

10) Becoming: The pregnant woman represents the interdependence of becoming. Just as the pregnant woman is headed towards the birth of her child, once the imprints of karmic formations on our consciousness are triggered by craving and grasping, the power of karma becomes very strong and directs the mind towards establishing a new resultant body.

11) Birth: Here the woman is giving birth – the drawing depicts the interdependence of birth. Just like the baby emerges from the mother's womb, the consciousness comes out of the old body and passes through the Bardo-existence. From there, it transmigrates to a new birth-existence.

12) Old age and death: In the twelfth drawing a man is carrying a corpse, symbolizing the interdependence of old age and death. The sight of a human corpse spontaneously evokes death. As we age, our body decays and we experience the interdependence of old age. When the four elements gradually absorb, the relationship between this life's body and mind is severed and the interdependence of death results.



The completely wrathful Rakshasa Lord of Death, with his red mouth who is holding the wheel illustrates how, through the power of the karma and the afflictive emotions, all beings in this cyclic existence are under the control of the Lord of Death. Moreover it exemplifies that it is not just once or twice, but as long as we don't abandon the roots of Samsara that we will continuously taste the worldly sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death, permanently revolving from the peak of the cyclic existence to the Most Torturous Hell. At the top of the image, the moon symbolizes the liberation from all the suffering—the state of Buddhahood triumphant over the four Maras. The figure of Lord Buddha pointing at the moon with his hand indicates the path, showing that those who don't achieve such a nirvana will continuously revolve at the bottom of the ocean of suffering. Therefore, since there is no end to Samsara, beings should work hard to find a way of obtaining the state of Nirvana.

If we analyze the allegorical meaning of the illustration from the perspective of the four noble truths, the six containing realms and the beings they contain depict the truth of suffering. The bird, snake and pig in the centre symbolize the truth of origin which is the afflictive emotions and the black and white paths around them represent the truth of origin which is karma. The drawing of the twelve links symbolizes the way how the wheel of Samsara turns, and the image of Buddha represents the truth of the path. The arisen moon signifies the truth of cessation, peace, and Lord Buddha pointing at it symbolizes the method to obtain Nirvana on the basis of the truth of the path.

Thence, the intelligent beings who strive to achieve lasting happiness, having thoroughly understood the presentation of the direct and reverse orders of interdependence and practiced the unmistakable path of cultivation and avoidance of the four noble truths, make as much effort as possible in applying the means to achieve the ultimate happiness: the triple jewel state of a conqueror, thus, extracting the essence of their human existence through supreme methods.

## Explanation Of How We Wander In Samsara Based On The Twelve Links Of Dependent Origination



This illustration of the "Wheel of Samsara", conceived by The Compassionate Teacher himself in order to show us the path to liberation, illustrates how beings revolve in Samsara driven by the power of karma and afflictive emotions. Scriptures relate that once they were taught this object of meditation, Kings Bimbisara, Udayana and others attained the supreme path of the noble beings by listening, reflecting and meditating on the direct and reverse order of the twelve links of dependent origination. Ever since then, many ordained and lay people have progressed on the pure path of liberation by listening, reflecting and meditating about the allegorical meaning of this illustration, combined with the stages of the path to enlightenment of the three types of beings.

Let us then reveal the symbolic meaning of the drawings in this illustration: we have the bird full of desire, the snake that harbors hatred and the ignorant pig. This threesome of bird, snake and pig symbolizes the three afflictions: desire, hatred and ignorance. As these are the source of the beings' wandering in Samsara and, these symbols have been drawn on the centre of the wheel. The bird and snake emerging from the mouth of the pig represents how desire and hatred arise from ignorance.

The black and white semicircles around them depict the virtuous and sinful karma that lead to higher or lower realms during the Bardo or intermediate existence of transmigrations. Furthermore, beings who owing to their non-virtuous actions will have unfavorable rebirths, will feel they are swooping upside down in the darkness during the Bardo state. Those whose rebirths will be in higher realms owing to their virtuous actions will experience a luminosity similar to a moonlight night or the glitter of a snow mountain reflecting the sunlight; they will have a feeling of going uphill [when going to a heaven] or on level ground [when bound for the human realm], etc. As for the drawing of the messenger of the Lord of Death carrying beings bound with ropes, it symbolizes beings who travel through the Bardo to a lower realm, being helplessly swept along by the power of their bad karma. Some who are being taken away after being tied up by the awful messenger of Death look unspeakably terrified. Transmigrations to higher realms are not that frightful.

The image shows a middle ring where gods', humans', demigods', hell beings', hungry ghosts' and beasts' realms accurately represent the six types of beings wandering in Samsara.

### Symbolic meaning of each of the twelve links.



1) Ignorance: The drawing that appears first among the twelve links depicts a blind person leaning on a walking stick. It symbolizes the interdependence of ignorance. Just as this person is confused about which is the right way, we are ignorant about the circumstances of karmic causality and interdependence; based on improper beliefs, we become perverted and engage in virtuous and sinful acts with no prior deliberation.



2) Karmic formation: In the second link, a potter represents the interdependence of karmic formation. In the same way as a potter can make all kinds of vessels, large or small, good or bad, karmic interdependence produces a variety of mental and physical aggregates, big or little, good or bad.



3) Consciousness: The third link shows a monkey in a tree; it symbolizes the interdependence of consciousness. Just as a monkey jumps from one tree to another in quick succession, a consciousness undergoes birth and death as it travels from the resultant body of the previous life to the present one and then to the next.



4) Name and form: The fourth drawing, a boat, depicts the interdependence of all sorts of names and forms. Just as a boat serves as a basis to convey travelers from this side to the other and as a vessel in which they can place their equipment and supplies, the different kinds of names and forms are the basis for the consciousness that came from the previous life to this one and will go on to the next, and also the vessel from which arise all kinds of pleasure and pain.



5) Sense organs: The fifth is an empty house. It represents the interdependence of the sense spheres: although the empty house essentially exists, there is no owner residing inside it. Likewise, although the existence of the five senses (which uphold the sense spheres) is totally established, the resident five consciousnesses are still not.



6) Contact: The sixth presents a couple embracing and kissing each other; this symbolizes the interdependence of contact. While the couple embraces and kisses, the mere pleasure of contact does not wholly fulfill the pleasure of having sex. Similarly, at the time of contact, we feel the object of touch is hot or cold, rough or smooth; but it is a mere impression of contact, as we still do not experience the feelings of pleasure or pain that arise from it.



7) Feeling: The seventh link shows an arrow lodged in a person's eye – it represents the interdependence of feeling. As soon as the eye is pierced by the arrow, suffering spontaneously arises. Likewise, if an instance of contact becomes quite powerful when touching something hot or cold, rough or smooth, feelings of pleasure or pain will arise naturally.



8) Craving: Here a man is drinking alcohol, symbolizing the interdependence of craving. When a man drinking alcohol experiences its effect, his desire for it and clinging will naturally grow, distracting his mind. In the same way, when we cling to the illusory appearances of worldly existence, our mind will be afflicted by the desire to obtain this or that or to not be separated from that or the other.



9) Grasping: The ninth drawing depicts a monkey gathering fruit, to portray the interdependence of grasping. The monkey's mind got excited by a beautiful piece of fruit and clutches it. Similarly, when craving becomes very strong, the mind becomes agitated.