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The Tibetan “Wheel of Life”: Iconography and Doxography¹

by Geshe Sopa

Had they not been so utterly destroyed, archeology would no doubt show that the vestibules or anterooms of Indian Buddhist temples belonging at least to the later monasteries such as Nālandā and Vikramaśilā were provided with banner paintings or murals depicting the Buddhist idea of the wheel or round of saṃsāric existences and its potential reversal, i.e., the *bhava-cakra* (Tib. *srid pa'i 'khor lo*). These paintings were utilized for demonstrating and teaching the rudiments of Buddhist doctrine. As such, the custom persists right up to the present in Tibetan Buddhist temples, where they are still commonly found in the vestibule to the right of the temple entry.

This use accords with the prescriptions of the Vinaya concerning the use of paintings in a Buddhist monastery. Here, the *Vinaya-sūtra* of Guṇaprabha, one of the most authoritative works dealing with the Vinaya of the Sarvāstivādins, the school which provides the canon for Tibetan monasticism, says:

In the vestibule make a wheel of saṃsāra./Make its five parts./In the upper the gods and men./The four continents./Like unto a waterwheel also the death, passage, and rebirth of apparitionally born (i.e., in the intermediate state, or *barḍo*,) sentient beings./Attachment, hatred, and ignorance in the form of a pigeon, a snake, and a pig at the center./Ignorance gnaws on the two former./At the rim the twelve components of dependent origination and everything held by impermanence./At the top the Buddha points to the full moon of nirvāṇa./At the bottom the two ślokas saying, “Gather up . . . (etc.)”²

Guṇaprabha being a direct disciple of Vasubandhu, the

Vinaya-sūtra is, of course, a late work. However, Guṇaprabha is not composing an original treatise, but merely collating and summarizing the substance of the earlier works of the *Vinaya-piṭaka* of the Sarvāstivādins.³ The beginning of the passage cited above, for example, is in part a direct quotation from the earlier *Vinaya-kṣudraka-vastu*'s "in the vestibule . . . depict a wheel of saṃsāra./ Depict its five parts./ . . ."⁴ In the *Vinaya-kṣudraka-vastu*,⁵ these lines occur as part of a story concerning Anāthapiṇḍika, the wealthy merchant of Śrāvastī who bestowed the Jetavana Grove on the Buddha and the saṅgha. Here, Anāthapiṇḍika is represented as viewing some of the buildings in the Jetavana Grove. On finding them to be rather bare and lusterless, he wishes to provide them with suitable paintings and murals, to which the Buddha Śākyamuni gives his consent together with some instructions on what and where to paint.

In a story which may be found in the *Bhikṣunī-vibhaṅga*⁶, the Buddha while staying in the Bamboo Grove in Rājagṛha asks Ānanda why Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana are so often to be seen with such a large following. Ānanda replies that Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, being so outstanding, respectively, in wisdom and psychic power, are both especially adept in demonstrating the five realms of transmigrant beings, from which teaching the people at large have experienced a very great benefit. At the end of Ānanda's reply, the Buddha, asserting that this is indeed the reason, goes on to say:

"Ananda, the two great bhikṣus, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, and those like the two great bhikṣus Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, will not always be present. Therefore, I advise that a five-part wheel be painted in the vestibule."

The Blessed One had stated that a five-part wheel should be painted in the vestibule, and when the monks did not understand how to depict it, the Blessed One said, "The five (kinds of) transients are transients in the hells, animal transients, preta transients, transients who are gods, and transients who are men."

When the bhikṣus did not know what and where to depict them, the Blessed One said, "At the bottom one should depict hell-denizen, animal, and preta transients. One also should depict the Eastern Pūrvavideha, Southern

Jambudvīpa, Western Aparagodanīya, and Northern Uṭṭarakuru. Attachment, hatred, and ignorance should be depicted in the center. The figure of the Buddha should be depicted pointing to the full moon of nirvāṇa. Apparitionally-born sentient beings should also be depicted dying, transmigrating, and being born. At the outer rim, the twelve members of dependent origination should be depicted both forward and reversed, and the whole grasped by impermanence. One should also paint the two verses, "Gather up . . . an end to suffering."⁷

Still another story of special interest for our subject is the tale of Utrayana, the king of Rāveṇa.⁸ In this story, which is also to be found in the *Bhikṣuṇī-vibhaṅga*, the negotiations of some Magadhan merchants traveling back and forth between the capital cities of Rājagṛha and Rāveṇa lead to a friendship and several exchanges of letters and presents between King Bimbisāra of Magadha and Utrayana. In the final exchange, King Utrayana sends to Bimbisāra a jewel-studded suit of armor.

King Bimbisāra read the letter, and on seeing the jeweled armor was amazed. He said to his ministers, "Gentlemen, summon the appraisers of precious things."

When the appraisers began to investigate the value of the jeweled armor, each gem individually, on perceiving that even the value of each was priceless, said to the king, "Divinity, here even each individual jewel is priceless. The price of any precious precious thing which cannot in actuality be set is put as 'a *krora*.'"⁹

King Bimbisāra reckoned its value, and then thinking, "What shall I send him in return?" became dejected.

Putting his jaw on his hand, he sat and pondered. Then he said to his ministers, "Gentlemen, King Utrayana sent me a gift such as this. What present shall I send him in return?"

Dbyar tshul, a Brahmin belonging to the "big noses"¹⁰ of Magadha said, "Divinity, in your land also there appears a precious thing more excellent than any in the three worlds: there is the Tathāgata, Arhant, perfectly accomplished Buddha, and thou mightest commission the painting of his bodily form on cloth and send that as a gift in return."

The king said, "Well then, I shall ask the Blessed One," and then King Bimbisāra went to where the Blessed One was.

Upon arriving, he bowed his head to the feet of the Blessed One and sat down to one side. Having sat down to one side, King Bimbisāra spoke to the Blessed One thus, "Venerable, a friend whom I have never seen, named Utrayana, king in the city of Rāveṇa, has sent me as a gift a jeweled suit of armor having the five prerequisites.¹¹ Therefore, if the Blessed One will allow, I, as well, shall commission the drawing of the Blessed One's likeness on fabric and send it to him as a present in return."

