Purification of mind through cultivation of what is wholesome and riddance of what is unwholesome, backed by everything from right intention to right effort, will take us far along the spiritual path, but not to final liberation. It will ease most of the suffering of saṃsāra, but not release us from it altogether. The mind is an entangled thing and at some point we get stuck on the path without proper insight into the twists and knots that keep us bound. These are difficult to see, but this is where wisdom comes in. Wisdom dispels the darkness of ignorance, which permits the delusive patterns of responding, conceptualizing and thinking of which these saṃsāric tangles are made. Although right view provides the foundation of all of path, it takes particular care to point out the tangles that keep us stuck. Because these are often so difficult to discover in our own experience and because their threads are almost inextricably ensnarled, the mental qualities known as the seven factors of awakening, which span right mindfulness and right concentration are brought to the fore in the final fruition of wisdom.

This chapter presents the basis of entanglement in causality and the simple corollary basis for disentanglement. It explores many of the major entanglements we suffer from in our saṃsāric lives, but by necessity (in this short introductory text) in a cursory manner. It deepens what we have studied under right view. The subject matter is largely human cognition, particularly how we conceptualize or picture the world, in conjunction with affective qualities of mind, such as craving and suffering, that closely adhere to human cognition. My strategy will be to give a broad overview, but then to zoom into some particularly interesting details in order to gain something of the flavor of the depth of these teachings. Expanding the contents of this chapter could constitute the basis of an advanced college degree, but I hope in this way to give a firm foundation in the nature of this important topic. I will then give some advice on the use of meditative techniques in practicing toward deepening wisdom.

Let me say at the outset that sometimes there are disagreements about the intricate details of early Buddhist teachings on the mind. This should not surprise us: The teachings are indeed intricate, have doubtlessly suffered at least small errors in transmission and have lost much of the cultural and intellectual context in which they were originally understood. This should however not concern us as much as we might as first suppose: The primary function of the teachings is to facilitate the exploration of our own experiential world; we naturally make corrections in our understanding as we go along, and even if some understanding has been mis-transmitted and we end up taking an occasional wrong fork in our experiential thicket, at least we continue to explore and will find our way. I have at a couple of points taken what is my best estimation of the winning side but with some tenuousness in reserve in a matter of some controversy, but in each case letting the early texts speak for themselves in preference to any favored later sectarian view. I take responsibility for any errors I may have introduced into the reader's understanding.

**Dhammas: elements of experience**

It is important to recognize the strongly subjective orientation of the early Dhamma, particularly with regard to mind. The field of inquiry is almost completely restricted to elements as they occur in experience, with almost no interest in mechanisms that might underly experience or persist behind the
scenes. In fact, the world itself is understood as not something “out there,” but as the world of experience.

“In this fathom-long living body, along with its apperceptions and thoughts, lies the world, the arising of the world, and the cessation of the world.”- AN II 48ff

Until this is pointed out, this can be disorienting since many of tend, perhaps since the European Enlightenment and the rise of science, to give “objective reality,” the world “out there,” primacy. For those readers of a philosophical inclination, the early twentieth century philosophical movement of Phenomenology, founded by Edmund Husserl, who returned to the idea that experience the ultimate foundation of knowledge, comes perhaps closest to the Buddhist perspective. What the Buddha generally refers to as the world seems very close to Husserl's life world. The move to a subjective perspective should actually be very satisfying to the Buddhist practitioner since it adheres almost completely to what we can verify for ourselves, particularly in quiet meditative states.

In developing right view, we need to negotiate the conceptual overlay that the Buddha provides for us in order to point out the relevant elements of experience we need to attend to in our practice. In some ways this conceptual overlay is a bit curious from the modern intellectual perspective. At the highest level, the Buddha seems to have given us two alternative schemas to categorize our world of experience, firstly, in terms of sense spheres, and secondly in terms of aggregates. Each of these is often used as a whole to refer to the world of experience, but its conceptual elements are also individually important in other contexts.

**Sense spheres (āyatana).** The world of experience arises in our sense faculties, as forms that impinge on the eyes, as sounds that impinge on the ears, and so on, thereby of which we become conscious. In Buddhism, rather than five senses we have six. The sixth is the mind sense (mano) through which we become conscious of our inner thoughts and mental processes. Happiness, lust or products of reasoning are thereby included in our world of experience. This way of dividing up the world gives us 18 categories in all:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>outer sphere</th>
<th>faculty</th>
<th>consciousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>form</td>
<td>eye</td>
<td>eye consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sound</td>
<td>ear</td>
<td>ear consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>smell</td>
<td>nose</td>
<td>nose consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taste</td>
<td>tongue</td>
<td>tongue consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tactile object</td>
<td>body (“feel”)</td>
<td>body consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mind objects</td>
<td>mind sense</td>
<td>mind consciousness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Form (rūpa)* is used narrowly in this schema for objects of sight. Elsewhere it is used for sounds, smells, tastes and tactile objects, that is, for all non-mental objects. The elements of the inner sphere are also referred to as *faculties* (indriya). This gives a rather definitive dichotomy of experience with the sense faculties as a kind of fence between the other two domains.

