THE BUDDHIST SIX-WORLDS MODEL OF
CONSCIOUSNESS AND REALITY

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Historically there have been two main metaphors for consciousness, one spatial or
topographical, the other temporal or biographical (Metzner, 1989). The spatial meta­
phor is expressed in conceptions of consciousness as like a territory, a terrain, or a
field, a state one can enter into or leave, or like empty space, as in the Buddhist notion
of sunyata. We could speculate that people who unconsciously adhere to a spatial
conception of consciousness would tend to a certain kind of fixity of perception and
worldview. The "static" aspects of experience might be in the foreground of aware­
ness, and there could be a craving for stability and persistence. From this point of
view, ordinary waking consciousness is the preferred state, and "altered states" are
viewed with some anxiety and suspicion-as if an "altered" state is automatically
abnormal or pathological in some way. This is close to the attitude of mainstream
Western thought toward alterations of consciousness: even the rich diversity of
dreamlife and the changed awareness possible with introspection, psychotherapy, or
meditation is regarded with suspicion by the dominant extraverted worldview.

The temporal metaphor for consciousness on the other hand, is seen in conceptions
such as William James' "stream of thought," or the stream of awareness, or the "flow
experience"; as well as in developmental theories of consciousness going through
various stages. Historically and cross-culturally, we see the temporal metaphor
emphasized in the thought of the pre-Socratic philosophers Thales and Heraclitus, in
the Buddhist teachings of impermanence (anicca), and in the Taoist emphasis on the
flows and eddies of water as the basic underlying pattern of all being. From this point
of view, wave-like fluctuations of consciousness are regarded as natural and inevi­
table, and health, well-being, and creativity are linked to one's ability to tune into and
utilize the naturally occurring, and the "artificially" induced, modulations of con­
sciousness.

According to Immanuel Kant, "space" and "time" are the a priori categories of all
thinking. It seems appropriate that these are the two most common metaphors we have
come up with in our reflections on consciousness. Perhaps the most balanced way to

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think about consciousness would be to keep both the spatial and the temporal
metaphors in mind. We can recognize and identify the structural, persistent features of
the perceived world we are "in" at any given moment, and we can be aware of the
ever-changing, flowing stream of phenomena in which we are immersed. Heraclitus is
believed to have said that you can't step twice into the same river—a statement on the
inevitability of change. What he actually said, much more interestingly, was "when
we step into the same river, the water is always flowing and always different." This is
really an affirmation of both structural constancy and the dynamic flow of ever-
changingness,

Mahayana Buddhism developed a world model or image variously called the "Wheel
of Samsara (Existence)," or the "Wheel of Birth and Death," or the "Six Realms of
Existence," or the "twelve-fold Cycle of Dependent Co-Origination." The Sanskrit
word samsara is derived from sam- "together" and the verb-root sri- "to flow"; thus it
means "flowing together," and the model is called "Wheel of Flowing Together." It is
a mandala, a map of consciousness, portrayed in countless paintings found allover
Tibet, in temples and shrines, usually facing the visitor as one enters the temple, like
a mirror being held up for self-recognition, asking which world are you in now,traveler?

The mandala has six segments which show the six worlds of existence, according to
the Buddha's teachings, inhabited by the different classes of beings, such as gods,
demons, spirits, animals and humans. This model is both topographical and biographecal. It is a spatial map, since we always exist in one of these realms, together
with the other beings who inhabit that realm. But it is also a temporal model, since we
are continually being born into (entering) and dying out of (leaving) the different
realms, according to our accumulated karmic predispositions.

It is possible to interpret the meaning of the six worlds (see Figure 1) at four levels, or
as four different kinds of metaphors. The first level of meaning we might call the
metaphysical/ecological: humans exist in the human world, animals in the animal
world, and the inhabitants of the other four realms are four different kinds of non-
human metaphysical entities, or what are traditionally called "spirits" (gods, demons,
ghosts). This first is the only non-anthropocentric interpretation of this model; the
three others are human-centered.

