

The Four Noble Truths and Psychological Insights in The Pāli Nikāya

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Abstract— The Four Noble Truths (Cattāri Ariya-saccāni) are at the heart of Buddhist teachings and a profound model for understanding the psychological structure of suffering and the path to its transformation. In the Nikāyas of the Pāli Canon, the Buddha presents a distinctly therapeutic system: identifying the problem, analyzing its causes, assessing possible solutions, and presenting a method of intervention. This essay analyzes the Four Noble Truths in the light of modern psychology, integrating references from suttas such as SN 56.11, DN 22, MN 38, and many other suttas related to the nature of perception, behavior, emotion, and ego formation. In doing so, the essay shows that Buddhist teachings are not only religious but also a classical yet timeless psychological science.

The doctrine of the Four Noble Truths constitutes the central foundation of Buddhist philosophy and practice, as preserved in the Pāli Nikāya. This study explores the psychological dimensions embedded within the Four Noble Truths and examines how early Buddhist teachings present a profound analysis of human suffering and mental processes. The First Noble Truth identifies dukkha (suffering or unsatisfactoriness) as an inherent aspect of conditioned existence, reflecting a realistic observation of human emotional and psychological experiences. The Second Noble Truth explains the origin of suffering as taṇhā (craving), highlighting the role of attachment, desire, and ignorance in shaping mental distress. The Third Noble Truth proposes the cessation of suffering (nirodha), suggesting that liberation is attainable through the transformation of mental states. Finally, the Fourth Noble Truth outlines the Noble Eightfold Path as a practical framework for ethical conduct, mental cultivation, and wisdom.

From a psychological perspective, these teachings provide insights into cognition, emotional regulation, and behavioral transformation. The Pāli Nikāya presents suffering not merely as a metaphysical concept but as a psychological condition rooted in perception, attachment, and habitual patterns of thought. By analyzing these teachings, this paper demonstrates that

early Buddhist doctrine anticipates several principles found in modern psychology, including mindfulness, cognitive awareness, and the transformation of maladaptive mental patterns. Consequently, the Four Noble Truths can be understood as both a spiritual doctrine and a sophisticated framework for understanding the human mind and the alleviation of psychological suffering.

Index Terms— our Noble Truths (Cattāri Ariya-Saccāni), Pāli Nikāya, Buddhist Psychology, Dukkha (Suffering), Mindfulness (Sati), Mental Suffering and Well-being, Cognitive Transformation, Ethical Conduct (Sīla), Mental Cultivation (Bhāvanā), Wisdom (Paññā), Buddhist Ethical Psychology

I. INTRODUCTION

As presented in the Pāli Nikāya, Buddhist psychology is a comprehensive system for understanding the mind, suffering, and path to liberation. It is rooted in the Buddha's core teachings, especially the Four Noble Truths, and offers a nuanced analysis of mental processes, pain, and ethical transformation.

The Pāli Nikāya is a collection of the Buddha's original discourses, clearly reflecting his thoughts and methods of practice to liberate himself from suffering. In it, Buddhist psychology is presented through analyzing mental states, suffering causes, and transforming consciousness methods. Buddhist psychology in the Nikāya emphasizes the impermanence of mental states and the functioning of the mind through factors such as greed, hatred, delusion, ignorance, and ego-clinging.

In Buddhist thought, the Four Noble Truths are the basic teachings centered on humans and practiced for humans. The Buddha recognized the good nature in all sentient beings, which is Buddha nature. If they know how to practice the right Dharma, they can all become

Buddhas. The Buddha preached his teachings out of great compassion for sentient beings and wanted to benefit them. This is the teaching that the Buddha preached in the early period, so it is also called the original teachings. The Four Noble Truths form a fundamental foundation of Buddhist psychology in the Pāli Nikāya, offering a diagnosis of human suffering and a practical path to achieving psychological happiness.

II. DIAGNOSIS OF MENTAL SUFFERING AND ITS CAUSES.

The Buddha's Four Noble Truths are often described as a "diagnosis and cure" for the human condition, particularly mental suffering. This framework is likened to a physician's approach: identifying symptoms, diagnosing the cause, offering the possibility of a cure, and prescribing a path to healing. Diagnosing Mental Suffering in The Four Noble Truths.

Diagnosing Mental Suffering (Dukkha) in the Four Noble Truths.

Life inevitably involves suffering, stress, or dissatisfaction (dukkha). This includes obvious forms like pain, illness, grief, and trauma, as well as subtler forms such as frustration, disappointment, anxiety, depression, and a pervasive sense of something missing or unfulfilled in life.^[1] Indeed, suffering is always associated with physical, mental, and emotional pain, from everyday stress to deeper existential insecurities.

This is the first noble truth, recognizing the truth of suffering. Suffering is not only physical pain but also psychological discomfort and pressure such as dissatisfaction, loss, sadness, anxiety, and dissatisfaction in life. For example, birth, aging, sickness, death, or separation, and not achieving desires are all manifestations of suffering.

Human beings need to realize that they are groping their way through the sea of suffering. Human beings must realize that the true cause of their unhappiness is always present within themselves.^[2] At the Deer Park,

the Buddha presented the truth of suffering to his listeners:

"Bhikkhus, this is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering, and being with something that makes you unhappy is suffering. Being away from something that makes you happy is suffering; not getting what you want is suffering; In short, the five aggregates that people cling to are suffering."^[3]

The desire to be free from suffering will not arise unless one realizes that one is suffering. The deeper and clearer the understanding of suffering, the stronger the desire for liberation. The law of "birth, aging, sickness, and death" is the four inevitable causes of suffering associated with the human condition. Ordinary people are born and will experience sickness, aging, and finally death. Only when people escape the cycle of birth will the other three disappear. Birth causes suffering, which means that from the time of being in the mother's womb to the time of birth and during childhood, one suffers and makes one's parents suffer. Or when we are old, our eyes are dim, our ears are deaf, we cannot do anything, and we have to rely on others, which causes suffering. Illness and disease also cause us to suffer and also cause those who help us to suffer. Finally, when we die, we may die in pain, die from illness, or die an "untimely death" and leave behind sorrow for our loved ones, which also causes suffering.

Suffering also originates from the cause of meeting and gathering with people you don't like or having to fall into situations you don't like and using things you don't want. Those negative things are things that no one wants. Therefore, they make people unhappy, confused, and uncomfortable and increase hatred. From there, the person will fall into boredom or annoyance; that is suffering. On the contrary, having to be away from family, away from loved ones, and away from things you like all lead to suffering. At this time, suffering is not physical pain but mental suffering. That person's spirit will feel absence, emptiness, and loneliness. That makes the soul sad and miserable.

¹ Dr. Rick Hanson, Ph.D.: "The First Noble Truth—The Noble Truth of Suffering." Nov 26th, 2014.

² His Holiness the Dalai Lama: " The Four Noble Truths "

³ SN 56.11. Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma)—translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi.

This suffering includes the gross forms of pain, illness, and trauma that we can all imagine, such as a broken leg, a stomachache, dealing with the devastation of a hurricane, the violent death of a loved one, or being diagnosed with a terminal illness. It also includes milder but more common forms of discomfort and pain, such as working long hours, feeling let down by a partner, headaches, frustration, disappointment, hurt, inadequacy, boredom, sadness, etc. And suffering includes the subtlest qualities of tension in the mind, restlessness, constriction, preoccupation, discomfort, boredom, dullness, boredom, a feeling of being an isolated self, of lacking something in life, something unsatisfactory, etc.