The Blessed One spoke, "Great king, I consent. The thought which you have is a good one. Just as soon as King Utrayana sees it, he will come to experience faith and to perceive the truth."

King Bimbisāra bowed his head to the feet of the Blessed One, and left the Blessed One's presence. He brought together the painters who resided throughout the land and said, "Gentlemen, paint on cloth the bodily form of the Blessed One."

They said, "We shall paint it." They tried to capture the marks of the Blessed One, but because the Buddhas, the Blessed Ones, do not sate through being seen, they could not capture the marks of the Blessed One. Then they were wearied, and having come before the king, said, "Divinity, we are incapable of capturing the Blessed One's marks. If the Divinity would invite the Blessed One to another palace and offer him the noon repast, then we would be capable of capturing the marks of the Blessed One."

King Bimbisāra invited the Blessed One to another palace, but even so, when they saw the body of the Blessed One, they did not become satisfied in looking at this and that because the Buddhas, the Blessed Ones, do not sate by being seen. Thereupon, as they were unable to capture the marks of the Blessed One, the Blessed One said, "Great king, the painters cannot catch the marks of the Tathāgata, so, without making them weary, bring the cloth and I shall cast my shadow upon it."

The king presented the fabric, and the Blessed One cast his shadow on it, and he said to the painters, "Gentlemen, fill in my shadow here with the various colors."

Also he said to the king, "Great king, when my likeness has been completed, underneath paint the refuges, and the basis of the discipline, and the twelve members of dependent origination in their order and in reverse. At the top paint two verses: 'Gather up and cast away. Enter to the Buddha's teaching. Like a great elephant in a house of mud, conquer the Lord of Death's batallions. Whoever

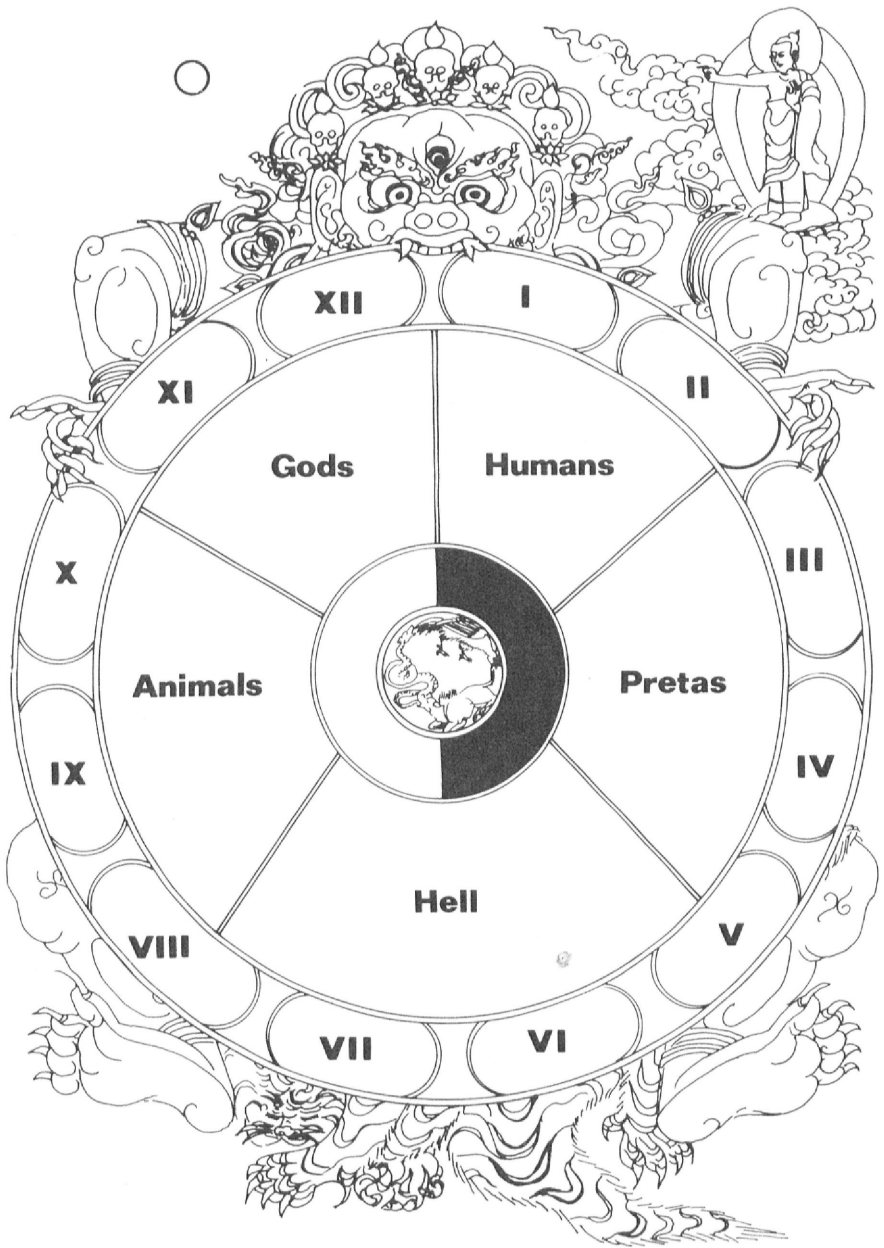
with great circumspection, practices this discipline of the Law, abandoning the wheel of births, will make an end to suffering.'"¹²

The story continues at length and tells of the reception of the gift of the painting by King Utrayana, his conversion to Buddhism, the ministry of Kātyāyana¹³ in the royal palace at Rāveṇa, Utrayana's becoming a bhikṣu and achieving arhantship, and finally his assassination at the hands of his son, Cūḍa¹⁴ (?), who in the context of the story serves as an edificatory example of one who by a single action commits two of the most nefarious sins, parricide and arhanticide.

