

Introduction To Buddhism Series

Lecture 4 – The Twelve Links in the Chain of Causation



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□ A quick review.

➤ Topic One : General Introduction

- ➔ Buddhism is an **education**, not a religion or a philosophy.
 - It teaches us how to recover our wisdom and regain our Buddha nature.
 - It teaches us how to solve our problems through wisdom – an art of living.
- ➔ The **law of causality** governs everything in the universe.
- ➔ All sentient beings possess the **same Buddha nature**.
 - Our Buddha nature is temporarily **lost** due to **delusion**.
 - Our lost Buddha nature can be recovered **only** via **cultivation**.
- ➔ Karma refers to an action and its retribution under the law of causality.
 - **Good and bad karmas do not offset each other – prevailing ones occur first.**
 - Karmas, good or bad, accumulate over time and do not disappear.
 - When many bad karmic retributions come together, they form disasters.
- ➔ Cultivation means to stop planting bad seeds and nurturing bad conditions, and to, instead, plant good seeds and nurture good conditions.

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□ A quick review.

➤ Topic Two : Taking the Three Refuges and Accepting the Four Reliance Principles

- ➔ We formally accept the Buddha's education and **set our goals** by Taking the Three Refuges.
 - The Three Refuges are within ourselves.
- ➔ We return to and rely on the **Three Refuges within ourselves** and accept the **Four Reliance Principles** provided to us by the Buddha to guide ourselves along the path of **cultivation**.
 - Rely on the Dharma, not on the persons who expound it.
 - Rely on the meaning of the sutra, not just on the words.
 - Rely on wisdom, not on perception.
 - Rely on the sutras that can lead us to break out of delusion, not on the ones which won't. (Sutras need to fit one's level, or they will not help.)
- ➔ Four Reliance Principles also help us authenticate a teaching and the person who expounds the teaching.

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□ A quick review (Cont'd)

➤ Topic Three : Recognizing the Four Noble Truths

➔ We begin cultivation by recognizing the Four Noble Truths:

- There is suffering in our lives.
- There is a cause or origin of sufferings.
- There is a cessation of sufferings.
- There is a path leading to the cessation of sufferings.

➔ Karma refers to an action and its retribution under the law of causality.

➔ Sufferings occur because we are committing innumerable karmas every moment.

➔ Bad karmas are driven by **three poisons: greed, anger, and ignorance.**

- Greed, Anger, and Ignorance are also called the **Mind Karma** that drives our **Body Karma** and **Speech Karma**.

➔ **Body Karma, Speech Karma, and Mind Karma** together

- **Seeded** and **are seeding** the causes of all sufferings of the past, present, and future
- **Conditioned** and **are conditioning** all sufferings of the past, present, and future

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□ A quick review. (Cont'd)

- Topic Three : Recognizing the Four Noble Truths (Cont'd)
 - ➔ Nirvana is the cessation of sufferings. (Nirodha 滅諦)
 - ➔ Nirvana can only be attained via continuous cultivation with diligence and focus, and when we reach Buddhahood.
 - ➔ Realization of the **Noble Eightfold Path** is **the path** to the cessation of sufferings, Nirvana.

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□ What are the Twelve Links in the Chain of Causation?

- Recorded in the *Agama Sutra* (阿含經) and many other sutras.
- Clearly depicts the function of the law of causality in the death & rebirth cycle – Dependent Arising (Pratitya Samutpada 緣生)
 - ➔ Due to the existence or production of A, B arises or is produced.
 - ➔ Phenomena exist/arise simply due to the presence/convergence of certain causes and conditions.
 - ➔ The function is **cyclically continuous** in nature.
 - ➔ Conditions themselves are impermanent.
 - ➔ Therefore, phenomena are empty of inherent existence.
 - ➔ These represent the phenomena in the **afflicted domain** (世間因果) – the first two Noble Truths.
- Also explain how to “stop” the chain (Moksha 還滅)
 - ➔ If we don't want B to arise or be produced, we **MUST STOP** the existence or production of A.
 - ➔ This is in the **pure domain** (出世間因果) – the last two Noble Truths.

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□ What Are the Twelve Links?

