Dependent Arising

"This being, that becomes; from the arising of this, that arises. This not being, that does not become; from the cessation of this, that ceases."

1. Overview

- **Meaning:** The universal law of conditionality
  nothing exists independently;
  everything arises in dependence upon causes and conditions.
- **Scope:** Explains both bondage in saṃsāra and the path to liberation.
- **Two Aspects:**
  - **Cyclic existence** — the wheel of rebirth driven by ignorance and craving.
  - **Cessation** — the reversal of ignorance through wisdom realizing emptiness.
- **Function:**
  - Dispels the two extremes of eternalism (belief in a permanent self) and nihilism (denial of causality).
  - Reveals the Middle Way —dependent yet empty.

2. Forward Order — The Twelve Links of Cyclic Existence

1. Ignorance

- **Definition:** Not knowing things as they are; the root delusion grasping inherent existence.
- **Function:** Distorts perception, causing one to act under misapprehension.
- **Types:**
  - Ignorance of karma and its effects.
  - Ignorance of the ultimate nature of self and phenomena.
- **Meditation:** Investigate: "Who suffers? What is grasped as real?"
- **Breaking point:** Wisdom realizing emptiness.

2. Karmic Formations

- **Definition:** Volitional actions of body, speech, and mind conditioned by ignorance.
- **Function:** Leave imprints on consciousness.
- **Key idea:** "Intention is karma."
- **Meditation:** Observe how intention precedes every act.
- **Breaking point:** Act with mindfulness, free of ignorance.

3. Consciousness

- **Definition:** The stream of awareness that carries karmic seeds from one life to another.
- **Function:** Serves as the "link" between lives, projecting rebirth.
- **Types:** Six sensory & mental consciousnesses; particularly the rebirth consciousness.
- **Meditation:** Trace awareness moment by moment — who knows?
- **Breaking point:** Recognize consciousness as dependently arisen, not self.

4. Name-and-Form (Nāma-rūpa)

- **Definition:** The psycho-physical organism at conception.
  - *Nāma* = feeling, perception, volition, contact, attention.
  - *Rūpa* = material body.
- **Function:** The basis for a new being; mutual dependence with consciousness.
- **Meditation:** See that "mind" and "body" co-arise, neither commanding the other.
- **Breaking point:** Insight into the emptiness of person.

5. Six Sense Bases

- **Definition:** The six faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.
- **Function:** Provide channels for contact with objects.
- **Meditation:** Contemplate how perception depends on these bases; no independent observer.
- **Breaking point:** Awareness of sense experience as empty appearance.

6. Contact

- **Definition:** The meeting of object, sense faculty, and corresponding consciousness.
- **Function:** The spark that initiates experience.
- **Meditation:** Notice contact as the first moment of awareness before labeling.
- **Breaking point:** Remain mindful before feeling arises.

7. Feeling

- **Definition:** The tone (pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral) that follows contact.
- **Function:** Becomes the seed for craving.
- **Meditation:** Observe feeling without grasping; impermanent, insubstantial.
- **Breaking point:** Mindfulness of feeling (second foundation of mindfulness).

8. Craving

- **Definition:** Thirst for pleasure, existence, or non-existence.
- **Function:** Bonds one to objects, perpetuating dissatisfaction.
- **Forms:**
  - Craving for sensual pleasure.
  - Craving for continued existence.
  - Craving for annihilation.
- **Meditation:** Sense the tightening that follows desire; loosen it with awareness.
- **Breaking point:** Cultivate renunciation and contentment.

9. Clinging

- **Definition:** Intensified grasping — taking things as "mine."
- **Four types:** Clinging to sensuality, wrong views, rules and rituals, and self-doctrine.
- **Function:** Strengthens karmic momentum toward rebirth.
- **Meditation:** Release identification with views and possessions.
- **Breaking point:** Deep reflection on impermanence.

10. Becoming

- **Definition:** The active process of existence —the maturation of karma into new life.
- **Two levels:**
  - *Karmic becoming* (actions still creating future birth).
  - *Rebirth becoming* (process leading directly to new existence).
- **Function:** Prepares the continuum for next birth.
- **Meditation:** Observe the mind's compulsion to "become something."
- **Breaking point:** Cease constructing identity.

11. Birth

- **Definition:** The arising of the psycho-physical aggregates in a new life.
- **Function:** Manifestation of the potential formed in becoming.
- **Meditation:** Reflect that birth itself is suffering; each birth brings aging and death.
- **Breaking point:** Realization of emptiness ends rebirth.

12. Aging and Death

- **Definition:** Decay, dissolution, and the sorrow that accompany them.
- **Function:** Completes one cycle and initiates the next through renewed ignorance.
- **Meditation:** Contemplate impermanence —every moment of arising carries death.
- **Breaking point:** Insight that nothing truly "dies" because nothing inherently "exists."

3. Reverse Order — The Cessation Sequence

The **reverse cycle** demonstrates how to stop the cycle — how liberation (*nirvāṇa*) becomes possible. By **removing each condition**, the next cannot arise. We begin at the end and work backward

- If there is no **birth**, then there is no aging and death, no sorrow, no lamentation, no suffering.
- If there is no **becoming**, then there is no new birth.
- If there is no **clinging**, then becoming has no fuel.
- If there is no **craving**, there is nothing to cling to.
- If there is no **feeling**, no craving arises.
- If there is no **contact**, there is no feeling.
- If there are no **six sense bases**, contact doesn't arise.
- If there is no **name-and-form**, there are no faculties.
- If there is no **consciousness**, name-and-form cannot develop.
- If there are no **karmic formations**, there is no conditioned consciousness.
- If there is no **ignorance**, no karmic volitions arise.

Thus, with the cessation of ignorance, the entire wheel of suffering stops.

4. Contemplative Applications

- **Analytical Meditation:** Trace each link in personal experience — "How does craving lead to becoming right now?"
- **Daily Insight Practice:** Watch a simple sensory event from contact → feeling → craving → clinging.
  Interrupt the chain with mindfulness before craving.
- **Ultimate Insight:** Each link is empty of inherent existence; cause and effect appear through mere dependence.
  Seeing this directly is the union of dependent arising and emptiness — the heart of the Middle Way.

5. Dependent Arising and Emptiness

- **Two Truths in One Insight:**
  - Dependent arising shows *conventional truth* (things function).
  - Emptiness shows *ultimate truth* (nothing exists independently).
- **Tsongkhapa's dictum:** "Because things are empty, they function; because they function, they are empty."
- **Meditative focus:**
  - Contemplate interdependence in body, speech, and mind.
  - Experience emptiness not as voidness, but as the vivid interconnection of all phenomena.

6. Symbolism: The Wheel of Life



- **Outer Rim:** Twelve links depicted clockwise.
- **Inner Rings:** Three poisons — ignorance (pig), attachment (bird), aversion (snake).
- **Lord of Death:** Holds the wheel, symbolizing impermanence.
- **Moon Above:** Liberation — cessation beyond the wheel.
- **Meditation:** Recognize oneself inside the wheel and aspire to transcend it through wisdom.

7. Practical Integration

- **Moral Level:** Purify karma — right view and intention cut ignorance at its root.
- **Psychological Level:** Recognize craving and clinging as momentary mental events.
- **Philosophical Level:** Understand causality without absolutism.
- **Meditative Level:** Cultivate vipassanā insight — "Whatever is dependently arisen is empty."