So much now for some of the subject matter which Guṇaprabha had before him when he composed the *Vinaya-sūtra*. For many modern readers, stories of the above type are bound to seem *prima facie* anachronistic, insofar as representations of the Buddha are not supposed to have occurred until centuries later at Mathurā or Gandhāra, which produced schools of sculpture, specimens of which are extant. Our knowledge of early Indian painting on the other hand is derivable from literary sources rather than from archeology, and to say that a literary text is anachronistic solely on the basis of its referring to representations of the Buddha in the painting of an early period,¹⁵ the very existence of which painting can only be established by such texts, may simply be putting the cart before the horse. While the Sarvāstivādin canon is recognized as containing much that is representative of the oldest substratum of Indian Buddhist literature, I am not in the meantime aware of any in-depth studies essaying to ascertain the historical stratigraphy of either the *Bhikṣunī vibhāṅga* or the *Vinaya-kṣudraka-vastu* to which I can refer the reader or myself. Thus, leaving the matter securely in the hands of art historians, we pass on to the doxography and full blown iconography, where we are on firm and distinct ground, for although the actual steps of the development and integration of all the iconographical elements which constitute the finished representations of the wheel of life are probably no longer altogether traceable, the doxographical elements clearly represent the essence of the doctrine which the Buddha Śākyamuni set in motion in the Deer Park to the five original converts, namely the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths, the means of elevation in and of a final release from saṃsāra, the round of

passage through existences which are implicated in various types and degrees of sorrow.

Turning then to the symbolism of the fully-developed vignette of the wheel of life, which is as shown in the illustration on page 131, and is described briefly in the above citation from Guṇaprabha's *Vinaya-sūtra*: The Lord of Death in the form of a savage red demon, symbolizing impermanence, grasps a five (or sometimes six)¹⁶ part wheel. At the hub of the wheel, three animals, a pig, a pigeon and a snake,¹⁷ representing respectively the three poisons of ignorance, attachment, and hatred, form a ring by each one's grasping the tail of another; or sometimes, the pig (ignorance) is shown as dominant over the others by his gnawing on the other two (attachment and hatred). On the right is the white half of a circle in which are depicted beings in the intermediate state (*bardo*) proceeding upwards to birth in the fortunate regions, and on the left is the black half of the circle, symbolizing those beings of the intermediate state moving downward toward miserable births in the unfortunate regions. As for the fortunate and unfortunate regions, these are the five (or six) parts of the wheel itself, with the regions of the gods and men in the upper half, and the regions of hell-denzens, pretas, and animals in the lower. In each of the five (or six) regions are depicted the ills characteristically befalling the creatures belonging to each. Thus, for instance, among the gods is shown the death and transmigration-fall of the gods of the desire world, etc; among the *asuras* the ills of strife; among men sickness, old age, and death, etc.; among hell-denzens the sufferings of heat and cold; among pretas the evils of hunger and thirst; and among animals the pain of being hunted down, misused, and slaughtered, etc. In this way the parts of the wheel illustrate the Buddhist teaching that in whatever region the birth of a sentient being occurs, the being there will experience characteristic evils belonging to that region, and in Buddhism, both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, long and detailed meditation on these evils is cultivated as an aid to producing a real aversion to the kind of life which is not free from ills such as these. Because, according to Buddhism, these lives have their genesis in a causal sequence of actions, etc., rooted in ignorance, this causal sequence is portrayed through the twelve members of dependent origination (*pratītya samutpāda*) on the



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 ॥ ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥

outer rim of the wheel. As we shall later be devoting greater length to descriptions of the twelve *nidānas* or members of dependent origination, they may be enumerated and described just briefly here as follows:

- I. ignorance is symbolized by a blind old woman;
- II. (karma) formatives by a man producing pots on a potter's wheel,
- III. consciousness by a monkey,
- IV. name-form by passengers in a boat,
- V. the six (sense) organs by an empty house,
- VI. contact by children having sexual intercourse,
- VII. feeling by an arrow sticking in the eye,
- VIII. craving by a man drinking beer,
- IX. appropriation by a monkey picking fruit,
- X. becoming by a pregnant woman,
- XI. birth by a woman delivering a child, and
- XII. old age and death by a man carrying a corpse.

In the sky above, the Buddha points with the finger of his right hand to the full moon, which symbolizes *nirvāṇa*, or the truth of cessation, which is freedom from all *kleśas*. At the bottom, and usually in gold letters on a black background, are the verses cited above: "Gather up and cast away . . . will make an end to suffering."

As for the way in which these iconographic elements symbolise the Four Noble Truths: the five (or six) part maṇḍala of *saṃsāra*, or transient existences, which are not free of suffering, represent the truth, or realities, of suffering.¹⁸ The three animals in the center, i.e., the pig, snake, and pigeon, symbolize its passion genesis, whereas the white and black half-circles flanking them respectively to the right and the left symbolize its action genesis. The manner then in which transmigration in *saṃsāra* takes place under the sway of passion action¹⁹ is symbolized by the outer ring of the twelve members of dependent origination. The whole maṇḍala's being held in the mouth and against the stomach of the Lord of Death symbolizes that inasmuch as none of the above is free from both suffering and its

cause, none of the above is free from the jaws of death either. The Buddha standing in the sky above and pointing indicates the truth of the path, while the verses below express it verbally, and the full moon to which he points symbolizes the truth of cessation i.e., *nirvāṇa*,²⁰ which is free and clear of all the passions.

Among these icono-doxographical elements, the least self-apparent and most complicated are the twelve members of dependent origination, which encompass not only the whole of *saṃsāra*, i.e., sufferings and their geneses, but also, through reversal, the turning away from *saṃsāra*, i.e., cessations and the paths producing these cessations. Consequently, in dealing with the doxographical side of the "wheel of life," we need especially to look at *pratītya-samutpāda* in greater detail.

The Buddhist theory of dependent origination (*pratītya samutpāda*) is both a general and a special theory, the latter referring to the twelve-membered chain of dependent origination. However differently the various schools of Buddhism may view their deeper implications,²¹ both the general and the specific theories are common to all these schools, both *Hīnayāna* and *Mahāyāna*.²² In all of these, some interpretation of dependent origination is always a pivotal theory, and consequently the general theory of dependent origination in particular may certainly vie with "dharma" and "emptiness" in being put forward as the "central conception" or "central philosophy" of Buddhism. In such a contest dependent origination ought easily to win.

