

Dependent Origination: Seeing the Dharma

By: Gary Buck

Week Five: Nama-Rupa/Mind and Materiality - Interdependence

Experiential Homework Possibilities

The theme for this week continues that of the past week, of noticing what happens when a new sensory experiences first dawns in your experience. Last week the emphasis was on noticing what happens in the body at this moment. This can continue to be the focus for this week. But now you can add to it noticing the relationship between the arising of the sensory experience, especially sights, sounds, and bodily sensations, and the knowing of them. Because there is an emphasis on including seeing in this exercise, sit with your eyes open with your gaze softly focused straight in front of you. If you're not used to sitting with your eyes open, it may take some time to feel comfortable with this way of sitting and to let your mind settle within it.

Since these practices work best when the mind is concentrated and relatively peaceful, allow yourself some time at the beginning of the sitting to settle the mind.

In order to increase the likelihood of new sounds and sights arising during your sitting consider doing this inquiry exercise outdoors in nature where you might see a bird fly by, a leaf drop, or a dragon fly zig zag across your visual field, feel a fly land on your hand or a breeze caress your cheek, as well as hear the sounds of the nature. Being in nature may also help to settle the mind.

With this class and as we progress through the next few classes, the exercises are targeted on increasingly subtle layers of experience. It's important to remember to just be with your own experience as it is happening. If what you're experiencing is the arising of feeling tone or craving, that's great. Or if you're catching the emergence of subjectivities in response to craving, that's also a really important kind of insight. In this experiential exploration of Dependent Origination, it's important to really attend to whatever layer of the process is available in the present sitting. Over time, the practice will deepen.

Suggested Reading

“Seeing the Wheel, Stopping the Spin,” by Christina Feldman.

<http://www.dharma.org/bcbs/documents/ChristinaFeldmanSeeingTheWheelStoppingTheSpin.pdf>

Avijjapaccaya Sutta, trans. by Ajahn Thanissaro.

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn12/sn12.035.than.html>

“Knower and Known,” in *World as Lover, World as Self* by Joanna Macy.

<http://www.dhushara.com/book/budd/mht/green.htm>

“Chapter 17: The Pippala Leaf,” in *Old Path White Clouds*, by Thich Nhat Hanh.

“The Perceptual Form of Life,” by Elaine Skarda. This is a rather technical but quite extraordinary theoretical article by a pioneer in the field of cognition. Trained as a philosopher, Skarda was hired to be part of an interdisciplinary team at a neuroscience laboratory at UC Berkeley in the mid 80s. Her studies of neuroscience and cognitive science led her to propose this novel theory of perception that is in many ways consistent with the view of Dependent Origination that I have been offering. This includes both the views that the underlying reality is holistic in nature and that the splitting of human experience into apparently separate subject and object is, in fact, a primary function of the perceptual process. Her theory led her to Buddhism, which she perceived to be largely in agreement with the conclusions to which her scientific studies pointed. In the late 90s she ordained as a nun in the Tibetan tradition and is currently in retreat somewhere in the Bay Area, occasionally coming out to teach the Dharma.

This article is another possible response to question at the end of class about the relationship between brain research and cognitive science and this week’s topic of interconnectedness and those to follow in the next two weeks.

http://webpace.webring.com/people/ll/lbrasington/The_Perceptual_Form_of_Life.pdf