It is important to understand that *consciousness* (viññāna) is not a thing or a faculty, nor is it six things. Rather it is any element in an ongoing stream of such instances, falling into any of six classes. The outer sphere, beyond the fence, contains elements that themselves arise in experience; we do not have direct experiential access to what we would consider in modern terms the objective world, even while it has the feeling of being other. This might raise the question, Why do we need both and outer sphere and consciousness? The reason is that when we are conscious we are conscious of something.
Consciousness refers to something, and this something is in experience, in what we call the outer sphere. Consciousness itself has properties, such as attention, in addition to referring to something. Our experiential worlds have a fundamental dichotomy, as long as consciousness works in the normal way. Dividing the world of experience into sense spheres emphasizes that dichotomy. The faculties are doors between inner and outer.

“In the six the world arose, in the six it holds concourse. On the six themselves depending, In the six it has woes.”

The importance of this dichotomy, and the reason the Buddha chooses to emphasize it, is probably that it determines the way in which one part of human experience. As Ñāṇānanda Thera puts it, “Where there is a fence, there is offense and defense.” In the context of human action, what is beyond the fence divides naturally into resources and dangers, that is, into things to desire and exploit and things to fear and avoid. This turns out to be important in the Buddhist understanding of mind.

**Five aggregates (khandha).** The aggregates provide a much less structured way to divide up the world of experience conceptually. The word *khandha* in Pali is simply a mass, heap or pile, that is, an unstructured grouping. *Aggregates* is a little fancy, but is the standard translation. There are five aggregates:

- **A form** (*rūpa*) is a material thing that arises as an object of consciousness. We have seen that it is subdivided further in the sense sphere schema. These are the physical things that we think are out there in the world.
- **A feeling** (*vedana*) is an affective assessment as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. It falls anywhere in the range within that single dimension from heavenly bliss to hellish anguish, but does not run the multidimensional gamut of human emotions, most of which are notions (see blow).
- **A perception** (*saññā*) identifies conceptual features of something, such as color and texture.
- **A notion** (*saṅkhāra*) is a putting-together of something. It has a volitional quality and so involves karmic acts, but commonly with reference to fixed or accustomed ideas or creative ideas.
- **A consciousness** is an awareness of some other element of experience, as we have seen.

The aggregates break experience into material experience and four forms of mental experience. It is not certain that they is meant to be exhaustive of all experience. This schema is commonly mentioned in reference to the elements of experience with which we might identify in order to construct a sense of self: A form helps locate the self in space. A feeling tells us something about how the self is doing. A perception can provide a characteristic feature of the self. A notion might tell us what the self is doing. And consciousness tells us where the self is directing its attention. Notice that the *khandha* schema in contrast to the sense sphere schema deemphasizes the role of form and consciousness in favor of three other mental factors.

**Causality**

The elements of experience arise from causes and conditions and provide causes and conditions for the arising of other phenomena. The teaching of *causality* (*idappaccayatā*), or cause and effect, is most often in the suttas formulated as follows:

---

1 Nibbāna Sermon 15.
When this is, that is,
From the arising of this comes the arising of that.
When this isn’t, that isn’t.
From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.

Ud 1.3

In should be noted that the mechanisms of causality are not of particular relevance, only the correlation as this verse states. It should be appreciated that causality makes all elements of experience contingent on other elements. Since a given element is both cause and effect, experience is in constant flux. This explains impermanence. Famous examples of conditionality are the Second and Third Noble Truths.

"And this, monks is the noble truth of the origination of dukkha: the craving that makes for further becoming — accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there — i.e., craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.

"And this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of dukkha: the remainderless fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that very craving." – SN 56.11

The Buddha’s reliance on conditionality is generally satisfying to the rationally scientific modern person. Taken to its logical conclusion, it excludes the supernatural (though often not the paranormal), that which violates natural laws, that ignores the norms of conditionality. However, Payutto points out that although we modernists readily acknowledge the conditioned structure of the physical world, we do not so readily do this in the mental world, perhaps because we assume this world to be dominated by oodles of unconstrained free thinking. However, although the Buddha attributes a degree of volition to the mental realm, he views it as highly conditioned by factors that can only gradually and with great effort be brought under control.

The understanding of causality in the physical or mental realms in fact allows us to engineer desirable outcomes by finding a point in a chain of conditionality that we can intentionally effect so as to produce desired outcomes further up the chain. Ultimately we hope through Buddhist practice to bring the fires of suffering under some degree of control. To control a fire we cannot will it to extinguish itself, or to burn more brightly, so we try to control its conditions: heat, oxygen and fuel. Dousing it with water deprives it of oxygen, blowing on it may give it more oxygen but also reduce its temperature, a fire break might deprive it of fuel. Similarly, we cannot will suffering to end with the command, “Don’t worry, be happy!” so we try to control its conditions, such as craving. We cannot will craving to end with “Don’t be so needy,” so we look for the conditions of craving and then try to control those, and so on. Wise reflection (yoniso maniskāra) is what enables us to recognize causal factors.