The theory of dependent origination cannot, however, as is sometimes asserted, be altogether treated as a theory of causality *per se*, that is to say, "dependent origination = causality." Indian philosophy did not need to wait for Buddhism to perceive cause and effect and to formulate theories of causality. What Buddhism did was to apply a quite specific solution to causal theory and to develop it through several variations against the background of different philosophical scenarios. In its most rudimentary formulations, i.e., those of the *Vaibhāṣikas*, the theory of dependent origination maintained a causal theory in which there is no genesis without a cause and likewise in which there is no genesis from some kind of permanent whole or monadic essence, such as were being postulated by the

Sāṃkhyas and other early schools of Indian thought. In its most developed and critical formulations, i.e., those of the Mādhyamikas,²³ the theory of dependent origination went beyond a theory of causality altogether and maintained that dependent origination simply means the existence of anything whatsoever as not being independent, and being therefore empty or devoid of any intrinsic selfhood. In this most developed theory, inasmuch as such a kind of existence no longer requires a real genesis, there is no need for a theory of real causality either, provided, of course, this repudiation of real causality is not taken to allow origination without a cause. In between these most and least rudimentary interpretations of dependent origination are a number of explanations²⁴ which require that dependent origination be understood also in terms of instantaneousness (*kṣaṇatva*). As a consequence of this spectrum of the various interpretations of the implications of dependent origination within the Buddhist schools themselves, it is difficult to generalize the meaning of the general theory of dependent origination except minimally and in negative terms, i.e., the unanimous refusal of all Buddhist schools to admit as causes, or as causally efficient,²⁵ certain types of metaphysical and logical entity, beginning with such partless permanents as Soul, God, Divine Idea, Universal Principle, etc., which were being ushered in as explanatory devices by the non-Buddhists. Possibly, in more positive terms one might venture to say that the meaning of the general theory of dependent origination is "genesis in dependence on other than self." Here however, the exception to such a positive formulation are the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas for whom "existence," which of course included genesis, needs to be substituted for "genesis,"²⁶ that is to say, "existence in dependence on other than self."²⁷ Here also in the Mādhyamika, the general theory of *pratītya samutpāda*, already central, receives still a new impetus in being put forward as the "king of reasons"²⁸ for maintaining the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of everything, a subject to which we will return later.

Whereas for Buddhism *pratītya samutpāda* in general represents a ground theory through which alone the genesis, etc., of things both animate and inanimate can become adequately explicable, the special theory of the twelve members of dependent

origination refers only to the genesis of the living, sentient individual in saṃsāra and his potential release. Thus, the teaching of the twelfold chain provides a special demonstration of misery and its origin. Likewise, through its reversal, cessation and the path of purification are shown, and the twelve links, forward and reversed, expatiate further the four truths or realities which are the special and most honorable²⁹ field of vision of the Buddhist saint, or Āryan individual. Consequently, since this twelfold linkage shares such an intimate relation with the Four Noble Truths, meditation on these twelve has provided Buddhists everywhere with an important and time-honored method of generating and stabilizing the mental attitude of revulsion from saṃsāra and of initiating and ripening the path of purification in their own mental continuums. Also, the abandonment of the nonvirtues, or the unwholesome, and the acquirement of the virtues, or the wholesome, cultivated on the basis of insight into the twelve members of dependent origination is said to bring about the result of an amelioration of suffering and an elevation within saṃsāra itself, even before the ripening of that steady aspiration for the highest good, the manifold of cessation which is liberation from all the *kleśas*, whether nirvāṇa or perfect Buddhahood itself.³⁰ Elevation within saṃsāra and the attainment of the highest good³¹ are, in simple religious terms, the reasons for the teaching of the Four Noble Truths and likewise the reasons for the special theory of dependent origination.

However, while the common religious denominator remains the same for all the Buddhist schools, there are among them significant metaphysical and logical differences regarding the precise kind of entity to which the twelve members are to be referred, as well as the specifics of their mode of linkage, relations, etc. Again, we have four main types of theory affecting determination of the nature of the twelve, corresponding to the four schools, the Vaibhāṣika, the Sautrāntika, the Yogācāra, and the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika, with the Svātantrika Mādhyamika divided between sharing some of the theories of the Sautrāntika or the Yogācāra. The literature relevant to these is to be found scattered throughout numerous sūtras and commentaries.

The sūtras include the *Vinaya-piṭaka* of the Sarvāstivāda, etc.;

the commentaries include the *Abhidharmakośa* of Vasubandhu, the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* of Asaṅga, etc. There are, however, several works in both the above classes which are worth mentioning here, as they are devoted just to the topics of the twelve components of dependent origination and are consequently of special interest to our subject. The first of these is the *Pratītyasamutpāda-vibhaṅga-nirdeśa-sūtra*, a short sūtra of the Hīnayāna in which the Buddha Śākyamuni addresses an assemblage of monks in the Jetavana Grove in Śrāvastī. Here, he sets forth very briefly the theory of dependent origination and delineates in a highly abbreviated manner its twelve components. This work is the subject of extensive commentary by Vasubandhu.

Another quite important sūtra dealing with dependent origination is the *Śālistamba-sūtra*, a sūtra of the Mahāyāna. This sūtra is a Mahāyānization or interpretation from the Mahāyāna point of view of the famous utterance of the Buddha, that whoever perceives dependent origination perceives the Dharma, and whoever perceives the Dharma perceives the Buddha. Here the scene is laid at the Vulture Peak in Rājagṛha, where the Buddha is present with twelve hundred and fifty bhikṣus and numerous bodhisattvas. The principal speaker is Maitreya. The venerable Śāriputra, having approached the Bodhisattva Maitreya, states that the Buddha on pointing to a rice plant seedling said, "Who see dependent origination sees the Dharma. Who sees the Dharma sees the Buddha," and Śāriputra goes on to ask Maitreya the questions, What is dependent origination? What is the Dharma? What is the Buddha? etc. The rest of the sūtra is devoted to Maitreya's response to these questions. There is the theory of dependent origination in general, and then an external and an internal dependent origination, the latter being synonymous with the specific. The external dependent origination espouses a theory of causality which is as illustrious for what it disallows as for what it permits to function as the substratum of what we call "a cause," and the internal dependent origination plumbs to the very depths the meaning of that nescience, the first of the twelve components, which is the root of rebirth in saṃsāra, and which is reversed by the Āryan path. The Dharma itself is to be identified with the eight-fold path together with nirvāṇa, the eight-fold path being synecdochic for the entire Āryan path. The Buddha is to be