The second level is the reincarnational interpretation: we human beings dwell in
these realms in various lifetimes, according to accumulated karmic propensities. A
third level of meaning is to regard it as kind of personality typology: different types or
classes of human beings exist in the different realms when they have the personality
and experience of the beings symbolically portrayed in those realms. At the fourth,
intrapsychic level, the six worlds represent a typology of states of consciousness. We
humans all pass through the realms within our lifetime, as a function of karmic
patterns (samskaras). In my courses I have sometimes asked students to estimate what
percentage of time, say out of the last week or the last three days, they spent in each of
the six worlds of consciousness; and this has proved to be an instructive exercise in
reflection and self-awareness.
Interestingly, the mandala is called the "wheel of birth and death," not "life and death." In the Western dualistic worldview life and death are opposites, in constant struggle with each other, as in Freud's theory of *eros* vs. *thanatos*, the drive to live and the drive to die. In the Buddhist conception, the opposite of death is not life, but birth. Life includes both birth and death, many births, many deaths, and many rebirths. Birth and death are the beginning and ending of a particular journey through one of the worlds, the entrance into and the exit from that state of being, from that state of consciousness. Thinking about birth and death this way has the effect of repolarizing one's attitude, into an equal acceptance of both death and birth. Buddhism and other Asian traditions have long taught what we in the West have only recently come to understand again: that we have life before birth and we have life after death. Western psychological research on hypnotic recovery of prenatal memories, and on the other-

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world visions of near-death experiencers (NDE), have expanded our empirical knowledge of prenatal and post-mortem life and consciousness.

So life is the overarching process, the higher-order concept. Birthing is a natural process of life, as dying is a natural process of life, According to Buddhism, as well as other philosophies in the perennial tradition of East and West, when we depart or die from one world, we enter or are born into another realm. Every dying is followed by a new birth. Every birth and every rebirth is preceded by a dying. Every transition in a human life-cycle can be thought of metaphorically as a dying and being reborn: one could say that the fetal self "dies" when the infant is born. In archaic and indigenous tribal societies, puberty rites of passage mark the initiation-birthing into adulthood as the ending-dying of the child-self. Sometimes such rites seem severe and brutal, almost like a symbolic "killing" of the child-self. In such a worldview, you have to die to one world, the world of childhood, in order to be born into the new world of adulthood.

In the hub of the Wheel of Flowing Together are shown three animals, biting each other's tails, symbolizing what the Buddhists call the "three poisons," the root causes or primary driving forces that keep the Wheel of Existence turning. The three animals in the hub are a rooster, symbolizing craving, lust, or greed; a snake, symbolizing aversion, aggression, or hatred; and a pig, symbolizing ignorance, delusion, or unconsciousness. The rooster of craving is eating the pig of delusion, which is feeding on the serpent of hatred. So, greed, hatred, and delusion are identified as the driving forces that keep us cycling through the various worlds of reality.

It is interesting to note that this parallels quite closely the Freudian analysis of the primary motivational dynamics of the human psyche. Freud identified sexual libido, which in the Buddhist view is one aspect of craving, and aggression, which is equivalent to hatred or aversion, as the two primary forces in the unconscious Id. The Freudian personal unconscious is characterized by what he called "primary process" thinking, which is irrational and delusional. Thus what both the Freudians and the Buddhists are saying is that all of our thinking, all of our feelings, all of our experience in all states of consciousness is ultimately driven by these three interrelated motivational factors—lust-craving, aggression-hatred, and deluded unconsciousness. All that is, except the experiences and insights that are connected with the path and practices of liberation, for which the metaphor is "getting off the Wheel."

