

WHAT A CONCEPT: Dependent Origination
The Spark of a Relationship
By LISA JONES, Staff Writer

You make eye contact with someone, and *pow!* You suddenly realize that you share a deep connection....

The Buddhist concept of dependent origination posits the interdependence — or deep connection — among all things. All beings and phenomena exist or occur only because of their relationship with other beings or phenomena. Nothing can exist in absolute independence nor arise of its own accord.

The reality is that we are inseparable from all beings and the universe itself, just as all beings and the universe are inseparable from us. To think or act otherwise is essentially to divorce ourselves from reality. As SGI President Ikeda explains: “The Buddhist scriptures include the parable of ‘Two Bundles of Reeds,’ aptly demonstrating this relation of dependent origination. Only by supporting each other can the two bundles stand straight — if one is removed, the other must fall. Because this exists, so does that; because that exists, so does this.”

On the “macro” level of interpersonal relationships, the concept of dependent origination illustrates that two marriage partners, say, or the people of two different countries or races exist only in relation to each other. By recognizing this reality and basing ourselves on this understanding of coexistence, we can resolve even the most severe interpersonal conflicts. If we’re enmeshed in an unhappy marriage, for example, *resolution* does not necessarily mean that the marriage itself will or must survive. Rather, it means that both parties will find a way to live harmoniously, so that both can thrive and be true to themselves. (This kind of resolution begins when one person decides to make it happen. Dependent origination posits, after all, that if one person is strong or takes initiative, his or her actions necessarily influence the lives of all other people.)

So when we make eye contact with someone and *pow!* — when we feel a deep connection with this person — it’s because we *are* deeply connected to him or her. This can be further elucidated by dependent origination on a “micro” level, as a chain of causality within the depths of our lives.

Buddhism teaches that each of us has made various causes in the past and therefore experiences various effects in the present. We’ve formed inherent causes in our lives in the distant past, causes that are always part of life at the present moment in a latent state. For example, we may have an inherent cause to be attracted to a certain kind of person — someone, say, whose slightest gesture launches us on a heart-churning journey of self-discovery. (That’s what I mean by *pow!*)

Suppose this kind of person appears in our environment — he or she could be considered an external cause that makes manifest the internal cause. The internal effect, then, is that we feel attracted to this person. The external effect, let’s suppose, is that we stare, smile...or flee in fear. The point is that the external effect simultaneously becomes an external cause that triggers further internal causes and external effects, in an endless chain of causality. *Pow!*

Even the most seemingly insignificant subtleties of life are entwined in an all-encompassing relationship of interconnectedness.

But the events in a chain of causality are not fixed or pre-determined. Rather, we can break out in a new direction at any time. Buddhist practice — chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo — is considered the cause that sparks inner revolution, the reformation of all our causes and effects.

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Ultimately, to understand dependent origination means to appreciate everything from which we and our present circumstances have originated — the support of parents, teachers, friends, Buddhism (and the influences of all those *pow!* people). From this appreciation arises commitment, sincerity and compassionate action.

Eighteen in a series

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