

## Anatomy of Quarrels and Disputes

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The *sutta* known as “Quarrels and Disputes” in the *Sutta Nipāta* may well contain the earliest rendering of dependent arising. At first glance it appears to be limited to a discussion of causes leading to our desire for that which is dear to us, to have significantly fewer links than the classic twelve-link version, and to make no use of the Prajāpati myth. An examination that focuses primarily on words used that match up well to the usual formula for dependent arising indicates otherwise.

In the *Sutta Nipāta*<sup>1</sup> there is a short discourse that may be the earliest version of *paṭicca samuppāda* in the Pali Canon. With its repeated use of the words *paḥoti* (‘arising’) and *nidāna* (‘cause’), plus one use of the word *paṭicca* (‘dependent’), the *sutta* is surely describing dependent arising. The vocabulary used in detailing the links of causation is quite different from the usual formula, and the whole is not framed in terms of rebirth, both indicators that it may be quite old.

It is not too hard to find seven of the classic twelve links in the text, but a close examination of the structure of the *sutta* through focus on the words associated with dependent arising suggests more: there are nine links. In this paper I will suggest that, in addition to the likelihood that this is, indeed, a very early rendering of dependent arising, it also adds evidence to the theory that the Buddha originally had ten links in the chain, not twelve. I will also suggest that when he is talking about what is obvious to all, he is often, and in this case too, wanting us to understand that he is also discussing what is not obvious.

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<sup>1</sup>KN 5.49 also known as Snp 4.11 [PTS Sn 862-877]. The Pali for the entire *sutta* can be found at Sutta Central: <http://suttacentral.net/snp4.11/pi/#11>

One of my goals in this paper is to separate the few key words from the text and its translation to the greatest degree that I possibly can. I am expressing by example the way in which translations can get in the way of understanding: I am trying to show that what this *sutta* is describing has not been recognized, in part, because translators all have their views as to what it says, and translate with that in mind, and the certainty that we know what it says can sometimes obscure the structure. It is through laying bare the key words and the structure that they form within the *sutta* that we can come to see what is going on. If I gave a full translation here, it would only distract from that, so I have kept translation to a minimum.<sup>2</sup>

The conversation portrayed in the *sutta* begins with an unidentified questioner asking someone<sup>3</sup> about the source of quarrels and disputes, and more:

Questioner: Where have quarrels and disputes, lamentation and grief together with avarice, pride and arrogance together with slander arisen from? Where have they arisen from? Come, tell me that.

The response follows, first giving one cause for the whole list, then taking individual pieces and describing where they come from. From there to the end of the *sutta*, one can perceive a pattern in each set, in which the first subject of the stanza can be thought of as “the main topic” and the second and sometimes third subjects under discussion are “side topics”.

This first pair of questions and answers could be diagrammed as two levels in our chain of events, the result that we start from being the top level, and the cause of that result set below it, as we work backward through this version of dependent arising. Thus our diagram begins, with the Pali words above and translations be-

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<sup>2</sup>I have avoided providing translations for reasons given above, however for those who would find them useful, several are available online. Leigh Brasington’s page on the *sutta* has a table that puts several translators’ versions together side-by-side. There are also full pages for Thanissaro Bhikkhu’s and John D. Ireland’s.

Brasington’s: [http://www.leighb.com/snp4\\_11.htm](http://www.leighb.com/snp4_11.htm)

Ireland’s: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.4.11.irel.html>

Thanissaro’s: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.4.11.than.html>

<sup>3</sup>At first glance, we might assume that this is a conversation between the Buddha and a questioner, but there are a couple of clues in the *sutta* that indicate that this is someone else talking about the Buddha’s teaching. In the line that begins with *kathaṃkathī*, reference is made to the *samaṇa* making a pronouncement. The *samaṇa* referred to is clearly the Buddha; they are speaking about him as though he is not there. Questions and answers at the very end are asking about what pandits and munis think the highest end is, but the final answer is suggestive of the Buddha’s own take on the matter: that it happens when there is no remainder.

low, a red line separating them, with arrows indicating the forward direction of the process:

DA Level	Main Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Matches To
1st (as result)	<i>kalahā vivādā</i> <i>paridevasoka</i> <i>macchara</i> <i>mānātimāna</i> <i>pesuṇa</i> quarrels disputes lamentation grief avarice pride arrogance slander	<i>kalahā vivādā</i> quarrels disputes	<i>pesuṇa</i> slander		<i>dukkha</i>
2nd (as cause of 1st)	<i>piya</i> the dear	<i>macchara</i> avarice	<i>vivāda</i> disputes		

TABLE 1 Quarrels and Disputes Result From The Dear

The *dukkha* of quarrels, disputes, lamentation, grief, avarice, pride, arrogance, and slander arise from ‘the dear’. Quarrels and disputes are tied up with avarice. Slander is caused by disputes.

