

**Dedicated Practitioners Program
Reading and Homework for October 2003
Buddhism and Social Engagement**

This month we begin to prepare for the November DPP retreat which will include sessions on dependent origination (*paticca samuppada*), kamma, the five aggregates (some of the most central and profound aspects of the Buddha's teaching) and the abhidhamma. Because some of these teachings may be new to you, there is an extensive optional reading list for this month. If you are unfamiliar with any of the topics, we encourage you to do as much reading as possible before the retreat.

Joanna Macy, Buddhist scholar and social activist, in *World as Lover, World as Self*, said this about dependent origination:

No philosophic tenet has had more impact on me than *paticca samuppada*. Confirming an intuitive sense I've always felt of the interconnectedness of all beings, this doctrine has provided me ways to understand the intricate web of co-arising that links one being with all other beings, and to apprehend the reciprocities between thought and action, self and world. It has led me to see that even my pain for the world is a function of this mutual belonging like a cell experiencing the larger body. Because it shows that causality, or power, resides in relationships rather than in persons or institutions, it offers the courage to resist conformity and to act in new ways to change the situation.

After exploring this teaching in the early Buddhist scriptures, I encountered it in general systems theory, in its explanations of the interdependent, self-organizing nature of open systems. . . . I also encountered it in Sri Lanka, where I went to study the Buddhist-inspired community development movement called Sarvodaya Shramadana. There *paticca samuppada* is the central operating principle that imbues the ways that strategies are mounted, organizers trained, and villagers work together. Most recently I encountered *paticca samuppada* in the field of ecology, especially in what is called "deep ecology", a way of thinking and seeing that takes the logical step of moving beyond anthropocentrism in recognizing the interdependence of all life-forms. I now use the term "deep ecology" as a functional equivalent to dependent co-arising, and I've developed experiential forms that I call "deep ecology work" to empower creative action for the healing of our world.

The teachings on kamma have also strongly affected Macy, and many other Buddhist social activists. As a segue from the themes of the last retreat, in this month's homework we will look at how these teachings might influence how we live in the world and the choices we make.

Readings:

Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality, Chs.1 & 2, by P.A. Payutto, available at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Academy/9280/coarise.htm>.

Seeking the Heart of Wisdom by Joseph Goldstein & Jack Kornfield, Ch. 10: Understanding Karma: Cause and Effect, available on the DPP website

Majjhima Nikaya 61: Ambalattikarahulovada Sutta (Advice to Rahula at Ambalattika)

Buddhism and Social Action: An Exploration by Ken Jones, available at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/bps/wheels/wheel285.html>

Optional Readings:

The other chapters of *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality* by P.A. Payutto
Small Boat, Great Mountain by Amaro Bhikkhu, Ch. 7: Off the Wheel, available at <http://www.abhayagiri.org/dhamma/SmallBoat.pdf>

Transcendental Dependent Arising: A Translation and Exposition of the Upanisa Sutta by Bhikkhu

Bodhi, available at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/bps/wheels/wheel277.html>

The Five Aggregates by Guy Armstrong, available on the DPP website

World as Lover, World as Self by Joanna Macy, Ch. 8: Karma and the Co-Arising of Doer and Deed

Seeking the Heart of Wisdom by Goldstein & Kornfield, Ch. 11: Understanding Karma: Liberation

Good, Evil and Beyond: Kamma in the Buddha's Teaching by P. A. Payutto, available at

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Academy/9280/kamma.htm>

The Introduction to *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*: by Bhikkhu Bodhi, available at

www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/bps/misc/abhiman.html

Reflections:

1. How has your meditation practice and understanding of the Buddha's teachings affected your relationship to social engagement?
2. Dependent origination can be understood on different levels (as a world-evolution theory, as describing the arising and passing of an individual life, or as a moment-to-moment process.) In what ways are each of these relevant to your dhamma understanding? Do any of these understandings influence the way you live?
3. If the theory of dependent origination is foreign to you, do you have an intuitive sense of interconnectedness? How do you understand the Buddha's teaching in relation to your intuitive understanding?
4. Do you believe in rebirth? How does your relationship to this teaching affect your understanding of the teachings on kamma?
5. Every day we are called upon to make ethical choices in life – about how we live, how we vote, what we buy and what we eat. How do the teachings on dependent origination and kamma affect your decisions on issues like dietary choices, abortion, the death penalty, euthanasia, considering country of origin of things you buy, dealing with pests in your home, the kind of car you drive, the impact of flying – your impact on the planet in general? What is the main teaching or frame of reference that influences your ethical choices?
6. Do you ever reflect on the kammic impact of an action before you do it? This month, we encourage you to undertake this reflection, especially about significant decisions you might have to make. What difference does this reflection make on your choices? Do you ever notice kamma manifesting for yourself or others?

Practices

Weeks 1 & 2	Dependent Origination: For the first 12 days, take one link each day. Before sitting, reflect on what each link represents, then make that link the focus of your meditation, either through contemplation or noticing it as it manifests. For the last two days, practice with the whole cycle, or with particular parts of the cycle, e.g. contact -> vedana -> craving, or clinging -> becoming -> birth.
Week 3	Intention and Kamma: Notice intentions as they arise. What are the factors that cause an intention to manifest as action, i.e. kamma?
Week 4	Though often the workings of kamma are too complex for us to fully understand, we can sometimes immediately see the kammic results of an action. In your meditation, notice what happens if you find yourself caught in a particular mind-state or dwelling on an issue in your life. Can you see a connection between cause and effect? Does bringing awareness to this process change it?

Please schedule a time to connect with your dharma buddy for a discussion of this month's reflections and practices, and for an interview with your mentor if you are receiving monthly interviews.