

The Embryo-Entering Consciousness Is Different from the Six Consciousnesses

This article contains two segments that expound the connection between the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising and the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising. The first segment explains the notion that “the embryo-entering consciousness is different from the six consciousnesses” while the second elaborates on the “transmigration-gate and emancipation-gate.”

The previous article has briefly elaborated that the practice and realization of Solitary-realizer Bodhi is achieved through observing and contemplating the Principle of Dependent Arising to eliminate self-view and even self-attachment to attain the fruition of liberation. However, the realization of the Principle of Dependent Arising is contingent upon the premise that “when embryo-entering consciousness exists, mind-and-body comes to be” for the successful contemplation of the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising—i.e., the contemplation of the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising can only be successfully established contingent upon the premise that the mind-and-body is conditioned by the embryo-entering consciousness in the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising. Therefore, the embryo-entering consciousness is a crucial and critical link between the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising and the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising—the reason that the Buddha expounded the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising before teaching the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising.

The embryo-entering consciousness (*tathāgatagarbha*) in the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising which gives rise to mind-and-body is not one of the six consciousnesses—it is not encompassed in the consciousness aggregate as one of the six consciousnesses. The way of contemplating the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising is as follows: When we explore in reverse order, the following questions begin to surface: How did aging, death, worry, sorrow, vexation, and suffering start? From where were we born, and to where will we go after death?” We will discover and find that aging, death, worry, sorrow, vexation, and suffering come to be due to the existence of birth. The reason for the existence of birth and the subsequent aging, death, worry, sorrow, vexation, and suffering is due to becoming. How does becoming come to be? There is becoming due to grasping. How does grasping come to be? There is grasping due to craving. How does craving come to be? There is craving due to the three kinds of

sensations. How do the sensations come to be? There are sensations due to contact. How does contact come to be? There is contact due to the six entrances. How do the six entrances come to be? There are the six entrances due to mind-and-body. How does body-and-mind come to be? There is body-and-mind due to consciousness. When we explore the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising up to this consciousness, we cannot proceed any further. Such is Buddha's teaching that "when I reached this consciousness, I had to turn back and could not go beyond it." Therefore, the Buddha taught in the *Agama Sutra*: "To which dharma does body-and-mind owe the existence? By which dharmas is body-and-mind conditioned? ... When there is consciousness, mind-and-body comes to be; mind-and-body has consciousness as its condition. When I thus contemplated, it occurred to me that when I reached this consciousness, I had to turn back and could not go beyond it." (*Miscellaneous Agama Sutra, Vol 12.*)

The Buddha expounded very clearly that when contemplating the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising to the point that mind-and-body comes to be due to consciousness. He realized that "when I reached this consciousness, I had to turn back and could not go beyond it." However, which "consciousness" is this "consciousness" referring to? Let us look at the *Agama Sutra* to see what the Buddha taught. In the *Long Agama Sutra, Vol 10*, Buddha addressed Ananda: "If consciousness were not to enter the mother's womb, would mind-and-body develop there?" Ananda answers: 'There would not be.' ... Therefore, I know that when there is consciousness, mind-and-body comes to be; mind-and-body is conditioned by consciousness. What I mean is exactly such.'" Hence, Buddha taught that "mind-and-body is conditioned by consciousness," and this "consciousness" is the embryo-entering consciousness. This is exactly what the Buddha taught.

Which consciousness (the one that gives rise to mind-and-body) is the embryo-entering consciousness then? Could it be one of the six consciousnesses of the consciousness aggregate? However, the conscious mind in the six consciousnesses will cease to exist right after the cessation of the state of intermediate existence between the last death and the next rebirth, so it cannot traverse to the next life. The conscious mind is part of the mind in mind-and-body and is an arising-and-ceasing dharma that possesses the other-dependent nature and arises dependent upon others. Therefore, it cannot move on to the next life, and of course cannot give rise to the body-and-mind of the next life. Then, could the embryo-entering consciousness be the mental faculty? The mental faculty is also part of the mind in mind-and-body and even though it can traverse all dharmas in the past, present and future and serve as a connecting link, it is only a

supporting condition for all arisen dharmas but not the root cause for the arising of all dharmas.