The Five Aggregates is the second sermon that the Buddha preached after the Four Noble Truths. In this sermon, the Buddha talked about humans. Humans are made up of two parts: the physical part and the mental part. The Buddha divided these two parts into five groups, which he called the Five Aggregates. These groups are the aggregate of form, the aggregate of feeling, the aggregate of perception, the aggregate of mental formations, and the aggregate of consciousness.

The five aggregates are five elements that depend on each other to form a human being, including the physical body and psychological structures such as sensation, thought, action, and consciousness (form, feeling, perception, action, and consciousness). Generally speaking, when we cling to the above five elements, considering them as me, mine, or myself, then suffering is present. The notion of "my body," "my feelings," "my thoughts," "my mind," "my perception". forms a greedy, selfish ego; from there, all suffering arises. All suffering, anxiety, fear, disappointment, and madness are associated with that notion of "I."

In addition, suffering comes from what people want and desire but cannot achieve, leading to suffering.^[4] What people achieve only brings temporary joy. For

example, delicious food, beautiful clothes, or honor and status only bring limited satisfaction and then make people continue to fall into suffering. Yochai Ataria also said about this as follows: "This body is not the self, nor is it something that belongs to the self. The self is not in the body, nor is the body in the self."^[5] However, people cling to these factors and assume that they have the nature of self, from which suffering arises. Therefore, we must realize their emptiness in nature.

Thus, suffering originates from causes within the transient human condition. The law of "birth, aging, sickness, and death" spares no one. Living in this society, people cannot avoid feelings of love, hate, or the needs of life to satisfy the desires of the five aggregates of the body, all of which lead people to suffering. So what is the deep root that causes suffering?

The Cause of Mental Suffering in the Four Noble Truths.

After stating the causes of suffering, the Buddha explained and presented the profound origin of suffering as originating from desire; all suffering arises from greed:

"Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination."^[6]

The root of suffering is identified as craving (tanha), clinging, or attachment and is considered the root of suffering. This refers to the tendency to cling to pleasant, pleasurable experiences, to resist unpleasant experiences, and to become fixated on identifying things as other than what they are. Craving leads to emotional constriction and mental anguish, such as dissatisfaction, regret, anxiety, jealousy, and other unhealthy mental states. The Buddha teaches that

⁴ Form (rupa): includes the four elements of earth, water, fire, and air. Feeling (vedana): feeling, perception, emotion. Perception (sanjina): all concepts that make up knowledge and self-consciousness. Volition (samskara): tendency, inclination. Consciousness (vijñana): consciousness, judgment, knowledge.

⁵ Yochai Ataria : "Body Without a Self, Self Without Body." Weizmann Institute of Science.

⁶ SN 56.11. Dhammacakkappavattanasutta - Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi.

suffering is not caused by painful experiences themselves but by our mental reactions—our craving and aversion in response to those experiences. So the second truth points out that the cause of suffering is craving (greed, attachment, desire). That is attachment, clinging to impermanent things, craving, and clinging to material things, emotions, or relationships that make people suffer when they cannot get what they want or have to be separated from the things they love.

It can be affirmed that the origin of all suffering is the combination of “craving” or desire, which is greed, anger, and ignorance. It is desire that creates reincarnation and rebirth; it is bound with the desire of ignorance and seeks pleasure here and there. “Desire” is emphasized by the Buddha into three types: desire for sensual pleasures; desire to live, to exist, to become; and desire for non-existence because of the view that there is no more existence after death.

First, the desire for sensual pleasures or sensuality is aimed at the objects of the senses. Each person possesses the “six senses” that aim at the objects: eye-consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, and mind consciousness. However, ignorance makes people not understand things as they are. Therefore, they consider bad things as good and then like them. When liking arises, desire begins, thus giving birth to desire. From there, it leads us to think and act to achieve and satisfy desire. Satisfying the senses is clinging to the five aggregates, giving birth to suffering.

Second, the desire for existence. Permanence is the deepest desire of human beings. This desire originates from the idea of permanence or eternal existence. When living in samsara or passing from one life to another, the body changes, but the soul does not change. Therefore, the ego always has a sense of existence. Thus, this desire seeks to be born in a happy place, to enjoy the blessings of the previous life, and to be born as a man or a woman in the next life. These things are related to the five aggregates, which cause suffering.

Third, the opposite of the above desire is because it does not exist. Some people believe that the soul and life exist only in this life while living, and nothing remains after death. With this view, people do not need to make an effort to live well with other people or things and do not need to abstain from thoughts and actions; that is, they can do evil without fear of

retribution. Therefore, people try to pursue objects that satisfy the senses and satisfy the flesh by all means. This satisfaction is also related to the five aggregates, giving rise to suffering.

The more profound and more fundamental cause is ignorance, which is the ignorance of not seeing the nature of phenomena that all depend on each other to arise, are impermanent and changing, and have no independent subject or stability within them. Because of not seeing clearly, greed arises, holding onto objects of pleasure. Because of not seeing clearly, one mistakenly believes that the "I" is the most important, the real thing that needs to be clung to, strengthened, and its needs satisfied. In other words, because of ignorance, there is an attachment to "I" and "mine," such as my body, my feelings, my thoughts, my lover, my property, my career, etc. Because of these attachments, there are the sufferings of life.

In short, we can clearly see that suffering or not depends on our mind; if our mind is full of greed, attachment, and wrong perception, suffering is certain. In other words, it depends on each person's perspective on life whether there is suffering or not. If we are not stirred, controlled, and dominated by ego and selfish desires or afflictions, then life is full of peace and happiness.

III. PATHWAYS TO MENTAL HEALING AND LIBERATION.

The path to spiritual healing and liberation in the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism is expressed through the third and fourth truths, namely Nirodha and Magga. This is the way of practice that ends suffering and brings about full freedom.

The Path to Cessation and Liberation in the Third Noble Truth (Nirodha).

The Third Noble Truth, known as Nirodha, teaches that the cessation of suffering is possible. This cessation is achieved by extinguishing the root cause of suffering craving (tanha) thus breaking the cycle of dissatisfaction and rebirth. The Buddha described this state of cessation as Nibbana (Nirvana), a profound liberation and peace that arises when craving, attachment, and ignorance are entirely abandoned.

How Cessation (Nirodha) Is Achieved:

Eliminating Craving: The core instruction is to let go of craving, which is the source of suffering. When

craving ceases, suffering also ceases. Eliminating craving in the Noble Truths is essential to ending suffering because craving (lust, desire, attachment) is the cause of suffering, according to the Four Noble Truths. The Noble Truths, especially the Noble Eightfold Path, provide the path of practice to eliminate craving, thereby reaching Nirvana, the state of complete liberation.

Method to eliminate greed in the Third Noble Truth:
Understand the nature of greed: greed is the desired attachment to form, sound, smell, taste, and touch - the five senses of the world, the origin of birth, death, reincarnation, and suffering.

Contemplate the body and mind: Practice contemplating impurity, seeing the body as consisting of impure parts such as hair, skin, blood, feces, pus. to reduce love and attachment to the body.

Protect the senses and guard against the three karmas: Keep the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind from being attracted by external things; do not grasp the general and specific characteristics of dharmas; and avoid letting the mind be controlled by greed.

Practice mindfulness and concentration: Focus the mind and maintain awareness to recognize and not get attached to feelings of desire when they arise.

Practice according to the Three Dharma Seals: contemplate impermanence, suffering, and non-self to understand reality, thereby reducing and eliminating desire.