explained as the attainer of the fruition of this path in a perfect enlightenment, or state of omniscience.³² Thus, through realization of dependent origination, i.e., the Four Noble Truths, one comes to realize the Āryan path, and through realization of the Āryan path one comes to realize the goal of that path, which is nirvāṇa and omniscience itself, and this is the meaning of perceiving dependent origination, then the Dharma, and then the Buddha. The *Śālistamba-sūtra* is a major Mahāyāna work, so extensively quoted by such ācāryas as Candrakīrti and Śāntideva as to permit Prof. N.A. Sastri to reconstruct (*Ārya Śālistamba Sūtra*, edited by N.A. Sastri, Adyar Library, Madras, 1950.) nearly the entire sūtra in Sanskrit utilizing such citations and following the order of the Tibetan translation. The sūtra has also been versified by Nāgārjuna as the *Śālistambaka-kārikā* and commented on by him in the *Śālistambaka-sūtra-tīkā*.³³

Another short but important commentary on dependent origination by Nāgārjuna is the *Pratītyasamutpāda-hṛdaya-kārikā* and his autocommentary, the *Pratītyasamutpāda-hṛdaya-vyākhyāna*.³⁴ Here, the general theory of dependent origination supports the inference of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), and the twelve components are treated briefly from the point of view of the passions (*kleśa*), actions (*karma*), and sufferings (*duḥkha*).

The remaining works especially in need of mention are the commentaries of Vasubandhu, i.e., from the Vaibhāṣika point of view, the *Abhidharmakośa* Book III, and from the Yogācāra point of view the *Pratītyasamutpādādivibhaṅga-nirdeśa*, his commentary on the *Pratītyasamutpāda-vibhaṅga-nirdeśa-sūtra*.³⁵ In Vasubandhu's commentaries a great deal of Sautrāntika explanation also appears by way of expatiation of points of controversy between schools.

Thus, in the above works the basic theory of dependent origination appears together with a variety of interpretations, both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, and representative of the four schools.

The rudiments of the theory of dependent origination are set forth so succinctly in the *Pratītyasamutpāda-vibhaṅga-nirdeśa-sūtra* as to provide a kind of chart of the subject matter:³⁶

This I once heard: The Blessed One was staying in Śrāvastī at the Jetavana Grove of Anāthapiṇḍika. Then,

the Blessed One said to the bhikṣus. "I shall teach primary dependent origination and its subsets. May you bear in mind what you listen to well.

"What is primary dependent origination? It is thus: When this exists, that arises. Because this was born, that appears. Thus, on account of nescience, formatives come to arise; on account of formatives, consciousness; on account of consciousness, name and form; on account of name and form, the six organs; on account of the six organs, contact; on account of contact, feeling; on account of feeling, craving; on account of craving, appropriation; on account of appropriation, mode of existence; on account of mode of existence, birth; on account of birth, old age and death and grief and lamentation and misery and discontent and distress. Therefore, just this great mass of suffering comes to arise. This is primary dependent origination.

"What are the subsets of dependent origination? What is the nescience of which it is said, 'on account of nescience, formatives'? Not knowing the limits of the past, and not knowing the limits of the future, and not knowing the limits of the past and future, and not knowing the internal, and not knowing the external, and not knowing the internal and the external, and not knowing actions, and not knowing maturations, and not knowing actions and their maturations, and not knowing the Buddha, and not knowing the Dharma, and not knowing the Saṅgha, and not knowing misery, and not knowing its genesis, and not knowing its cessation, and not knowing the path, and not knowing cause, and not knowing the entity which arises from a cause, and not knowing virtue and nonvirtue, and not knowing transgression and nontransgression, and the to-be-cultivated and the not-to-be-cultivated, and evil, and the illustrious, and the black, and the white, and dependent origination together with its subsets, and not comprehending exactly what are the six organs of contact, and not knowing exactly that one as that one, and not seeing, and not realizing, and not fathoming, and totally not fathoming, and not recognizing—and these so-called aspects of darkness are 'nescience' so-called.

"What are the formatives of which it is said, 'on account of nescience, formatives'? These formatives are threefold, What are the three? Formatives of the body, and formatives of the speech, and formatives of the mind.

"What is the consciousness of which it is said, 'on account of formatives, consciousness'? The six different consciousnesses, i.e., visual consciousnesses, auditory cons-

sciousnesses, and olfactory, and gustatory, and tactile, and mental consciousnesses.

"What is the name and form of which it is said, 'on account of consciousness, name and form'? The four heaps of noncorporeals, i.e., the heap of feelings, the heap of discriminatings, the heap of formatives, the heap of consciousnesses. What is form? All [things] whatsoever that are form are the four great elements and the products of the four great elements, and this form joined together with the above name is name and form.

"What are the six organs of which it is said, 'on account of name and form, the six organs'? The six inner organs, i.e., the inner organs of sight, of hearing, of smell, of taste, of touch, and of mentals.

"What is the contact of which it is said, 'on account of the six organs, contact'? The six variant contacts, i.e., joining of the visual (organ, object, and consciousness), of the auditory, of the olfactory, of the gustatory, of the tactile, and the joining of the mental (organ, object, and consciousness).

"What is the feeling of which it is said, 'on account of contact feeling'? Feeling is threefold: well-being, misery, and neither well-being nor misery.

"What is the craving of which it is said, 'on account of feeling, craving'? Craving is threefold: the cravings of the desire world, the cravings of the form world, and the cravings of the formless world.

"What is the appropriation of which it is said, 'on account of craving, appropriation'? Appropriation is fourfold: appropriation of the desirable, appropriation of the ideological, appropriation of ethics and ethos, and appropriations of the theory of a self.

"What is the existence of which it is said, 'on account of appropriation, mode of existence'? Mode of existence is threefold: desire world mode of existence, form world mode of existence, and formless world mode of existence.