Around the outside rim of the Wheel are twelve images symbolically showing the twelve links in the chain of "dependent co-origination"—basically, how everything hangs together. The Sanskrit name for the doctrine of the twelve-fold chain, encircling the Wheel on its rim, is pratitya samutpada. This has been variously translated as "dependent origination" or "dependent co-arising" or "co-dependent origination" or "interdependent co-arising." Here the term "co-dependent" has a normal, not a pathological connotation, as it does in the addiction field, where it refers to the addiction-supporting behavior of the spouse of an addict. This teaching of the twelve-fold chain is considered the foundational teaching of causality in the Buddhist worldview. It is quite different from the accepted Western linear, dynamical model of causality. The latter is exemplified by the billiard ball situation, in which ball A hits
ball B and causes it to move; or by the germ theory of disease, according to which the singular cause of a disease is the invading bacteria or virus.

Joanna Macy has coined the term "mutual causality" to describe the interdependence principle that is at the heart of this Buddhist model; and she has shown that this principle can also be found in the Western philosophy of science known as general living systems theory (Macy, 1991). In the Buddhist view, all phenomena, everything that happens in the world, both internal and external realities, are linked together in twelve identifiable parts, that always arise together and pass away together.

In the temple mandala paintings of the Wheel of Samsara, the whole wheel, with its six worlds, the "three poisons" in the hub, and the twelve-fold cycle of "co-dependent origination" around the rim, is held in the jaws and claws of a gigantic, demonic figure, identified as Mahakala, the great spirit that personifies the entropic destructive forces of time. So the mandalais being held up like a mirror to the viewer, as if to say "these are your possible lives, your worlds of existence, driven as you are through births and deaths by the three primary forces, and conditioned as you are by the twelve mutual interdependencies." It is clearly a cyclical view of time and causality, in which we return again and again into the same recurring realms of existence, until we are finally able to free ourselves, through the practices of meditation, from our attachments and attain liberation. There are some parallels between this Buddhist Wheel of Existence, and the medieval European symbol of the "Wheel of Fortune," as found for instance in the Tarot. Both wheels portray the ups and downs of our changing fortunes; however, the Western Christian symbol has nothing comparable to the sophisticated analysis of the cycle of mutual causality.

THE SIX WORLDS OF EXISTENCE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

The six worlds are the realms of consciousness in which we live, to which we are attached, into which we are born and out of which we die, depending on our karma and the unfolding of the links of "dependent co-wising." Some people may live all their life in one world-they are typical inhabitants of that realm, akin to the spirits of that realm. Most of us move through the different worlds, the different states, spending months, weeks, days, hours, or minutes in any given realm. One could say each world typifies a certain kind of attitude, a certain set of attachments or motivations, a certain kind of addiction or compulsion.

We can visualize the Wheel of Samsara as a clock face divided into six two-hour segments. At the top of the Wheel, between 11 am and 1 pm, is the heavenrealm, the realm inhabited by devas, divine beings who are living in a blessed state of joy and ecstasy. Unlike the Christian conception of heaven as a state we can only attain to in the after-life, depending on our behavior and God's grace, this devic realm is regarded by the Buddhists as merely one of the six realms of conditioned existence-albeit a very enjoyable one. According to Buddhism, the beings in this realm are living off their accumulated good karma, like a kind of savings account, and when this is exhausted they will devolve into a less agreeable realm of existence. The goal of meditation is not heaven, but nirvana, which means transcendence of all attachments.
in all worlds. People living in this heavenly realm are the people who seem to be blessed with happiness and good fortune, who can spend their lives enjoying the delights of the senses and cultivating aesthetic experiences. We could say they are devoted to the pursuit of sensual pleasure, including the ecstatic states to be found through spiritual practices, to sensation seeking and to aesthetic enjoyment of all kinds. We are in these heavenly states of consciousness, when we're having “high” experiences, such as the ecstasies of erotic union, creative inspiration, and the blissful contemplation of natural or aesthetic beauty.