With each subsequent pairing, the main cause of the previous set becomes the main topic of concern – it becomes the result for which we need to figure out a cause – in the next set, so in the next set, “the dear” that is the cause of all the quarrels becomes the result for which the questioner is seeking a cause. The side topics don’t follow that same pattern, since new issues get introduced, rather than recycling those from the previous level, though there is one possible exception in the fourth level, as we’ll see; and once, towards the end, an apparent side topic becomes the main topic.

DA Level	Main Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Matches To
2nd (as result)	<i>piya</i> the dear	<i>lobhā</i> longings	<i>āsā ca niṭṭhā ca</i> <i>samparāyāya</i> <i>narassa</i> hopes for the future and fulfillment of those hopes		
3rd (as cause)	<i>chanda</i> desire	<i>chanda</i> desire	<i>chanda</i> desire		

TABLE 2 The Dear Results From Desire

All three results have the same cause: desire.

The next set diagrams as:

DA Level	Main Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Matches To
3rd (as result)	chanda  desire	vinicchaya kodha mossavajja kathaṃkathā decision anger lie-telling doubt			
4th (as cause)	sāta asāta the pleasant and unpleasant	rūpesu disvā vibhavaṃ bhavañca seeing bhava and vibhava in form			

TABLE 3 Desire Results From The Pleasant And Unpleasant

I leave *bhava* and *vibhava* untranslated because the usual translations are unsatisfactory, and it is my belief that we have misunderstood their meaning, a point I will discuss below, because it seems to me that analysis of this *sutta* gives an indication of what they are about.

Note that while the Pali here makes it clear that decision is the result of seeing *vibhava* and *bhava* in form, the next phrase can be read in at least two different ways. It says that anger, lie-telling, and doubt are also caused by “these two”, and we are left unsure whether the two are *vibhava* and *bhava*, or the only slightly earlier – but main-topic – pleasant and unpleasant. K.R. Norman’s translation takes it to refer to the earliest mentioned pairing of feelings, while Thanissaro (with whom I agree) goes with the second and nearer pairing, which seems to be indicated by the *ete*’s “these” which has been used instead of the more distant “those”.

DA Level	Main Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Matches To
4th (as result)	sāta asāta the pleasant and unpleasant	bhava vibhava [bhava vibhava]			
5th (as cause)	phassa contact	phassa contact			

TABLE 4 The Pleasant And Unpleasant Result From Contact

Both issues are caused by contact.

DA Level	Main Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Matches To
5th (as result)	<i>phassa</i> contact	<i>pariggahā</i> possessions	<i>mamatta</i> possessiveness	<i>phassa</i> contact	
6th (as cause)	<i>nāma rūpa</i> name and form	<i>icchā</i> longing	<i>icchā</i> longing	<i>rūpa</i> form	

TABLE 5 Contact Results From Name and Form

The above set is unusual because the main topic, contact, gets repeated again at the end of the list of side topics, and it gets given two different, though related, answers. In the first, name and form are the cause of contact, in the final, just form, and it is the final rendition that gets picked up as the main topic in the next set – the only time a result-and-cause pairing that is in the position of side topic gets moved to the primary position in the following set. This seems to be because the cause of contact can be seen two ways: “in brief” as name and form, and “in detail” beginning with form, with name’s part in the process explained separately further down the sutta.

DA Level	Main Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Matches To
6th-a (as result)	<i>rūpa</i> form	<i>sukha dukha</i> pleasure & pain			
7th-a (as CURE)	<i>na saññasaññī</i> <i>na visaññasaññī</i> <i>na asaññī</i> <i>na vibhutasaññī</i>  <i>not percipient of</i> <i>the perceivable</i> <i>not percipient of</i> <i>that which is</i> <i>beyond</i> <i>perception</i> <i>not unpercipient</i> <i>not percipient of</i> <i>what is</i> <i>indistinguishable</i>	(not explicitly answered)			

TABLE 6 Form Results From Perception

The above set reverses the format we’ve been accustomed to. In all the previous levels, the setup has been “situation followed by cause” whereas here it is “situation followed by cure”. We can infer from the facts presented (that form goes away when there is no perception of any of the named kinds) that it is perception that is the cause of form.