When indeed the truths manifest,
To the ardent, meditating brahmin,
Then all his doubts disappear,
Since knows each causal factor.

When indeed the truths manifest,
To the ardent, meditating brahmin,
Then all his doubts disappear,
Since he has seen the eradication of causes.

When indeed the truths manifest,
To the ardent, meditating brahmin,
Having smoked out the army of Māra he stands,
He shines like the sun in the sky.
Causality, for the Buddha, is taken as a universal principle, underlying all experience and events. Nothing happens of itself, but only through conditions and there is no first condition to anything. Causality is the fabric of the world. This is perhaps the Buddha’s primary metaphysical insight. Although causality is described as a relation between a phenomenon and its cause or set of conditions, when scaled up into a network of such phenomena, interrelated in such ways to many other phenomena, the resulting system can be quite complex and difficult to track, with many loops and collateral effects. It becomes, in other words, like an ensnarled wad of yarn, difficult to disentangle. The Buddha used the term dependent co-arising (paṭicca-samuppāda) to describe such a network. The term dependent co-arising has a general meaning as the natural extension of conditionality to larger chains and networks, but most often in early Buddhism it is used to refer to a specific set of relations at the heart of the human dilemma, often represented as a series of twelve links.

**A tour of the twelve links of dependent co-arising.**

It is helpful to think of the dependent co-arising formula as a skeleton that needs to be fleshed out by starting with the stated twelve factors, finding their references in the discourses of the Buddha and working out from there. The result is that the skeleton indeed seems to support the entirety of the Dharma, and each aspect of the Dharma finds its place somewhere in the space between skull and toe bone. No other of the common formulas, neither Four Noble Truths, nor five aggregates, nor Six Sense Bases, is so comprehensive in this way. Also dependent co-arising describes simultaneously (1) the nature of the human dilemma, that is, how we have managed to get ourselves so ensnarled in saṃsāric existence, and (2) how we resolve that dilemma, that is, how targeting any particular link through our practice can weaken a large section of the chain of dependent co-arising. It is certainly in reference to such contemplations that the Buddha said,

*If one understands dependent co-arising, one understands the Dhamma.*

These twelve Factors and their links provide a particularly clear psychological model of the conditioned arising of the deluded sense of being a self along with the problems at many levels that this entails. Although it as presented a simple linear chain for expository purposes, its full complexity is revealed as it is fleshed out, for its dynamics actually involves many branches, loops and overlaps. The linear chain can be seen as a trace of a single thread through the snarl that in actuality becomes twisted and knotted with other threads, many of them identical, along the way.

This is what the basic twelve-linked series looks like:

- ignorance → notions → consciousness →
  - name-and-form → sense bases → contact →
    - feeling → craving → attachment → being →
      - birth → old age, death, this mass of suffering.

Ignorance is like darkness, it fails to provide the conditions that might prevent the unfortunate from happening, in particular it is the absence of insight into the delusive nature of notions. Much of our practice aims to dispel ignorance by shining the light of wisdom to reveal what is actually happening in the subsequent links of dependent co-arising.

Notions (saṅkhāra) are the accustomed or creative means of fabricating reality, from our plans and aspirations, through engineering feats, to our interpretations of what we think is going on around us. They are karma; they are the stuff of dreams. They are enabled, or rather fail to be disabled in their
delusive nature, by the darkness of ignorance. Notions provide the building blocks of the human dilemma, the knots in the snarl that follows. They are one of the aggregates we have already met.

*Consciousness* (*viññāṇa*) is like a paint brush, fabricating a convincing external reality wherever it alights, much as a magician creates an imaginary reality through props and slights of hand. The props and slights of hand correspond to notions. In creating an “out there” out of notions, consciousness inadvertently creates the impression of an “in here,” opening the door for the distinction of self from an external world. It is one of the five aggregates we have already met.

*Name-and-form* (*nāma-rūpa*) are objects of consciousness, grounded in materiality. Like fire and heat, consciousness and name-and-form are closely bound and keep each other going, for without consciousness there are no objects of consciousness, and without objects of consciousness there is nothing to be conscious of.

A name-and-form, as an object of consciousness, is not materiality in the Cartesian sense, but rather abstrusely: A name-and-form is a notion-made product of a concession between a *designation contact* (*adhivacana-samphassa*) and a *sensory contact* (*patijīga-samphassa*). The factors involved in designation contact are: feeling, perception, volition, contact and attention. Whereas consciousness is knowing *of* perception is knowledge *as*. For instance, a rock becomes a chair, a table or a weapon (after becoming a rock, of course) depending on one's intentions in a particular situation. The factors involved in sensory contact are earth, water, fire, air and their dependencies. Notice that two of the five aggregates, form and perception, show up as functional factors within the twelve links only as aspects of name-and-form.

