

Dukkhasamudaya

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Dukkhasamudaya is called the second Noble Truth. It means *dukkha* (suffering) has a cause. It also means that the cause of suffering and suffering arise simultaneously.

Why is one born again and again and why does one suffer? The Buddha saw its cause at the experiential level. One is born because of one's desire. A desireless person ceases to be born but one with desire is bound to be born. *Desire* in Pali is called *taṇhā*. *Taṇhā* has been defined diversely. It is *duppūrā* (difficult to satisfy), *uparivisāla* (extended on top), and *visaṭagamini* (covering a great area). (*Uparivisālā duppūrā, icchā visaṭagāmini*, see Mittavinda Jātaka no. 369)

Taṇhā is craving for various objects and thoughts and ideas of the world. All one's six sense organs have their respective objects in the outside world, which one craves for. He sees beautiful objects of the world with his eyes, hears melodious sound with his ears, smells good perfumes with his nose, tastes dainty dishes with his tongue, touches soft things with his body and thinks of or reflects upon thoughts with his mind. He likes them when he has pleasant sensations and he wants to have more and more of them without knowing that they do not last forever. Because he is ignorant of the real nature of things, he has inordinate attachment and passionate clinging for them. When different objects of the world come in contact with their respective sense organs and they do not produce pleasant sensations, he develops aversion for them and desires to get rid of them. In both the cases, he either craves for or develops aversion towards things. This, in short, is *taṇhā* (desire).

It has been very clearly explained in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta where *taṇhā* arises.

Yaṃ loke piyarūpaṃ satarupaṃ etthesā taṇhā uppajjamānā uppajjati, ettha nivisamānā nivisati. (Wherever in the world of mind and matter, there is something enticing and pleasurable, there this craving arises and gets established.)

But what in the world of mind and matter is enticing and pleasurable? All sense organs, their respective objects, their consciousnesses, their contact with

their respective objects, the sensations arising from the contact, their perception, the mental reactions, the cravings, thought conceptions of different objects and rolling in thoughts of those objects are enticing and pleasurable. It is there that *taṇhā* arises and gets established as said in the Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta.

This realization at the experiential level must have been a sort of ‘eureka’ for the Buddha. He saw where *taṇhā* arises. Consequently, it must not have taken him long to conclude how *taṇhā* could be eliminated. It is *vedanā* which causes *taṇhā*. When one likes something or when he doesn’t like it, in both the cases, *vedanā* produces *taṇhā*. If at this point, he does not react to sensations but remains equanimous, he will be able to not allow *taṇhā* to arise and multiply. He creates desires by reacting to sensations. If, on the other hand, he does not react to sensations, then desires are not produced. How this process works can be understood with the help of a simile. When a blacksmith hones a knife against a moving whetstone many sparks arise. If somebody keeps oil and wick ready there to catch a spark, each spark can become a conflagration. But in their absence, each spark dies out. In the same way, if one does not react to sensations, desires do not multiply. Furthermore, the old accumulated desires are also exhausted. This is what is expressed in the statement made by the Buddha.

Khīṇaṃ purāṇaṃ navaṃ natthi sambhavaṃ, virattacittā āyatike bhavasmim.

Taṇhā accompanied by pleasure and lust, finding its delight here and there, leads to re-birth. *Yāyāṃ taṇhā ponobbhāvika nandirāgasahagatā tatratrābhinandini.*

Desire, also called craving, is threefold: craving for sensual pleasure (*kāma taṇhā*), craving for existence (*bhava taṇhā*) and craving for non-existence or for life to end (*vibhava taṇhā*) as said above. In short, it is craving of one kind or another which causes suffering. *Taṇhā* is a fetter that binds one to the wheel of birth and death. The Buddha aptly compares it to a seamstress who brings two ends together i.e., who joins two existences. *Phasso kho, āvuso, eko anto, phassasamudayo dutiyo anto, phassa nirodho majjhe, taṇhā sabbini, taṇhā hi naṇ sabbati tassa tasseva bhavassa abhinibbattiyā.* A. Chakka Nipāta, 2.105. *Taṇhā* supplies oil which keeps the lamp of life burning.

By realizing the law of Dependent Origination, the Buddha knew the cause of suffering. By realizing the same law, he also knew that if *taṇhā* is removed,

suffering will end. (*imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti, imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti;*) (See Mahānidāna Sutta in the Dīgha Nikāya).

This realization made him say confidently that suffering can be ended. The third Noble Truth (*dukkha nirodha*) is related to this.

One must go a little deeper to understand whether *taṇhā* is the first cause of *dukkha* and how it is responsible for his being born again and again and suffer. If he just looks at the law of Dependent Origination, it becomes clear that *taṇhā* is not the first cause of *dukkha*. *Taṇhā* is caused by *vedanā* (sensation) and *vedanā* is caused by *phassa* (contact). In this way the cycle goes on. But it is clear, however, that although *taṇhā* is not the first cause, it is the most palpable and immediate cause. Why palpable and immediate? Because as it is said in the *Abhidharma samuccaya* quoted from what the Buddha taught f.n.4 p.29, it is the principal cause (*pradhānyārth*) and it is ubiquitous (*sarvatragārtha*). In the Pali Vibhaṅga, therefore, *taṇhā* comes first in the list of other defilements such as *kilesā and sāsava dhammā* that cause *dukkha*.

Taṇhā is a very comprehensive term. It is ‘not only desire for and attachment to sense pleasures, wealth and power’ as lucidly explained by Walpola Rahula, ‘but also desire for and attachment to ideas and ideals, views, opinions, theories, conceptions and beliefs.’ op. cit. p.30. In the Sammāditṭhi Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya M. 1.65, this is called *dhamma taṇhā*. All quarrels and battles between individuals or the nations have their roots in this selfish kind of desire. It will not take one long to see that selfish attitude causes tremendous suffering, be it a quarrel between two brothers, two families or two nations.