"What is the birth of which it is said, 'on account of mode of existence, birth'? The birth of these and those particular kinds of these and those particular sentient beings, and their very birth, and transformation, and advanced evolvment, and full evolvment, and their attainment of the respective skandhas (the psycho-physical aggregations), and attainment of the respective *dhātus* (sense organs and their organs and consciousnesses), and attainment of the respective *āyatanas* (sense organs and their objects), and the confirmation of the skandhas, and the full evolvment of the vital faculty; these are 'birth.'

“What is the aging and death of which it is said ‘on account of birth, aging and death’? Baldness, and white hair, and gathering of wrinkles, and being withered, and feeble, and bent like an ox drinking water, the body filled with dark drops, and coughing up mucous together with wheeziness of breathing, and having movements like falling forward, and having recourse to a walking stick, and being stupefied by dullness, and declining, and deteriorating, and being decrepit, and the faculties being debilitated and decayed, and the compositions being old—and this becoming very old is age. What is death? The transference of this and that particular kind of this and that individual sentient being, and their redirection, and disintegration, and the loss of subject, and the loss of the life, and the disappearance of heat, and the cessation of the vital faculty, and, the separation of the aggregates (skandhas), and dying—and this completion of one’s time is death. This death together with the above age is called ‘age and death.’

“These are the subsets of dependent origination.

“Monks, I said that I would explain the primary dependent origination and its subsets, and this speech of mine is for that.”

Thus, the above-cited sūtra is almost entirely devoted to the specific theory of dependent origination. However, the general theory is also introduced and its essentials delineated in the three statements following the question, “What is primary dependent origination?” i.e., “When this exists, that arises,” “Because this was born, that appears,” and “Thus, on account of nescience, formatives come to arise . . . etc.” This third statement, while it serves to introduce the specific theory, also shows a feature of the general theory.

“When this exists, that arises” (*asmin sati idam bhavati*) is the most classical way of stating the general theory, and it formulates the Buddhist predilection to maintain as causative something which is manifestly or ascertainably present in a cause-and-effect situation, like seed, etc., as a cause for a sprout, or fire, etc., as a cause for smoke, rather than nonapparent but allegedly operative theistic principles such as the Will or Thought of a Creator. Vasubandhu, in his commentary³⁷ on the above sūtra, calls this characteristic of dependent origination “unmoved” or “unimpelled” (*yo ba med ba*), i.e., unmoved from without by any universal conscious design. The second

statement, "Because this was born, that appears," indicates that the entity which can function as a cause is itself something impermanent and never a permanent, inasmuch as it is itself something born. By the same token, it rejects the casual efficiency of many kinds of permanent, albeit atheistic, metaphysical entities postulated as causes by non-Buddhists, postulates such as Universal Matter, Natural Law, etc. This second characteristic of dependent origination is simply designated "impermanence." Finally, the third, "On account of nescience, formatives, come to, arise. . . ." shows a third characteristic of the general theory, usually referred to as "potentiality," that is to say that all things cannot be the causes of all things, but only certain things may be singled out as the causes of other things, namely, when they can be ascertained to have the potential to produce those things. Thus, for instance, nescience can be singled out as a cause of formatives because without nescience formatives can no longer arise or be produced.

With this we are brought to a detailed examination of the twelve components, which will be taken up in the second part of this paper.³⁸

NOTES

1. This paper was undertaken as the first of two, or maybe three, projected papers dealing primarily with the various aspects of the Buddhist idea of dependent origination (*pratītya samutpāda*). I would like to thank Elvin W. Jones for his editorial and literary assistance in the preparation of this paper.

2. *sgo khang du 'khor ba'i 'khor lo'ol cha lnga par bya'ol gling bzhi po dag gol rjus te skye ba'i sems can zo chun rgyud mo bzhin du 'chi 'pho ba dang skye ba dag kyang ngol dbus su 'dod chags dang zhe sdang dang gti mug dag phug ron dang sprul dang phag gi rnam par rol sngama de gnyis gti mug gis za bar rol kho ru khor yug tu rten cing 'brel bar 'byrung ba'i ye lag bcu gnyis dang thams cad mi rtug pa nyid kyis bzang bar rol steng du sangs rgyas mya ngan las 'das pa'i dkyil 'khor dkar po nye bar ston pa'ol 'og tu brtsam par bya ba'i tshigs su bchad pa gnyis sol (Gunaprabha, *Vinaya-sūtra*).*

3. The Sarvāstivāda is one of the four main schools which subsume the eighteen subschools of the Hīnayāna. Its scriptural literature is sometimes referred to as the Sanskrit Canon in contradistinction to the Pāli Canon. It was in its Sarvāstivādin form that Buddhist monasticism entered Tibet, and its rules and prescriptions regulating monastic life are to be found in its *Vinaya-piṭaka*, or collection of scripture dealing with monastic discipline. This collection of works is generally held to be on a par in antiquity with the Pāli Canon,

the scriptural collection of the Theravādins, who are in turn a modern survivor of another of the four main schools subsuming the original eighteen sub-schools of the Hīnayāna, i.e., the Sthaviravādins.

4. "Sgo khang du ni cho 'phrul chen po dang 'khor ba'i 'khor lo cha lnga pa/ khyam su ni skyes pa'i rabs kyi phreng ba. . . ." "In the vestibule, depict the great magical feats (referring to the contest in miracle workings between the Buddha and the *tīrthikas*) and the five part wheel of saṃsāra; in the hallway the series of birth stories (Jataka). . . ." Nyingma Edition of sDe dge 'bka' gyur (hereafter sDe dge) (Dharma Publishing, 1981), bKa' gyur, Vinaya, Vol. 4, Pg. 114, fol. 1.

5. The *Vinaya-kyudraka-vastu*, the basis of a miscellany of monastic training, is devoted to numerous topics dealing with monasteries and monasticism and is the third of the four main works of the Sarvāstivādin Vinaya.

6. The *Bhikṣuṇī-vibhaṅga* and the *Bhikṣu vibhaṅga* constitute the *vibhaṅga* division, or second of the four main works of the Sarvāstivādin Vinaya. These two works are commentaries on the *Pratimokṣa* sūtras, and they expatiate at length the details of the individual precepts which constitute the vows for nuns and monks respectively. The two *vibhaṅgas*, and also the above-cited *Vinaya-kyudraka-vastu*, contain numerous stories of the comings and goings of the teacher Śākyamuni through the towns of the kingdoms of Magadha, Kośala, Kośambi, Aṅga, etc.