- First Link – Ignorance or Avidya (無明)
 - Second Link – Volitional Action (行)
 - Third Link – Consciousness (識)
 - Fourth Link – Name & Form (名色)
 - Fifth Link – Six Sense Spheres (六入)
 - Sixth Link – Contact (觸)
 - Seventh Link – Feeling (受)
 - Eighth Link – **Attachment (愛)**
 - Ninth Link – **Grasping (取)**
 - Tenth Link – **Existence (有)**
 - Eleventh Link – Birth (生)
 - Twelfth Link – Aging and Death (老死)
- Past Avidya and Actions** (blue box) points to the First and Second Links.
- Birth of present life** (green box) points to the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Links.
- Sufferings of present life** (green box) points to the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Links.
- Avidya and Actions of present life, which are conditioning the next rebirth life cycle** (green box) points to the Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Links.
- Next life cycle** (red box) points to the Eleventh and Twelfth Links.

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□ First Link – Ignorance or Avidya (無明)

- Delusion, full of confusion (惑) – the fundamental seeds of all sufferings.
- Two categories:
 - ➔ Incorrect understanding or misconception (見惑)
 - ➔ Incorrect thoughts (思惑) – the function of incorrect understanding
- Misconceptions (見惑):
 - ➔ Misconceptions about self (身見)
 - Dwelling on “me” and “what I have” (我與我所)
 - Deeply believing that “I” am the controlling body, the governor (我是主宰)
 - ➔ Always on dichotomy (邊見)
 - Dwelling on either “this” or “that”, “existence” or “empty”
 - Not taking the middle way
 - ➔ Misconception about precept (戒取見)
 - Misunderstanding of precepts, for example, people who practice asceticism (苦行) think that ascetic practice enables one to attain awakening.
 - ➔ Prejudices or bias (見取見)

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□ First Link – Avidya (無明) (Cont'd)

➤ Misconceptions (見惑):

➔ All other improper views (邪見)

- The most serious one is not believing the law of causality.
- Other disrespectful views, for example, toward teachers.

➤ Incorrect thoughts (思惑):

➔ Greed (貪)

➔ Anger (瞋) & Resentment (恚)

➔ Ignorance (癡)

➔ Arrogance (慢)

➔ Doubt about Dharma Teaching (疑) – **not believe in the law of causality**

➤ Four Contra-facts (四顛倒):

➔ Take unclean objects as clean (以不淨為淨)

➔ Take sufferings as happiness (以苦為樂)

➔ Take non self-existence as self-existence (以無我為我)

➔ Take impermanence as permanence (以無常為常)

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□ First Link – Avidya (無明) (Cont'd)

- Four severity levels of Avidya (地藏菩薩本願經 *Ksitagarbha Bodhisattva's Fundamental Vows Sutra*)
 - ➔ People with sharp faculties (或有利根，聞即信受)
 - Believe in and accept the Dharma teaching as soon as they are exposed to.
 - ➔ People with fruitful present conditions (或有善果，勤勸成就)
 - Believe in and accept the Dharma teaching after diligent effort by the expounders.
 - ➔ People with weak faculties or little good deeds (或有暗頓，久化方歸)
 - Believe in and accept the Dharma after persevered effort by the expounders.
 - ➔ People with severe karmic obstacles (或有業重，不生景仰)
 - Never believe in or respect the Dharma teaching in this lifetime.
- Complete cleansing of misconceptions and incorrect thoughts will condition us to the first level of enlightenment – Shravaka (聲聞)
- Due to **Avidya** there is **Volitional Actions**. (無明緣行)
 - ➔ When Avidya functions (i.e., conditions are input), it produces actions (karma).