Opposite the heaven realm, at the nadir of the Wheel, between 5 pm and 7 pm, is the hell world, filled with beings who are undergoing unspeakable agonies, torment, and suffering. This is a realm marked by pain and suffering, by hopelessness and helplessness, where one typically feels that one is being punished or damned, and will never be able to escape. In real world terms this is the state of consciousness of people who are being tortured, maimed or injured, people in war or catastrophe, or those racked with intractable pain due to illness, or the psychic torments of psychosis and nightmare. The hell realm, like the kingdom of heaven, is within. One can be outwardly in benign circumstances and inwardly agonizing. Someone passing us in the street may be walking through a private, interior hell, or more rarely, enjoying an inner heaven experience. We are in hellish states of consciousness when we are victimized, when we feel stuck, hopelessly and helplessly depressed, or inescapably trapped in abusive or oppressive situations. As Gurdjieff often pointed out, attachments to suffering and victimization can be among the most tenacious of the addictions-compulsions.

Next to the heaven realm, between 1 pm and 3 pm on the Wheel, is the realm of the asuras. Usually translated as “jealous gods” or “titans,” I interpret them as “spirits of rage and violence.” This is a realm marked by constant violence, fighting, aggression, rage, competition, and conflict. The asuras are pictured as heavily armed (thus, psychically armored) warriors on horseback, roaring into battle with the sounds and gestures of threat and attack. Between their realm and the heaven realm is a large tree: while the blessed spirits are enjoying the delicious fruits of this tree, the angry spirits are attempting to steal the fruits, and some of them are cutting down the tree. Driven by greed, envy, and jealousy, people in this realm are constantly engaged in competition, aggression, and struggle, whether this be in the business world, the military, the criminal subculture, sports, international relations, or social, interpersonal, and even sexual and familial interactions. In the United States, which has been called a "culture of violence," this realm dominates the media and entertainment—almost as if the entire population is caught in a kind of collective trance of hatred and violence. Any of us are in this realm as a state of consciousness when we are in the mode of angry conflict and predatory competitive struggle.

Between 3 pm and 5 pm on the Wheel is the realm of animals. The existence of this realm does not mean that humans reincarnate as animals, as popular misconceptions of Hindu and Buddhist beliefs would have it. Rather, since animal consciousness is focussed on instinctual survival for self, offspring and herd, human beings exist in the animal realm when their consciousness is limited to survival programs for self and kin. It is not an inferior type of consciousness than the human, nor is it "less evolved."
In the Buddhist worldview, *homo sapiens* has no privileged ontological status in the animal kingdom. This is the state of consciousness we are in when we are focussed on survival activities, for example when carrying out the routines of work for the purpose of providing food and shelter for ourselves and family. There is a paucity of play, of creativity, of curiosity, and of spiritual transcendence. (This is not to say that real animals lack these qualities—it is a matter of relative preponderance.) When we humans are focussed on the “bare necessities” of “making a living” and “raising a family,” we are functioning like animals, since animals too carry out these activities. We are decidedly not acting “like an animal” when engaged in brutal and insensitive behavior—this is more characteristic of the *asura* realm.

Then there is a realm (between 7 and 9 pm), inhabited by beings called *pretas*. This is often translated as “hungry ghosts”; but I like to think of them as the “spirits of frustrated craving.” The image here is of beings who have huge bellies, symbolically showing their hunger and craving, yet narrow slit-like throats, which prevent them from ever satisfying their thirst or hunger. They are always needy, but forever unsatisfied. This is a pretty apt symbolic definition of what used to be called “neurosis”—a kind of obsessive absorption with one’s own needs and wants, along with an inability to find satisfaction or enjoyment. This is also the realm of drug addictions, of alcoholism, compulsive eating, eating disorders (bulimia, anorexia), in all of which it seems clear that physical thirst and starvation are metaphorically and psychically equated with emotional hunger and deprivation, and sometimes even with spiritual craving, the “thirst for wholeness” (Grof, 1993).