The Noble Eightfold Path: This is a comprehensive path of practice that includes wisdom, morality, and concentration, helping to eliminate desire and afflictions.

The result of eliminating greed:

When craving is eliminated, suffering ends completely, leading to liberation and Nirvana.

A practitioner who eliminates craving will no longer be bound by sensual pleasures and afflictions, living in peace and freedom even during many difficulties in life.

Eliminating craving is complete renunciation, leaving no trace of craving, not clinging to any dharma

In short, eliminating craving in the Noble Truth of the Path is the process of practicing mindfulness, deeply contemplating the body and mind and impermanent reality, maintaining precepts, and developing concentration through the Noble Eightfold Path in

order to completely cut off craving, thereby ending suffering and achieving ultimate liberation.

Renunciation and Letting Go: This involves the “remainderless fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go” of craving and attachment. "Renunciation" is the decisive action of Prince Siddhartha when he left all the most precious things in worldly life, such as the throne, wife and children, happiness, and fame, to seek the truth and liberation from suffering. This is a great sacrifice, not because of difficult circumstances but because of a deep awareness of the impermanence of worldly happiness.

Renunciation is also the letting go of the phenomenal causes of suffering and afflictions, such as greed, hatred, and ignorance, as taught by the Buddha in the "Samudaya" section of the Four Noble Truths. The abandonment of these causes is a prerequisite for ending suffering and attaining Nirvana.

Letting go does not mean denying happiness but is liberating from attachment, greed, and attachment to worldly dharmas, helping the mind to be at peace, no longer bound by afflictions.

Letting go is not being attached to material things, fame, emotions, or external objects. This is one of the essential virtues of Buddhism, helping practitioners achieve inner peace and liberation.

Letting go includes a deep awareness of the impermanence of all things and phenomena, thereby not clinging to things that cannot be held forever, helping to reduce suffering and anxiety.

Letting go is also the relinquishing of discriminatory notions and attachments to self, person, sentient beings, and life span, helping to transcend duality and attain profound liberating wisdom.

Renunciation is the concrete action, the decision to leave what binds to reach liberation, while letting go is the psychological state, the continuous practice of not being attached to those things. Both aim to end suffering, escape the cycle of birth and death, and reach Nirvana, which is the core of the truth of the path in Buddhism. In the reality of the path, renunciation is the decision to leave the causes of suffering and worldly attachments, while letting go is the practice of a mind that is non-attached and non-clinging, helping to reach peace and final liberation.

Direct Realization: The cessation of suffering is not just a theoretical state but an experiential realization.

Through meditation and mindfulness, individuals can experience relief, happiness, and peace as they let go of attachments.

Realization of the Noble Truth of Cessation
Realization of the Noble Truth of Cessation, or Nibbana, occurs through the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. Nibbana is the complete cessation of suffering, the absence of greed, hatred, and delusion, and the ultimate awakening of the mind.

The Noble Truth of the Path is the path leading to Nibbana, which extinguishes all suffering and frees one from the cycle of rebirth. Practicing the Noble Truth of the Path helps transform ignorance into enlightenment.

Enlightenment Enlightenment is the direct experience of the Four Noble Truths. To attain enlightenment, one must practice reading, thinking, and meditating.

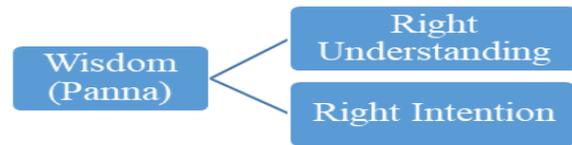
Direct Teaching A practitioner can attain enlightenment through direct teaching from a knowledgeable friend or by reading the teachings and realizing their meaning, which helps his mind open up.

Pathways to Mental Healing in the The fourth truth is the path (Pāli: magga) leading to the cessation of suffering.

The Fourth Noble Truth, known as Magga in Pāli, is central to Buddhist teachings on mental healing and liberation from suffering. It is described as the path leading to the cessation of suffering, offering a practical guide for transforming mental distress and achieving lasting peace.

The Buddha described the Noble Eightfold Path as a practical method for overcoming suffering. This path is not a linear sequence but a set of interrelated practices to be cultivated together.

These eight elements are often grouped into three categories (the Threefold Way):



How Does Magga Lead to Mental Healing?

Transforming Craving and Ignorance: The path is designed to uproot the causes of suffering (tanha) and ignorance (avijja)-by cultivating insight, ethical conduct, and mental discipline.

Balanced Living: It advocates a balanced approach to life, neither indulging in sensory pleasures nor engaging in harsh self-denial.

Practical Tools: Each aspect of the Eightfold Path offers valuable tools for mental healing, such as mindfulness meditation, ethical living, and developing wisdom.

Ultimate Goal: By following this path, Buddhists believe one can achieve Nibbana (nirvana)-the complete cessation of suffering and the realization of true peace and liberation

Mahayana Pathways: The Five Paths and Bodhisattva Ideal.

The Bodhisattva path is a typical path of Mahayana, where practitioners seek enlightenment for themselves and vow to save all sentient beings, not entering Nirvana immediately but continuing to stay in the world to help others. Bodhisattva is the ideal image of a Mahayana practitioner, representing a spirit of active engagement and boundless compassion.

In the Mahayana tradition, the Bodhisattva path can be understood through various practices and stages. Some texts emphasize practices such as the Six Paramitas (generosity, morality, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom), the Fourfold Path (winning, giving, beneficence, and working together), and other Mahayana-specific practices.

In addition, in some traditions, the Bodhisattva path is also described through stages of enlightenment practice, such as cultivating the six uncontaminated senses (seeing form without being deluded by form, hearing sound without being defiled by sound, etc.) to transform the mind and progress to Bodhisattva hood. The Five Paths are a central framework within Mahayana Buddhism, describing the progressive stages a practitioner, especially a bodhisattva,

undertakes on the journey toward complete enlightenment. These stages not only map spiritual development but also embody the core ideals of the

bodhisattva, whose motivation is to attain awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings.^[7]

The Five Paths Explained.

Path Name	Sanskrit	Key Features and Milestones
Path of Accumulation.	sambhāramārga	It begins with taking the bodhisattva vow, cultivating Bodhicitta (altruistic intention), and accumulating merit and wisdom. The practitioner aspires toward enlightenment for all beings and starts to practice the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment
Path of Preparation	prayogamārga	It is also called the path of joining or application. Here, the practitioner deepens meditative insight, especially into emptiness, and develops an analytical understanding of reality.
Path of Seeing	darśanamārga	Marks a direct realization of emptiness (ultimate reality), corresponding to a bodhisattva's first bhūmi (ground). The practitioner becomes an arya (noble being) and sees the truth directly.
Path of Meditation	bhāvanāmārga	The bodhisattva familiarizes and stabilizes the realization gained on seeing, purifying remaining obscurations through meditation. This path encompasses the second to tenth bhūmis.
Path of No More Learning	aśaikṣamārga	The culmination of the journey: complete enlightenment (buddhahood). All obscurations are removed, and the practitioner attains omniscience and perfect compassion, corresponding to the eleventh bhūmi.

Correspondence with the Bodhisattva Bhūmis.

The Five Paths are closely linked to the ten (sometimes eleven) bodhisattva bhūmis (grounds), further delineating the stages of spiritual attainment.

The first two paths (Accumulation and Preparation) lead to the first bhūmi.

The Path of Seeing is the entry to the first bhūmi.

The Path of Meditation encompasses the second through tenth bhūmis.