The above set’s answer contains one extra piece of information that was not explicitly asked for, but which completes the sequence and so had to be included. It is in the phrase *saññānidānā hi papañcasañkhā*, in which the answerer provides one more link in the chain:

DA Level	Main Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Matches To
6th-b (as result)	<i>papañcasāṅkhā</i> definitions that proliferate				
7th-b (as cause)	<i>saññā</i> perception				

TABLE 7 Definitions Result From Perception

Note that this doesn’t actually add a level, because the cause of both is perception.

Now that we have all the levels of the links in the chain diagrammed, we can work our way down the main topics and see the easily visible seven links, which I will number to match the twelve links of the classic form that dependent arising takes in the Nikāyas.

In the chart below, the blue arrows indicate equivalence rather than direction.

BLANCHARD – ANATOMY OF QUARRELS AND DISPUTES

DA Level	Main Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Matches To
1st (as result)	quarrels disputes lamentation grief avarice pride arrogance slander	quarrels disputes	slander		12. <i>dukkha</i> / aging-and- death
2nd (as cause)	the dear	avarice	disputes		11. birth
2nd (as result)	the dear	longings	hopes for the future and fulfillment of those hopes		
3rd (as cause)	desire	desire	desire		9. clinging
3rd (as result)	desire	decision anger lie-telling doubt			
4th (as cause)	the pleasant and unpleasant	seeing <i>bhava</i> and <i>vibhava</i> in form			7. feeling
4th (as result)	the pleasant and unpleasant	[ <i>bhava</i> <i>vibhava</i> ]			
5th (as cause)	contact	contact			6. contact
5th (as result)	contact	possessions	possessiveness	contact	
6th (as cause)	name and form	longing	longing	form	4. name- and-form
6th-a (as result)	form	pleasure & pain			
7th-a (as CURE)	non-perception				3. conscious- ness
6th-b (as result)	definitions that proliferate				
7th-b (as cause)	perception				3. conscious- ness

TABLE 8 Seven Visible Links

The *sutta* starts off overtly being about how our desire for whatever is dear to us is the source of the problems that manifest as quarrels and disputes. With mentions of what is dear to us, of longing, and of avarice, it is quite clear that

what's being discussed is how our perception that we need certain things in order to be happy is actually the cause of our unhappiness. I would argue that this is obviously what is meant, but that more is intended to be understood here than just the obvious. It is easy to see that what is dear to us is things outside of us: our loved ones and our possessions; it is less easy to see that what is dear to us is also that which is inside us: our perceptions, and our sense of who we are, especially as defined by our certainty of the correctness of our perceptions. My argument here is that this more subtle point is also being addressed in this *sutta*.

It is tempting to put 'the dear' down as *upādāna*, as 'clinging', but there are a few reasons not to. One is that 'the dear' clearly represents what we cling to, not the clinging itself, and another is that if 'the dear' is in ninth place as *upādāna*, then 'desire' would have to be *taṇhā*, 'craving', but the place of craving is taken up by one of the side topics, as we'll see.

Perhaps more critical than that is that the term 'the dear' had a specific meaning in the context of the times. Early in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*<sup>4</sup> 'the dear' gets effectively defined as self in an unattributed statement: "If someone were speaking of something other than the self as dear, and one were to say of him, 'He will weep for what is dear to him', one would very likely be right. One should worship only the self as dear: then what is dear to one is not perishable." The phrase "one should worship" is the equivalent of "one should truly know", so this gives us a statement that the true knowledge is that it is only the self that is dear. The Upaniṣadic thought here is that what is outside us that is considered dear is perishable, and so will cause *dukkha*, but when what is dear is the self, it is not perishable, and so will not. However, in the Buddha's approach, both versions of dearness – internal and external – are perishable, and both cause *dukkha*.

The dear as self comes up again in a story in which the famous philosopher, Yājñavalkya, is speaking to his wife Maitreyī while preparing to leave society for good. She asks him to give her liberating knowledge, and he says:

"Ah, you have always been dear to me, and now you speak what is dear too. Come, sit down, I will teach you: but, as I explain, meditate upon it."