Name-and-form is certainly the most subtle (and consequently most misunderstood) link in the chain of dependent co-arising. The Buddha also attested to its critical importance, “Where name-and-form as well as sense and the designation are completely cut off, it is there that the tangle gets snapped.” – SN 7.6

For this reason we will revisit name-and-form an number of times in this chapter. Also the recommended readings on this topic are worth pursuing.

*The six sense bases* are the inner sphere highlighted in the sense sphere schema for classifying experience. It enforces a dichotomy between the realms of consciousness and its objects (name-and-form) and in this sense presupposes them. If consciousness and name-and-form were to be fully penetrated with the eye of wisdom, it would be discovered that this dichotomy is delusive. It is misleading to view the sense bases as the physical eye, perhaps with some nerve tissue attached, etc., which would need to presuppose nothing. Rather these are functional mappings between objects to consciousness through six channels or *doors* (*dvāra*) from consciousness to the imputed external reality it represents. The six sense bases are somewhat redundant in the chain of dependent co-arising, but it seems to function to highlight the apparent dichotomy already discussed with regard to the sense sphere schema intrinsic to much human experience. This dichotomy entails a evaluation of objects beyond the fence in terms of attraction or aversion, which implicitly underlies the links of feeling, craving and attachment that follow.

A *contact* is a particular encounter with the world beyond the fence, facilitated by some sense base. It is a peek through one of the six sense doors. Notice that each of the links preceding this is best understood as an collection of certain kinds of instances, for instance, a given instance of name-and-form to the six sense bases (all of them), rather the function of the arising of name-and-form with consciousness is a presupposition of the very concept of the sense faculty and its differentiation into six types. Scholars seem to spend a lot of effort eel-wriggling around the ordering of these links, but with no useful results. Although the logic is somewhat indeterminate, the account presented here should
provide a simple clear way for the reader to progress through the chain. In any case, contact moves to the perspective of the specific instance. The presence of the six sense bases permits many individual instances of contact. An individual instance of contact is actually by definition a coming together of a sense faculty a sense object and an instance of consciousness.

“Dependent on eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact.” – MN 18

Similarly for ear, sounds and ear-consciousness, etc. Rather than a form, a sound, etc., an instance of name-and-form is more precisely what arises, involving some specific sense faculty.

A feeling is the affective quality that follows from, and accompanies, an instance of contact, essentially a positive, negative or neutral evaluation, that is, pain, pleasure or indifference in response to the associated external object of consciousness. It belongs to one of the aggregates we have already met. Experience tells us, even if the discourses rarely mention it, that pleasure and suffering come in a variety of intensities, from slight to super-extreme.

A craving responds to a feeling with a forward-looking concern for retaining or maintaining objects of gratification, or for avoiding or losing objects of displeasure. A lot of drama happens around each instance of craving. It is a cause of suffering (dukkha), ever shadowed by suffering. Craving is a potential impediment to ethical conduct and the elimination of craving is the focus of purity of mind and right effort. It represents either of first two of the three fires of greed, hatred and delusion, the third developed primarily in the links leading up to craving. It is a source point for the arising of unwholesome karma.

The teaching of the the Four Noble Truths intersects with dependent co-arising at craving. The core second noble truth can be summarized as:

\[
\text{craving} \rightarrow \text{suffering}
\]

This is true in the simple sense that suffering shadows craving, that is, is immediately felt in conjunction with craving, but also as a summary of the the remainder of the chain of dependent co-arising beginning with craving and ending with old age, death, this mass of suffering.

Attachment is the cumulation of craving around the mass of objects that grow where craving was initially present sometimes to the level of self-identification at every level of human experience. The Pali word for attachment, upādāna, also means fuel; the idea is that fire attaches itself to fuel. Since each of the five aggregates can provide objects of attachment in dependent co-arising, the term upādānak-khandha stands for the aggregates of attachment, but also means heaps of fuel or piles of firewood. This provides a vivid image of the potential heat of suffering made possible by the accumulation through craving of attachment. Less often, attachment is characterized as nourishment, nourishment for edible food, for consciousness, for contact and for activities.

Existence includes the fully developed delusional consolidation of a separate self along with of its external realm of interest as defined by the set of attachments. Continuing the metaphor for attachment, it is the fire that arises from attachment. It forms a fully functional entity that coordinates its actions in protecting and exploiting interests in relation to a resource-rich yet often hostile external world. The word nirvana refers to extinguishing this fire.

A birth is the projection of the inertia of a consolidated existence into a new life after death.

