

THE ABHIDHAMMA DOCTRINE OF CONDITIONAL RELATIONS

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1. The Abhidhamma view of reality is based on two complimentary methods. One is analysis (bheda). The other is synthesis (sangaha). The purpose of analysis is to show that the objects of our conceptual thought are not substantial entities or irreducible realities. The purpose of synthesis is to show that the ultimate factors into which they are reducible (= dhammas) are not independent entities, but are nodes in a complex web of relationships.

2. Analysis shows that what we consider as “one” can be increased to “many”. Synthesis shows that what we consider as “many” can be reduced to “one. Analysis, when not supplemented by synthesis, leads to pluralism, that is, the recognition of many factors as independent entities. Synthesis, when not supplemented by analysis, leads to monism, that is, the recognition of one entity as ultimately real. The combined use of both analysis and synthesis transcends the binary opposition between monism and pluralism.

3. In evolving a view of existence that cannot be interpreted in either monistic or pluralistic terms, the philosophy of the Abhidhamma accords with the “middle doctrine” of early Buddhism, the doctrine that avoids the extremely realistic view of existence that maintains that everything exists absolutely (sabbam atthi) and, the opposite extremely nihilistic view which maintains that absolutely nothing exists (sabbam natthi). It also avoids the monistic view that everything is reducible to a common ground, some sort of self-substance as the ultimate ground of existence (sabbam ekattam) and the opposite pluralistic view that the whole of existence is resolvable into a concatenation of discrete entities, with no interconnection and interdependence (sabbam puthuttam). Transcending these two pairs of binary extremes, the “middle” doctrine explains that phenomena arise in dependence on other phenomena without a self-subsisting noumenon as their ultimate ground of existence.

4. The interconnection of the elements of reality (dhammas) is not explained on the basis of the dichotomy between substance and quality, the distinction between “the support and the supported” (adhara-adheya-bheda). A given element (dhamma) does not inhere in another element (dhamma) as its quality, nor does it serve another element (dhamma) as its substance,

5. It is with reference to conditions that the interconnection of the elements (dhammas) has to be understood. When one dhamma helps another dhamma either to originate or to persist in being, it is called a condition. The conditions do not represent something real and objective in addition to the dhammas. The dhammas themselves become the conditions when they behave in a particular manner in relation to other dhammas. Only the dhammas are real, the conditions are conceptual constructions, with no corresponding objective realities of their own.

6. There are two versions of the doctrine of conditionality. Earlier is the one called “dependent arising” (paticca-samuppada), “arising of things in dependence on other things”. Its abstract structural form is

expressed as “when this exists, that comes to be; (therefore) with the arising of this that arises (imasmim sati idam hoti, imassa uppada idam uppajjati). The opposite process of ceasing is expressed as “when this does not exist, that does not come to be; (therefore) with the cessation of this, that ceases (imasmim asati idam na hoti, imassa nirodha idam nirujjhati).

7. It is this doctrine of “dependent arising” that early Buddhism makes use of to explain the causal structure of individual existence. In the commentaries this principle is defined as “the arising of (many) effects evenly in dependence on a conjunction of (many) conditions”. This, in other words, means that nothing arises from a single cause, and that nothing arises as a single effect. If Early Buddhism refers only to one condition, it is in order to focus on the most basic factor among many others. And, likewise, if only one effect is mentioned, it is in order to single out the most basic effect among many others.

8. The other doctrine of conditionality is the one developed by the Abhidhamma. Its purpose is not to substitute the earlier one, but to supplement it. Hence in the Visuddhimagga of Acariya Buddhaghosa we find a combined use of both doctrines.

9. The Abhidhamma doctrine of conditionality is an integral part of the dhamma theory, the theory of elements. It assumes its significance within framework of the dhamma theory. Its purpose is not to explain the absolute origin of the mental and material dhammas. This is in consonance with the early Buddhist doctrine of causality whose purpose is not to explain the absolute origin and the ultimate direction of the world. The Abhidhamma doctrine of conditionality dissociates itself from all theories relating to cosmogony, which seek to trace the absolute origin of the world-process from some kind of uncaused first cause, either a personal God or an impersonal Godhead.