He said, "It is not for the love of a husband that a husband is dear: it is for the love of the self (*ātman*) that a husband is dear. It is not for

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<sup>4</sup>BrU 1.4.8. Translation by Valerie J. Roebuck (2003)



the love of a wife that a wife is dear: it is for the love of the self that a wife is dear.”<sup>5</sup>

This story is paralleled by one in the Pali canon that seems designed to call the Upaniṣadic tale to mind while allowing the Buddha to provide his own lesson about why the dearness of self is important. Found in the verses at the front of the Samyutta Nikaya,<sup>6</sup> this little story is set in the palace of King Pasenadi. He asks his wife Mallikā if there is anyone dearer to her than herself. In our times we might expect her to say, “You, dear,” to her husband, but she answers in a way that is consistent with the thinking of Yājñavalkya, saying there is no one more dear to her than herself. She then asks the king if there is anyone dearer to him, and he, too, finds himself dearest. When the queen, who is a devoted follower of the Buddha, reports this conversation to him, he says that no one anywhere finds anyone dearer than their own self, and quips that it is because this is true for everyone that we should not harm others.

The presence of this tale – which may have been an actual event, or perhaps a story invented to please the king and his wife, who were cast in roles that remind us of the famous philosopher and his wife, roles that tell us that they well understood the great philosopher’s point – strongly suggests that the Buddha was familiar with Yājñavalkya’s description of the self as dear. That the story was preserved and repeated indicates that the concept may have been familiar to a fairly wide audience.

If this is so, then when the question answerer is describing the source of our problems as ‘the dear’, it is likely that as well as intending that his questioner (and/or any future audience for this story) should understand that there is a problem with our desire for that which is dear outside of us, a further point being made is that we are also in trouble when what is dear to us is ‘the self’. We would then have two levels of meaning expressed simultaneously in the same *sutta*.

This would make ‘the dear’ that we first encountered in the second level down represent what it is that is born in the eleventh link (*jāti*) in the classic form of dependent arising: it is the dear self that we cling to.

Another hint that, on one level, what is being discussed throughout the *sutta* is touching on Vedic conceptions of self, is the frequent use of the phrase “in the world” (*loke* or *lokasmim*), since there is the view that the self and the world are

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<sup>5</sup>BrU 2.4.4-5. The second paragraph is also repeated word-for-word at BrU 4.5.6. Translation by Valerie J. Roebuck (2003)

<sup>6</sup>SN 3.8 [PTS S i 75]

one and the same. So when the questioner asks, “Where do things that are dear have their origin in the world?” or asks about “whatever longings there are in the world”, we can recognize that dearness and longings don’t happen “in the world”: they happen within us.

When the question is asked, as the second level moves to the third, “Where<sup>7</sup> is the cause of what is dear in the world” (*piyā su lokasmiṃ kutoṇidānā*) it doesn’t really make sense that desires are the cause of ‘the dear’ (*chandānidānāni piyāni loke*) if we are thinking of ‘the dear’ as things outside ourselves: do our desires create the things we love or are attached to? No, those things already have an existence in the world – our desire doesn’t create them – but our desire does create their dearness to us. It might be said, however, that our desire for our self to be a certain way does create what passes for a self, that which is born, and that its creation leads to *dukkha*.

I would suggest that it is this that is being discussed in the side topic when the second level is moving into the third, where questions about longings (*lobhā*) and hopes and their fulfillment for the future (*āsā ca nitṭhā ca samparāyāya narassa*) are brought up, giving us the first good hint that what’s going on in the side topics is not actually more detail about how our desire for that which is outside us leads to trouble, but that a second level of discussion about hopes for the self in the future is being addressed. The word *samparāyāya* is the big clue here, because while it definitely can and does simply mean “in the future” it is also a term used quite often to discuss the life that follows this one, in the next world.<sup>8</sup>

It is, of course, possible to see the talk of longings and hopes for the future that are inspired by desire as still referring to future aspirations for what is dear that is outside of us; but by the time we reach the cause in the next level down, it should be

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<sup>7</sup>It is interesting that the questions in this early *sutta* takes the form of “where is the cause” rather than “what is the cause”. In my paper “Burning Yourself” I suggested that the detailed descriptions of each link in the chain described a field in which we could look to see for ourselves what was being described – in other words the descriptions were not the literal “what” of our modern way of detailing a chain of events, but instead they were a “where”. The language here seems to indicate that this may have been a common format.