Old age, death, this mass of suffering is the prospect of samsāra brought to the self who is born and of its repeated recurrence in future lives, along with the insecurity and existential despair these entail.
Dependent Co-arising is an account of the factors of human experience and the causal relations among these, an account reveals the delusive quality of human cognition and how these qualities give rise, step by step to the demon of self that possesses our bodies to bring us agony and make us bring harm to the world, an account of our *almost* hopeless entanglement in the snarl of saṃsāric existence. The twelve links describe the arising of a self-centered pathology, common to virtually all persons. The purpose of understanding the links is that it exposes the points at which this pathology can be broken down, for if one link is broken, then the subsequent links cannot arise, for each link represents a necessary condition—though in general not a sufficient condition—for the link that follows. Awakening is the breakdown of the whole chain and thereby a total reworking of the age-old cognitive structure of the mind.

**Some remarkable aspects of dependent co-arising**

Some aspects of this chain stand out. Particularly remarkable is its impersonality; there is no assumption of an agent behind the various processes implicated. There is consciousness, but no cognizer, feeling, but no feeler; seeing/hearing/etc. but no seer/hearer/etc. At the same time, the chain is largely concerned with the *conditioned* arising of something delusively self-like, first through the dichotomy imposed by consciousness and name-and-form and restated by the sense bases, the interest in the opportunities and threats of the external world, the consolidation of a self-interest in craving and attachment, then existence and rebirth, as if there were something substantial there to be reborn. The uninstructed worldling generally sees a self planted in the center of consciousness in particular looking from a particular vantage point at what is going on around him, flashlight in hand. But while consciousness is a discernible process, it too arises from conditions and no holder of the flashlight is ever discerned. The self *is* represented in dependent co-arising, but only as a conditional imputation that is constructed from and within the world of human experience, fully formed only at the late link of existence.

Another remarkable aspect of the twelve links of dependent co-arising is that, the pathology it accounts for has little to do with the actual *content* of experience, and much to do with its *architecture*. Craving, for instance, is just craving, regardless of whether it is rooted in childhood deprivation or unrequited love or too much exposure to TV commercials. Although each instance has content, the pathology results primarily from the causal structure of the various links. This is why Buddhist pastoral counseling rarely involves tracing one's vexations back to early life experience but more often the blanket advice to “get over it.”

Another aspect has already been noted: the twelve links are remarkably subjective in their presentation. Objects of consciousness are fabricated and the only reference to a physical world is through one half of the name-and-form compound. This does not deny the existence of an external, unexperienced reality, only the relative irrelevance of such a reality in the human pathology. Sometimes the teachings seem to come up to the surface, or to stand outside of the subjective viewpoint, as it were. This seems necessary either to establish a clear ethical perspective, or to demonstrate the delusive nature of our thinking, both of which typically amount to the same thing.

For instance, DN 15 presents an alternative chain of dependent co-arising that branches away from the conventional twelve links after the link of craving, then takes us out of the subjective perspective and into bodily actions performed in the world. In this way the Buddha demonstrates that subjective phenomena accounted for in conventional dependent co-arising have ethical consequences in terms of causing real harm in the world.

```
feeling → craving → seeking → gain → valuation →
  fondness → possessiveness → ownership → avarice →
```
guarding → taking up sticks and knives, contention, disputes.

Finally, the perspective of the twelve links does not comprehend all of the human mind but is limited to what comes under the rubric, “Here comes trouble!” For instance, although we learn a lot about the arise of greed, hate and delusion, we learn nothing of kindness, compassion and generosity. We also learn how perception, thought and views, alongside greed and hatred lead to suffering, but we disregard the (Darwinian) functionality of all of these in perpetuating the human species. These are simply beyond the purview of the twelve links, which are concerned with the human dilemma. Once that is resolved then the rest is left to fend for itself.

In its linear step-by-step formulation, the conventional twelve-link chain of dependent co-arising is deceptively simple. In fact, Ven. Ānanda was once deceived in this way and revealed this to the Buddha:

“It's amazing, lord, it's astounding, how deep this dependent co-arising is, and how deep its appearance, and yet to me it seems as clear as clear can be.”

“Don't say that, Ānanda. Don't say that. Deep is this dependent co-arising, and deep its appearance. It's because of not understanding and not penetrating this Dhamma that this generation is like a tangled skein, a knotted ball of string, like matted rushes and reeds, and does not go beyond transmigration, beyond the planes of deprivation, woe, and bad destinations.” – DN 15

When we begin to flesh out the chain with additional causally related factors and consider the dynamics of these factors in cognitive processing that we appreciate the complexity of its snarl.

**The dynamics of dependent co-arising**

Consciousness fashions a picture of reality, flitting from here to there, drawn by interest, particularly by craving, paint brush in hand. It plays a central role in the dynamics of dependent co-arising as each of the factors arises from its conditions, sparking those factors for which it is conditional. My intention here is to illustrate two stages in picturing reality, first, that of picturing a single object and its implications for craving and suffering, and, second, that of picturing the world as a collective product of attachment. I hope thereby to illustrate the nature of the entanglement that the linear description of dependent co-arising easily conceals.

