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.