For example, in the discussion of “the dear” the question and answer, then, would not be suggesting that desire causes the things we love to come into existence, but it is saying that if we look at what is dear we will see something in it that is caused by desire – what we will see where the dear is, is “dearness”, but we have to look at “the dear” to see it, so the speaker is using words that describe a “where” not a “what”.

<sup>8</sup>Thanissaro Bhikkhu has “where is the cause of the hopes & fulfillments for the sake of a person’s next life?”

clear that with “*bhava* and *vibhava* seen in form” (*rūpesu disvā vibhavaṃ bhavañ ca*), we’re no longer talking about the simple level of desire, because these terms – often translated as ‘existence’ and ‘non-existence’<sup>9</sup> – are generally understood to be talking about humans’ desire for continuation of their own selves, rather than about anything outside of themselves.

It is here, with the introduction of these two terms, that we can see that it is within the side issues that the missing links in the chain can be found, since *bhava* and *vibhava* are the very definition of *taṇhā* in many explanations of dependent arising, and of craving in general.<sup>10</sup> I suggest that what we find in the fourth level is in fact the missing eighth step, even though here its cause is contact rather than feeling, as in the classic twelve-link version. The side topics, paralleling the apparent main topic, are addressing the deeper point of what is being said.

I have long suspected that *bhava* and *vibhava*, two terms difficult to translate, are such a challenge because they had a very specific and well known meaning in the Buddha’s day, one that has been lost due to its separation from the original context, how people then thought about the world, and themselves, and their futures. The understanding of them that I would propose works in a way that makes the flow of this *sutta* make more sense.

Though it is well known that the Buddha argued against the two extremes of eternalism and annihilationism, somehow the two terms *bhava* and *vibhava* don’t seem to get connected to those opposing worldviews, even though translations in which there is mention of “craving for existence, and craving for non-existence” should make it apparent that this is what is being talked about.<sup>11</sup> Or if they do get viewed in relation to the two popular views of the day, that understanding accepts the “spin” on annihilationism at face value – as a craving for non-existence – rather than the subtler position it is more likely to have represented.

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<sup>9</sup>These are K.R. Norman’s. Alternatives include Thanissaro Bhikkhu: “becoming and not-”. John D. Ireland: “appearing and disappearing”.

<sup>10</sup>For example DN 15 [PTS D ii 61] where the two appear along with *kāmatāṇhā*, and the same again in MN 9 [PTS M i 49], and SN 22.22 [PTS S iii 26].

<sup>11</sup>Some dhamma interpreters take these terms to mean craving for continued existence of the self vs. craving for extinction through suicide, a position which finds very little support in the *suttas*. See also Thanissaro Bhikkhu’s “Paradox of Becoming” in which he argues that since the goal of practice is to end becoming, the desire to end its partnered craving for non-becoming creates a paradox which he goes to great lengths to resolve. If *bhava* and *vibhava* are seen as this paper proposes, that paradox vanishes into the definition-produced ether it came out of, since just as there is no paradox in ending craving for rounds of rebirths, neither is there a paradox in ending the craving for union with Brahman which is, I believe, what *vibhava* is all about.

It seems as though there were two distinct and competing schools of thinking that were popular in the area at the time. In one, the self was thought to make the rounds of rebirth, more or less eternally; in the other the self was thought to blend into the great Oneness of Brahman after death. The former was all about karma, and earning merit towards a good next rebirth; the latter was about knowledge as a means to win union with Brahman, the *ātman*-Brahman view of what happens after death. But to the enemies of that view, that end would sound like extinction, annihilation, the death of the self: hence *vibhava*'s association with “non-existence” or “not-becoming” or “disappearance”. To the believer in *ātman* and its union with Brahman, though, the *vi-* in *vibhava* would mean something else entirely, something ‘higher’ or ‘beyond’ becoming, beyond the usual existence in the separateness of form: a formless state.

It seems to me that the puzzling phrase *vibhavaṃ bhavañcāpi yam etam attham*,<sup>12</sup> which is found in the fourth level results, can be resolved by recognizing that *bhava* and *vibhava* are two opposing ways of looking at the world. It can then be rendered as “Also, beyond becoming and becoming, whichever it is” – in other words “whichever the natural order turns out to be” (or perhaps “whichever it is one believes in”).