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□ Volitional Actions (行、造業)

- Four categories
 - ➔ Good: the seeds and conditions leading to good retribution (fruition) (善業)
 - ➔ Bad: the seeds and conditions leading to bad retribution (惡業)
 - ➔ Neutral (無記業)
 - ➔ Pure: the seeds and conditions leading to enlightenment (淨業)
 - On the cultivation path
- Three forms of actions that commit to karmas: Body (身業), Speech (語業), Mind (意業)
- The power of karmas (地藏菩薩本願經 *Ksitagarbha Bodhisattva's Fundamental Vows Sutra*):
 - ➔ It's as big as Mount Someru. (能敵須彌)
 - ➔ It's as deep as an ocean. (能深巨海)
 - ➔ It's hindering us from seeing the true reality. (能障聖道)
- Due to **Volitional Actions** there is **Consciousness** (行緣識)
- Avidya and Actions are the **Causes/Seeds** (過去苦因) in the past, from which the present **Effects** (Dukkha, 現在苦果) arise.

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□ Consciousness (識)

- Awareness or Recognition – has eight dimensions, called “eight-consciousness.”
 - ➔ Sight-consciousness (眼識)
 - ➔ Hearing-consciousness (耳識)
 - ➔ Smell-consciousness (鼻識)
 - ➔ Taste-consciousness (舌識)
 - ➔ Touch-consciousness (身識)
 - ➔ Mind-consciousness (意識) – the realm of discrimination (分別心)
 - ➔ Mano-consciousness (末那識) – the realm of ego where the sense of self resides (執著心)
 - ➔ Alaya-consciousness (阿賴耶識) – the repository with infinity capacity for all karmas of past and present (i.e., seeds and conditions)
- In conventional terms, consciousness is called “**soul.**”

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□ **Consciousness** (識)

- ▶ “A soul floats, changes, and moves very fast until it finds a fetus.”
(Confucius 孔子：『游魂爲變，精氣爲物』。)
 - Parent/child affinity (親因緣) conditions the parent/child relationship
- ▶ Parent/child affinity – a mixture of the four
 - Returning favors or gratitude (報恩)
 - Returning grudges or grief (報怨)
 - Collecting debts (討債)
 - Repaying debts (還債)
- ▶ Due to **Consciousness** there is **Name and Form** (識緣名色)

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□ Name and Form (名色)

- The four great elements begin to converge (四大聚合) into five-aggregates or five-skandhas (五蘊、五蔭)
 - ➔ Solidity (地大)
 - ➔ Fluidity (水大)
 - ➔ Heat or energy (火大)
 - ➔ Motion (風大)
- The convergence of the four great elements creates the fetus from which body, organs, and senses begin to develop.
- Due to **Name and Form** there are the **Six Sense Spheres** (名色緣六入)

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□ Six Sense Spheres (六入、十八界)

- Six organs are formed: eyes (眼), ears (耳), nose (鼻), tongue (舌), body (身), and mind (意).
- Six consciousnesses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and mind.
- Six faculties are developed: the ability to identify matter (色, sound (聲), odor (香), taste (味), tangible objects (觸), and mind objects (法).
- Due to **Six Sense Spheres** there are **Contacts** (六入緣觸).

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□ Contact (觸)

- Our sense organs or faculties begin to receive external stimuli.
- Due to **Contact** there are **Feelings**. (觸緣受)

□ Feelings (受)

- Five types: **Sadness** (苦), **Happiness** (樂), **Depression** (憂), **Joy** (喜), **Equanimity** (捨)
- Due to **Feelings** there are **Attachments**. (受緣愛)

□ Attachments (愛)

- Dwelling on things, tangible or intangible
- Including dwelling on likes and dislikes
- Attachments are the **Avidya** (無明) reflected in our present life.
- Due to **Attachments** there is **Grasping**. (愛緣取)

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❑ Grasping (取)

- Driven by our **attachments**, we pursue conditions.
- It is our present **Volitional Action**, reflected in
 - ➔ Body, Speech, and Mind
 - ➔ Thus, karmas are created and accumulated through our actions.
- Due to **Grasping** there is **Existence**. (取緣有)

❑ Existence (有)

- New seeds resulted from **Grasping** are deposited in our **Consciousness**.
- The new seeds plus the ones already in our consciousness will be conditioned to produce the future rebirth.
- Due to **Existence, Birth (or Rebirth)** is produced. (有緣生)

❑ Consciousness through Existence are the seeds from which future Dukkha arise. (現在苦因)

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□ Birth (生)

