

Day Five Notes for Reflection

The Five Aggregates and Dependent Origination

The Five Aggregates are interconnected with the links of Dependent Origination.

The first six links, after ignorance – that are Formations, Consciousness, Mentality Materiality, the Six Sense Bases, Contact and Feeling – encompass the Five Aggregates.

While the flow of Dependent Origination is like a river, the Five Aggregates are like the riverbed. The river flows within the bounds of the riverbed and its banks. The riverbed is never the same as the river flows. Moss, dirt, pebbles, fish, and rocks traverse it through the flow of the river and can touch or get left behind on the riverbed.

In the same way, through the flow of Dependent Origination, depending on whether or not there is Craving, Conceit, and Ignorance, the Five Aggregates, as vessels for such a flow, can become contaminated with those fetters.

However, once new water, that of Effective Insight, and the new force of that water, Effective Application, start to flow down, the elements that were on the riverbed are washed away and the riverbed as well as the river itself become pristine.

Faculties and Processes

There are faculties and there are processes. The faculties for Feeling, Perception, Intention, Contact, and Attention are the factors of Mentality while Form comprises Materiality. These together make up the fourth link of Mentality Materiality in Dependent Origination.

Then there are processes, the activities, of Contact in the fifth link, Feeling in the sixth link, and Perception, which is tied to that process of Feeling. Formations are processes that condition the faculty for Intention within Mentality Materiality and through that faculty are brought into fruition through thought, speech or action. Consciousness is a process that can only be detected when it mingles with Mentality Materiality and felt through the processes of Contact, Feeling and Perception, and through the Six Sense Bases.

Form

Form is the Materiality within Mentality Materiality, or what one may consider as the Mind-Body Complex. Form consists of and contains the faculties related to Feeling, Perception, Intention, Contact and Attention, and that includes the Six Sense Bases. In other words, Mentality is contained within Materiality. At the same time, Mentality also affects Materiality based on how Feeling and Perceptions through

Contact and Attention determine one's Intentions, and how those Intentions may cause one to act.

For example, one may see (or Feel/Perceive/Cognize) that the body, that is Form, is becoming unhealthy and based on this, one decides, intends, upon making changes. One acts on those changes and the Body, through the actions one intends, is transformed. In more minute ways, the Body continues to be in flux, whether a sickness enters it and thus the Body is different from what it was before the sickness, or when cells shed to give way to new cells that perform the same work in which case the Body is now comprised of new composites, causes and conditions or any other internal or external Contact and change that affects it.

The Form Aggregate continues to change in every microsecond, dependent upon causes and conditions, and so Mentality and Materiality and the processes it affects are both interdependent and interpenetrative, leading each other through change. The proof of such change is on a macro level – in which one's body matures from infancy to puberty to adulthood to old age – as well as on a micro level – in the way the body's cells shed and experience autophagy and the way one's internal systems are affected by one another as well as external factors. In this continually changing and transformative environment, one cannot attach a sense of self to pertain to any aspect of the Form Aggregate, both on the macro level and the micro level. It functions purely on various factors that arise and pass away, dependent upon causes and conditions.

Feeling

Feeling includes sensory experiences tied to the Six Sense Bases, the receptors, neurons and nerves that allow the reception of the outside world. They also include any Feeling within the body and one's awareness of movement conditioned by Intention. These experiences are what influence and condition the faculty for Feeling within Mentality.

At the same time, these experiences are dependent upon the faculty for Feeling, which includes the Six Sense Bases. Physical Feeling arises and ceases at lightning pace at a rate of up to 11 million bits per second by some contemporary estimates, through photons, auditory waves, odor molecules, flavor molecules, and tangibles. Although only a miniscule amount of that information is registered in one's normal, waking state, according to some research, this process is experienced at the most microscopic level in the dimension of Infinite Consciousness. How each Consciousness is registered at this level is determined by which Formations tied to a particular sense base are stronger, both in momentum and quantity.

Every bit of sensory data received is one iota of sensory experience, sensory cognition, and sensory Perception, which arise and cease in every successive microsecond. This arising and ceasing within the Feeling faculty continually changes

its structure and ability at a minute level and over time the effects of such changes may become noticeable.

The body and its various facets, including the sense faculties, begin to wane as the years go on – another example of impermanence. For example, the eyes may grow weary, there isn't much sharpness in the ears, or one's body itself weakens. Perhaps, the mind itself may slow down through diminished ability to decipher at a normalized pace. In this way, the processes of the various sorts of Feeling themselves change in quality and reception through the ever-changing faculty for Feeling. At the same time, correct rest, healthy nutrition, and other activities may sharpen the faculties as well as the reception of Feeling.

Perhaps external damage may cause them to be impaired. One may have been born into this lifetime with one set of sensory receptors that is compromised in its ability to function. Besides the senses, even while at rest, there is internal activity of the organs that continues to change the way one feels – this includes the heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature, digestion, nerve pain, and so on.