**Picturing an object.** One Sunday afternoon Fred and Wilma Frup were hiking through the state park and came across the private property of one Wilbur Weatherby through which a natural spring flows. They asked permission to drink of the spring, proceeded to talk for an hour's duration with Wilbur about the wonders of fauna and flora and then departed with a very favorable impression indeed of their newly found acquaintance.

The next day, Sam Wetwhistle, engineer for Crystal Sparkles® Spring Water, a corporate water bottler, known for their rather aggressive stance on land use issues, pulled up in his clearly labeled truck to Wilbur's gate. It is Sam's experiential world which will be of our concern here. Wilbur sized Sam up very quickly as he emerged from his truck, determined his intentions as he spoke and dismissed him abruptly and rather rudely, for Sam had arrived with specific instructions and plans in mind that would involve fierce negotiations with Wilbur. Sam's consciousness was fixed on Wilbur, who, as an object of consciousness, began to grow, for ...

“what one chooses, plans and has a tendency toward becomes an object for maintaining
Wilbur grew through perception and other forms of evaluation as additional notions were recruited in a process that is described metaphorically as follows.

“Consciousness is the seed, karma the soil and craving the moisture.” – AN 3.76

Karma here is the reservoir of notions Sam employed to make sense of Wilbur. Craving is what made him want to make sense of Wilbur and consciousness was the attention he gave to Wilbur in the first place then sustained through Wilbur's rude dismissal. Although this process can be viewed as an extension of name-and-form, it is also made explicit as a side branch of dependent co-arising in the Honey-ball Sutta (MN 109).

\[
\text{contact} \rightarrow \text{feeling} \rightarrow \text{perception} \rightarrow \text{thought} \rightarrow \text{proliferation} \rightarrow \text{wildly speculative views}
\]

The conceptual embellishment of objects in this way is a pitfall, and proliferation (papañca) sometimes identified as the point at which it runs wild.

Anuruddha stated: “Dhamma is for one who wants little, is contented, is secluded, energetic, mindful, composed, wise.” The Buddha added an 8th factor: “This Dhamma is for one who likes and delights in non-proliferation, not for one who delights in proliferation.” (NS11)

Contact entails consciousness, and craving in this case will repeatedly draw consciousness back to the same object. This is the way Sam's picture of Wilbur accrued layer upon layer:

Wilbur is unwelcoming,
mean-spirited,
possessive,
a tree-hugger,
an impediment to economic growth,
ignorant of current economic realities,
a pinko eco-terrorist,
un-American,
a depraved rascal!

Such are the notions Sam kepts in reserve for people like Wilbur and put to good use in Wilbur's case. From contact with what had been thought, proliferated and speculated, negative feelings arose, from which that form of aversive craving known as anger arose. As Sam left in a rage, he first looked under his truck to make sure that some hidden cohort had not planted a bomb or drained his brake fluid.

There is inevitable delusion in picturing objects. Notice how differently Fred or Wilma, on the one hand, and Sam, on the other, pictured Wilbur. The greatest delusion is that we take our pictures seriously as being about a reality beyond the fence and therefore true independently of us. Once consciousness alights on an object, like Wilbur, we watch it grow from within like a crystal of its own accord, not recognizing how much of its content is growing according to our own subjective evaluations and needs. But in fact, our own quest for personal advantage is all the while being projected as properties intrinsic to the thing itself. Even common folk wisdom occasionally reminds us of the oftentimes delusiveness of such reality,

Beauty … is in the eye of the beholder!

Our most cherished loved ones, admired celebrities and valued electronic gadgets have arisen into our worlds in much the same way as Wilbur into Sam's but with more positive accretions. Objects of the
senses are primarily accretions of stories we make up about them for our convenience, our notions. We then believe in them as things beyond the fence and have desire or aversion for them, and so the link of craving arises to vex our lives.

**The three primary characteristics of phenomena.** As we picture objects beyond the fence we do so with characteristic biases. In three particularly significant ways we highlight objects as worthy of craving much more than they deserve: we make them more permanent than they really are, we ignore the distress they cause us and we identify with them personally. The Buddha asks us to consider that all things have these three ubiquitous qualities (*lakkhana*):

- **impermanence (anicca),**
- **suffering (dukkha),**
- **non-self (anatta).**

This is much like asking us, as we picture digitized images or videos on screen, to pay attention to this ubiquitous feature:

- **pixels,** ...

... after which we realize that the images are not as they seem.

Somehow we repeatedly fail to realize that everything is in a state of flux, continually being born from conditions and also dying with conditions: food we buy, our furniture, our car, our own bodies, even mountains. Everything and everyone we cherish we will lose one by one ... until the ones that remain lose us. The world is slipping by like sand through our fingers. There is no happy ever after. And yet this is not at all how we tend to picture objects. Our conceptual constructions, the names-and-forms, do not keep pace with their unfolding. Yet, we have a stake in things on the other side of the fence, because we expect the to either serve to gratify or threaten. Because things are impermanent, when we seek gratification we crave in the context of broken promises. That which is craved causes us suffering. We suffer whether they have worn out, vanished or died or in the process of doing so. If we've lost it already, we suffer. If we still have it, we are anxious that we will lose it. And we particularly suffer when they are closely identified with ourselves like our immediate family or our bowling championship.