Is the embryo-entering consciousness the empty space then? However, the Buddha taught that there is no dharma in the empty space and the empty space is simply a form at the edge of form, so it cannot give rise to mind-and-body. Then, does mind-and-body come to be naturally? If one claims that nature is the cause and condition that give rise to mind-and-body, one then has fallen into the fallacy of non-Buddhists who believe that everything is generated by nature without a cause. Does mind-and-body come to be through only conditions in the Principle of Dependent Arising? However, the conditions in the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising are all impermanent dharmas themselves; they are the arising-and-ceasing dharmas, and the arising-and-ceasing dharmas cannot give rise to mind-and-body.

Some people think that if none of the above is the root cause of the arising of all dharmas, it must be the king of the Great Brahma Heaven who gives rise to mind-and-body or there must be a sovereign (God) who creates mind-and-body. However, both the king of the Great Brahma Heaven and God are manifestations of mind-and-body, and they themselves were created by their own individual embryo-entering consciousness; so how could they give rise to mind-and-body of others? So which consciousness is the embryo-entering consciousness? In fact, the embryo-entering consciousness is the origin of the cycle of birth and death and the fundamental cause that creates and manifests all dharmas; it is called “the root (primordial) consciousness”, “basis of the known”, and “the fundamental reality.”

Why is it called the root consciousness? Because all dharmas in the three realms come to be from this foundational consciousness—it is the foundation (root) of all dharmas and therefore is called the root consciousness. From the term “root consciousness,” it is obvious that all dharmas come to be from the root consciousness, and no other consciousness can play such a role. If there were another consciousness other than the root consciousness that could play such a role, that would become the root of the root consciousness. If it were so, then there would be the problem of infinite regress, and the contemplation on causes and conditions could never be accomplished and enlightenment would never be possible. Therefore, the consciousness must be the root consciousness that Buddha taught: “when I reached this consciousness, I had to turn back and could not go beyond it.”

This root consciousness is also called “the basis of the known” because it is the fundamental support of all conscious minds and Manas (the mental faculty) that know and understand all dharmas of the three realms as well as the six sense objects. All the perceptive minds depend upon the *tathāgatagarbha*—the embryo-entering consciousness—to be able to understand and know all dharmas in the three realms as well as the six sense objects. Why is it also called “the fundamental reality, the limit of reality, the ultimate state”? The adjectives “limit”, “ultimate”, “fundamental”, clearly suggest that all dharmas eventually regress back up to this consciousness. “Limit” signifies the boundary that no other dharm can give rise to this fundamental consciousness. If anyone thinks that there is another dharma that can give rise to this consciousness, then they must be non-Buddhists who either take the void as the origin of all manifestation, or fall in the fallacy of taking the conscious mind as the fundamental consciousness.

This embryo-entering consciousness is also called the non-mind mind or the mind without the characteristics of an ordinary mind in the *Prajna-Paramita Sutra*. Why is it called the non-mind mind? Because this mind does not have the various characteristics of the minds like the sixth conscious mind or the Manas, and it does not possess the discerning characteristic of the first five consciousnesses that are capable of discriminating the five sense objects. It is not the mind that ordinary people know and hence it is called the non-mind mind. Although it can manifest all dharmas in the three realms and the six sense objects, it does not discern any dharma in the three realms or the six sense objects. It does not have the characteristics of the sixth or seventh consciousness, or the first five consciousnesses, and hence it is called the mind without the characteristics of an ordinary mind as well.

This embryo-entering consciousness is also the neither-arising-nor-ceasing *tathāgatagarbha* to which the Chan school practitioners awaken or enlighten. Because of this neither-arising-nor-ceasing (*tathāgatagarbha*) mind, all dharmas of the three realms and six sense objects can be manifested; it is also the fundamental cause of sentient beings’ transmigration. Hence, the Chan school calls it “one’s original face before birth.

This mind has yet one other name—the *ālaya* consciousness which synergizes the arising-and-ceasing and neither-arising-nor-ceasing. While all dharmas of the three realms and six sense objects are functioning and being discriminated by our conscious mind and Manas during the state of arising-and-ceasing, the *tathāgatagarbha* remains in its own state of neither-rising-nor-ceasing. Although it gives rise to all dharmas of the three realms and the six sense objects for the sentient beings to use, it is neither-arising-nor-

ceasing itself. It is because the flow of the seeds of the first seven consciousnesses functioning and working together with the eight consciousness *tathāgatagarbha*—the synergistic cooperation between the seeds of delimited existence of sentient beings and the *tathāgatagarbha* working together which appears as a single mind—that this embryo-entering consciousness is called the *ālaya* consciousness.