10. The three postulates of the doctrine of conditionality:

(a) Nothing arises without the appropriate causes and conditions. This amounts to a rejection of the theory of fortuitous origination (adhicca-samuppanna), the theory that rejects all principles of causality and conditionality.

(b) Nothing arises from a single, solitary cause. This amounts to a rejection of all theories that come under mono-causality/mono-conditionality (eka-karana-vada). It means the total rejection of all monistic theories which attempt to reduce the world to an underlying trans-empirical principle.

© Nothing arises as a single, solitary phenomenon (ekassa dhammassa uppatti patisedhita hoti). On the basis of a single cause, or on the basis of a number of causes, or purely due to haphazard circumstances, there can never be a single, solitary effect.

11. The rejection of the above theories means, from a number of causes a number of effects take place. Applied to the dhamma theory, this means that a multiplicity of dhammas brings about a multiplicity of other dhammas.

12. One conclusion that emerges from this situation is that dhammas arise, not as isolated, solitary phenomena, but as clusters. This explains why whenever consciousness arises, it arises together with at least seven mental factors (the universals), namely, contact (phassa), feeling (vedana), perception

(sanna), volition (cetana), one-pointed-ness (ekaggata), psychic life (arupa-jivitindriya), and attention (manasikara). No psychic instance can ever occur with less than eight constituents. Even the smallest psychic unit turns out to be a complex correlational system. In the same way, the smallest unit of matter (basic octad) is a cluster of eight material factors, namely, the four primary elements, viz. solidity, visciduity, temperature, mobility and four secondary elements, viz. colour, odour, taste, and nutritive essence.

13. There are two other basic principles behind the doctrine of conditionality. The first is that no dhamma, mental or material, can propel itself into existence by its own power. By their very nature, dhammas are devoid of own power, or own sway (vasavattita). This amounts to the rejection of self-causation (sayam kata). The other is that no dhamma, mental or material, can be brought into being by a power external to the dhammas. This amounts to the rejection of external causation (param kata). The rejection of the two theories means that dhammas alone help other dhammas to arise and persist in being.

14. According to Buddhism, the cause is not some kind of potential effect. As one Buddhist commentary observes, the cause is “not pregnant with the effect” (na phalena sagabbho). Here, the allusion is to the evolutionary theory of causation of the Samkhya Philosophy. According to the Samkhya the effect remains in a latent form in the cause, and therefore, the effect is some kind of evolutionary stage of the cause. On the other hand, according to Buddhism, “the cause is not in the effect” (phale hetu natthi), and therefore the “effect is empty of the cause” (hetu-sunnam phalam).

15. A “condition” is defined as a dhamma which is helpful for the origination (uppatti) or existence (thiti) of another dhamma. The function of causing the cessation is not attributed to any dhamma, because a dhamma that arises and exits, must necessarily come to cessation without the intervention of any extraneous causes or conditions. Only origination and existence require conditions, not cessation. Even according to the “doctrine of dependent arising”, only arising is due to conditions, not cessation. That is why we do not have the expression “dependent cessation” (paticca-nirodha).

16. There are altogether 24 conditions, namely, (1) root-condition (hetu-paccaya), (2) object-condition (arammana-paccaya), (3) predominance-condition (adhipati-paccaya), (4) proximity-condition (anantara-paccaya), (5) contiguity-condition (samanantara-paccaya), (6) co-nascence-condition (sahajata-paccaya), (7) mutuality-condition (annamanna-paccaya), (8) support-condition (nissaya-paccaya), (9) decisive-support condition (upanissaya-paccaya), (10) pre-nascence-condition (purejata-paccaya), (11) post-nascence-condition (pacchajata-paccaya), (12) repetition-condition (asevana-paccaya), (13) kamma-condition (kamma-paccaya), (14) result-condition (vipaka-paccaya), (15) nutriment-condition (ahara-paccaya), (16) faculty-condition (indriya-paccaya), (17) jhana-condition (jhana-paccaya), (18) path-condition (magga-paccaya), (19) association-condition (sampayutta-paccaya), (20) dissociation-condition (vippayutta-paccaya), (21) presence-condition (atthi-paccaya), (22) non-disappearance-condition (avigata-paccaya), (23) absence-condition (natthi-paccaya), (24) disappearance-condition (vigata-paccaya). It is with reference to these conditions that the inter-dependence and dependent origination of the elements of reality (dhammas) has to be

understood, both in their temporal sequence in the case of mental elements, and spatial concomitance in the case of material elements.

