

Week 4 – Progressive conditionality

Buddhism Level 2 – Buddhist Wisdom – symbolic Dharma

In cyclic conditionality there's a tendency to react between opposites: pleasure / pain, gain / loss, happy / sad. The fruition of pleasure contains the seed of pain etc.

In progressive conditionality each state provides the basis for a yet more creative state while being the fruition of the previous.

THE SPIRAL PATH OF PROGRESSIVE CONDITIONALITY

Link	Sanskrit / Pali	
Unsatisfactoriness	<i>Dukkha / Duhkha</i>	
Faith	<i>Saddha / Sraddha</i>	
Joy / Delight	<i>Pamojja / Pramodya</i>	
Rapture / ecstasy	<i>Priti / Piti</i>	“Meditation” Mundane path
Calm	<i>Prashabdhi / Passaddhi</i>	
Bliss	<i>Sukha</i>	
Concentration (Samadhi)	<i>Samadhi</i>	
Knowledge & vision of things as they really are	<i>Yathabhutajnandarshana / Yathabhutananadassana</i>	“Wisdom” Transcendental path
Disentanglement / Withdrawal	<i>Nirvega / Nibbida</i>	
Dispassion	<i>Vairagya / Viraga</i>	
Liberation / Freedom	<i>Vimukti / Vimutti</i>	
Knowledge of the destruction of the poisons	<i>Ashravaksayajana / Asavakkhayanana</i>	

The doctrine of conditioned co-production is an all-inclusive formulation of Reality, within which are included two trends, one cyclic between opposites, the other progressive between factors which mutually complement and augment each other. The second trend is not merely the negative counterpart of the first, but possesses a positive character of its own. Upon this second trend the spiritual life is based. In relation to the first trend Nirvana may be described only negatively, in terms of cessation... In relation to the second trend Nirvana may be described as the farthest discernible point of the increasingly positive and progressive series of reactions away from the samsara.

Samsara and Nirvana in A Survey Of Buddhism, Sangharaskhita

We will look at two links of particular significance.

IN DEPENDENCE UPON UNSATISFACTORINESS ARISES FAITH

Most of spiritual life is lived in this gap – a constant process of trying to “step onto the spiral”. One way of looking at it is “Abandon hope!” of gaining any final fulfilment from mundane existence. Or see it as about having preferences rather than demands. Not fighting reality, not wanting people to serve the function you’ve marked out for them, let others be, not taking refuge in mundane refuges. Can be a big relief, leads to joy.

The [progressive] version of dependent arising delineates a type of development that only becomes possible when this hope [for fulfillment in cyclic conditionality] has been dispensed with. It hinges on the prior recognition that any attempt to eliminate suffering through the gratification of craving is doomed to failure, and that the only way to stop it is to cut through the vicious nexus at its base.

Bhikkhu Bodhi, Transcendental Dependent Arising, Wheel 277

Phenomenal life by definition is a promise that is never kept. If we fulfil a desire, we're happy for a brief moment, but the nature of fulfilling one desire is immediately to find another one, and another one, and another one... When we rest at peace with our pain, this repose is the "Gateless Gate". And it's the last place we want to be; it's not pleasant, and our whole strategic drive is for pleasantness... It takes years of patient practice before we become comfortable resting there, until it's just a hard and friendly rock that's moulded to us, and where we can finally find rest and be at peace.

The Icy Couch in Nothing Special, Charlotte Joko Beck

[Faith is] the ethically wholesome counterpart of craving or thirst. In dependence upon feeling the unsatisfactoriness of the world, there arises not craving but faith – faith in something above and beyond the world, a sensitivity to a higher dimension of truth and reality. Perhaps the best definition of faith is that it is the response of what is ultimate in us to what is ultimate in the universe.

The Spiral Path in What is the Dharma, Sangharakshita

IN DEPENDENCE UPON CONCENTRATION ARISES INSIGHT

Steady penetrating concentration is usually needed in meditation to make significant insights in meditation. This link represents the transition to a transcendental vision: "knowledge and vision of things as they really are" – or Insight. It's only here that we really start to move beyond the wheel – though we're still on it in a way. Everything up to "concentration" is essentially human or god-realm: there's a correlation between meditative states & god realms.

Really ethics and (samatha) meditation are the buildup and provide the basis for wisdom, which traditionally is cultivated through vipassana meditation. Wisdom in sense of prajna is life altering; it undermines conventional assumptions about what's important, takes some of the urgency out of our demands on life. Someone with irreversible insight has escaped the "gravitation pull" of samsara: "Stream Entrant" has passed the point of no return.

HOME PRACTICE

When you notice yourself making strong demands (internally or externally) on the world – for things to be a certain way, for someone to act a certain way, for you to get something – see if you can to whatever extent relax the demand into a more of a request. Can you "abandon some hope" of your demand giving you final fulfillment, or even of getting what you want? Is there any sense of relief in that?

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

Wheel of Life, Kulananda, ch 12

The Buddhist Vision, Subhuti, ch 9 & 10

What is the Dharma? Sangharakshita, ch 7, or *The Stages of the Spiritual Path*, CD 034