Whatever may arise, one can see with reflection that the Feeling Aggregate, which contains all forms of Feeling that includes sensory experiences and other Feeling within and throughout the body as well as the faculty for Feeling within Mentality, is susceptible to change from one's choices and Intentions, as well as from external factors that are also dependent on and made up of composites, causes and conditions.

Perception

The process of Perception is rooted in learning and memory, which are components of the faculty for Perception. When one first becomes conscious of an object – whether it is a thing, person, place, name, concept, idea, belief, or any sort of information – there is the bare cognition (Consciousness) of it, which is tied to that object when there is Contact with Mentality Materiality through the Six Sense Bases – that is the Feeling process.

When one learns what that object is, it is now new information that becomes stored in one's memory through Formations. These Formations then condition one's mind based on that new piece of information.

When one then sees (cognizes through Consciousness or Cognition), the Formations activate the Cognition and this turns into recognition (recollection or remembering) or re-cognition, which is the process of Perception.

Such Perception can then, through the process of Intention rooted in the faculty for Intention, take the Feeling that arose as personal, or pleasurable or painful to a sense of self, pertaining to or affecting a self or arising from a self or anything

around the sense of self. This Perception then gives rise to mental proliferation, in which one obsesses over and in turn reconditions the Formations that will cause one's next choice, or process of Intention that is rooted in the faculty for Intention in Mentality Materiality, to be the dominant, automatic response to stimuli.

However, through Attention rooted in Reality, which is wise Perception, through learning and remembering the concepts related to the Dhamma, one then reconditions the Formations so that one's Intentions and choices in the next moment start to experience with wisdom that the Feeling that arose is not self, not possessing a self, or not felt by a self, or pleasurable or painful to a sense of self.

The more one Perceives through continuous Attention rooted in Reality through Effective Observation, via the faculties for Perception, Intention and Attention, the more the Formations become reconditioned, and those Formations fettered by Craving, Conceit and Ignorance weaken since there is no longer any Attention via Contact to provide them nutriment. In this way, during an attainment event, during the process of Contact, when there is complete letting go, these fetters break apart and fade away, never to return to condition one's mind into Samsara.

When this change occurs through the process of Perception, it also changes the faculty for Perception.

Memory is provided new neural pathways that replace the old ones and the karmic impulses (Formations) that give rise to the old ones no longer function or barely function depending on the attainment level and strength of those impulses.

This is the effect of the work done through Effective Application, Effective Observation, Effective Collectedness and Attention rooted in Reality.

That is not to say one forgets what a banana is, for example. Rather, one sees the banana for what it is – an impersonal object, which means there is no sense of self to relate it to, which would otherwise make one Crave for it. Reflect on this with regards to your more emotional memories. In one fully released, such memories continue to exist but there is no longer an emotional resonance with taking any of it personal.

Even after this new attainment arises, the Perception Aggregate – that is the Perception processes and faculty – is still subject to change through new information being collected, but still seen with wisdom, as one makes contact with new situations, places, peoples and objects. That wisdom is not taking any process of or around that Contact to be self or pertaining to any sense of self. This is rooted in Effective Vision.

Formations

The Formations Aggregate consists of Formations as a process and Intention as both a process and a faculty within the subset of Mentality. Formations as a process are karmic impulses that activate through the process of Contact and through the media of neurons and synapses and the signals that traverse through them.

These Formations condition the cognition that will then take root in an Intention faculty that is either corrupted by the fetters of Craving, Conceit and Ignorance within the Formations conditioning it or one that is pure and void of any sense of self, Craving or delusion. The conditioning of such an Intention occurs in every given present moment, where one acts with Attention rooted in Reality through Effective Application of the 6Rs and Effective Observation and thus bit-by-bit eats away at the fetters through such Effective Choices.

How one perceives the Feeling determines the next set of Formations that will arise, and these Formations will then condition one's process and faculty for Intention.

The cycle repeats and with each repetition, there is transformation of the faculty for Intention, which then strengthens the process of choice in the next given moment to lean towards one certain way more than the other. Formations therefore are the carriers of kamma, both their effects and their causes. The breaking of this pattern is through the utilization of the Eightfold Path.

From a neurological perspective every time a Formation arises activated by the process of Contact, Feeling, and Perception, a synapse is created or fires to accommodate that Formation. In the active sense, Formations are the signals that traverse through the synapses that then condition and activate certain types of Consciousness during the process of an Intention, Feeling, and the reaction or response to such a Feeling, while in the passive sense, Formations are the effects of choices and Intentions, and thus are the synapses themselves.

If each Formation was a synapse or a signal passing through neurons and synapses, then there are trillions, even hundreds of trillions, of Formations that have come to be and cease as one matures in a lifetime. This is not to say that these trillions of Formations remain as they are or continue to grow or decrease indiscriminately. Rather, they are pruned depending on the amount of energy provided via one's choices and activities. The less one reacts with Craving, the less those Formations in relation to those reactions will become active and will fade away without remainder, while the more one responds with Insight, the more the Formations in relation to those responses will strengthen.