The sixth realm, between 9 and 11 pm, is the *human world*. Buddhism teaches that the human realm is the most favorable realm to be born in, because in the human realm we have all the possibilities of the other realms as well, and the best opportunities for realization and liberation. So in the iconographic imagery of the human realm, you have people meditating and experiencing blissful states, and you have people working, and suffering, and playing, and fighting. So there is a great range of possibilities in this realm; and the possibilities of transcendence and liberation are also very good. The Buddhists teach that you can transcend, you can get liberated from any of the realms, which is why a Buddha figure is shown in each world, teaching enlightenment to the spirits and humans in that realm. But from the human realm it is considered to be the easiest because there the possibilities for transcendence are greatest. William James was perhaps thinking of this when he wrote that “the (human) mind is at every stage a theater of simultaneous possibilities.”

THE TWELVE-FOLD CHAIN OF INTERDEPENDENT ORIGINATION

Turning now to a discussion of the twelve-fold chain, the *pratyata samutpada*, which is laid out along the outer rim of the Wheel of Birth and Death, I will briefly summarize the meaning of each phase. Each of the twelve phases or links has a name and in the paintings is illustrated by a symbolic image. This symbolic imagery is very interesting and often gives us a better sense of what the Buddhists meant than an English translation of psychological concepts and processes. Again, the sequence should not be thought of in a linear way as in “x leads to y.” Rather, they arise...
together, in "co-origination." The underlying operating principle is: "when this arises, that arises, when this falls away, that falls away."

Since the chain is a circular process, with no designated beginning or end, one can start at any link in the twelve-fold cycle. The one that seems to relate most directly and vividly to attachment behaviors is the one called vedana, usually translated as "feeling" or "judgment" or "reaction." The symbolic image is of man with an arrow stuck in his eye. This is an extraordinary image: he's looking with open eyes, and he's got an arrow in one eye. It represents what I would like to call "judgment fixation," a painfully fixed focus of attention on some desired sense object. According to Buddhist psychology every experience we have, and every sense-object we perceive, is always and immediately judged as "good," "bad," or "indifferent." This emotionally reactive judgment fixates our attention on this object, even when we experience it as painful. In addictions and compulsions, the normal capacity to focus attention on what we want, becomes the obsessive, exclusive fixation of attention on what we crave. Interestingly, this fixation phase of the twelve-fold cycle is situated right at the nadir of the Wheel of Samsara, in the center position of the hell world. This is suggestively symbolic of the role of attachment as well as judgment in bringing us into hellish states of consciousness.

Immediately prior to vedana-fixation in the twelve-fold chain is sparsa-"sense contact," the unmediated contact between sense organ and sense object. "When this arises, that arises." Sparsa is symbolized on the Wheel by a painting of two lovers embracing—a man and a woman kissing, and because of this pleasure element, I am calling it "attraction contact." This is a beautiful image, reminiscent of Zen Buddhist art, for the bare immediate contact of the senses with the perceived world. The sense organ involved in sensory and sensuous contact may be visual, auditory, touch, taste, smell, or intuition—the "sixth sense." In this cyclical, "co-dependently originating" cycle of phenomena, every event of sensory contact is always immediately accompanied or followed by, a judgment-fixation, which decides whether the experience is pleasant, painful, or neutral.

The step in the chain after the judgment-fixation is thirst (trishna) symbolized by a man being served a drink. The word trishna for this phase is usually translated as "craving" or "thirst" or "desire"; but it seems significant to me that the man is being given a drink. In other words, it's not just thirst or wanting or desire, but satisfied thirst or desire. As the Wheel of Births and Deaths keeps turning, there occur real satisfactions of real needs. This phase corresponds to what psychologists of the Behaviorist school call "reinforcement"; associative learning takes place when a given response is immediately followed by, "reinforced by," food or drink, or another valued sense-object. The man is not just wanting a drink—he's actually being offered a drink and taking it. So when there is fixation-attachment, and then this is reinforced by the satisfaction of hunger or thirst, then the processes of co-dependent origination keep moving along.