So far, I think, it is easy to understand. But what is not easily grasped is how this *taṇhā* causes one’s rebirth.

In order to understand this, one has to understand the deeper philosophical aspect of the Second Noble Truth and to clearly understand this, one has to understand the theory of *kamma* and rebirth which may be called the most important teaching propounded by the Buddha.

Let us first try to understand why do beings live. For their existence, they require nourishments. According to Abhidhamma philosophy, there are four kinds of nourishment: material food (*kabalīnkāra*), contact of our six sense organs with their respective objects (*phassa*), consciousness (*viññāṇa*) and volition or mental volition (*manosañcetanā*).

What is mental volition? It is the will to exist, and to continue to exist again and again. This ‘will’ manifests itself in one’s actions, wholesome or unwholesome. The Buddha has said that volition is *kamma cetanāhaṃ, bhikkhave, kammaṃ vadāmi*. All actions that one does are not volitional actions. The volitional actions that produce results are the actions that matter as far as the theory of *kamma* is concerned. Involuntary actions do not matter. This has been well explained in the first two *gāthās* of the Dhammapada¹. This nutriment of mental volition is closely related to the three kinds of *taṇhā* mentioned above. Whatever actions produce their results are products of mental volition. These actions are responsible for one’s well-being or otherwise. If the volition is good, the action that one does is wholesome and this ensures one’s well-being. If the volition is unwholesome, the action is also unwholesome. So how can it ensure one’s well-being?

Wholesome or unwholesome actions have the force to respectively drive one in a good direction or in a bad one and so make one move in the cycle of birth and death. In short, he moves in *samsāra* because of his *kamma*. As he does actions with attachment and desire, so these actions produce their results, good or bad, as seeds germinate. In the case of an *arahant*, his actions do not produce any result, because he does his actions without attachment and clinging. His actions are like fried seeds incapable of germinating and producing fruits.

The theory of *kamma*, therefore, is the theory of cause and effect, of action and reaction. It is a natural universal law. If one performs good actions, he reaps good results; if he doesn’t do so, he doesn’t. This law has got nothing to do with the law of retribution i.e., with the law of reward and punishment. It is unfortunately this interpretation of the law that people think (and they are made to think by those who have vested interests) that their condition, pitiable or otherwise, is due to their past *kammas*. They tend to become fatalists and do not try to ameliorate their conditions. The theory of *kamma* according to the Buddha is the law of cause and effect. As the cause is, so is the effect. Just as sweet seeds produce sweet fruits and bitter seeds produce bitter fruits, so also our volitional actions are responsible for our moving in a good or bad direction. The Buddha says that one is free to work. One’s hands are not tied by his past actions. The results of his past unwholesome actions can be eliminated by his present wholesome actions. So, there is no fatalism here, but rather there is great freedom to choose to do wholesome actions.

So far, it is clear that wholesome and unwholesome actions produce respectively good and bad results in this life. One may be happy or unhappy depending upon his past *kammas* but they have nothing to do with his birth in a *brahman* or a *sūdra* caste. The caste system is not universal. The theory of *kamma* is universal since it applies to all people of the world and not only to the people of India (where unfortunately there is a caste system).

This aspect of the theory of *kamma* is easy to understand but what is difficult to understand is how these volitional *kammas* continue to manifest themselves in a life after death. The theory of *kamma* explains this.

We know that a being consists of five aggregates (*khandhas*), only one of which is physical (*rūpa*). The other four are mental (*nāma*). They are actually energies and can be extirpated when their source dries up. The Buddha says that death is that state when the physical body completely stops working. But do all these energies die out? What Buddhism says about them has been nicely described by Walpola Rahula. “Will, volition, desire, thirst to exist, to continue, to become more and more, is a tremendous force that moves whole lives, whole existences, that even moves the whole world.” (op.cit. p.33). This comes very close to ‘libido’ as psychologists have defined and ‘will’ as Schopenhauer has shown in his famous book entitled *The World as Will and Idea*. Will Durant in his book *The Story of Philosophy* says, “Will indicates want and its grasp is very strong. Desire is infinite and fulfillment only limited.” (op.cit. p.33) (p.312)

This force, which does not cease with the death of the body, continues on in different forms causing rebirth. But *who* is actually born is still a difficult question to grasp. Nagasena says, in his authoritative book *Milindapañho*, that it is neither the same nor another (*Na ca so, na ca añño*). How it is so can be understood only when one understands the process described by the Buddha. In the *Paṭṭhapāda Sutta* in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, it says one gets curd or yoghurt from milk and gets butter from yoghurt, but neither yoghurt can be called milk nor butter be called yoghurt. But one cannot get any of them without milk. In the same way, the force that survives the death of the body keeps on changing under the influence of other *kammas* and manifests itself in another form. The force continues to exist because of one’s desire or *taṇhā*. When *taṇhā* is rooted out, the force also like the body dies out. And one’s movement in the cycle of birth and death stops forever. This is called *nirvāṇa*.

Questions:

- 1 What do you mean by *dukkhasamudaya*? Explain in detail.
- 2 It is said that ‘*Uparivisālā duppūrā, icchā visaṭagāmi*’. Elaborate on this saying.
- 3 Enumerate the three kinds of *taṇhā* and describe them in detail.
- 4 *Imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti, imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti*. Explain.
- 5 *Yaṃ loke piyarūpaṃ sātaraṃ etthesā taṇhā uppajjamānā uppajjati, ettha nivisamānā nivisati*. Explain with examples.
- 6 What is the psychological cause of desire (*taṇhā*)? Explain with examples.