The story from which we are citing occurs as a part of a discussion of the question of whether a monk may work for gain and compensation. The Utrayana story, from which we shall cite a little later, forms part of the discussion prescribing the behavior of a monk residing in a royal court.

7. kun dga'bo thams cad du dge slong sari'i bu dang/ mod gal gyi bu chen po gnyis dang/ shari'i bu dang/ mod gal gyi bu chen bo gnyis lta bu dag mi 'byung bas de'i phyir sgo khang du cha lnga pa'i 'khor lo bri bar rjes su gnuang ngoll' bcom ldan 'das kyi sgo khang du cha lnga pa'i 'khor lo bri bar byaoll' zhes bka' stsal nasl dge slong rnam's kyi ji ltar bri ba mi shes nas becom ldan 'das kyi bka' stsal pal' gro ba lnga po sems can dmyal ba'i 'gro ba dang/ dud 'gro'i 'gro ba dang/ yi dags kyi 'gro ba dang/ lha'i 'gro ba dang/ mi'i 'gro ba bri bar byaoll' dge slong rnam's kyi gang du bri bar bya ba mi shes nas becom ldan 'das kyi bka' stsal pal' mthar sems can dmyal ba dang/ dud 'gro dang/ yi dags kyi 'gro ba bri bar byaoll' shar gyi lus 'phags dang/ nub kyi ba lang spyod dang/ byang gi sgra mi snyan dang/ 'dzam bu'i gling yang bri bar byaoll' dbus su 'dod chags dang/ zhe sdang dang/ gti mug dag bri bar byaoll' sangs rgyas kyi sku gzugs mya ngan las 'das pa'i dkyil 'khor dkar po ston par bri bar byaoll' rdzus te skyes pa'i sems can zo chun gryud ma'i tshul gyis 'chi 'pho bu dang skye ba dag kyang bri bar byaoll' khor yug tu rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba'i yan lag bcu gnyis lugs su 'byung ba dang lugs las bzlog pa dag bri bar bya zhing thams cad mi rtag pas bzung bar bri bar byaoll' tshigs su bcad pa gnyis po/ brtsam par bya zhing byung bar byaoll' sangs rgyas bstan la 'jug par byaoll' 'dam bu'i khyim la glang chen bzhinll' 'chi bdag sde ni gzhom par byaoll' gang zhig rab tu bag yod barll' chos 'dul 'di la spyod 'gyur ball' skye ba'i 'khor ba rab spang nasll' sdug bsngal tha mar byed par 'gyurll' zhes bya ba yang bri bar byaoll' sDedge, Vinaya, Vol. 3, p. 196, Fols. 3 ff.)

8. The Tibetan *sgra sgrogs* is probably translating the Sanskrit *Rāveṇa*; however, at the time of writing this paper I have not been able to ascertain

this definitely. At any rate, the King Utrayana of *Sgra sgrogs* in our story is certainly not Udayana of Vatsa, whose capital was Kośambi. This Utrayana appears in the Tibetan translation of the *vibhaṅga* as *U tra ya na*, whereas Udayana appears in the same as *Shar ba'i bu*. Likewise, Vatsa appears here in Tibetan in its transliterated form *Ba tsa*, and Kośambi in its transliterated form, *Ko sham bi*. The story places *Sgra sgrogs* far to the west of Magadha, in the borderlands, and obviously outside of the Ganges basin. In the meantime, and at least until determining the Sanskrit place name with greater certainty, the writer tends to think of it as somewhere in the region of Oddiyana or of Taxila.

9. A *krore*, i.e., ten millions, the upper limit of counting in the Indian number system which is being utilized in the story.

10. "Big noses" is an expression referring to municipal officials and the like.

11. The five prerequisites of a fine suit of armor, i.e. comfortable to wear for whatever time, difficult to cut, difficult to pierce, turning away poisons, and presenting a splendid appearance: *duś tshigs su reg pa bde ba dang/ gcaḍ dka' ba dang/ dbug dka' ba dang/ dug 'jil ba dang/ suang ba'i bdaḡ nyid dang ldan pa*. (sDe dge, loc. cit.)

12. *Rgyal po chen po sku gzugs byas zin nas 'og tu skyabs su 'gro ba dang bslab pa'i gzhi dang rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba'i yan lag bcu gnyis lugs su 'byung ba dang lugs las bzlog pa dag bri bar byao. Steng du tshigs su bead pa gnyis pol brtsam par bya zhing 'byung par byal sangs rgyas bstan la 'jug par byal 'dam bu'i khyim la glang chen bzhing/ 'chi bdaḡ sde ni gzhom par byal gang zhig rab tu bag yod par/ chos 'dul 'di la spyod 'gyur bal skye ba'i 'khor ba rab spang nas/ sdug bsngal tha mar byed par 'gyur/ zhes bya ba dag bri bar byao/* (sDe dge, Vinaya, vol. 3, p. 196, fol. 4.)

In the above cited passage, as in the other passage cited from the same work (cf. note 7), there is no indication as to how the twelve members of dependent origination were to be represented, or if, in fact, they were to be represented at all beyond being indicated by their names rather than by being portrayed by symbolic vignettes.

13. The Venerable Katyāyana, a direct disciple of the Buddha Śākya-muni.

14. The Tibetan *Gtsug pud can* may be translating the Sanskrit *Cūḍa*.

15. It is interesting to note that the subject matter alluded to in the above texts is generally narrative, and in the instance of our proto-wheel of life, didactic rather than iconic. This accords well with the earliest Buddhist sculpture and suggests at least the possibility of a school or schools of Buddhist painting as antecedents to narrative sculpture. Unfortunately, even representatives of later Indian Buddhist painting are not exactly plentiful. A painting of the Wheel of Life does appear in the caves at Ajanta.

16. In the five-part wheel, the gods (*devas*) and the counter-gods (*asuras*), who are also a class of *deva*, are depicted together in the same part or section. However, the *devas* and the *asuras* are depicted as belonging to different sections or parts when the wheel is six-part.

17. In paintings of the wheel of life, it is not uncommon to find another bird than the pigeon, especially the cock. The pigeon, however, conforms to the Vinaya.

