

Daily life and dependent origination

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As long as we have craving and attachment, we will always have fear. We worry about our life, we worry about our death. When we develop wisdom, we have no craving, nor clinging, nor hatred, nor anger, nor greed. It is a long walk, but if you try, perhaps you also can follow the path that the Buddha discovered for us.

Around 2,500 years ago, the Buddha sat cross-legged and contemplated life. Through his contemplation, the idea of dependent origination came to him. This idea was that everything arises from causes and secondary causes. A flame burns because a match is lit. The flame cannot exist until someone lights the match.

Similarly, the Buddha realised that dependent origination meant that all beings are going through a continuous cycle of birth, old age, sickness, and death.

However with further contemplation, the Buddha was able to stop the cycle of dependent origination that governed his own existence.

On account of ignorance and delusion, most of us keep following this cycle. We carry out many activities, and develop many attachments to this life. We try many new things in order to give ourselves satisfaction. We chase after pleasure and we try to avoid or throw away those things we do not like. So we survive, and yet we are dying every moment.

From the moment of conception, in our mother's womb, we have to grow. In order to grow, we have to give up and get rid of old things, and take on new things. For example, at first we drink breast milk, but then that is not enough for us, and we are given soft mashed food. We eat that and grow a little bigger, but when our teeth grow, we are given hard food; raw fruit and vegetables.

So just to grow, we must keep changing, giving up our old ways and diet, and begin new ways and a new diet. At first we also cling to our mother, but then we become too big for her to carry us. Then we have to let her go and begin crawling, and walking for ourselves.

Every moment, we are being reborn. When we look at a candle-flame, it may burn for an hour or two, but each flame is not the same. Each flame consumes a different part of the candle. Every moment we are dying and being reborn, but we do not detect our rebirth.

In the Buddhist scriptures, it mentions that we are travelling in a cycle without stopping. We sit here for one or two hours, yet we do not detect that we are moving. We do not detect that the world is rotating and orbiting around the sun. That our sun is also moving through space. How can we stay in one place for more than a moment ?



We are moving and we are changing also, but we do not detect it. This change affects every part of our mind and body. This change also affects the hardest rocks. Even though a rock has existed for millions of years, it is still changing and renewing itself.

Not knowing or recognising change is delusion. On account of this delusion, we experience things as either desirable or undesirable. Our eyes focus on visible objects, our ears focus on tangible sounds, our tongue focuses on tastes, our body focuses on touch.

Depending on our focus on visible things, if we see a pleasant sight - we are pleased. If it is unpleasant, then we feel upset in our minds. We always like or dislike things to happen. We do not recognise things as they are.

When you open your eyes, you see the cup on the table beside me here now. We all recognise it as a cup. But the original cup has already changed. Its image still remains in your mind. But the conceptual image is not the real one.

When we have desire for something, we want to be close to it. If we dislike something, we want to move away from it. Like and dislike creates a push/pull affect in our mind. This liking and disliking creates craving to be near or far away from people or things. The craving creates attachment, but this craving comes about through not understanding things as they are.

Object contact feeds our feelings and our craving. Since we were young children, we have been conditioned to associate different objects with different emotions. Now when we are older, we still allow ourselves to form these emotional images of things we desire, and we forget to try to experience only the present situation.

As we get older, we should try to cultivate seeing things as they are, - without the emotional images and attachments from the past. We should see only the visible cup. We should not allow ourselves to process thoughts of like or dislike in our mind.

If we cultivate the habit of living in the immediate present, we will not see things as very beautiful or very ugly. Instead, we will see things as they are, and our mind will not be agitated, but relaxed and calm.

We should try not to let emotional images form of objects we see, then we can live without attachment. Actually, in reality, this is very difficult to practise. But this is mindful practice. If we practise like this we will be able to exclude craving and clinging. But unfortunately most people think that peace is only temporary, and permanent peace is regarded as beyond this world. Greed, ignorance, and delusion govern this world, and continue to get us into trouble.

If a person gets good instruction and tries to develop themselves to seeing things as they really are, then they will find great peace and happiness. Unfortunately, we are all so accustomed to living with forms and images and living in the past and not the present.

When we develop mindfulness, then deeper understanding happens. That deeper understanding helps us to change. We may go through several stages of understanding things, but after a while we will lose our fear.

As long as we have craving and attachment, we will always have fear. We worry about our life, we worry about our death. When we develop wisdom, we have no craving, nor clinging, nor hatred, nor anger, nor greed.

Why then do we lose those emotions ? - Because our understanding becomes profound. Everything is changing and does not remain in this world. There is nothing that is free from change. When our craving and attachment is gone, we are free. We have no worries or fears, only peaceful serenity with us. Nobody can provoke us to get angry. Then our personality changes.

It is a long walk, but if you try, perhaps you also can follow the path that the Buddha discovered for us. I hope so.

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About the author : Venerable Sayadaw U Zagarabhivamsa is a highly respected teacher and scholar, being formerly a professor of Abhidhamma and Pali language at Nalanda Buddhist Institute in India.

In 1988 Venerable Sayadaw U Zagarabhivamsa, (or Venerable Dr U Zagara as he is sometimes more commonly known!) took up residence as Abbot at a rented cottage in North Parramatta to serve the small Burmese community in Sydney. In 1989, when larger premises were purchased, he moved to the Burmese Buddhist Society Temple in Merrylands. He may be contacted now at the Burmese Buddhist Vihara, at 67 Orchardleigh Street, Yennora NSW 2161 Tel : 02 9788 4168.