Contemplating impermanence, suffering and non-self reveal the false premises that underlie much of reality as we have perceived it. As an empirical matter they win all debates, yet we find it perplexingly easy to overlook them. The three characteristics remind us of the primary human absurdity, that we fashion the objects beyond the fence ourselves in our own minds, take them seriously as something real and substantial, become infatuated with them and then crave them. They remind us that these objects are by nature unreliable, that they cause us distress when we have a stake in them and that it is pointless to identify with them. The overall message is the *fading of passion (virāga):* our infatuation with the things of the world are too hot too handle and those things are not even what they promise. A meaningful life lies elsewhere.

**Entangled in the world.** Rupert was committed to a life of exquisite taste. It was not enough for him to drive a BMW, he had to drive a Bentley and to take up two parking spaces. He was a connoisseur of fine food, wine and art. He would make a point that a martini be, contrary to popular misconception, stirred, never shaken. He was always seen at one of the better seats at opera or ballet performances, always in an aloha shirt and fedora next to a glamorous woman. In society he told clever stories, laughed at other people's jokes and was widely considered quite charming, but otherwise he
was a recluse. Few had seen his home, the modesty of which would have surprised the rest, for his wealth was not great. The reader can recognize elements of form, feeling, perception, notions (remember that these include volitional activities and composite ideas) and consciousness with which Rupert identified and to which he was attached.

Rupert's fine taste was for public consumption. It defined him as a cut above the rest. This committed him to the view that some people were a cut above others and therefore deserved the financial means to means their endowment of fine taste. Accordingly his political and economic views tended to be conservative and passionate. He lived in horror of (1) losing the wealth that sustained his public lifestyle and being forced to drink beer in a bar and drive a Honda, (2) encountering anyone who could afford better seats or a finer bottle of wine, (3) experiencing a fender-bender with a Honda, (4) becoming too old and feeble to be taken seriously, (5) not being taken seriously even as a young man. Every ember of attachment was burning hot, but he could never pinpoint the source of his relentless dis-ease, for he lived, he imagined, a life of ease.

The world of experience consists significantly of the things we picture in the world and what they accrete as our cravings bring our consciousness repeatedly back to those things. Our world emerges from our cravings just as our cravings emerge from our world. The two are folded into one another like an omlet. When we talk of the link of attachment we are talking from the collective perspective of all of the cravings, and therefore suffering, alive in such a world. The Fire Sermon passes through the categories of the world according to the sense sphere schema describing everything graphically as burning:

"Bhikkhus, all is burning. And what is the all that is burning?

"The eye is burning, forms are burning, eye-consciousness is burning, eye-contact is burning, also whatever is felt as pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant that arises with eye-contact for its indispensable condition, that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hate, with the fire of delusion. I say it is burning with birth, aging and death, with sorrows, with lamentations, with pains, with griefs, with despairs.

"The ear is burning, sounds are burning...

"The nose is burning, odors are burning...

"The tongue is burning, flavors are burning...

"The body is burning, tangibles are burning...

"The mind is burning, ideas are burning, mind-consciousness is burning, mind-contact is burning, also whatever is felt as pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant that arises with mind-contact for its indispensable condition, that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hate, with the fire of delusion. I say it is burning with birth, aging and death, with sorrows, with lamentations, with pains, with griefs, with despairs. – SN 35.28

We have seen that the name of the link attachment (upādāna) also refers to the fuel that feeds a fire. This is used in combination with the word for aggregate (khandha), which also means a heap or pile, as in a pile of fuel or stack of firewood, but is also used as the name of the alternative schema for categorizing the world alongside the sense sphere schema. The aggregates of attachment or stacks of firewood (upādānak-khandha) are thus the world we've created for ourselves by cumulatively picturing objects beyond the fence, believing in them and craving them. The image evoked by this word is a snapshot taken just before the world is about to be engulfed in flames.

Let me point out an important ethical observation, as far as I know not explicitly pointed out in the
early texts but implicit in them, concerning attachment. We know from earlier chapters that actions motivated from craving (greed or hatred) are unwholesome and as part of our training we avoid such actions and learn to take great care around those things toward which we experience either greed or hatred. Attachment, made of craving, provides a field for practicing in this way. However, the fuel is not distributed evenly. Between the piles are those things that we simply have never taken an interest in, as opportunities or as threats. Consciousness has generally passed them by and they have not grown into recognizable objects. This is why, for instance, international leaders or captains of industry can make important political, military or business decisions and take virtually no notice of the adverse impact they might have on millions of people or on ecosystems, and yet experience no tell-tale sign of ill-will before the decision, nor remorse after. In their experiential worlds those people or ecosystems simply are not there. Such are the far-ranging ethical consequences of delusion in contrast to greed or hatred.