The next phase after that, which is correlated spatially on the Wheel with the world of hungry spirits, is called upadana, "clinging" or "grasping." The symbolic image is of
a man picking fruit from a tree. He's gathering nourishment. He's actively gathering and collecting the sense-objects that he wants to incorporate. Whereas trishna is the receiving phase of need satisfaction, upadana is the active phase of appetitive behavior and sensation seeking. This probably corresponds to the process referred to by Freud as cathexis, the "investment" of emotional energy in the pursuit of a desired object. The process described by William James as 'appropriation;' where the self appropriates to itself the sense objects it desires, also parallels this gathering-grasping phase.

So far, we have seen the following interconnected sequence of events: bare sense contact is followed by judgment-fixation, which is followed by satisfied thirst, which leads to further gathering and grasping. "When this arises, that arises." After grasping, the next step in the non-sequence is becoming, symbolized by the image of two lovers having sexual intercourse. Something new happens now: there is connection, repolarization, conception, and fertilization, a coming into being. After this phase, both literally and symbolically, there is the phase of birth: the image is of a woman giving birth. This phase is juxtaposed to the human realm, the realm of favorable births and opportunities. Although birth follows naturally enough on sexual intercourse, the birth referred to is not only the birth of a new body. Rather, it is the birthing of any new, alive process— an idea, a creative project, an organization, a relationship, a journey—which follows upon the conception of that process. And after birth, just as inevitably and naturally, there is always death, symbolically portrayed in the image of a corpse being carried to the funeral pyre. And, as Lama Govinda has written, "according to the teachings of the Abhidharma, 'birth and death' is a process which takes place in every moment of our life" (Govinda, 1960, p. 246).

From the perspective of a Western worldview, this circular nexus of interdependent events represents an astonishing bypass of the mind-body dualism which has so perplexed Western philosophers. The four phases—sense contact, "feeling-fixation," "satisfied craving," "gathering-seeking"—are psychic or subjective events. The three that follow thereafter—sexual intercourse, birth, and dying—are biological, though also psychic in a metaphorical sense. There is no implication in this model that consciousness events cause material events, or vice-versa; neither level is a primary determinant; one does not "cause" the other. They are mutually interdependent phenomena, co-arising and falling away together. The fact that the cycles are repeated again and again also means that these interdependent links are not limited to one lifetime, but carry across numerous reincarnations.

Then, at the zenith of the Wheel of Samsara, at the start of the chain of interactive, interdependent processes, next to the realm of the divine, blessed spirits, we have avidya, "ignorance," "blindness," or "unconsciousness," symbolized by the image of a blind woman walking with a staff. Unconsciousness, or ignorance of our true nature, is, according to the Buddhists, the foundational condition of our existence in any of the six worlds of conditioned existence. Lama Govinda (1960, p. 245) writes, "avidya, the not-knowing or nonrecognition of reality, ... is not a metaphysical cause of existence or a cosmogenic principle, ... but a condition that is responsible for our present state of consciousness." We live in ignorance of our own nature, our attention captured by illusory phenomena, craving the satisfaction of desires which
lead inevitably to repeated births and deaths. Only through meditation can we hope to attain true knowledge of reality, and liberation from the continuous round of rebirths.

The very next image in the sequence is that of a potter making a clay-pot. This is called *samskara-*"karmic patterns," which are created by our blind, unconscious actions. Karmic thought-patterns and reaction-patterns are formed and thereby given reality, the way a potter shapes his pot through the actions of his hands. From a condition of blindness and unconsciousness, we create our karmic destiny through the patterned activities of mind (thought) and body (action). A Tibetan Buddhist saying goes, "If you want to know your past, look to your present conditions; if you want to know your future, look to your present actions" (Sogyal Rinpoche, 1994). Our unconscious actions in the past (*avidya; samskara*), both biographical and reincarnational, are determining our present state of consciousness.