Each Formation has the potential of arising and ceasing at any given second that then conditions millions of iotas of Consciousness based on the type of Contact, Feeling and Perception that may arise. In either the active or passive case, there can be trillions of occurrences of arising and ceasing depending on the levels of Contact,

Feeling, Perception and Intention that bring Formations to action in any given timeframe.

Where then in any of those occurrences is there the sense of self?

If a self were tied to each occurrence, there would be hundreds of trillions of selves within one lifetime.

Moreover, if self was tied to the process or faculty for Intention, such a process and faculty both undergo change every time Formations arise and are given to rise via Contact, Feeling and Perception, in which case it would be unwise to tie the concept of a permanent, unchanging, singular self to the process or faculty for Intention. There cannot be in that case a permanent, unchanging, singular self that is equated or tied to the Formations Aggregate.

If one understands that Formations and the process and faculty for Intention are all part of an impersonal process that is continually arising and ceasing at the level of microseconds and changing based on the inputs through Contact, Feeling and Perception, and one's Intentions as a reaction or response to those inputs, one can see that no part of this can pertain to an independent, permanent, singular sense of self. Dropping this notion, clarity is sharpened. With such sharp clarity, one penetrates the Dhamma and Insight and Release are experienced.

Consciousness

Consciousness is purely cognition.

In order for the process of Consciousness to be measured, it must be tied to Mentality Materiality.

If the faculties for Feeling, Perception, Intention, Contact, and Attention within the Form rooted in Materiality are not present, Consciousness is not experienced, let alone at the level of the processes of those faculties. At the same time it is through Consciousness that one experiences Mentality Materiality. In this, there is interdependence between Consciousness and Mentality Materiality.

Formations condition Consciousness. Whatever Formations arise, whether conditioned by Ignorance in which case they are fettered by Craving, or established from Effective Vision, in both circumstances they come to be through the process of Contact. When the Formations arise, they activate the Consciousness, or type of Cognition through which a certain Intention then drives it forward to be experienced through one of the Six Sense Bases.

Using some contemporary estimates that if there are 11 million bits of data per second arising through the physical sensory input and Feeling, then each bit of data

is a quantum of Consciousness or Cognition. In other words, Consciousness that is established and tied up with the experience of the senses or through any form of Contact internally via pain or pleasure arises and ceases connected to that experience of Feeling, Perception, Intention, Contact or Attention. This indicates that Consciousness cannot be singular, permanent, and thus taken to be a false sense of self that is continuous. At the snap of a finger, using the figures of current research, there are up to 1,650,000 occurrences of arising and cessations of physical sensory consciousness. Where is there a sense of self in any of those individual occurrences of consciousness arising and ceasing, of which hundreds of millions have ceased by the time you finish reading this question?

Consciousness therefore continues to arise and cease, dependent on the experience. As experiences are ever changing, so is Consciousness. Even the notion of a Consciousness from which everything emerges and that is experienced outside of the scope of the Five Aggregates or the Three Symptoms of Reality cannot be sustained without a mental framework. Anything experienced is not only subjective but it is also always changing. To say there is a substratum of eternal Consciousness would indicate that it is a state of existence, or an experience, even if it allows the truth of the impersonal nature of that same Consciousness. And how is it experienced? All experience falls within the subjective bounds of Mentality Materiality and therefore even such an experience of “infinite, eternal, unending, all-encompassing Consciousness” would fall within these bounds, and since it is not always present but arises only when Attention is put on such an ideated Consciousness, then such a Consciousness is temporary, subject to change, and dependent on causes and conditions.

Impersonal Kamma

The question that if none of these Aggregates arise from, are, produce, or pertain to any form of a permanent, singular Self, then what is the Self through which kamma is produced, felt and experienced, is one rooted in Ignorance. Kamma itself arises as an impersonal process through Formations.

Kamma can only be experienced through the modalities of Mentality Materiality and the Six Sense Base – Kamma is dependent on them for it to be experienced in the same way Consciousness is – and since it is dependent, it arises and ceases in the same way as the links within Dependent Origination would, making it impersonal, impermanent, and therefore not worth holding on to, whether it is good, bad or neutral Kamma.

Kamma terminates at the point of the process of Contact and Feeling. How one Perceives that Kamma determines whether that reaction to such Kamma will take it as personal and thus cause Craving in the form of identification with it, delighting in it or averting from it, or whether one lets go with wisdom rooted in the Eightfold Path.

In the first case, where one reacts with taking that Kamma personally, that is taking the effects of a choice previously acted upon in the past to be personal and belonging to a self, this causes identification with it. This then leads to the rest of the links of Dependent Origination, in which Suffering is experienced.

However, when Kamma is felt at the process of Feeling and is Perceived as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and therefore not self or pertaining to a sense of self, one immediately lets go. This letting go is utilizing the Eightfold Path through the process of the 6Rs. When one lets go, that Kamma is experienced but does not produce Suffering or give rise to a sense of self that experiences that Suffering, thus creating new Kamma. In doing this, Formations continue to be reconditioned until whatever remnants of previous choices are experienced are let go a final time, never to be experienced again. This is called the Cessation of Kamma.