The Path of No More Learning is associated with the final, eleventh bhūmi, representing complete Buddhahood

The Bodhisattva ideal and generating Bodhicitta.

The Bodhisattva ideal is to develop Bodhicitta, that is, to make the aspiration to attain complete enlightenment not only for oneself but also for the boundless benefit of all sentient beings. Bodhicitta is the mind of true enlightenment, pure and clear, free from afflictions, and is emitted with infinite compassion, embracing all sentient beings like the void.

Bodhisattvas take compassion as their primary goal, constantly striving to practice to save sentient beings, demonstrating the spirit of entering the world and perseverance on the path to enlightenment.

The Bodhisattva is the main person and idea in Mahayana Buddhism. Unlike the arhat ideal in early Buddhism, which emphasizes individual liberation, the Bodhisattva aspires to attain enlightenment not only for himself but also for the liberation of all sentient beings. This stems from cultivating two main qualities:

Compassion (karuṇā): The desire and commitment to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings. Compassion (karuṇā) in Bodhicitta is an essential spiritual quality in Buddhism, especially in the Mahāyāna tradition. Karuṇā, or loving-kindness, is an achievement in the spiritual development of deep compassion for the suffering of all sentient beings, a wish to help them escape suffering and the cycle of birth and death.

Compassion in Bodhicitta:

Bodhicitta is the aspiration to attain enlightenment not only for one's benefit but also for the liberation of all sentient beings. It arises from compassion and wisdom and is the mind that aims to save all sentient beings from suffering and samsara.

The compassion in bodhicitta is a feeling of pity and a commitment to take concrete action to save sentient

⁷ Buddhist paths to liberation. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist_paths_to_liberation.

beings, as Bodhisattvas have practiced over many lifetimes.

In the Mahayana sutras, bodhicitta is divided into aspirational bodhicitta (vowing to save) and action bodhicitta (practicing to save with boundless compassion).

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is one of the Four Immeasurables (loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity), which represents a noble compassion that embraces all suffering sentient beings and is the foundation for developing bodhicitta.

Characteristics of Compassion in Bodhicitta:

Compassion is the feeling of being moved by the suffering of others, the desire to help them escape from suffering and no longer suffer the consequences of bad karma.

It counteracts the evil mind of harming others and violence and reduces negative emotions such as anger, jealousy, and greed, helping the mind become pure and clear.

Compassion in Bodhicitta combines love, wisdom, and practical action, such as meditation, contemplation, and giving, to develop and maintain the Bodhicitta.

Wisdom (*prajñā*): Realizing the emptiness and true nature of phenomena. Wisdom (*prajñā*) within Bodhicitta is essential and inseparable in attaining ultimate enlightenment in Mahayana Buddhism. Bodhicitta is likened to the "father" and wisdom to the "mother"; the union of these two factors produces the "child," which is perfect enlightenment, Buddhahood.

The Role of Wisdom in Bodhicitta:

Bodhicitta is the awakened mind that arises from love and compassion and is an essential seed for attaining Buddhahood. However, if there is only Bodhicitta without wisdom, meditation on emptiness can lead to lower nirvana instead of complete enlightenment.

The wisdom in Bodhicitta is a profound understanding of the nature of reality, especially emptiness and the workings of all phenomena. This is supramundane wisdom, different from worldly knowledge, which helps to cut off afflictions and karma, leading to liberation.

Wisdom is seen as a tool for realizing the truth and practicing Bodhicitta effectively, helping practitioners generate the mind and maintain and develop the awakened mind to the point of perfection.

The Nature and Levels of Wisdom in Buddhism Related to Bodhicitta:

Wisdom in Buddhism is not ordinary intelligence but a direct, clear understanding of the Four Noble Truths and the nature of reality beyond dualistic thinking.

There are many levels of wisdom, from fundamental wisdom (right view) to omnipotent wisdom (wisdom that can realize everything), and the highest is Dharmadhatu wisdom, which represents the transcendent wisdom corresponding to the Dharmakaya of the Buddha.

The process of cultivating Bodhicitta includes generating the mind, subduing the mind, clarifying the mind, reaching and attaining the unsurpassed Bodhi, in which wisdom is developed and perfected through each stage to lead the Bodhicitta to ultimate enlightenment

The wisdom (*prajñā*) in bodhicitta is the profound and direct understanding of the nature of reality, especially emptiness, which makes bodhicitta an aspiration for enlightenment and a practical path to Buddhahood. The union of bodhicitta and wisdom is the prerequisite for attaining full enlightenment in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition.

IV. DEPENDENT ORIGINATION AND COGNITIVE PROCESSES.

Dependent Origination (Pāli: *paṭiccasamuppāda*) is a central Buddhist doctrine describing how phenomena arise in dependence upon other phenomena, forming an interconnected web of causality. This principle is foundational for understanding the nature of existence and suffering and offers a profound model for analyzing cognitive and psychological processes. This principle asserts that all things and phenomena arise and cease based on the interdependence of causes and conditions; nothing exists independently or naturally. The famous verse describing dependent origination is "This exists because that exists, this does not exist because that does not exist, this arises because that arises, this ceases because that ceases." []

Dependent origination is not created by the Buddha or anyone else but is the natural, objective truth of the universe and human life. The Buddha was simply the first person to realize and teach this truth. Dependent origination is also the foundation of impermanence and selflessness in Buddhism, helping to destroy the notion of a fixed and permanent self.

In the process of samsara, dependent origination is manifested through 12 links, from ignorance leading to action, consciousness, name-and-form, six sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, existence, birth, and aging and death, forming a continuous cycle of birth and death. If one link in this chain is broken, the cycle of birth and death is broken, leading to liberation.

Canonical References

In the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, the Buddha states, "Birth is painful, aging is painful, illness is painful, death is painful."

The Upajjhatthana Sutta urges frequent reflection: "I must endure old age, but I have not overcome old age... I must endure death, but I have not overcome death...". The Pabbatopama Sutta uses the imagery of mountains crushing all beings to illustrate the inevitability and universality of aging and Death.

Interpretation

In both Theravada and Mahayana traditions, jarāmaraṇa symbolizes the inevitable decay and cessation of the five aggregates (body and mind), generating dissatisfaction and suffering.^[8]

Only those who achieve enlightenment (bodhi) escape this cycle of birth, aging, and death (saṃsāra)

Aspect	Description
Meaning	Aging and death: final link in dependent origination
Buddhist Context	Central to suffering (dukkha), impermanence, and the cycle of rebirth
Canonical Sources	Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Upajjhatthana Sutta, Pabbatopama Sutta
Escape	Only through enlightenment is one freed from aging and death

Aging and death in Buddhism serve as profound reminders of impermanence and motivate the pursuit of liberation from suffering.

⁸ Significance of Jaramarana old-age-and-death. <https://www.wisdomlib.org/concept/jaramarana-old-age-and-death>

⁹ Dependent Cognitive Model (DCM): A Buddhist Exposition of Cognitive Process and its Application by

Dependent Cognitive Model (DCM).

The dependent cognition model in the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination is a chain of twelve closely linked factors, explaining how people and phenomena arise based on each other, without independent self-nature, thereby leading to the cycle of birth, death, and suffering. Each link is the condition for the following link to arise, forming a continuous circle of birth and death and showing the path to liberation when one link is broken.

Inspired by Buddhist philosophy, the Dependent Cognitive Model (DCM) explicitly applies the principle of Dependent Origination to cognitive science and therapy. According to DCM:

Sensory experiences initiate a sequence: sense-contact → feeling → identification → thinking → conceptual proliferation.

