Dependent Origination: Seeing the Dharma

By Gary Buck

Week Four: Feeling Tone, Craving, and Grasping

Experiential Homework Possibilities

Homework

Continue the exercises from the earlier weeks Homework as time allows, especially integrating the work with subjectivities, cravings in its various forms, and feeling tones into daily life activities. As you continue to work in this way you may notice times when a new sensory experience arises where there is just the sensory experience.

In formal sitting practice, begin with an exploration of the body from the perspective of the four elements we used in class. Then simply rest with our attention focused on the body as a whole. From time to time, new sense experience will arise that pulls your attention away from the body as a whole to a new narrower focus. It might be the arising of a sound, or some bodily sensation of discomfort in a specific part of the body. Catch the new sensory experience as early in your experience of it as possible, just letting it be simply as it is. See what you can discover about the transition from the full body focus to the new, narrower focus on the newly arisen sensory experience. Notice especially anything that happens in the body as your attention shifts. Also be attentive to what happens next. Does a feeling tone emerge? Is there craving? Does a new subjectivity built upon feeling tome, craving, and grasping, constellate around the new sensory experience? Does the mind sense door chime in to flesh out and extend the life of this particular subjectivity with intentions, judgments, analysis, critique, etc. If possible notice the relationship of each of these layers of experience on the body itself.

One practice that I have found helpful in focusing attention on just the links of the six sense doors and contact is that of making mental notes for each kind of sense experience. As soon as you are aware that a sound has arisen in the field of experience, you make the mental note “hearing, hearing, hearing” to yourself. Or if it’s a thought, “thinking, thinking, thinking,” etc. The reading selection below by Chanmyay describes the traditional Burmese way of doing this labeling practice.

Always in your practice be open to new ways of exploring that may occur to you. Let curiosities or questions that emerge stimulate your own meditative inquiries, whether it’s a variation on practices that have been suggested or something completely different. This will help you to make the practice your own and to develop your own experiential understanding of this teaching of Dependent Origination.

Note: The practices that I’ve been suggesting are most effective when concentration is strong. If you’re feeling particularly unsettled or unfocused, it may be useful to devote some time to allowing your mind to settle before engaging in these inquiries. Use any

practice you already know that works for you. Because these inquiry practices are especially effective when concentration is strong, you may find it useful to include them the next time you are on retreat.

Suggested Reading

"The Six Doors of the Senses" by Chanmyay Sayadaw. This is a very traditional Theravadan description, coming from the Burmese tradition, of meditation focusing on the six sense doors emphasizing making mental notes of each new sensory experience as it arises. The usefulness of making such mental notes is in helping stop the process of Dependent Origination at the links of the sense doors and contact. The writer also gives a description of the four elements making up our experience of the body. http://www.buddhanet.net/vmed_7.htm

"Sabba Sutta: The All" and "Pahanaya Sutta: To Be Abandoned" Suttas on the six senses translated from the Samyutta Nikaya by Ajahn Thanissaro. http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn35/sn35.023.than.html and http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn35/sn35.024.than.html

"Salayatana-vibhanga Sutta: An Analysis of the Six Sense-media" translated from the Pali by Ajahn Thanissaro. http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.137.than.html

"Transcendental Dependent Arising: A Translation and Exposition of the Upanisa Sutta" by Bhikkhu Bodhi. http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/wheel277.html

Two books that explore the experience of the senses in a larger cultural and ecological perspective that I recommend are *The Spell of the Sensuous* by David Abram and *Sight and Sensibility: The Ecopsychology of Perception* by Laura Sewall, PhD.