17. In a very general sense the twenty-four conditions can be subsumed under three headings:

(a) Co-nascence: Example, mental states in relation to other mental states.

(b) Pre-nascence: Example, the sense-organ of visual consciousness in relation to visual consciousness.

© Post-nascence: Example, mental states in relation to material elements (rupa-dhammas) of the physical body.

18. Root Condition (Hetu-Paccaya)

In the Buddhist Discourses, “hetu” and “paccaya” are used as more or less synonymous (cf. ko hetu, ko paccayo). On the other hand, in the Abhidhamma, “paccaya” is used as a general term for condition, and “hetu” is used in a specific sense to mean “roots” (mula), that is, the factors that determine the ethical quality of volitional actions. “Hetu” in the sense of “root” is one of the 24 conditions (paccayas). There are in all six roots: greed, hatred, and delusion are unwholesome; non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion are either wholesome or indeterminate. They are wholesome when associated with wholesome consciousness and indeterminate when they arise in resultant and **functional** consciousness.

19. Object-Condition (Arammana-Paccaya)

The object condition is so called because it causes a conditioned state to arise in order to become an object of cognition. The reference is to the six kinds of sense objects – the visible, sound, smell, taste, touch, and non-sensuous mental objects. Its field of operation is very wide as to embrace not only the fundamental components of actuality, called dhammas, but also conceptual constructs that have only consensual reality. For, the definition of object condition is not based on whether it is real or unreal, but whether it could enter the avenue of sense experience as an object of the cognitive process. While the objects of the first five kinds of consciousness belong to the present moment, the mind-consciousness can have as its object anything whatever – mental or material, real or conceptual, past, present, or future, or that which is free from time (kala-vimutta). Although conceptual constructs could become conditions by way of object, none of them can become that which is conditioned (paccayuppanna) in relation to any kind of conditions (paccaya). If it were otherwise, they too would become components of actuality.

20. Predominance Condition (Adhipati-Paccaya)

This has two types, object predominance and, co-nascence predominance. The first refers to an object that dominates over the mental states that take it as their object. In this case only those objects that have a strong appeal to the individual can become the conditioning state. The second refers to a relation where the conditioning state exercises a dominant influence on the conditioned states. Here the conditioning states are concentrated intention (chanda), energy (viriya), consciousness (citta), and investigation (vimamsa). On a given occasion only one of these factors can activate as a condition. Here

the reference is not to an object of consciousness, but to consciousness and three mental factors: “concentrated intention”, “energy”, and “investigation”.

21. Proximity Condition (Anantara-Paccaya) and Contiguity-Condition (Samanantara-Paccaya)

These two conditions are identical. They refer to a relation where the conditioning state causes the conditioned state to arise immediately after it has ceased, so that no other state can intervene between them. The two conditions describe the temporal relationship between mental states that arise one after the other in uninterrupted linear sequence. The consciousness and its concomitants that have just ceased are the conditioning states. The consciousness and its concomitants that arise immediately afterward are the conditioned states. There are two things to be noted here. The first is that there is no gap or interstice (antara) between the preceding and the succeeding mental states. The second is that the preceding gives rise to the succeeding in such a way that the latter conforms to the former (anurupa-cittuppada-janana-samattha). This explains why a given process of cognitive events occurs not in a haphazard way, but strictly following the psychological order (citta-niyama).