This sequence shapes emotional responses and behavioral patterns.

Individuals can regulate emotions and transform maladaptive cognitive habits by understanding and intervening in this process, primarily through mindfulness and insight.^[9]

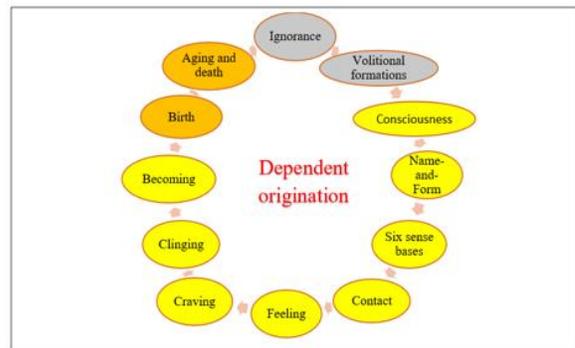


Figure 1 Diagram of the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination

The Meaning of the Dependent Cognition Model in the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination.

Each causal condition depends on the previous causal condition to arise; no causal condition exists

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independently, demonstrating dependent origination (dependent origination).

The Twelve Links causal conditions describe the process of rising suffering and samsara. It shows the path to liberation when one link (especially ignorance, craving, and clinging) is destroyed, disintegrating the entire cycle of samsara.

This model is not only temporal (from ignorance to old age and death) but also simultaneous, demonstrating the close connection and simultaneous operation between factors in perception and phenomena.

The theory of 12 links of dependent origination also clarifies the Buddhist view of no-self, denying the existence of a permanent, independent "I," but only the continuity of dependently arisen phenomena.

In Buddhist traditions, the 12 links of dependent origination explain the cause of suffering and the path to liberation from suffering, especially emphasizing correct perception and the elimination of ignorance, craving, and clinging to attain liberation.

In short, the dependent cognition model in the 12 links of dependent origination is a profound philosophical system of Buddhism, explaining how psychological and physical factors are linked to create existence and suffering and showing the path to liberation through understanding and eliminating the links in this chain of dependent origination.

Psychological and Therapeutic Implications.

The twelve links of dependent origination have profound psychological and therapeutic implications, as they reveal the causal chain that leads to suffering and the sense of self. Understanding this chain offers a framework for insight into the nature of mind, suffering, and liberation.

The twelve links serve as a framework for psychological analysis, mapping out how unconscious processes, perception, and volition contribute to personality and motivation. ^[10]

Recognizing the interdependence of mental states allows for targeted interventions in therapy, fostering mindfulness and adaptive functioning.

The model emphasizes no permanent, independent self; the "self" is a process arising from interrelated causes and conditions. ^[11]

Psychological Implications.

Understanding the causes of suffering: The 12 links of dependent origination describe a continuous chain of causes and conditions that give rise to suffering in human life, starting from ignorance (not understanding correctly the impermanent, suffering, and non-self-nature of life) leading to action (karmic actions), which then continue to give rise to different mental and physical states such as consciousness, name and form, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, existence, birth, aging, and death. Through this, people realize that suffering is not random but continuously arising from causes and conditions, from which they can observe and clearly understand their mental and emotional states.

Inner Cause and Effect: The twelve links describe how present thoughts and actions (karma) condition future experience, emphasizing the psychological process by which suffering arises from ignorance and mental habits rather than external factors alone. ^[12] This highlights the mind's role in perpetuating suffering through conditioned patterns.

Formation of Self: The links explain how the sense of a separate self-arises through a sequence starting from ignorance, mental formations, consciousness, name and form (personality), sensory experience, feelings, craving, grasping, and becoming, culminating in birth and aging/death. ^[13] This shows that the self is not inherent but a dependent process central to Buddhist psychology.

Analyzing the arising of craving and attachment: In the chain of dependent origination, causes such as craving

¹⁰ Chowdhury, S. B. (2019). PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN THE DOCTRINE OF DEPENDENT ORIGINATION. *The Journal of International Buddhist Studies College*, 2(2), 10–31. retrieved from <https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/ibsc/article/view/211313>.

¹¹ 12 parts of Dependent Origination. https://www.dhammadownload.com/index.php/12_parts_of_Dependent_Origination

¹² Personalizing the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination by Ven. Tenzin Gache, 2017.

¹³ THE 12 NIDANAS.

https://www.tibetanbuddhistencyclopedia.com/en/index.php/THE_12_NIDANAS

(craving, liking) and clinging (attachment) are the main causes leading to rebirth and continued suffering. Recognizing the arising of craving and clinging helps practitioners to observe, acknowledge, and gradually let go of attachments and cravings in the mind. The chain illustrates how feelings lead to craving (attachment) and grasping, which fuel the compulsive cycle of desire and suffering. This explains addictive and compulsive behaviors from a psychological standpoint.

Perceptual Shifts: Contemplating dependent origination encourages shifts in perception: recognizing no inherent self, seeing how experience is a web of interdependent causes, and realizing that much of what we take as real is mental projection. This can reduce ego fixation and increase psychological flexibility.^[14]

The psychology of reincarnation and karma: The 12 links of dependent origination explain the operation of consciousness through many lives, from ignorance leading to karma-creating actions, then rebirth of consciousness, and continuing the chain of cause and effect in subsequent lives. This helps Buddhists understand karma and reincarnation deeply, realizing the continuity of consciousness and behavior through many lives.

Roots of Affliction: Early Buddhist texts and commentaries identify ignorance (avijjā), craving (taṇhā), and clinging (upādāna) as the root mental afflictions driving the cycle of suffering. Understanding these allows for targeted psychological interventions to reduce suffering.^[15]

Therapeutic Implications

Awareness - mindfulness: by becoming aware of the links – especially ignorance, contact, feeling, desire and grasping – one can interrupt the chain, preventing the arising of suffering. Mindfulness practice helps to recognize these links as they arise in the present moment, allowing conscious choice rather than automatic reaction.

Breaking the cycle of rebirth: Realizing that suffering and rebirth are caused by ignorance and the actions of

conditioned consciousness empowers the individual to take responsibility for his or her mental states and actions, promoting liberation through wisdom and ethical conduct. Realizing that suffering and rebirth are caused by ignorance and the actions of conditioned consciousness empowers the individual to take responsibility for his or her mental states and actions, promoting liberation through wisdom and ethical conduct.

Compassion Development: Understanding that all beings are caught in this causal chain fosters authentic compassion, as one recognizes the shared condition of suffering rooted in ignorance and craving.

Psychological Transformation: The model provides a clear map for therapeutic work by identifying specific links to address, such as reducing ignorance through education and insight, weakening craving and clinging through meditation and cognitive restructuring, and transforming mental formations through ethical behavior and compassion.

Guidance on the path of practice: The 12 links of dependent origination are a road map for the Buddhist practice journey. Understanding each link helps practitioners identify the root causes of suffering and apply practices such as mindfulness, meditation, and wisdom to transform ignorance, reduce craving and attachment, and attain liberation.

Emptiness and non-self: Nāgārjuna's interpretation of dependent origination as revealing the emptiness (śūnyatā) or non-self (anattā) nature of phenomena leads to a lucid state of mind free from mental dissatisfaction. This insight is therapeutic in dissolving rigid self-identity and reducing suffering.

Helps the mind become light and peaceful: When understanding the principle of dependent origination, people no longer cling to mental and emotional states, reducing worries, anxiety, and suffering. This awareness helps the mind become lighter and more peaceful in daily life.