18. In Buddhism, misery (*duḥkha*) is threefold: first, the misery of actual suffering; second, the misery of instability or change, especially change from a happy or fortunate condition to an inferior one; and third, the misery of an all-pervasive conditionedness whereby the destinies of sentient beings are brought about through the autonomous workings of other forces and powers, i.e., karma and *kleśa*, quite independent of their own control. In the wheel of life, the first of these three kinds of misery is shown throughout the five (or six) parts and pervades even the gods as far as the desire world. The second kind appears among the gods of the form world (*rūpadhātu*), and the third among the gods of the formless world (*arūpyadhātu*).

19. . . . "under the sway of passional action" because according to Buddhism mere action will not bring about rebirth in *saṃsāra*. Such birth is brought about only through actions given direction by the power of the passions (*kleśa*). In this sense, actions are like seeds and the passions the necessary conditions for their germination and production of fruit. Consequently, the arhant when he has uprooted the *kleśas*, even though he still has the seeds of countless actions accumulated during an immeasurable past, does not experience rebirth in *saṃsāra*, i.e., in an existence touched by sorrow, because his plenitude of germinal potential is given no further opportunity for fructification, on account of his conquest of the passions. Thus, passional action is envisaged as essentially fivefold, that is the three root passions of ignorance, attachment, and aversion, together with two kinds of action, namely, seeding actions and germinative actions. In another way, actions and passions are sometimes compared to a father and a mother, respectively, as in the famous *saṅdhyābhāṣā*, or figurative utterance of the Buddha, that one should kill one's father and mother in order to gain purification. As this passional action is a major feature within the twelve members of dependent origination, we shall have occasion to return to it at length later in the main body of the paper.

20. Cessation is a manifold, i.e., the cessations of all of these and those particular passions (*kleśa*) belonging to the desire, form, and formless worlds. The most significant of all these cessations is *nirvāṇa* itself, which is emancipation from all the *kleśas*.

21. There is both an explicit and an implicit theory of dependent origination. Whereas the former is closer to the letter of the *sūtras*, the latter has given rise to greater depth of philosophical interpretation.

22. All these schools, both *Hīnayāna* and *Mahāyāna*, i.e., the *Vaiḥbhāṣika*, *Sautrāntika*, *Yogācāra*, and *Mādhyamika*, and the various subschools subsumed by each.

23. "most developed and critical" may properly be said, especially if one takes into account not only its Indian developments but also its continuations in Tibet.

24. i.e., those of the *Sautrāntikas* and the *Yogācārins*, e.g., *Asaṅga's Abhidharmasamuccaya* on the eleven meanings of *pratītya samutpāda*: "The meaning of genesis in dependence on or in relation to is without a Creator; genesis having a cause; without a Sentient Being; under the control of other (than self); unimpelled (by any Design); impermanent; instantaneous; a continuum of cause and effect; a conformity between cause and effect; a mani-

fold of causes and an effect; and an ascertainability as to particular causes. These are the meanings of dependent origination" (*Byed pa po med pa'i don ni rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba'i don dang / rgyu dang bcas pa les 'byung ba'i don dang/ sems can med pa'i don dang/ gzhan gyi dbang gyis don dang/ gyo bad med pa'i don dang/ mi rtug pa'i don dang/ skyed cit ma'i don dang/ rgyud dang 'bras du rgyun mi 'chad pa'i don dang/ rgyu dang 'bras bu mthun pa'i don dang/ rgyu dang 'bras bu sna tshogs pa'i don dang/ rgyu dang /bras bu so sor nges pa'i don gyi rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba'i don noll*) (cited from block print in author's possession).

25. "causally efficient" = *arthakriyasamarthya*.

26. In all school of Buddhism except the Mādhyamika, dependent origination refers only to the kind of entity which has a genesis (i.e., *saṃskṛta dharma*), whereas in the Mādhyamika it refers to all entitles (*sarvadharmā*, including *asaṃskṛta dharma*).

27. i.e., existence in dependence on parts.

28. Various ācāryas of the Mahāyāna have eulogized the Buddha, especially through praise of the teaching of dependent origination, e.g., Nāgārjuna in the initial sloka of the *Madhyamaka-kārikās*.

29. "a most honorable or noble field of vision of the Buddhist saint or Āryan individual" because explicitly for the Hīnayāna, but also, albeit implicitly for the Mahāyāna, it is the immediate perceiving of the truth of suffering which initiates the Āryan path, that is to say the transformation of the yogin from the vulgar (*prthagjana*) to the noble (*ārya*) individual.

30. i.e., the highest or supreme good as envisaged by the Hīnayāna and the Mahāyāna respectively. Although the ideas symbolized in the wheel of life, the four truths, the twelve *nidānas*, etc., *per se* suggest the Hīnayāna, there is nothing here which is not equally the Mahāyāna, especially in the light of Nāgārjuna's commentary on the twelve members of *pratītya samutpāda*, a topic to which we shall return subsequently.

31. Elevation, or the attainment of a better destiny, in *saṃsāra* = *niḥśreyasa* (*mngon par mtho ba*). The highest or supreme good = *abhyudaya* (*nges par legs pa*).

32. Here in the sūtra "omniscience" has a quite special sense of "knowledge of all the factors leading to existence in *saṃsāra* and all the factors conducive to emancipation." In this sense the Buddha as the realizer of *nirvāṇa*, the goal of the Āryan path, is also a realizer of omniscience, and there is here the very apparent parallelism from dependent origination through the *dharma* to the Buddha.

33. Cf. sDe dge, bstan 'gyur, Sūtrānta, v. 74, pp. 10–11.

34. Cf. sDe dge, bstan 'gyur, Mādhyamika, v. 68, p. 74 ff.

35. Cf. sDe dge, bstan 'gyur, sūtrānta, v. 74, p. 264.

36. My translation is from the Peking edition: *Tibetan Tripitaka, Peking Edition*, ed. D.T. Suzuki (Tokyo-Kyoto, 1957), v. 34, p. 306.

37. Although Vasubandhu's commentary is a Yogācārin work his comments on this and the two following features of the general theory are common to all Buddhist schools.

38. Cf. note 1.

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