

Quotes & Notes for Bone of Existence, Talk 2

John Rockwell

Thrangu Rinpoche, *The Twelve Links of Interdependent Origination*

7. Feeling

In the chain of the twelve links of interdependent origination, one link gives rise to the next link; each link is the cause for the next link to arise. Once there are the perceptual entrances, there can be sensual contact. And once there is contact, then feelings arise. These feelings can be either pleasant, unpleasant, or indifferent. For instance, when the eye sees something that is beautiful, that creates a pleasant feeling.

If the visual faculty sees something ugly, then there is an unpleasant feeling. Eyes can also see things which are not particularly ugly or beautiful, and then there is a neutral feeling or the feeling of indifference. The raw quality of feeling good, bad, and indifferent is the seventh link, feeling. Feelings such as those of compassion can lead to positive karma; feelings such as hate can lead to negative karma.

The twelve links can be grouped in various ways. Looking at these links globally, the first two links of ignorance and karmic creation are the cause for the next five links of consciousness, name and form, the perceptual entrances, contact, and feeling. This means that through the main root of ignorance, one made the karmic creations in former lives, which then give rise to links three, four, five, six and seven in this life. In other words, our present consciousness and the links that follow are conditioned by previous ignorance and karmic conditions. The way that consciousness is imprinted determines the fourth link of name and form; name and form, in turn, give rise to the perceptual entrances. Due to the perceptual entrances, there is contact, with the external perception, the sense organ, and the consciousnesses coming together, from which we get the seventh link, of feeling. Each link leads to the next, but in terms of a larger view the first two links relate to past lives, and then give rise to the next five links, which have to do with this life. In their turn, these five links will be the basis for how one acts in this life, which will create future lives. So there is a constant play of causality, on smaller and greater levels.

Again, the seventh link is feeling. When there is a pleasant feeling through contact with the objective world, there arises a sense of need. When one has pleasant feelings, one wants to maintain or continue them. This leads to the eighth link, which is grasping.

8. Grasping

A better translation for the eighth link is “involvement” rather than “grasping,” since it concerns an involvement with the objective world that one experiences. This grasping can be part of a certain situation, such as being in love and grasping at one’s loved one, or a feeling that one has to have people’s admiration and respect, or desperately holding onto a material possession, such as a house or car or form of entertainment. When there is a pleasant feeling, one wishes to keep that feeling of pleasantness. One’s mind becomes involved in clinging to this subjective experience. Besides clinging and grasping at nice experiences, we also reject unpleasant feelings and we want to keep away from unpleasant experiences. Involvement can be clinging or rejecting; in both there is some kind of involvement with the objective world one experiences, because of the way it makes us feel. Actually, there are three kinds of involvement: clinging, rejecting, and indifference.

Due to a pleasant feeling, one's involvement with that feeling grows to a point where one decides that one definitely needs to acquire the thing which gives rise to the pleasant feeling. On the other hand, one may decide that one needs to get away from the things which give rise to unpleasant feelings. This is the ninth link.

9. Adoption

The link of becoming involved with something, either wanting it or avoiding it, leads to the ninth link of adoption, in which one makes definite plans to get the object of one's desire. This could also be a decision to eliminate or avoid something one has deemed unpleasant. At this stage, the process is still mental. In the tenth link, this decision is put into action.

The Path is the Goal 22: Awareness brings egolessness because there is no object of awareness. You are aware of the whole thing completely, of you and other and of the activities of you and other at the same time. So everything is open. There is no particular object of the awareness.

If you're smart enough, you might ask the question, "Who is being aware of this whole thing?" That's a very interesting question, the sixty-four-dollar question. And the answer is, nobody is being aware of anything but itself. The razor blade cuts itself. The sun shines by itself. Fire burns by itself. Water flows by itself. Nobody watches—and that is the very primitive logic of egolessness.

Contemplations

1. If feeling is karmically neutral, how is it that the kleshas of thirst or craving arise? What is your personal experience of this?
2. What is your most basic klesha? How does it arise?
3. Where do you feel most stuck in your body? What happens when you feel into that stuckness and be open without expectation or storyline?