¹⁴ Dependent Origination by Rodney Smith.

<https://dharmafeed.org/talks/27582/>

¹⁵ Unfolding Dependent Origination: A Psychological Analysis for Disclosing the Root of the Afflictive State

of Mind by Sanjoy Barua. Chowdhury Mahidol University, Thailand.

V. UNDERSTANDING THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF MENTAL STATES

The interdependence of mental states in the 12 links of dependent origination is a fundamental principle in Buddhism, demonstrating the causal relationship and continuous interaction between the factors that create the arising and existence of mental and physical phenomena. Besides, Dependent Origination (Pratītyasamutpāda) is a fundamental Buddhist concept that explains the interdependence and conditionality of all phenomena, including mental states. It suggests that mental states do not arise in isolation but depend on a complex network of causes and conditions, emphasizing existence's interconnected and dynamic nature.

The Interdependence of Mental States in the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination.

- Instantaneous Interactions Between Mental States.

In each present moment, mental states such as consciousness, volition, contact, feeling, and name and form do not exist independently but depend on and arise from each other:

Contact (the contact between the sense organs and objects) creates conditions for consciousness to arise. Consciousness recognizes objects based on name and form (mind and matter).

Feeling is the joy, suffering, or neutrality arising from this contact.

Volition is the psychological reaction, the mental action that arises immediately after contact and feeling.

Name, form, and consciousness arise together; consciousness relies on name and form to recognize, and name and form create conditions for consciousness to intend. For example, when seeing money (name and form), consciousness recognizes and can give rise to greed (action).

- The chain of cause and effect according to the cycle of birth and death

The twelve links of dependent origination in Buddhism describe the continuous flow of mind and matter from one life to the next:

Ignorance (not knowing the truth) conditions actions (karmic creations).

Actions condition consciousness (individual consciousness).

Consciousness conditions name and form (body and mind).

Name and form condition the six sense bases (six sense organs).

The six sense bases condition contact.

Contact conditions feeling.

Feeling conditions craving (desire).

Craving conditions clinging (attachment).

Clinging conditions existence.

Existence conditions birth.

Birth, condition, aging, and death; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and emptiness.

Each link cannot exist independently but always depends on the previous link to arise and is the condition for the following link to develop. When one link is destroyed (for example, ignorance is destroyed), the entire chain of causes and conditions will disintegrate, leading to liberation from suffering and samsara.

- Mental States as Conditioned Phenomena

Dependent origination teaches that mental states arise dependent on prior conditions and, in turn, condition subsequent states. This means that any single mental event, such as a feeling, perception, or craving, is not self-existent but emerges because of multiple interrelated factors. For example, sensory contact leads to feelings, which can give rise to craving and clinging, eventually forming a sense of self or identity.

- The Chain of Twelve Links (Nidānas)

This process is often illustrated through the twelve links of dependent origination, which describe how ignorance leads to mental formations, consciousness, name-and-form (mind and body), the six sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, and finally aging and death. Each link conditions the next, showing how mental states evolve moment-to-moment and contribute to the cycle of suffering.

- Moment-to-Moment and Collective Conditioning

Dependent Origination operates within individual consciousness and on collective levels such as social and cultural systems. Mental states are conditioned by past experiences, memories, and shared societal views, perpetuating prejudice or conflict patterns. Thus, the

interdependence of mental states extends beyond the individual to the communal and global scale.

- The Role of Ignorance and Awareness

Ignorance (avijjā) is the fundamental condition that initiates the cycle of dependent origination, obscuring the true nature of mental phenomena and reality. This ignorance leads to misperception and craving, which reinforce the sense of a fixed self. By cultivating mindfulness and insight, one can interrupt this chain, seeing mental states as transient and conditioned, thereby reducing suffering and dissolving the illusion of a permanent self.

- Implications for the Nature of Self and Reality

Because mental states arise dependently, there is no inherent, independent self behind them. The self is understood as a process or a flow of conditioned psychological and physical phenomena rather than a fixed entity. This insight into the interdependence of mental states aligns with the Buddhist doctrines of impermanence (anicca) and non-self (anatta).

- The General Meaning of Interdependence

The operation of the 12 links of dependent origination shows that there is no independent, permanent "I" or "self," but all are the result of the interaction of dependent origination.

Every mental state and phenomenon depends on other conditions and cannot arise or cease.

This reliance can be comprehended in terms of time (from previous lives to this life and the next) or synchronicity (states arising together in the present moment).

The interdependence of mental states in the twelve links of dependent origination is expressed through the continuous causal relationship and interdependent interaction between the links in the chain of dependent origination. Each state is the result of the previous state and the cause of the next state, creating the cycle of birth, death, and suffering. When one link is broken (such as when ignorance is destroyed), the entire chain will disintegrate, leading to liberation. This is a testament to the non-self, impermanence, and dependent origination of all mental and physical phenomena in Buddhism.

Dependent origination challenges the idea of a fixed self.

Dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda) fundamentally challenges the idea of a fixed, independent self by asserting that all phenomena, including the self, arise dependently through a web of causes and conditions rather than existing inherently or permanently. This Buddhist doctrine explains that what we perceive as a "self" is not a static entity but a dynamic process co-arising with the world moment by moment, conditioned by countless factors.

Key points on how dependent origination challenges the fixed self:

- No Independent Existence: Dependent origination teaches that nothing exists independently; everything is interdependent and co-dependent. The self is not a separate, unchanging essence but arises in dependence on mental, physical, and environmental conditions.
- Self as a Process: The sense of a fixed self is a mental construction arising from ignorance (avidya) and attachment. This false notion of a permanent self is generated through a chain of dependent links that produce the illusion of an enduring "I" or "me."
- Impermanence and No-Self (Anatta): Because all phenomena arise dependently, they are impermanent and lack inherent self-nature. This aligns with the Buddhist doctrine of anatta, which denies any permanent, unchanging self or soul.
- Co-Arising of Self and World: The world and the sense of self arise together conditionally; our perceptions, desires, and experiences shape and define the self, and the self, in turn, shapes how we experience the world. This mutual dependence means the self is fluid and relational, not fixed.
- Transformative Insight: Realizing dependent origination leads to loosening attachment to a fixed self, reducing suffering caused by clinging to a false identity. It opens the possibility of liberation by seeing through the illusion of a permanent self and understanding the interconnected nature of existence.

Dependent origination refutes the notion of a fixed self by revealing that the self is a contingent, ever-changing process arising from complex, interdependent causes rather than an independent, permanent entity. This insight is central to Buddhist

philosophy and practice, aiming to overcome suffering through understanding the true nature of self and reality.

Ignorance is the first cause in the 12 links of dependent origination.

Ignorance in the Buddhist view of the Pāli Canon is the first of the twelve links of dependent origination. The root cause gives rise to the subsequent links in the chain of dependent origination, especially action (karma). Ignorance denotes the state of blindness, which is not correctly perceiving the nature of the body, mind, and world, leading to errors in judgment and creating good and bad karmic actions. It denotes the fundamental misunderstanding or lack of correct understanding of the nature of reality, including the impermanence of phenomena, the nature of suffering, and the absence of a fixed self. This ignorance (avijjā in Pāli) is the root condition that initiates the entire chain of causation leading to suffering and rebirth.