Although it has all these different names, it is the same embryo-entering consciousness that gives rise to the mind-and-body. It goes by so many different names because Buddha, out of necessity, were using different names in the *Agama Sutra*, *Prajna-Paramita Sutra*, and the *Consciousness-Only Sutra* in the third round of dharma transmission to expediently teach and guide sentient beings.

This embryo-entering consciousness is the root cause, not a condition, that gives rise to all dharmas. It is not a condition like mind-and-body, six entrances, birth, or aging, worry, sorrow, afflictions, and sufferings, where each of these links is dependent upon the previous one as the condition and none of them is the root cause. Each of the twelve links in the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination depends on the immediately preceding link as a causal condition to come to be but they themselves are incapable of manifesting any dharma without the root cause. The twelve links of the Principle of Dependent Arising must rely on the embryo-entering consciousness as the root to manifest anything. Hence, the embryo-entering consciousness is the prerequisite for the successful practice of observing and contemplating the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising, which is why the Buddha elucidated the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising prior to teaching the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising.

Let us continue to investigate further to which the consciousness in the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising is referring when it says “consciousness conditions mind-and-body.” The consciousness in the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising refers to the six groups of consciousness. It is the groups of consciousness specified in “ignorance conditions acts; acts condition consciousness,” which is the six groups of consciousness of the previous life. Because the karmic seeds of the six consciousnesses from past life have not yet been eliminated, the *tathāgatagarbha* continues to grasp on to mind-and-body and enters the embryo in the next life.

Let us compare the two versions of the Principle of Dependent Arising:

The Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising in reverse order is as follows:

Aging and death → birth → becoming → grasping → craving → sensation → contact → six entrances → mind-and-body → consciousness (embryo-entering consciousness).

The Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising in reverse order is as follows:

Aging and death → birth → becoming → grasping → craving → sensation → contact → six entrances → name-and-form → consciousness (six consciousnesses) → acts → ignorance.

From the surface, it appears that the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising is short of three links—six consciousnesses, acts, and ignorance—when compared to the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising. However, in reality, the only differences are ignorance and acts. As sentient beings explore the causes and conditions that give rise to mind-and-body in the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising, they arrive at the embryo-entering consciousness and realize that “when I reached this consciousness, I had to turn back and could not go beyond it.” They continue to explore why this embryo-entering consciousness has the momentum to enter another embryo again in the next life. Where does such momentum (the momentum of rebirth) come from? Why will the embryo-entering consciousness grasp on to mind-and-body again to let sentient beings go through the incessant cycle of rebirth that give rise to the mind-and-body, the six entrances, and eventually birth, aging, illness, death, worry, sorrow, vexation, and suffering over and over again? They discover that the answer is because of the seeds of the six groups of consciousness of the previous life, i.e., the seeds (of attachments) of the six consciousnesses of previous life have not yet been eliminated. But from where do the seeds of the six consciousnesses of previous life come? They realize that it is due to the ignorance link from the previous life. Ignorance coupled with the karmic seeds from previous lives induced various physical, verbal and mental acts and fostered the karmic seeds of six consciousnesses (all acts) of the previous life. These karmic seeds are stored in the *tathāgatagarbha* and will induce the *tathāgatagarbha* to continue to grasp on to mind-and-body again to cause sentient beings’ incessant transmigration in the three realms. At this point, sentient beings have learned that ignorance, volitional acts, and six consciousnesses of the previous life are the main force that has driven the embryo-entering consciousness to enter the embryo again. Consequentially, they will want to eliminate ignorance. But prior to eliminating ignorance, volitional acts must be eliminated;

prior to eliminating volitional acts, the karmic seeds of the six consciousnesses must be eliminated.

