SAMSARA AND NIRVANA

These two opposing terms describe the conditioned world (samsara) and the inner freedom from it (nirvana). At various levels of teaching, nirvana is seen as a goal or intermediate goal, while through the practice of the highest view in the Diamond Way, the conditioned world is experienced as the "Pure Land."

The term Nirvana has often been misleadingly translated by linguists as "the great extinction". Only in connection with its counter term Samsara (cycle of conditioned and suffering states of being) its meaning becomes understandable.

In Theravada Buddhism, nirvana is experienced as a state of complete peace or freedom from suffering. According to this view, in order to experience nirvana, one must cut off all ties to samsara, to the world of conditioned existence. Therefore, these meditations also aim to avoid all causes of further rebirths.

The followers of the Great Way, however, see in this only a small realization. For they evaluate the mere experience of undisturbed spiritual peace merely as an intermediate stage on the path or even as a dead end. With the great Nirvana they strive for the blossoming of all enlightened qualities through appropriate meditations. In addition to peaceful equanimity, this also includes joy, love and compassion as unlimited and unchanging qualities of the mind of all sentient beings.
In order to realize these highest qualities (see Buddha nature), they open to all sentient beings in the cycle of existence (samsara). Associated with the so-called Bodhisattva Promise is the desire to accept rebirth until all beings are liberated from suffering.

Finally, the followers of Diamond Way Buddhism focus their meditations on the Buddha state as a mirror for their own being. The identification with his enlightened qualities gives them the power, at best in one lifetime, to master all stages of the path to liberation and enlightenment.
Thus, in the phase of post-meditation, that is, in everyday life, they also strive to discover the Buddha potential in all beings. Namely, from the highest philosophical viewpoint, Buddha Shakyamuni explained the inseparable unity of samsara and nirvana.

When the unchanging state of truth of the mind is recognized as limitless openness, its experience is transformed into the joyful experience of its free play, and the same world that is now experienced appears as a profoundly meaningful experience of a "Pure Land." What does this have to do directly with samsara and nirvana?

Both the Great Way and the Diamond Way describe small nirvana as a joyful state.
And the followers of Theravada? Complete peace or free from suffering can mean something similar (see above). After overcoming the mental veils of disturbing feelings, it is also possible to dissolve the deep-seated habit of ego illusion. It is the root of all sufferings in samsara. Only after this experience does one have the courage and confidence to overcome all preconceived notions and further conceptual veils of the mind. After emotional and conceptual veils are removed through meditation training, the wisdom of a Buddha is revealed as a timeless being of mind without beginning or end, middle or boundary. In this great and unsurpassable nirvana, the mind shows its full power in the spontaneous expression of its enlightened activity.

THE 12 LINKS OF DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

The teaching of the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination helps to explore one's own consciousness and to change things. In this way, we become able to deal with those problems that arise from overly entrenched patterns of life.

The Twelve Links of Dependent Origination are a causal chain that describes how suffering arises from ignorance and how this ignorance continues to affect our thoughts and actions. The causal chain includes both the physical and the mental aspects, which permeate one another. We thus shape the quality of our consciousness and lay the tracks of karmic tendencies.

The Twelve Links of Dependent Arising in their sequence:

1. **Ignorance**: consciousness does not recognize itself, which is the basis for disturbing feelings. There are two types: ignorance associated with disturbing feelings and subtle ignorance, the clinging to ideas and concepts.
2. **Tendencies or habit patterns:** positive, negative or neutral tendencies are accumulated.
3. **Consciousness:** firstly, the basic consciousness and the tendencies in it that arise through actions; secondly, the matured aspect of this consciousness that gives rise to things.
4. **Name and form:** "form" refers to the development of the physical body, and is one of the of the Five Accumulations (skt.: skandhas, accumulations). "Name" represents the other four. Skandhas: feeling, discrimination, mind factors and consciousness. Finally, the body consciousness is expressed through the five senses.
5. **Sense organs and sense faculties:** Literally translated from Tibetan, it means "opening to perception."
6. **Contact or touch:** the sense ability meets the object through the sense organ. The meeting of these three is touch. The perception of objects gives rise to the next link, namely...
7. **Feeling:** a distinction is made between pleasant, unpleasant and neutral.
8. **Desire:** Based on these feelings, desire arises, and one experiences, depending on the nature of the feeling, one experiences a strong, weak or neutral relation to something.
9. **Grasping** arises from craving and means making an effort to get something (e.g., food or clothing, etc.).
10. **Becoming:** This is the power of karma that leads to rebirth.
11. **Birth:** We grow older hour by hour.
12. From the continuous change of the skandhas, the last link arises: **old age and death**.

In this way, the cycle closes, and the links of dependent arising continue to work endlessly until finally, at some point, liberation from the cycle of existence is achieved.

In Tibetan Buddhism, pictorial symbolism is very important. The artistic representation of the doctrinal content helps to make the teachings more understandable. Traditionally, the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination are depicted in the circle of the Wheel of Life, a representation of the conditional existence of samsara. Each point is accompanied by a symbolic image that aptly illustrates the theoretical content of the chain link.

The teaching of the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination is not a theory alien to life. It helps us to explore our own consciousness and to change things. In this way, we are able to come to grips with those problems that arise from overly entrenched patterns of life. We can eventually use this teaching to completely remove basic ignorance and realize the wisdom nature of our mind.