In the fourth level of causes, these two, *bhava* and *vibhava* – or, more specifically, seeing them in form – are the cause of decisions, anger, lie-telling, and doubt, all things that are logical outcomes of having a belief system (either one of the two) that brings one into conflict with others who have differing beliefs. And if we look back up the side-issue chain, we find those hopes for the future – with ‘future life after this one’ clearly implied by *samparāyāya*'s context in so many other *suttas* – which is certainly at the heart of what *bhava* and *vibhava*, as belief-systems, would be about. And it is not only those hopes that are caused by desire, but the fulfillment of those hopes. What fulfills one's hopes about the self's existence in the near future, or in the future after death? The only thing that can do so is the existence of the self: desire brings about the existence of what passes for the self; that is the fulfillment.

Thus we have a subtle side-chain, not overtly stated: *bhava* and *vibhava* as craving (*taṇhā*) for existence or a future beyond existence (as ways of thinking about self); then moving upward to hopes about one's future and its fulfillment

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<sup>12</sup>K.R. Norman translates it as “the thing which is ‘non-existence’ and ‘existence’ too”. Thanissaro Bhikkhu has it as “whatever is meant by becoming & not-”. Ireland has “What is the meaning of appearing and disappearing?”

– this is the missing tenth link: the craving for becoming (*bhavataṅhā*) fulfilled as becoming (*bhava*); this leads up to ‘the dear’, which, when seen as capping the side-chain, is the creation of what we tend to think is ‘the self’: its birth. ‘The dear’, then, fills two different roles, as the overt (what is outside us that we consider dear) and the subtle (our sense of self).

In the later renditions of dependent arising, when the two chains that here are side by side are combined, craving takes on both sets of meanings, the overt and subtle, with definitions that include *kāma* along with *bhava* and *vibhava* (see footnote 10, above).

Below we now have a chain with more links filled in. The purple arrows that have been added to this chart are, like the blue arrows, indicating equivalence rather than anything to do with direction.

DA Level	Main Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Side Topic	Matches To
1st (as result)	quarrels disputes lamentation grief avarice pride arrogance slander	quarrels disputes	slander		12. <i>dukkha</i> / aging-and- death
2nd (as cause)	the dear	avarice	disputes		11. birth
2nd (as result)	the dear	longings	hopes for the future and fulfillment of those hopes		10. becoming
3rd (as cause)	desire	desire	desire		9. clinging
3rd (as result)	desire	decision anger lie-telling doubt			
4th (as cause)	the pleasant and unpleasant	seeing <i>bhava</i> and <i>vibhava</i> in form			8. craving 7. feeling
4th (as result)	the pleasant and unpleasant	[ <i>bhava</i> <i>vibhava</i> ]			
5th (as cause)	contact	contact			6. contact
5th (as result)	contact	possessions	possessiveness	contact	
6th (as cause)	name and form	longing	longing	form	4. name- and-form
6th-a (as result)	form	pleasure & pain			4. form
7th-a (as CURE)	non-perception				3. conscious- ness
6th-b (as result)	definitions that proliferate				4. name
7th-b (as cause)	perception				3. conscious- ness

TABLE 9 Nine Links Plus The Breakdown of Form and Name

Before we go looking for missing link number five (*salayatana*, the six senses), there is some more good information to be gained from a close look at the bottom-most links in the *sutta*, starting where contact is mentioned twice in the same

question, and given two related answers: name and form in one, and just form alone in the other. This comes about because the questioner asked a question that sounds like a riddle: “When what has disappeared (*vibhūte*) do contacts not make contact?”<sup>13</sup> The answer is that it is with the disappearance of form that contacts don’t make contact. Notice that the word for ‘disappeared’ is related to *vibhava*.

The answer makes the riddle sound literal: it is obvious that if there is no physical form in the world, nothing can touch, so contact doesn’t exactly ‘disappear’ but it does cease to happen. But is the disappearance of all things physical what is actually being discussed here? Is that what the phrase “the cessation of contact” means: that without physical form, nothing will ever touch anything any more? It seems far more likely that here the Buddha’s teaching method takes something that is obvious, and makes statements about that obviousness but expects that the student will be able to understand that something else, something deeper and more subtle, is what is actually meant. The next level of questions and answers makes this clearer.