22. Co-Nascence-Condition (Sahajata-Paccaya)

Here both the condition and the conditioned arise together. It operates in the following instances: (a) each mental state in relation to the other mental states that are associated with it; (b) each mental state in relation to the material phenomena that arise together with it; (c) each great material element in relation to the other three great material elements.; (d) each great material element in relation to the dependent material elements; (e) at the moment of rebirth, the physical base of mind for the resultant mental states.

23. Mutuality-Condition (Annamanna-Paccaya)

Here the conditioning state activates reciprocally. If A is a condition by way of co-nascence to B, at the same time B is a condition by way of co-nascence to A. It operates in three instances: (a) consciousness and mental factors, (b) the great material elements, (c) the physical base of mind and the resultant mental states at the moment of rebirth.

24. Support-Condition (Nissaya-Paccaya)

There are two types. The first is co-nascence-support. It is the same as the co-nascence condition mentioned above. The second is pre-nascence support. It has two types. (a) The five physical sense-organs and the seat of mental activity in relation to the mental states that take them as their material support. At the moment of rebirth, the physical base of mind and the resultant mental states arise together and support each other as co-nascence and mutuality conditions. (b) The second pre-nascence support refers to a relation where consciousness arises with its physical base as its support and object as well.

25. Decisive-Support-Condition (Upanissaya-Paccaya)

It is called so, because it supports the conditioned as a strong inducement. This condition is of three types: (a) object-decisive-support (arammanupanissaya), only very desirable objects that cause mental states to apprehend them are included here; (b) proximity-decisive-support (anantarupanissaya); it is the same as proximity-condition that explains the linear succession of mental states, but with this difference: Here the preceding mental states cause the succeeding mental states to arise because of their strong dependence on the cessation of the preceding conditioning states. (c) Natural-decisive support condition (pakatupanissaya): This is a wide-ranging relation that takes as its conditions all past mental and material elements (dhammas) that have a strong impact for the arising, at a later time, of mental states. It seeks to explain the influence of previous desires and tendencies as motivating factors for subsequent acts.

26. Pre-nascence and Post-nascence Conditions (Purejata and Pacchajata-Paccaya)

Pre-nascence condition refers to a relation where something that has arisen earlier becomes a condition for something that arises later. Post-nascence condition refers to a relation where something arisen later becomes a support to something that has arisen earlier. Because of their time-difference, they apply only to relations between mind and matter. Since the lifespan of matter is longer, a material dhamma that arises earlier can serve as a pre-nascence condition to mental states that arise later. Similarly a mental state that arises later can serve as a post-nascence condition to material elements that have arisen earlier. There are two types of pre-nascence condition: base-pre-nascence (vatthu-purejata) and object-pre-nascence (arammana-purejata). The first refers to the five physical sense-organs in relation to the five consciousnesses named after them, and the physical seat of mind in relation to mental states. As for the object-pre-nascence condition, each physical object serves as a condition for the mental states that arise in a sense-door cognitive process. This condition also includes the 18 kinds of real material elements when they become objects of mental states in a mind-door process. In the relation by way of post-nascence, the condition is always mental. Mental states that arise subsequently become post-nascence conditions for the material elements of the body that have arisen earlier.

27. Repetition Condition (Asevana-Paccaya):

This refers to a conditional relation between mind and mind only. Its function is to cause its conditioned states to gain more and more proficiency, so that the succeeding states come to possess greater and greater efficiency. It is just as in learning by heart through constant repetition the later recitation becomes easier and easier.

28. Kamma-Condition (Kamma-Paccaya)

This is of two kinds. The first is co-nascent kamma condition (sahajata) where, the condition and the conditioned arise together. The reference is to volition (cetana), which is a universal concomitant of consciousness. As kamma-condition, volition coordinates mental states to perform their respective functions. The other kind is called asynchronous (nanakhanika); here there is a time difference between the condition and the conditioned. The conditioning state is a past kamma and the conditioned states are resultant (vipaka) consciousness, its mental factors, and the material elements (dhammas) born of kamma (kamma-samutthana).