- The karmic effect of our current **Attachment, Grasping, and Existence**.
- As soon as there is **Birth, Aging and Death** are unavoidable.
- Due to **Birth** there is **Aging and Death**. (生緣老與死)

□ Aging and Death (老與死)

- Death is the worst of all sufferings.
- Buddha told us it's like “a live turtle being de-shelled” (『生龜脫殼』), and
- like “a live body being sliced up by blizzard of knives” (『風刀解體』)

□ Birth, Aging and Death are the future Dukkha (苦) arisen from the seeds of suffering we are presently planting. (未來苦果)

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- ❑ **The entire death/rebirth cycle repeats UNLESS THE CHAIN IS BROKEN.**
- ❑ Otherwise, it's an **awfully lonely** journey in a never-ending cycle.
- ❑ Buddha told us that the chain can be broken.
 - There is a cessation of suffering. (Nirvana – the Third Noble Truth)
 - There is a path leading to the cessation of suffering. (the Fourth Noble Truth)
 - ➔ The path is the Noble Eightfold Path
- ❑ OK. But, where do we start?
 - **Not** from the results, but **MUST** from the seeds and conditions.
 - Remember, we just said: **“If we don’t want B to arise or be produced, we MUST STOP the existence or production of A.”**

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□ Let's take a closer look at **Attachments (愛)**, **Grasping (取)**, and **Existence (有)**.

- All we can control in this life are these three.
- **Breaking out from any one of them frees us from the cyclic chain and thus liberates us from the vicious suffering cycle of death-and-rebirth. (Moksha 解脱)**
- The easiest place in the chain to break is at **Existence**.
 - ➔ Stop “depositing” anything into our consciousness
- Pratyeka-Buddha (緣覺) accomplish their level of enlightenment by breaking out of the chain from the three places in the chain.

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□ Mahayana's Perspective of the Four Noble Truths and Twelve Links (大乘佛法對四聖諦與十二因緣的觀察)

- All dharmas are conditionally arisen or existent (緣生); so are the Twelve Links in the Chain of Causation.
 - ➔ There is concise and precise explanation in the *Maha-Prajna-Paramita-Hridaya Sutra*, i.e., *Heart Sutra*. (般若波羅密多心經)
- “Forms do not differ from emptiness; emptiness does not differ from forms. That whichever is form is emptiness; that whichever is emptiness is form. So are for sensations, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness in relation to emptiness.”

『色不異空，空不異色；色即是空，空即是色。受想行識，亦復如是』。

 - ➔ This describes the empty nature of the Five Aggregates (五蘊); that is, our body.
 - ➔ The physical existence is a false illusion (幻有).
 - ➔ **The essence is that we do not dwell on a false illusion.**

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□ Mahayana's Perspective of Four Noble Truths and Twelve Links (大乘佛法對四聖諦與十二因緣的觀察)

▶ “All dharmas are empty in nature; they do not arise or disappear, they are not tainted or pure, and they do not increase or decrease. Therefore, in emptiness there is no form, no sensation, perception, mental function, or consciousness. There are no eyes, no ears, nose, body, or mind; there is no color, no sound, odor, taste, contacts, or mind objects. There is no realm of the eyes, and up to and including no realm of mind consciousness.”

『是諸法空相，不生不滅，不垢不淨，不增不減。是故空中無色，無受想行識，無眼耳鼻舌身意，無色聲香味觸法。無眼界，乃至無亦意識界』。

→ The sense of existence of any dharma is also a false illusion.

→ Dharmahatu (法界 dharma realms – our living environment) is also a false illusion. **Therefore, we should not dwell upon it.**

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□ Mahayana's Perspective of Four Noble Truths and Twelve Links (大乘佛法對四聖諦與十二因緣的觀察)

▶ “There is no Avidya, nor the extinction of it, up to and including no aging and no death, nor the extinction of them. There are no Four Noble Truths. There is no wisdom, and therefore, there is nothing to attain.” (*Heart Sutra*)

『無無明，亦無無明盡，乃至無老死，亦無老死盡。無苦集滅道，無智亦無得』。(般若波羅密多心經)

- The sense of existence of the Four Noble Truths and the Twelve Links in the Chain of Causation is also a false illusion.
- They were never there to begin with.