According to Buddhist scriptures, ignorance is not only the condition that gives rise to action but also the cause of action; that is, ignorance is the root that causes karma (action) to be created and accumulated in the storehouse consciousness, which leads to rebirth and reincarnation. Ignorance makes people unable to see the cause and effect and unable to understand correctly the operation of the dharmas, so they continue to create wrong karma, maintaining the cycle of birth and death and suffering. In addition, ignorance is also considered one of the three root afflictions, the source of all afflictions and suffering, which obscures wisdom, preventing people from realizing the impermanent, suffering, and non-self nature of all things. Therefore, ignorance is the starting point of the chain of dependent origination because when ignorance is destroyed, other causes and conditions do not arise, leading to liberation from samsara.

Ignorance as the Root of Suffering: Ignorance means not knowing the Four Noble Truths and the true nature of existence impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anatta). This misunderstanding causes beings to misperceive reality, leading to craving and clinging, perpetuating suffering.^[16]

Ignorance Conditions Volitional Formations: In the twelve links, ignorance gives rise to volitional activities (kamma), which shape consciousness and continue the cycle of rebirth. Without ignorance, these mental formations would not arise to perpetuate samsara.^[17]

Ignorance as a Starting Point for the Cycle: While not necessarily the "first cause" of everything in an absolute sense, ignorance is the convenient and practical starting point in the chain of dependent origination because it underlies all subsequent links and keeps beings trapped in cyclic existence.

Ignorance as Misperception of Self and Reality: Ignorance involves mistaking impermanent aggregates for a permanent self, leading to attachment and suffering. Overcoming ignorance through wisdom (prajñā) is the key to liberation.

Ignorance as the "Leader" of Unskillful Qualities: According to Buddhist texts, ignorance leads to wrong views and intentions, which cascade into unwholesome actions and suffering, reinforcing the cycle.

Ignorance is the first link because the fundamental misapprehension triggers the chain of dependent origination, causing volitional formations and the continuation of samsaric existence. Addressing ignorance through insight and wisdom is essential to break this cycle and end suffering.

VI. PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA AND MODERN COGNITIVE THEORIES.

Ontological Principle: The ontological principle of dependent origination (Pratityasamutpada) is a principle that explains the nature and interconnectedness of existence, becoming, and ultimate reality in Buddhism. According to Peter Harvey, it is an ontological theory that suggests that nothing exists independently, except Nirvana; all physical and mental states are dependent and arise from previous states and create other dependent states when they cease. This is similar to the modern view of the interdependence and continuity of mental and physical states.

¹⁶ What Buddhists Believe by Venerable K. Sri Dhammananda Maha Thera

¹⁷ Dependent Origination By Christina Feldman

This principle asserts that all things and phenomena arise based on causes and conditions, that is, interdependence in a causal relationship without a first cause or a transcendent creator. Therefore, the nature of things is "dependent on others" meaning that their existence always depends on each other, without independent existence or fixed self-nature.

Cognitive aspects: Eviatar Shulman and Noa Ronkin argue that Dependent Origination is not only an ontology but also a descriptive model of mental experiential processes and their relationships. It emphasizes the impermanence, selflessness, and interdependence of cognitive phenomena, similar to modern cognitive theories of mental states' interconnectedness and constant transformation. According to the theory of dependent origination, the phenomenal world is a network of dependent origination in which all phenomena are interrelated and cannot exist independently. Perception is no exception; it is always the result of the interaction between consciousness (the subject of perception) and name and form (the object of perception).

In the Mahānidāna Sutta, the Buddha describes the process of the arising of mental activities such as the six sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, etc., which are the factors that connect the individual with the visible world, showing that perception is not an absolute reality but is relative and dependent on conditions of dependent origination.

"Thus, Ananda, from name-and-form as a necessary condition arises consciousness. From consciousness as a necessary condition arises name-and-form. From name-and-form as a necessary condition arises contact. From contact as a necessary condition arises feeling. From feeling as a necessary condition arises craving. From craving as a necessary condition arises clinging. From clinging as a necessary condition arises becoming. From becoming as a necessary condition arises birth. From birth as a necessary condition, aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, suffering, and despair come into operation. That is the origin of this whole mass of stress."^{18]}

Perception is not objective reality but is governed and distorted by subjective and objective conditions;

therefore, perception has only relative value on the path to ultimate truth.

Buddhist scholars such as Nāgārjuna and epistemologists such as Dignāga and Dharmakīrti developed the idea of dependent origination regarding cognition, emphasizing that all cognition dependently arises; there is no independent cognition, but only cognition of things through signs (nimitta); there is no fixed entity.

Modern Cognitive Theories: Mapping Mental Processes.

Modern cognitive theories focus on understanding and mapping the mental processes that underlie human cognition, such as perception, memory, learning, reasoning, and decision-making. These theories aim to explain how the brain processes information, forms mental representations, and guides behavior.

- Cognitive Maps and Mental Representations

Recent neuroscience research has detailed how the brain forms cognitive maps—internal mental representations of the environment that help us navigate, recall, and plan. For example, studies tracking neural activity in the hippocampus show how animals learn to differentiate between similar environments by forming distinct neural representations, effectively creating mental maps that encode spatial and contextual information. This process involves complex computations akin to state machines, where the brain infers hidden states beyond immediate sensory input to guide behavior. Understanding these mechanisms sheds light on memory formation intelligence and may inform artificial intelligence development

- Information Processing Approach

One foundational modern cognitive theory likens the mind to a computer that processes information through stages: input (sensory data), storage (memory), and output (response). This approach emphasizes attention, perception, and memory as key processes in cognition. It remains influential in explaining how mental processes operate sequentially and interactively to produce behavior

¹⁸ DN 15. Mahanidana Sutta: The Great Causes Discourse translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

- Computational and Connectionist Models
Contemporary theories also include computational approaches that model cognition using algorithms and neural networks. Connectionist models simulate how networks of neurons process information in parallel, learning patterns and associations, which align with findings on how the brain forms and modifies cognitive maps.
- Cognitive Load and Dual-Processing Theories
Cognitive Load Theory explains how mental effort impacts learning and task performance, distinguishing between intrinsic, extraneous, and germane cognitive loads. It highlights limits in working memory capacity and informs instructional design to optimize learning. The dual-process theory proposes two systems of cognition: an automatic, fast, intuitive system (System 1) and a slower, deliberate, analytical system (System 2), explaining how people process information and make decisions.
- Theoretical Integration and Empirical Evidence
Modern cognitive theories integrate insights from psychology, neuroscience, and artificial intelligence. They analyze cognition at multiple levels from cellular and molecular brain processes to algorithmic representations and observable behavior. This multi-level approach enables a comprehensive understanding of mental processes and their neural underpinnings. Modern cognitive theories map mental processes by combining behavioral data, neural activity, and computational models. They reveal how the brain constructs internal representations (like cognitive maps), processes information in stages or networks, manages cognitive load, and employs dual systems for reasoning. These theories advance our understanding of cognition’s complexity and guide applications in education, AI, and the treatment of cognitive disorders.

Key Contrasts and Overlaps.

Aspect	Paṭiccasamuppāda	Cognitive Theories
Scope	Existential/ethical	Empirical/mechanistic
Self-concept	Denies permanent self	Assumes stable cognitive schemas
Causality	Cyclic, interdependent	Linear, stage-based
Goal	Liberation from suffering	Behavioral prediction /optimization

Both frameworks reject randomness in human experience, emphasizing conditioned processes – whether through karmic patterns or neural pathways. However, cognitive theories focus on observable mental operations, while Paṭiccasamuppāda integrates ethical and soteriological dimensions. Modern theories like Prototype Theory (categorization via mental prototypes) echo Buddhism’s deconstruction of rigid conceptual boundaries. This interplay highlights how ancient wisdom and contemporary science both seek to explain human experience through causality, albeit with distinct methodologies and end goals.

