

Am I Seeing Clearly

Something happens, and all of a sudden we find our mind or body wanting things to be different. If it touches a behavior we have struggled with, an addiction or an old pattern, we might catch ourselves thinking: "Why do I keep doing that?" Or maybe it isn't the act at all, but the quieter version of the same question: "Why do I keep thinking about that?"

Can there ever be relief?

The first step is simply to catch it, and once we have, to ask: am I seeing clearly? The Buddha offered a kind of answer to the "why" behind these questions in what he called the **twelve links of dependent origination**. It is a map of how suffering arises, and knowing it can help when we find ourselves caught in a cycle we would like to change.

The chain begins with **ignorance**, but not in the sense of being uninformed or unintelligent. The Pali word is *avijjā*, which points to something more basic: not seeing clearly the nature of what is happening. In any given moment there is so much we miss. We do not see that the feeling driving us will pass on its own. We do not see that the thing we are reaching for cannot deliver the relief it promises. We do not see the conditions, inside us and around us, that are shaping the moment. This not-seeing is fertile ground, and it is where the seeds of our suffering most often take root.

Out of that ground come our **volitional formations**, the habitual tendencies we carry into every moment. Some are grooves worn by everything we have done. Others run deeper, carved before we drew our first breath, in temperament and inheritance we never chose. Whatever their source, they color our reaction before we have begun to think at all.

Then **consciousness**: the bare lighting-up of awareness as the moment registers at one of the **sense doors**. Buddhist thought counts six, the five physical senses and the mind as a sixth. Consciousness is simply the knowing that something has arrived. Bound up with it is what the tradition calls **name-and-form**, the meeting of body and mind that makes any experience possible: the physical side, and the mental side of feeling and perception and attention that let the moment be known. The two are inseparable, each leaning on the other like two sheaves of reeds propped together.

Contact concludes the first half of the chain. This is the meeting itself: the sense base, the object, and consciousness coming together so that experience ignites. It is the threshold. Everything before it was the machinery assembling in the dark, beyond our reach. Everything after it is the territory where practice begins. So this is where we can first hold the question: am I seeing clearly? Not because we can stop it, it has already happened, but because from here on, what unfolds is no longer entirely automatic.

Feeling tone arises next, and this is not feeling in the sense of emotion. It is simpler: the pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral quality that colors an experience before any story forms

around it. **Craving** follows, the pull that forms around that tone, wanting the pleasant to stay, the unpleasant to go, things to be other than they are. Often this feels completely automatic, as though no other response were possible. Part of what practice reveals, slowly, is that there is more room here than first appears.

Then the moment crystallizes into **clinging**: the pull hardens into a grip, no longer just leaning toward or away but holding on, unwilling to let it be otherwise. From there comes **becoming**, the momentum gathering toward action, the pregnant pause before we act. Something else is taking shape here too: a sense of self forming around the reaction, an "I" who wants this, who has been wronged, who deserves or needs. The reaction gains its force because there is now someone it belongs to.

That self then fully arrives, and this is the next link: **birth**. Not birth into a life, but the birth of an "I" in this very moment, the one to whom this is happening, the one who is acting. A breath ago there was just experience unfolding. Now there is someone at the center of it, someone the whole situation is about.

This leads, finally, to the last link: **aging and death**. The moment passes. The self that felt so solid recedes, the situation dissolves, and what is left behind is residue, the ache of something wanted and lost, or feared and endured. And here is the crucial turn: if that residue is not met with clear seeing, it does not dissipate. It sinks back into the not-seeing we began with, thickening it, and conditions the next time around. The chain closes into a circle. Aging and death feed ignorance, and the whole thing turns again.

In its completeness, this map becomes useful for our recovery. Our addictions were never a matter of being broken, or of having chosen wrongly at some single decisive moment. They were the chain of dependent origination running in the dark, link after link, unseen. And the chain only runs automatically when it runs unseen.

That is the good news hidden in the map. We do not have to catch the moment early to be practicing. We do not have to interrupt the chain at exactly the right link, or do any of it perfectly. Noticing that we got pulled, even long after, even as residue, is already a moment of seeing, and seeing is the one thing the chain cannot survive. The noticing is the practice. The caring enough to look is the practice.

Every moment is an opening to explore how the mind works, and meditation is simply the quietest place to ask the question that matters most. Not "did I get it right." Not "did I catch it in time." Only this: am I seeing clearly?