However, how can ignorance, acts, and six consciousnesses be eliminated? Since the ignorance, acts, and consciousnesses of the previous life are already in the past, how is it possible to eliminate them and where are they being stored? They are stored in the embryo-entering consciousness, where the karmic seeds of ignorance have been stored. Because of the existence of the embryo-entering consciousness, the *tathāgatagarbha*, which stores previous karmic seeds of ignorance, mind-and-body will continuously come to be. Therefore, when sentient beings attempt to eliminate ignorance and act as well as six consciousnesses from the previous life, they must find out the principle and methods on eliminating ignorance, acts, and consciousnesses, which will be discussed in details in a later article when we explain and elaborate on both the transmigration gate and emancipation gate. Hence, to eliminate the karmic seeds of ignorance, acts, and six consciousnesses is to eliminate the momentum and forces that induce the embryo-entering consciousness to reenter the embryo. In other words, we must eliminate the momentum that drives the embryo-entering consciousness to reenter the embryo but not the root consciousness. This is exactly the reason the Buddha elucidated the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising before the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising.

Next, we shall explore in more details why the Buddha elucidated the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising prior to the Principle of the Twelve links of Dependent Arising. The main reason is to prevent sentient beings from falling into the non-Buddhist theory of no fundamental cause. If there were not an embryo-entering consciousness serving as the basis for contemplation, when sentient beings contemplate the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising in reverse order, they would fall into the fallacy of infinite regress. When they were to contemplate in reverse order from aging, death, worry, sorrow, vexation, and suffering to birth, to becoming, and all the way to the arising of mind-and-body, they would conclude that mind-and-body came to be because the seeds of consciousnesses in the previous life had not yet been eliminated; the seeds of consciousnesses in the previous life came to be because of physical, verbal and mental acts (caused by the consciousness aggregate); and the physical, verbal and mental acts in the previous life came to be because the karmic seeds of ignorance had not yet been eliminated. If they kept exploring deeper, they would wonder where ignorance in the previous life came from and where it was stored. Did it come from ignorance of yet another previous life? They would continue this contemplation endlessly, and would fall

into the fallacy of infinite regress. This is the first problem caused by the theory of no fundamental cause that denies the existence of the root cause of all dharmas.

The denial of the existence of the embryo-entering consciousness will create another inevitable problem—nihilism. When sentient beings cannot ascertain that “the embryo-entering consciousness is the root cause that gives rise to mind-and-body”, they will arrive at a nihilistic state after the complete elimination of the karmic seeds of ignorance in the previous life—nihilistic state after the elimination of ignorance, acts, consciousnesses, and mind-and-body. This is exactly why during Buddha’s era Śāriputra berated bhikkhu Yamaka who fixated on the nihilistic belief that there would be nothing left after the death of an arhat who had extinguished all taints.

The World-Honored One elucidated the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising before the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising because he wanted to make sure that practitioners of the Two Vehicles would have no fear within (because they would know that the state of nirvana without remainder after death was not nihilistic emptiness due to the presence of the never ceasing fundamental reality—the embryo-entering consciousness). In other words, practitioners of the Two Vehicles had faith in the Buddha and believed in his teaching that the fundamental reality would never cease to exist; as a result, they had the courage to eliminate mind-and-body and the six entrances (in particular, the internal six entrances) without any fear.

Moreover, the World-Honored One elucidated the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising prior to the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising to ensure that practitioners of Mahayana would have no fear to remain in the cycle of birth and death. Only through personal realization of the *tathāgatagarbha*, and with the premise that the *tathāgatagarbha* does exist, can Mahayana practitioners have no fear to continuously remain in the cycle of birth and death while practicing the Bodhisattva Way. Also only through reliance on the *tathāgatagarbha* (the embryo-entering consciousness that gives rise to mind-and-body) can practitioners of Mahayana continue to cultivate from lower to upper grounds without having to completely eliminating self-attachment while still retaining the last bit of afflictive hindrances to nourish future rebirths so as to benefit sentient beings life after life incessantly.

The Buddha elucidated both the ten-link and twelve-link versions of the Principle of Dependent Arising to properly set up the emancipation-gate and transmigration-gate. It must be under the premise of the embryo-entering consciousness in the Principle of the

Ten Links of Dependent Arising can the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising be successfully established. And only so, can the true transmigration-gate in the Principle of the Ten Links of Dependent Arising as well as the emancipation-gate of the Principle of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising be established based on the true dependent arising to help learners of Three Vehicles eliminate self-view and self-attachment. This is the true and real teaching of “the embryo-entering consciousness is different from the six consciousnesses” taught in both the ten-link and twelve-link versions of the Principle of Dependent Arising.

