

Transmigration-gate and Emancipation-gate

The “consciousness” in the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising is different from the “consciousness” in the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising; the former is the embryo-entering consciousness whereas the latter refers to the group of six consciousnesses.

The consciousness in the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising is the embryo-entering consciousness, the root consciousness as mentioned in Buddha’s teaching: “When I reached this consciousness, I had to turn back and could not go beyond it.” It is the fundamental cause, the *tathāgatagarbha*, that gives rise to mind-and-body and all phenomena. This fundamental consciousness is the root source of all sentient beings’ transmigration through the cycle of birth and death; every aspect of sentient beings starts from and is born out of it. Although this consciousness is neither-arising-nor-ceasing itself, it does give rise to mind-and-body, which in turn conditions the six internal entrances, contact, sensation, craving, grasping, becoming, birth, aging, death, illness, worry, sorrow, vexation, and suffering in the cycle of birth and death incessantly. This is the transmigration-gate—the true dependent arising made possible by the *tathāgatagarbha*.

The consciousness in the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising refers to the six consciousnesses, the consciousness in Buddha’s teaching: “Ignorance conditions volitional acts; volitional acts condition consciousness,” Due to ignorance, sentient beings commit various physical, verbal, and mental acts that result in the tainted seeds, which are immediately deposited back in the *tathāgatagarbha*; these seeds in turn induce the *tathāgatagarbha* to give rise to mind-and-body and the six consciousnesses of future lives causing sentient beings’ incessant transmigration between births and deaths. So, the consciousness in “ignorance conditions volitional acts; volitional acts condition consciousness,” in the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising refers to the six consciousnesses. It is the primary target of eradication for learners of the three vehicles when practicing elimination of self-view and self-attachment. Such is the principle for the emancipation-gate.

Many people have deliberated the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising. However, why are they not able to eliminate self-view and self-attachment? They have even substituted the self-view and self-attachment taught in Buddhism with their worldly versions and definitions of self-view and self-attachment. Such mistake results

from their lack of knowledge of the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising, and their lack of knowledge about the fact that the consciousness in the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising is the embryo-entering consciousness, and that the embryo-entering consciousness never ceases. Most people do not have the knowledge that the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising is a prerequisite for the correct observation and contemplation of the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising and hence result in various incorrect views.

In general, people incorrectly take the contemplation of the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising in forward order, i.e., contemplating ignorance conditions acts, acts condition consciousness, consciousness conditions mind-and-body, mind-and-body conditions six internal entrances, six internal entrances condition contact, contact conditions sensation, sensation conditions craving, craving conditions grasping, grasping conditions becoming, becoming conditions birth, and birth conditions aging, illness, death, worry, sorrow, vexation, and suffering, as the contemplation on the transmigration-gate. Through such contemplation, they conclude and believe that ignorance gives rise to volitional acts, volitional acts give rise to consciousness, and so forth all the way to aging, illness, death, worry, sorrow, vexation, and suffering.

After having incorrectly contemplated this incorrect version of transmigration-gate, they think that in order to eliminate aging, death, worry, sorrow, vexation, and suffering, birth has to be extinguished. In order to extinguish birth, the process of becoming in the three realms all the way to mind-and-body, consciousness, acts, and ignorance must all be extinguished. They incorrectly think that this contemplate of the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising in reverse order is the emancipation-gate.

However, this misunderstanding of the transmigration-gate and emancipation-gate is an incorrect view of the transmigration-gate and emancipation-gate because it will lead to nihilism and the fallacy of infinite regression. Starting at ignorance as a condition in investigating the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising will fall into the fallacy of “no fundamental cause but mere conditions.” Every link in the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising is a condition for sentient beings’ cycle of birth and death but not the fundamental cause of their cycle of birth and death. If ignorance were mistakenly taken as the cause of birth and death without a true fundamental cause, one would conclude that the cycle of transmigration were due to ignorance. One would inevitably have to enquire “from where did this ignorance come?” They would conclude that ignorance in this life came from the ignorance in previous life. They would have to further

enquire “from where did ignorance in the previous life come?” They would then conclude that the ignorance in the previous life came from yet another previous life, which would lead to the fallacy of infinite regression admonished by the Buddha.

Another problem that is brought about by not correctly recognizing the Principle of the Ten Links Dependent Arising as the prerequisite for the contemplation of the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising is the inevitable arrival at nihilism. If there were not an embryo-entering consciousness implicated in the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising that gave rise to all phenomena, then there would be nothing left when the ignorance link in the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising was extinguished. For example, after arahats or Solitary Buddhas having extinguished their own ignorance, acts, consciousness, karmic seeds of the six consciousnesses, and mind-and-body, what remained would be nothingness—nihilism. However, this is not what the Buddha taught us. The Buddha said that when arahats or Solitary Realizers extinguished ignorance, acts, consciousness, the karmic seeds of past lives, and mind-and-body, there still remained the fundamental reality. The state in which the fundamental reality exists by itself is called remainderless nirvana. Bhikkhu Yamaka once held the wrong view and insisted that arahats who rid themselves of taints would be completely annihilated when their lives ended. However, after venerable Śāriputra reprimanded him, he had corrected such wrong view and was able to progress on the liberation path and became an arahat.

The Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising is both a black as well as white dharma. It is named a black dharma because the embryo-entering consciousness can store the karmic seeds of ignorance from previous lives, and these uneradicated seeds will inevitably induce the cycle of rebirth and hence the name “black dharma.” Since the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising reflects the fact of cyclical rebirth in life (the transmigration), it is called a black dharma. The reason sentient beings continue to be bound in the incessant cycles of birth and death is due to their ignorance about the embryo-entering consciousness being the fundamental cause of transmigration, their mistaking the conscious mind or emptiness as their permanent and unchanging self, their erroneously fixating on the belief that there is no cause but only conditions, their incorrectly taking the impermanent as permanent, or even their incorrectly taking “that which arises dependently is void of any intrinsic nature” as what is implied in the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising.