The step after *samskara* is called *vijnana*, which can be translated "thinking;" or "conceptualizing;" or "comprehension." (The usual translation is "consciousness," but this seems far too general—we are dealing here with twelve different phases of consciousness). The symbolic image—a monkey reaching out for branches to hang on to—gives a clear indication that this is what Buddhist teachers call the "monkey-mind": the conceptual mind constantly reaching and grasping for concepts and connections. One of the meanings of "grasp" is in fact "to understand;" and "comprehend" has the same associative analogy to manual seizing or clutching. When we make or "get" a certain interpretation of reality, we might say "I've got it;" or "I can grasp it," or "I have the hang of it." We humans are primates with overactive minds. We create karmic patterns through our actions and our thoughts, and we're constantly looking to make or grasp new interpretations of reality. It is interesting too that comprehension or cognition (*vijnana*) comes immediately after the making of karmic patterns through action; this shows the close connection between thinking and making. We construct our world of reality through the interpretations, the models, we construct in our minds.

The next step after monkey-mind thinking is *nama-rupa*, literally "names and forms," their indissoluble connection symbolized by the image of two men in a boat, moving up and down together. Some commentators interpret *nama-rupas* referring to the mind-body dualism and connection. However, in my opinion, it makes more sense to see this as referring to the two types of thinking. Our thinking is always dual: there are always images that go with the words, and labels that go with the pictures. Recent Western neuropsychology has emphasized the twofold nature of brain function, with the left brain hemisphere involved with language and sequence, and the right hemisphere with perception of images, patterns, and shapes. The monkey-mind is constantly generating both verbal interpretations and pictorial representations, closely associated with each other.

The following phase, usually called "perception," is symbolized by a house with six windows. These are the six sensory-perceptual systems, through which we obtain information about the external world, as a person residing in a house obtains information from outside through the windows. Twofold thinking is followed by sixfold
perception. The eyes have often been called the "windows of the soul." While the West recognizes the usual five, Buddhism (and the Hindu Vedanta psychology) recognizes six sensory systems, the "sixth sense" being what some call "inner vision," or "second sight," or "imagination," or "sentience," or "intuition." The psychophysical structure of six sense-organs means that there are six channels for the perception of information coming through, six channels in which sense contact can take place.

Sense contact, sparsa, the lovers kissing, is in fact the next phase of the cycle, which leads in turn to fixation, craving, seeking, and becoming. The model is telling us that the normal, natural relationships of psychophysical interdependence are such that the inherent structure of the perceptual systems leads directly to the processes of attachment, which in turn leads to new becoming, new births and deaths. Our sense organs themselves function the way they do because the mind functions the way it does, constantly co-generating interpretations and representations. Our blind, unconscious actions create karmic patterns, our minds make interpretations of reality and our senses give us input about reality, which leads to craving, attachment and continued conditioned existence. That is the Buddhist view of how our worlds of reality are constantly re-created and maintained.

Elsewhere, I have shown how this Buddhist model of interdependent factors of consciousness can be used to help understand the phenomena of addiction and compulsion, and compared it with a Western psychological model which sees these as manifestations of contracted, fixated states of consciousness (Metzner, 1994, 1996). We can see how, in an addictive process, the individual does not cycle through the whole process, moving through desire and craving to birth and becoming. Rather, the addict gets fixated and keeps repeating the behavior that satisfies the craving, looping back around the cycle again and again, instead of going on to the next event, which might bring new and different sources of satisfaction.

I conclude with a comment on this Buddhist model by Joanna Macy (1991, p. 18):

In this doctrine, reality appears as a dynamically interdependent process. All factors, mental and physical, subsist in a web of mutual causal interaction, with no element or essence held to be immutable or autonomous. Understanding this is important because, it is held, our suffering is caused by the interplay of these factors and particularly by the delusion, craving and aversion that arise from our misapprehension of them. We fabricate our bondage by hypostatizing and clinging to what is by nature contingent and transient. The reifications we construct falsify experience, imprison us in egos of our own making, doom our lives to endless rounds of acquisition and anxiety. Being so caused, our suffering is not endemic; it is not inevitable. It can cease, the causal play reversed. . . . Our hope hinges on no external agency, but derives rather from the causal order itself, where self and act, project and perception are mutually determining. Hence liberation entails a vision of the dependently co-arising nature of all phenomena.

NOTE

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REFERENCES


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