29. Result Condition (Vipaka-Paccaya)

The conditioning factors are the mental states which arise as the results of kamma. The conditioned factors are the self-same mental states and the material dhammas that have arisen together with them. The role of the result condition is to bring about a tranquillizing influence on the conditioned states and to make them passive and quiescent. The results of kamma are said to arise effortlessly and not as something propelled by an external force. While the mental states that arise as results of kamma are result conditions in relation to each other, the co-nascent material dhammas which are conditioned by them, do not in turn activate as a conditioning factors. The reciprocity is only between mental states.

30. Nutriment Condition (Ahara-Paccaya)

The conditioning factors are the four nutriments upon which all living beings subsist, namely, nutritive essence of material food (kabalinkara-ahara), sensory contact (phassa), mental volition (mano-sancetana), and consciousness (vinnana). Here “nutriment” includes both material nutriment (rupahara) and mental nutriment (namahara) that govern both biological and mental life. Nutriment condition shows that the empiric individuality is a nutritional process, a process of alimentation (aharatthitika).

31. Faculty Condition (Indriya-Paccaya)

There are 22 faculties. Among them only 20 are faculty conditions. The first five faculty conditions are the physical sense-organs for the first five kinds of consciousness named after them. As sensitive material elements (dhammas) are receptive and reactive to sense data, they determine the efficiency of the consciousnesses that take them as their conditions. The next two are faculties of femininity and masculinity. They are not recognized as faculty-conditions. One reason given for this is that at the initial stages of the embryonic development, they do not perform their respective functions of manifesting sex distinctions. At no time does a faculty condition remain dormant and inactive. This is the reason for their being not recognized as faculty conditions. Next are the two life faculties. The mental life faculty stabilizes all mental states as a universal concomitant of consciousness. The material life faculty stabilizes all kamma-originated matter, the organic matter that enters into the composition of a living being. The remaining faculties are all mental. The first among them is mind faculty. It is another expression for the whole of consciousness (the 89 classes of consciousness). The next five faculties are five kinds of feeling: pleasure (sukha), pain (dukkha), joy (somanassa), displeasure (domanassa), and equanimity (upekkha). Next in order come the five spiritual faculties: faith (saddha), energy (viriya), mindfulness (sati), concentration (samadhi), and wisdom (panna). Among the last three faculties, the first is “I will know the unknown” (annatannassamitindriya). It is the knowledge of the path of stream-entry. The second is the faculty of one who has final knowledge (annatavindriya). It is the knowledge of the fruit of ‘arahantship’. The third is the faculty of final knowledge (annindriya). It is the six kinds of supra-mundane knowledge. These immaterial faculties are each a co-nascent faculty condition for the mental states associated with them and the material elements (dhammas) that arise together with them.

32. Jhana Condition:

Here the word 'jhana' is not used in its usual sense to mean higher reaches of mind attained in meditative absorption. As a conditioning factor here 'jhana' means close contemplation (upanijjhayana) of an object. It refers to the following seven factors, namely, initial application (vitakka), sustained application (vicara), zest (piti), one-pointed-ness (ekaggata), joy (somanassa), displeasure (domanassa) and equanimity (upekkha). These mental states enable the mind to closely contemplate its object. Among them displeasure is unwholesome and occurs only in consciousnesses associated with aversion. The other six can be wholesome, unwholesome, or indeterminate, depending on the consciousness in which they occur. The conditioned states are the consciousness and the mental factors associated with them and the material dhammas that arise together with them.

33. Path Condition (Magga-Paccaya):

There are twelve factors that function as path conditions: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration, wrong view, wrong intention, wrong effort, and wrong concentration. They do not lead to the same destination. The first eight lead to blissful states and the final goal of Nibbana. The last four lead to birth in woeful states.

34. Association Condition (Sampayutta-Paccaya)

This conditional relation obtains only among mental states. Here a given mental state causes other mental states to arise together with it. The mental states so associated share four characteristics: a common physical base, a common object, simultaneous origination, and simultaneous cessation.