The problem with taking the notion “that which arises dependently is void of any intrinsic nature,” which is a statement characterizing impermanent dharmas, as a

statement about the permanent dharma and use it to contemplate the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising is as follows: Because every link in the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising is itself impermanent and destructible, treating these impermanent links as permanent will lead inevitably to nihilism. As a result, sentient beings will hold on to self-view and wrong views steadfastly and fall into the darkness of ignorance and transmigrate in the cycle of birth and death. This is why the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising is a black dharma.

The transmigration-gate of the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising is also a white dharma because, through contemplation on the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising, sentient beings are able to willingly eradicate the karmic seeds of ignorance after having ascertained that the embryo-entering consciousness is indeed the fundamental consciousness and also the consciousness mentioned in Buddha's teaching: "when I reached this consciousness, I had to turn back and could not go beyond it." To extinguish the karmic seeds of ignorance, sentient beings have to be certain of the existence of the fundamental cause (the root consciousness) which stores the karmic seeds of the past lives.

There are eight kinds of sufferings in lives: sufferings of birth, aging, illness, death, not getting what we want, separation from what we love, association with those we hate, and the five flourishing aggregates. The fundamental source of the first seven kinds of suffering is "the five flourishing aggregates". The essence of life itself is suffering. Why is there suffering? It originates from birth in the three realms—birth in the desire, form, and formless realms. Why is there birth? It originates from the becoming of the three realms—becoming in the desire, form, and formless realms. Why is there becoming? It is from grasping: grasping of desire, preconception, misconception of precepts, and the concept of self. Why is there grasping? It is from craving—craving in the desire, form, and formless realms. Why is there craving? It is from sensation—painful, pleasant, and neither painful nor pleasant sensations. Due to liking for pleasant feelings and aversion to unpleasant feelings, sentient beings engage in volitional acts that produce karmic results. Why are there three kinds of sensations? They originate from six kinds of contact. Where do the six kinds of contact come from? They are from the six entrances, which include the six internal and six external entrances. Eliminating the six entrances is the key to extinguishing transmigration as well as eradicating self-view and self-attachment. Where do the six entrances come from? They come from mind-and-body, which refers to sensations, perceptions, formations, consciousness, and forms. Where do forms, sensations, perceptions, formations, and consciousness come from? They come from the

root consciousness mentioned in Buddha's teaching: "when I reached this consciousness, I had to turn back and could not go beyond it."

After exploring up to this point, we will realize that the driving force for the fundamental consciousness (the embryo-entering consciousness as mentioned in "when I reached this consciousness, I had to turn back and could not go beyond it") to enter mind-and-body in the three realms is ignorance as in "ignorance that conditions acts, acts that condition consciousness, and consciousness that conditions mind-and-body." Ignorance in the past lives along with the karmic seeds trigger physical, verbal and mental acts and result in karmic seeds for future six consciousnesses, which in turn become the driving force for the embryo-entering consciousness to grasp onto future mind-and-body. If we want to eliminate karmic seeds of ignorance of the past lives, we must eliminate the six consciousnesses, acts, and ignorance of the past lives.

However, where are the karmic seeds of ignorance of the past lives stored? They are stored in the embryo-entering consciousness, the *tathāgatagarbha*. These karmic seeds become the driving force that enables mind-and-body to arise from *tathāgatagarbha*. Therefore, what needs to be eliminated is the driving force, not the *tathāgatagarbha* itself. Attempting to eliminate the embryo-entering consciousness *tathāgatagarbha*, which is impossible in reality, will certainly lead one to fall into the non-Buddhist nihilistic view.

In summary, the correct contemplation of the Principle of Dependent Arising should start with contemplating the transmigration-gate of the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising in reserve order as the first stage. That is, starting with investigating the reason for aging, death, worry, sorrow, vexation, and suffering; we see that suffering originates from birth in the three realms, birth originates from becoming, all the way to mind-and-body originates from consciousness; we realize that this "consciousness" is the embryo-entering consciousness as mentioned in the teaching: "when I reached this consciousness, I had to turn back and could not go beyond it." After ascertaining the existence of the embryo-entering consciousness, we shall observe, contemplate, and ascertain in forward order that this consciousness gives rise to mind-and-body, mind-and-body gives rise to six entrances, six entrances give rise to contact, contact gives rise to sensation, sensation gives rise to craving, craving gives rise to grasping, grasping gives rise to becoming, becoming gives rise to birth, and birth gives rise to aging, death, worry, sorrow, vexation, and suffering. This completes the contemplation of the transmigration-gate of the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising in the forward order. After

having ascertained the existence of the embryo-entering consciousness, we shall next contemplate the emancipation-gate of the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising in reverse order starting again from aging, death, worry, sorrow, vexation, and suffering. We shall see that aging, death, worry, sorrow, vexation, and suffering all originate from birth, birth originates from becoming, all the way to six consciousnesses result from volitional acts, and volitional acts originate from ignorance. Finally, we shall contemplate the emancipation-gate of the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination in forward order by ascertaining that ignorance gives rise to volitional acts, volitional acts give rise to six consciousnesses, all the way to birth gives rise to aging, death, worry, sorrow, vexation, and suffering. Only after having completed these two rounds of forward and reverse contemplation will we have completed the observations and contemplation of the Principle of the Ten Link of Dependent Arising as well as the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising, which is the correct way to contemplate the Principle of Dependent Arising.

