudes. Or in terms of beliefs / views:

Determinism & randomness

Determinism – we'll be looked after by higher being, or our fate is already decided by the stars, or everything that's going to happen is already determined, so no need to make any effort.

Randomness – there's no pattern to the universe, stuff just happens, can't make any real difference.

Middle way

Actions have consequences. There are conditioning relations between events. If we have an aim (eg. go on holiday to India, or learn an instrument) we can set about

creating the conditions that conduce to that outcome. But we can't just "buy" the outcome, or control it absolutely. There are always other conditions out of our control. Just keep taking the next step & whatever outcome arises.

You can't will happiness or Enlightenment – they arise naturally out of the conditions that you create. Like a flower arising naturally out of seed, earth, sun, water etc. Can't force a flower from a seed.

So we can change – we're constantly changing. We can choose to change in a particular direction. Buddhist path unfolds naturally through dependent arising – as does everything – but we try to see it and work with it. And we need to give it time.

Existence & Non-existence

These categories are useful in relative sense, but Buddha didn't talk of existence or non-existence of things. Instead conditioned co-arising; everything material or mental comes into being in dependence upon conditions and has no existence separate to them.

Realise all the conditions that lead to you sitting here now. We can't ever finish the list.

Nothing exists "from it's own side". Just a flow of conditions, some of which appear stable for a period, and so we label them as things.

INTERCONNECTEDNESS

We've seen that every "thing" (event, object, mental state) is conditioned by factors external to it. There's no fixed boundary. So everything is interconnected – including us. We live in interconnected world, completely porous to influences of each .

Images of interconnectedness

- Indra's net – infinite net of jewels, each reflecting every other in its facets
- The sea of conditions, we're like vortices in it.

HOME PRACTICE

Throughout the week, when you sit down to eat, or when you cook, imagine some of the conditions that led to the food in front of you. Let the mind expand out as far as you can into the web of conditions that underlie the food: all the different people involved in growing, distributing, selling etc; all the physical conditions such as rain, sun, earth; any animals involved etc. Try to see "in" the meal all the conditions that underlie it, and in turn, how you are conditioned by them all.

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

The Dynamics of Being chapter, in *What is the Dharma* by Sangharakshita

Western Buddhism, Kulananda, Chapter 1 & 2

The True Nature of all Dharmas, in *A Survey of Buddhism* by Sangharakshita