35. Dissociation Condition (Vippayutta-Paccaya)

This conditional relation activates in three ways: as co-nascence (sahajata), post-nascence (pacchajata), and pre-nascence (purejata). At the moment of rebirth the seat of mental activity and the mental states arising together with it are dissociation conditions to each other by way of co-nascence. In the course of life, consciousness and mental factors function as dissociation conditions for the material dhammas of the body by way of post-nascence. The five physical sense-organs and the physical seat of mental activity function as dissociation conditions for the consciousnesses by way of pre-nascence.

36. Presence Condition (Atthi-Paccaya) and Non-disappearance Condition (Avigata-Paccaya)

These two conditions are identical in meaning, differing only in the letter. Here the condition helps the conditioned to arise and persist during the time when it functions as a condition. It is not necessary for the two related states to arise together or cease together. What is necessary for them is to overlap at a particular time. Accordingly this particular condition can embrace the pre-nascence, post-nascence, and co-nascence conditions. For, although the pre-nascence condition arises earlier and the post-nascence condition arises later, both activate as conditions at the present moment.

37. Absence Condition (Natthi-Paccaya) and Disappearance Condition (Vigata-Paccaya)

They refer to the same kind of relationship. Absence condition is so called because its absence provides an opportunity for the presence of the conditioned state. Disappearance condition is so called because

its disappearance provides an opportunity for the appearance of the conditioned state. Both conditions describe the linear sequence of consciousness, where the immediately preceding one disappears before the emergence of the immediately succeeding one. These two conditions are identical with the proximity and contiguity conditions, mentioned earlier.

38. The above survey of the twenty-four conditions shows that a given thing can become, at one and the same time, a condition to something else in different ways. For example, the visual organ becomes a condition in relation to visual consciousness by way of support (*nissaya*), pre-nascence (*purejata*), faculty (*indriya*), dissociation (*vippayutta*), presence (*atthi*), and non-disappearance (*avigata*). We need to note here that although pre-nascence condition arises earlier, it activates as a condition at the present moment (*vijjamaanakkhane*).

39. The twenty-four conditions can be classified into four classes according to the time of their occurrence. The first class includes those that activate as conditions simultaneously with the conditioned (*samana-kala*). This group includes fifteen conditions, namely, roots, co-nascence, mutuality, support, pre-nascence, post-nascence, result, nutriment, faculty, jhana, path, association, dissociation, presence, and non-disappearance. The second group includes those conditions that arise and activate in the past (*atita*). This group includes five conditions, namely, proximity, contiguity, repetition, absence, and disappearance. These five conditions refer to the linear sequence of mental states, where the immediately preceding disappears, giving an opportunity for the immediately succeeding mental states to arise. The third group, if it can be called a group, includes only one, that is, the kamma-condition. As co-nascent kamma condition, it activates in the present. As asynchronous kamma condition, it is always a past wholesome or unwholesome volition that becomes the conditioning state. The fourth group includes those conditions that belong to the three divisions of time, past, present, and future (*tekalika*), as well as those that are independent of time (*kala-vimutta*). Here those that belong to the three divisions of time are the mental and material element (*dhammas*) that become objects of consciousness. While the objects of the first five kinds of consciousness are always present, the objects of mind-consciousness can belong to any of the three periods of time. The conditions that are independent of time (*kala-vimutta*) are Nibbana and mental constructs (*pannatti*). Since Nibbana is the unconditioned dhamma, it transcends time. Mental constructs are independent of time because, unlike the elements of reality (*dhammas*), they are not brought into being by conditions and as such, they have no corresponding objective counterparts of their own.

40. The above survey of the twenty-four conditions should show that some conditions are repeated under different names. They are the three pairs, namely, (1) proximity and contiguity, (2) presence and non-disappearance, and (3) absence and disappearance. Each pair contains two identical conditions. If we eliminate what is repeated, we are left with twenty-one conditions. Why the number was increased to twenty-four could perhaps be explained in the context of the schematic order of exposition followed in the *Patthana* in presenting the doctrine of conditionality. The number twenty-four, unlike the number twenty-one, is easily amenable to divisions, classifications and combinations. It is very likely therefore that the number of conditions was increased to twenty-four in order facilitate their schematic presentation.