

Week 3 – Conditioned co-production

Buddhism Level 2 – Buddhist Wisdom – doctrinal Dharma

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Start to understand the nature of Conditioned CoProduction
- See its application in terms of:
 1. How to bring about a desired outcome – “bring things into being” – with particular reference to the spiritual path
 2. “What is” – the nature of reality – what has become.
- See how it works in terms of the Middle Way
- (if time) See one corollary in terms of interconnectedness.

MEDITATION

HOME PRACTICE REVIEW

“Identify one area in your life where you either a) experience conflict within yourself, or b) experience conflict with someone else, or difficult emotions in relation to someone else. Can you identify a view that seems to underlie the conflict? Is there a more liberative view that you can bring, at least academically, to the situation?”

REVIEW OF LAST WEEK

Talked about our glimpses of Perfect Vision – experiences that seem to bring us closer to Reality.

And Views: maps of world that may be more or less accurate; or like spectacles. Saw how our views can condition emotions. Exercise of seeing how two different views produce two different emotional responses to the same situation.

Right View are Buddha's description of Perfect Vision; Our task is to get clear about the Dharma – acquire right view – and then put “meat on the bones” by reflecting on our experience in this light -> Perfect Vision.

Some examples of right view

- What we are now is a product of previous actions
- What we will become is a product of our present actions
- We are fundamentally involved with other people and all other living beings in an interconnected universe
- The only certainty is that we will die, but we don't know when
- We have the potential for full Enlightenment

One way Buddha chose to express his Perfect Vision was in the 4 Noble Truths.

Another way is the doctrine of Conditioned Co-production (in fact the general model of which the 4NT are a specific example, as is the whole rest of the Dharma!)

CONDITIONED CO-PRODUCTION - INTRO

The central Buddhist View – all other views and practices can be unpacked from it.
But consequently it's very abstract & terse, so let's look at an example to start with

Exercise

Let's imagine you want to go on holiday to India – what do you need to do?

Brainstorm onto flipchart all jobs: investigate flights, buy ticket, get visa, inoculations, travel insurance, currency etc.

These are all “conditions” that we need to set up for the desired outcome “holiday to India” to arise.

What 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? (especially if you include all the inconceivably many conditions?) Notice how so many conditions are outside our sphere of influence.

CONDITIONED CO-PRODUCTION – THEORY

Pratitya samutpada – Sanskrit or paticca samuppada – Pali

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

Pratitya samutpada literally means something like ‘existing on account of arising together’.

Usually encapsulated in a pithy verse:

[write on board]

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

Buddhaghosha defines it as the way “phenomena arise together in mutual dependence”. 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.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this idea in Buddhism:

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

Majjhima Nikaya I. 191

CONDITIONED CO-PRODUCTION AS MIDDLE WAY

Buddhism is often talked of as the “middle way” – but middle way between what?

Actually a very subtle doctrine – basically involves steering middle way between any dualistic oppositions. Has very practical implications for a spiritual path. For example:

Exercise

In threes: Think of a skill or quality that you've developed to some extent (eg. musical instrument, typing, cooking, professional competence)

How did you do it? ie which conditions did you consciously set up? And which just arose? How did you feel about the process?

Discussion like the holiday example, there are definite conditions you can set up, out of which arises your goal. But you can't just will a competence or skill into being. Need to keep setting up the conditions – putting one foot in front of the others.

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 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.

In terms of the Buddhist path – 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. But we can choose to change in a particular direction. And we have to give it time.

Buddhist path unfolds naturally through dependent arising – as does everything – but we try to see it and work with it, rather than holding subtly to one or other poles.

So far so obvious, just using funny language. But it goes much further

Existence & Non-existence

Question that science keeps trying to answer – does something exist or not?

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.

Exercise

Brainstorm all conditions that lead to you sitting here now

Note – we can't ever finish the list.

Aside – can reflect on how fortunate we are that so many conditions exist that support our learning the Dharma; so easy for it not to be the case (expand)

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. But having a label for a phenomenon doesn’t give it any real existence.

All things (including ourselves) are empty of an inherent, independent existence – doctrine of emptiness you may have heard of.

INTERCONNECTEDNESS

We’ve seen that every “thing” (event, object, mental state) is conditioned by conditions 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 other (me talking, you talking, affects everyone in the room, and everyone we come into contact with etc).

Your presence is completely connected to millions of people you’ve never met, who’ve produced food, goods, buildings etc. We’re sitting in room built 200 years ago by people long dead, decorated by people who you’ve never met etc...

Images of interconnectedness

Indra’s net

Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net which has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out indefinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel at the net's every node, and since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that the process of reflection is infinite

The Avatamsaka Sutra

The sea of conditions

Bit more dynamic (from Kulananda, Western Buddhism):

All phenomena – matter, mind, thoughts, ideas – contained in this sea of conditions. We’re like whirlpools, vortices, each unique with our own characteristics. Come into being, subsist, then disappear. We take shape from conditions in the sea – “matter”, ideas, opinions, all floating around in the sea, shape our vortex.

Don’t imagine you’ve got it yet – it’s actually inconceivable!

Deep, hard to perceive, hard to understand... beyond logic, subtle, intelligible only to the wise.

Digha Nikaya II. 33

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