For the first time, instead of picking up the answer to the first set of the previous level’s questions (the answer was “name and form”) the next question picks up on the final, but related answer: “form”. This question, though, takes a different tack from the previous ones, because rather than asking, “Where is whatever it is that causes this?” it seems to be asking about what kind of person has, or what state of mind one needs to be in to have, form “disappear” (*kathaṃsametassa vibhoti rūpaṃ*).<sup>14</sup> What is under discussion is not the physical disappearance of form, but, as the answer shows us, something about how our perception of form disappears.

The answer contains four different ways in which one would not perceive (including “not not perceiving”<sup>15</sup>) in order for form to disappear (*vibhoti* – also akin to *vibhava*), and it is apparent from the variety of translations of the set of terms that exactly what is being said is still quite obscure to us. But for the purposes of this paper, the specific meaning of the terms is less important than that it is “how we are perceiving” that affects form in a way that makes it *vibhoti* – which, yes, might mean ‘disappear’ in some sense, but might have a more refined meaning than that if, as I suspect, it has more to do with continued existence but in a ‘form-

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<sup>13</sup>K.R. Norman translation.

<sup>14</sup>Ireland: “For whom does materiality disappear?” Thanissaro: “For one arriving at what does form disappear?” Norman: “For one attained to what state does form disappear?”

<sup>15</sup>Ireland: “...he is not without perception nor is his perception (of materiality) suspended...”

less' way rather than in a distinctly individualized way. I think that *vibhava* in all its varieties is used to talk about opposition to dualities, about not defining the world in terms of subject and object, me and what is outside of me. What it is that disappears is the perception that everything we come into contact with is separate from us. When we understand ourselves to be inextricably entwined with everything that is around us, with all that is going on around us, there is no longer any room for contact to happen, because we were never separate enough in the first place: we were always in contact, so the moment of contact no longer occurs. This is what we are to understand on a deeper level, when it is said that when there is no form there is no contact: when we perceive ourselves as in constant contact with the ever-present flow of what's going on around us, there can be no instant of contact with what is separate from us, because we never were separate to begin with.

This concept of formlessness, of everything being One, goes back to the Prajāpati myth, which had a popular version, in which the Great All split itself up into diverse forms, with the consequence that because of the differences the pieces could not recognize their common nature. It also had a somewhat less popular version, in which all the pieces Prajāpati split himself into were so uniform that they were indistinguishable from each other, and they all stuck together. The two tales represent form (as individuality, and the need for names) and formlessness.

Returning to the *sutta's* movement down the chain, the very last phrase in the last answer to a question about the links of dependent arising comments on the cause of the perceptions that bring about form: *saññānidānā hi papañcasañkhā*, which I would translate as saying that the state in which we perceive form comes about "because perception is the cause of definitions that proliferate". I submit that this is saying that *sañkhā*, 'definitions', are 'names' (*nāma*), and so, with 'perceptions' standing in for 'consciousness' in the chain, the Buddha is telling us that consciousness is the cause of our tendency to perceive form as separate, and therefore to name and define everything as if it had individuality and separateness from us. It is because of this that we see the world in terms of separation between subjects and objects, which is what makes contact possible. Without that separation, we would see that we were always part of the ongoing flow of events, never out of contact with the world.

The missing link in the chain is the six senses, *salāyatana*, which in the twelve-step chain stands between name-and-form and contact. I have posited, in my paper "Burning Yourself", that the six senses are where they are in that chain because



the first five links make reference to the Prajāpati myth of creation, and that it is specifically the popular variant, in which the First Man splits himself into a myriad of individual forms, no two alike, that is being described in the classic version. A crucial component of that story is that Prajāpati gained senses through which he could come to know himself by creating the creatures with sense organs (including us), so it was after he split into name-and-form that the senses were activated in the search for himself through contact with the many separate individuals in the world.

In this *sutta*'s description of the earliest links, however, it is not the popular myth that is dominant; rather, a discussion of formlessness is emphasized. The focus here is on the less popular Prajāpati story, and in that myth-as-a-model, the senses play no part.