VII. MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION PRACTICES.

Practicing mindfulness and meditation are two methods that help improve mental health, reduce stress, and increase self-awareness by focusing on the present and regulating the mind. Mindfulness is a state of being fully aware, without judgment, of the present moment, without being caught up in the past or worried about the future. Standard mindfulness practices include:
Mindful breathing exercises are a practice that helps to unify body and mind, bringing people back to the present moment, thereby creating peace and awareness and reducing stress. Below are the steps and ways to practice mindful breathing according to the Buddhist tradition, especially according to the instructions of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh:

- Sitting Posture
Sit up straight but relaxed, keeping your body comfortable, not tense.
Pay attention to your breathing
Bring your attention to your breathing without trying to control it. Observe the natural inhalation and exhalation, noticing the time between each inhalation and exhalation.

- Recognizing the breadth
While breathing, you can silently say:
"Breathing in, I know I am breathing in."
"Breathing out, I know I am breathing out."
This is not thinking but pure awareness, helping the mind not to be distracted.

- Watching the Breath Throughout

Mindfully watch the breath from the beginning to the end of each inhalation and exhalation. When the mind becomes distracted by thoughts, gently bring the mind back to the breath.

- Do not force or control the breath

If the breath is short or uneven, do not try to change it; just be aware of it. In the light of mindfulness, the breath will gradually become deeper, slower, and gentler.

- A short mantra can be used to support

For example:

"In, out."

"Deep, slow"

"Healthy, light"

"Calm, smile."

"Present, wonderful."

Mindfulness of thoughts and emotions: Ask yourself and name your current feelings and thoughts, such as "I am feeling anxious." Do not judge or cling; let the feelings pass like clouds.

Mindful eating: Focus entirely on eating, savoring the taste and texture of the food, chewing slowly, and not thinking too much about anything else while eating.

Mindful walking: Pay attention to the feeling of your feet touching the ground, feel your muscles when moving, and use this feeling as an anchor to keep your mind in the present.

Researchers have looked into the benefits of mindfulness practice and found that it can help with stress, sleep, emotional control, depression and anxiety symptoms, and being more flexible in life.

Meditation is the act of concentrating the mind on one thing in order to reach a state of mental calm from which to see and think about the truth. Buddhist meditation includes different types of meditation, but the core is concentration and stillness (deep thinking) to develop wisdom and inner peace.

The meditation process usually involves:

- Sitting still, maintaining a comfortable posture but with a straight back.
- Focusing on a point such as breathing, a mantra, or a specific object.
- When the mind wanders, gently bring the attention to the meditation object.

Meditation helps develop the body and mind, reduces stress, increases emotional intelligence, reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety, and improves the ability to adapt to life's challenges

VIII. CONTEMPORARY APPLICATIONS IN COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL THERAPY.

Contemporary applications of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)^[19] in Buddhism involve integrating ancient Buddhist wisdom especially mindfulness, compassion, non-attachment, and awareness of thoughts with modern psychological techniques to deal with mental health problems like depression, anxiety, and stress.

Core Connections Between Buddhism and CBT.

Though developed in vastly different contexts, Buddhism and CBT share foundational principles:

Mindfulness of Thought: Both emphasize recognizing and observing thought patterns rather than being controlled by them. Buddhism encourages detachment from thoughts, while CBT focuses solely on identifying and challenging unhelpful or distorted thought patterns.

Present-Moment Focus: Mindfulness, a central Buddhist practice, aligns with CBT's emphasis on grounding oneself in the present experience.

Changing Relationship to Self: Buddhism teaches the impermanence and constructed nature of the self, which resonates with CBT's approach to modifying self-referential beliefs contributing to emotional distress.^[20]

¹⁹ Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a structured form of psychotherapy that aims to treat a variety of mental health conditions by changing unhelpful patterns of thinking and behavior. CBT therapy is based on the core principles that mental health problems are partly due to faulty or unhelpful learned

patterns of thinking and behavior and that individuals can learn better-coping strategies to reduce symptoms and improve functioning.

²⁰ Paul Greene, Phd. Posted on April 21, 2020, Categories Buddhism, Psychotherapy

CBT focuses on identifying and changing irrational, negative thoughts that cause suffering, helping the patient live more realistically and rationally. Similarly, Buddhism teaches about impermanence, cause and effect, suffering (dukkha), and the way to end suffering through correct perception and letting go of craving (tanha).

The Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism emphasizes correct thinking, similar to CBT, which focuses on positive self-talk and reducing assumptions, fears, and phobias.

Specific CBT Techniques Applied to Buddhist Practice.

Thought Records: Writing down negative thoughts to identify cognitive distortions parallels the Buddhist practice of recognizing the “three poisons” (greed, hatred, and delusion) and cultivating mindfulness toward them. This helps develop compassion and equanimity.

Behavioral Experiments: Testing beliefs about attachment and impermanence through experiential exercises echoes Buddhist teachings on non-attachment and impermanence (anicca), fostering insight into the transient nature of desires and possessions.

Cognitive Restructuring: Actively replacing negative thought patterns with more balanced, compassionate ones supports the cultivation of the Four Brahmaviharas, loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity, key Buddhist virtues.

Mindfulness and Meditation: Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)^[21] uses meditation to help people become more aware of their thoughts and feelings, just like Vipassana and other Buddhist meditation techniques do. Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy is widely used clinically to prevent relapse of depression and to treat anxiety.

²¹ MBCT is a modern form of psychotherapy that combines CBT and Buddhist mindfulness meditation. This method helps patients focus on the present and observe thoughts and emotions without judgment, thereby reducing negative thoughts and improving mental health, especially for people with depression. MBCT meditation increases awareness of the breath, body, and mind, enabling patients to better identify

Practical and effective application in therapy.

Buddhist philosophy offers a pragmatic framework for understanding and managing mental health disorders by addressing suffering (dukkha), its causes (attachment, craving, ignorance), and cessation through mindfulness and ethical living.

CBT helps patients identify distorted thinking, such as personalization, black-and-white thinking, and catastrophizing, and learn to challenge and manage them to respond more positively.

Modern therapies like MBCT and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) incorporate Buddhist meditation techniques to reduce mental afflictions such as anger, craving, and pridefulness, aiming to increase emotional regulation, empathy, and compassion.

These integrative approaches help patients develop better attention control, reframe maladaptive thoughts, and adopt healthier attitudes, reducing distress and increasing well-being.

MBCT and Buddhist meditation help people live in the present, reduce stress and anxiety, and rebuild trust and a sense of psychological well-being. Buddhist meditation also helps to increase self-control, tolerance, and acceptance of the past and to deal with issues of time, experience, change, loss, and death, which help treat psychological trauma.

IX. CONCLUSION

The Four Noble Truths in the Pāli Nikāya provide a profound psychological map for understanding and transforming human suffering, emphasizing self-awareness, ethical living, and mental discipline as the keys to liberation and well-being. It is not only religious teachings but also a sophisticated system of psychological analysis. The Buddha's approach preceded many modern therapeutic models in its emphasis on introspection, understanding the nature of

and manage negative thoughts and emotions. The peaceful meditation spaces of temples are also used to enhance the effectiveness of MBCT practice, helping patients connect deeply with their inner self, calm the mind, and relieve suffering.

perception, and developing psychological regulation skills. Viewed through a psychological lens, the Nikāya teachings become a practical map to help people recognize, understand, and transform suffering at the deepest.

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