Dependent Origination: Seeing the Dharma

By: Gary Buck

Week Three: Feeling Tone, Craving, and Grasping

Experiential Homework Possibilities

Homework

1. Take a walk through a downtown area which is full of sensory stimulus (including bakeries!!) and/or through a natural environment with a different kind of sensory stimluli. Focus on noticing the moment each new sensory input catches your attention. It might be a newly arising sound, a smell wafting your way, some movement or color in the visual field that catalyzes a shift in your attention to focus on this new input. What feeling tone ensues? Can you catch the emergence of a particular sense of self arising in relation to moments of desire and aversion? Can you catch the feeling tone without letting craving, leading to a subjectivity, arise? That is can you bring equanimity to the experience of the feeling tone? At first this exercise may involve a reflecting back on a sequence that has just occurred as you review how very quickly a new sensory input led to a feeling tone, which in turn catalyzed a craving that quickly fixated into grasping followed by the emergence and establishment of a new subjectivity. With practice, you may begin to catch elements of the sequence, links in the chain of Dependent Origination, as they quickly emerge.

2. Continuing the above inquiry, notice what ensues from moments of desire and aversion. Pay careful attention to moments where a subjectivity has already emerged based on the craving of the moment. Notice how this subjectivity acts on its underlying desire or aversion. In this exploration you might notice or reflect on some of the links in the expanded version of Dependent Origination we discussed in the third class: Dependent on craving, seeking arises, etc.

- Seeking,
- Acquisition,
- Partaking,
- Intensified Desire and Passion,
- Attachment,
- Possessiveness,
- Avarice,
- Guarding of Possessions, and finally
- Taking up of stick and sword, etc.

3. Repeat the exercise from the first week's homework where you found a park bench to sit on where there will be people walking by. Notice how you respond to each person, this time focusing on the attraction, neutrality or aversion you feel towards each new person.

4. In sitting practice, focus your attention on thought. When a new thought arises, notice if it results in either desire or aversion. Especially notice any bodily sensations that accompany the experience of desire or aversion to a particular thought. You can work in a similar way with new physical sensations. How does experience of the body change in relation to a physical sensation that is either pleasant, neutral, or unpleasant?

Suggested Reading

"Dependent Origination" by Nyanatiloka Nyanatiloka (1879-1957) was one of the first westerners to be ordained as a Buddhist monk. He is originally from Germany but lived his monastic life in Sri Lanka, a Theravadan Buddhist country. This is a traditional discussion of Dependent Origination, perhaps one of the first to be written in English. Comparing it to other readings, you may get a sense of how the understanding of this teaching has developed over time as Buddhism establishes itself within the context of Western cultures.
http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanatiloka/wheel394.html

"The Mahanidana Sutta" Translated by Ajahn Thanissaro. This is the sutta where the expanded version of DO from this week's talk and listed above, was taught by the Buddha. There are other interesting sections to this sutta as well.
http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.15.0.than.html

"Contemplating Dependent Origination," Chapter 10 in *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree: The Buddha's Teaching on Emptiness*, by Ajahn Buddhadassa (1926-1993). Ajahn Buddhadassa discusses several strategies for meditatively working with this teaching of Dependent Origination.
http://www.seattleinsight.org/Portals/0/Documents/Study%20Materials/Contemplating-Dependent-Origination-Buddhadassa.pdf

"Mindfulness and Cognitive Process, Part 1: The Pathology of Desire," by John Peacock
"Mindfulness and Cognitive Process, Part 2: Signs of Desire," by John Peacock
https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=Y29tbW9uZ3JvdW5kbWVkaXRhdGlvbi5vcmd8YnVkZGhpc3Qtc3R1ZGllc3xneDozNjI2ODFjY2UyOWE4ZTMw

"Down to Earth Wisdom from Charlotte Joko Beck" This selection is from the blog of Marguerite Manteau-Rao, a therapist in Palo Alto, CA. She offers an article by Zen Master Charlotte Joko Beck (1917-2011) interspersed with her own commentary more from a Theravadan mindfulness perspective. A major focus of the Beck's article is on the role of desire in our lives and the way it leads to suffering. Other themes that presage what is to come as we continue our deconstructive look at Dependent Origination are the issue of our ordinary experience of a split into knowing subject and known object and the actuality of joy in our lives when we're able to see through that apparent split.

http://minddeep.blogspot.com/2011/09/down-to-earth-wisdom-from-charlotte.html