I believe that the reason why the six senses are missing from this explanation of dependent arising is not because they had not yet been perceived by the Buddha as being a part of the chain – nor because they were added by someone else later; rather, it is that they were in fact part of his understanding, but were not useful in a discussion oriented towards formlessness.<sup>16</sup>

As noted in “Burning Yourself”, a similar situation occurs in DN 15's lengthy discussion of dependent arising, which also seems to be a nine-step formulation. There, too, the six senses get left out, but there, too, when the discussion turns to the pairing of name-and-form and consciousness, the less popular model of the Prajāpati myth is subtly called upon in a discussion of how our perception of forms allows us to categorize things, and we are asked to notice how our reaction would be different if we could not distinguish forms. I am suggesting that it is the references being made to the formless version of the Prajāpati myth that causes the fifth step, the senses, to be left out of these early, ten-step formulations of dependent arising.

There are many *suttas* in which dependent arising is discussed that include fewer than ten links, and one popular theory about this is that there were originally many less links, or that there were several distinct chains that were later combined. But I believe that, as I have posited in my paper on the *sutta* known as “The City”, the Buddha has told that his original insight covered ten steps, and

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<sup>16</sup>At a guess, it might be that his questioner was a believer in formlessness – associated with the ātman-Brahman view of the universe, which is why he asked the puzzle-question about what must *vibhuti* for contact to no longer make contact in the first place: it was a leading question. This possibility is also supported by his frequent use of “in the world” in phrases that are actually pointing out what goes on within the self, as mentioned in the text above.

that the other variants we find are simply abbreviated teachings, focusing on just certain elements of the lesson, and the other links got left out not because they didn't exist when the talk was given, but because they weren't needed to make the point (or, as with The City's eleven steps, including them all would create nonsense).

It is easy to miss the reason for missing links. Even in this *sutta* on “Quarrels and Disputes” only seven links are fairly obvious. The two placed subtly to the side make for a much less linear rendering of dependent arising than we are accustomed to, and this might indicate that this is a very early version indeed, or it may just be that the Buddha was being clearer at this point in time that he was discussing two problems simultaneously: the overt issue of how desire (here *chanda*, in later *suttas kāma*) leads to problems, and the more subtle underlying issue of how concepts about the self, the world, and how they work, have the same effect of leading to trouble. Or, perhaps, both are true: it is an early *sutta*, and back in those days he was being clearer about the two levels.

While the first two links in the classic chain are missing at this point, I suggest that they may well be included too, though perhaps not overtly. Maybe at the time the talk was given the speaker was not even conscious of them. In the Pali of the third level result/fourth level cause there is the additional comment that one who is doubtful should follow the path of knowledge (*ñāṇapathāya*), and that the recluse (*samaṇa*, whose teachings we are hearing about) gives us this information because he has known it (*ñatvā*); the implication is, of course, that knowledge is the cure for our initial ignorance, so it seems that the Buddha was aware that ignorance was a core problem, but it could be that at this point he had not found the most useful way to fit it into the chain. Then there is the mention of ‘longings’ (*icchā*) back in the fifth/sixth level side topics, where it is described as the cause of ‘possessions’ (*mamatta*) and ‘possessiveness’<sup>17</sup> (*pariggahā*). Now it would, of course, be possible to read these as literal explanations of how longing is the cause of our having material possessions, but this was effectively covered much earlier in the *sutta*, with ‘the dear’ being brought about by ‘desire’, so it would be odd to repeat the point again low in the chain. What might make sense, in the context of a side-topic that is part of what is apparently a parallel chain, is that the possessions and possessiveness we are talking about have more to do with our sense of who we are than of what we own, in which case the ‘longings’ may well be what develops

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<sup>17</sup>These are K.R.Norman's translations. Thanissaro Bhikkhu uses ‘mineness’ and ‘grasping, possessions’.

into the idea of *saṅkhārā*, which, as described in “Burning Yourself”, is the desire for – and the driving force that creates – what passes for ‘the self’.

To summarize, then: while at first glance this appears to be an early rendering of dependent arising, with only seven links, and not to be tied to the origin myths that shape the final, twelve-link form, on closer inspection it seems to be using the same structure that underlies the ten-link version, which the Buddha tells us in “The City” was his first way of seeing it. Of the ten, only the six senses are left out, for a good reason, which is that the end of this *sutta* is focused on formlessness, which is part of the version of the Prajāpati myth that makes no use of the senses. In addition, the structure of this *sutta* indicates that the chain of events the Buddha is describing with dependent arising simultaneously covers both how desire for what is outside of us, and how desire for what is inside us (our self-concepts) lead us to *dukkha*.