**The self.** Attachment was the basis of the world in which Rupert lived with his fancy car and his his opera tickets. It could have become either a pleasant or an unpleasant place depending on his dispositions and his developmental choices along the path. Attachment also defined who he was as a personality or a self. This is what we call the link of existence. In his case, he fancied himself a man of exquisite taste and the means to show it, but consider also the shadow-side of this self, articulated as consciousness repeated alighted among the aggregates of attachment: this was a self that never had enough wealth, that was forever envious of others' good fortune and by the same token unconcerned for others' misfortune, that was perpetually frail and that always lacked self-confidence.

“If one stays obsessed with form [similarly feeling, perception, notions, consciousness] that is what one is measured/limited by. Whatever one is measured by, that is how one is classified.”

SN 22.36

And yet this was the only self Rupert knew and it was inevitable that he would also become attached to that, the greatest attachment of all. All things change, and, as it happened, the self Rupert imagined enduring forever was not sustainable. He lost his wealth; he simply spent it all. For him this was like death. He was a broken man, living out of his Honda. One day, what he had become was reborn, at least its shadow side.

**Practicing within the tangle**

The practice of untangling the snarl of dependent co-arising is to follow the noble eightfold path. The reader might recall for the discussion of right view in the last chapter that what I call the four truths formula declares the noble eightfold path as the way to the cessation of each of various factors and that among them are suffering and each link in the chain of dependent co-arising. The reason that these factors share a common path to their resolution is that they are so inextricably interrelated, that they co-arise, that is, (more or less) arise together and fall together. Nonetheless, individual steps in the path tend to relate particularly closely to particular links in the chain. The link rattled by the most steps seems to be craving and the step that rattles the most links seems to be mindfulness, if not right view. (I've been working on a metaphor involving a suspension bridge made of wood planks and chains, but it has not quite held up in my mind.)

Craving characterizes unwholesome choices and is therefore directly implicated in right intention, right speech, right action and right effort, each of which resists impulses seeking personal advantage in favor of harmlessness, beneficial consequences, kindness, renunciation, etc. Mindfulness refined through the equanimity developed through concentration plays a critical role in fine-tuning these practices lest these impulses slip right by before more wholesome factors come into consideration. Craving is one of the most vulnerable links in dependent co-arising in that with diligent practice it is possible to
significantly unlearn its impulsive ways. Weakening craving weakens attachment, and weakening attachment weakens craving when consciousness does not spend so much time obsessing about the five aggregates of attachment.

Attachment provides the domain for most of the contemplations known in Buddhist practice, most of which are taught within the four foundations of mindfulness. These contemplations, however, work primarily to weaken notions. Objects of attachment are not only craved, they are well-established as name-and-forms, that is through perception and thought, generally because of a history of craving. They are made of notions. By asking us to re-conceptualize those objects, contemplations tend to break down the notions of which they are made. Contemplations we've encountered are:

- The primary characteristics: impermanence, suffering, non-self,
- Bodily contemplations: elements, parts of the body, stages of decomposition,

These contemplations are most effective with a well engaged faculty of mindfulness that remembers which conceptualization to impose. The simultaneous success of engaging concentration to sharpen mindfulness may vary because of the complexity of some of the contemplations. Insight sharpened by concentration may penetrate to break the bond between consciousness and name-and-form or between name and form.

Cultural norms, conventions for expressing respect, ritual and holding things as sacred are means found even in folk society that define behavior around objects that override behaviors based on craving. As such they can influence the way we view those objects. For instance, respect for life, that is, holding all living things as sacred, which can be taught to young children, might dispel the tendency to make non-objects of things that carry little meaning in terms of personal advantage. This is the counterpart of developing dispassion, mentioned above, for those objects we accorde inordinate craving.

Various practices aim to nip conceptual embellishments in the bud. Mindfulness itself has the power to stop perception at bare perception, “in the body there is just the body.” Right speech includes avoidance of frivolous or idle chatter, which stands close to frivolous or idle thought and leads to proliferation. Right effort includes sense restraint, which stops short of contact and therefore perception. Right concentration slows down or even shuts down the progression from perception to thought to proliferation to speculation.

In our practice we loosen each of the knots and snarls of dependent co-arising a little at a time. As one becomes looser, we gain some more room for working on those nearest. Given enough time the tangle unravels. The Buddha employed a similar simile.

"Just as when an ocean-going ship, rigged with masts & stays, after six months on the water, is left on shore for the winter: Its stays, weathered by the heat & wind, moistened by the clouds of the rainy season, easily wither & rot away. In the same way, when a monk dwells devoting himself to development, his fetters easily wither & rot away." – SN 22.101

Further Reading

Noa Ronkin, 2011, Early Buddhist Metaphysics.