

*This Being, That Becomes: The Buddha's Teaching on Conditionality*, by Dhivan Thomas Jones. Windhorse Publications 2011. 206pp. Pb. £12.99/\$20.95, ISBN-13: 9781 8995799097.

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The doctrine of dependent origination, or conditioned arising, can be difficult to teach at an academic level, or indeed to analyse with the subtlety and care it demands. It is of course, as the Buddha insisted, profound: indeed at the beginning of the *Mahānidāna Sutta* (D II 55), Ānanda is famously told off by the Buddha for saying, with enthusiastic delight, that it all seems perfectly clear to him. Reading Buddhist texts, one's sympathies are often drawn to the non-enlightened follower who so often asks the question that one would like to ask oneself, or says something other non-enlightened people must have felt. But after reading the *Mahānidāna Sutta*, the Buddha's great and awe-inspiring discourse on this difficult doctrine, we are left feeling that whereas Ānanda's wonder at its beauty seems justified, the Buddha's admonition was also here definitely needed: it really is not easy to understand! In modern educational situations many students find this to be the case, particularly if it is taught, as it sometimes is, as one of the first of many 'lists' in introductions to Buddhist thought, out of its context, where there will be little real feeling for the interrelationship of the lists as a whole, or how it would be seen at the time by ancient practitioners. Indeed some introductory accounts can leave new students bewildered and even mildly depressed by a series of links that can be presented as hard to follow as a sequence in an intelligible way, particular if terms appear over technical, or implying a negative view of our experience in the world.

So, on the basis of several recommendations, this review looks at a work by Dhivan Thomas Jones that does help to explain dependent origination, or 'conditionality' as he calls it, and does so well, intelligently and with a sense of its positive and encouraging applications, in ancient and modern contexts. Jones is an academic, with a doctorate on the presentation of the divine abidings in early Buddhism, but he is a practitioner too. For this particular work, which is basically explanatory in intention, his ability to move between these worlds is very helpful. The author's attempts to relate some of the links to personal experience, while not a preferred or even necessary route for all academics, bring the subject to life, make it seem less intimidating and help its processes to be seen as comprehensible. It also indicates how it would be seen at the time, as it is now, as offering encouraging guidelines for further development of the Buddhist path. And with regard to this, Jones stresses the importance of seeing its doctrine as liberating, by quoting the famous passage, spoken by Sāriputta and attributed by him to the Buddha:

One who sees dependent arising sees the *Dhamma*; one who sees the *Dhamma* sees dependent arising. (M I 190–1)

The book works well as an introductory guide, exploring some of the doctrine's ramifications, historical setting and some modern interpretations in a helpful way. It introduces some of the basic notions needed to understand the doctrine in the light of other Buddhist principles, with careful thought to the reader, whatever his or her interest in the subject. Young people coming to Buddhist doctrine for the first time will find it particularly helpful. Pāli terms and extensive and pertinent quotes from the *suttas* are explained well for those who are new to the study of Buddhism; those familiar already with the basic doctrine will find the author's background knowledge of the Buddha's time and other texts as offering helpful information that places the doctrine in its historical and intellectual context.

In the introduction the author sets out his intention, which is to provide a resource that can be used either by those studying the doctrine in groups, or by those wishing to use it as an academic reference work. He makes a clear distinction between these two functions, and throughout the work one feels that his etic accounts and occasionally emic suggestions are differentiated well. In simple terms, he knows when he is explaining historical background and context, and when he is making suggestions as to how these can be understood with reference to the reader's own experience, whether practitioner or not. After explaining the centrality of the conditionality in Buddhist thought, and relating it simply and clearly to some features of Brahminical practice and theory, the introduction gives some analysis of key terms employed throughout. Jones again reminds the reader that the doctrine is one that was not intended to arouse gloom, but rather demonstrates that it would have been seen at the time, as now, as informing a way beyond suffering, and transcendent and liberating in its implications. He then moves on to interpretation of the word *dukkha* in the light of modern terms such as 'stress' and 'discontent'. This is a helpful discussion of this term, as this can often be misunderstood and give rise to misconceptions amongst those coming to Buddhism for the first time.

The book then works through some extended discussion of the subject. It begins this with a chapter based on its title, part of this formula:

This being, that becomes; from the arising of this, that arises;  
This not being, that does not become; from the ceasing of this, that ceases.

(*Udāna* 1.1)

Here the underlying principles of how interdependency and conditionality are described in early Buddhist texts are well explained. This is followed by a systematic discussion of this in the light of the four Noble Truths. The third chapter, which explores each of the twelve links in relationship in detail, is followed by discussion in the fourth of the less well known positive counterpart to the doctrine, in the transcendent version of the list, leading to awakening (S II 29). The author notes that it is necessary for this positive application of the doctrine to be also acknowledged, in order for the twelve links to be seen with the perspective that would have been intended at the time. The fifth chapter explores the crucial nature of volition in shaping *kamma*; the sixth explores ways in which the middle way has been seen to be enacted, with reference to texts discussing both practice and doctrine. The seventh chapter examines the three marks, with contemplation of them as a means of liberation. In the eighth and final chapter the author

offers some more speculative consideration, giving suggestions as to how the principles of conditionality can be seen to be applied in other Buddhist systems, and finding examples of comparable and apt sentiments in English poetry in the works of Pope and Coleridge: a good way of making the doctrine accessible to those from Anglophone cultures.

Questions are asked at the end of each chapter, as part of its intention to be a manual to provoke investigation and practice. Some, if not most, of these questions – such as how one could make positive changes on the basis of the twelve links – will be useful primarily only to those who are using the book for practice; many readers will simply ignore them. But there are others that are more general and investigative, and suitable for introductory discussions with undergraduates or students of evening classes coming to Buddhism for the first time. For instance, asking whether we can see the need for the middle way in various extremes of attitudes to food in our modern culture, or consideration of whether the life of a householder at the time of the Buddha would be much like ours, are good starting points for general discussion in classes of this kind. Each chapter follows sequentially from the one before well, and explains what it is doing at the outset; the author has taken care that the reader will understand the often technical terms he uses, and does not make any attempt to ‘blind with science’. There are extensive references to sources where the doctrine can be investigated in more detail.

There is an important differentiation between academic work and *Dhamma* discussion on the basis of personal experience. This book works within both of these spheres, but it does also make clear its twofold intention and for the most part ensures that the transition between the two functions is distinct, though, in this instance, sometimes usefully complementary. Many scholars and teachers of Buddhism are understandably wary of any work that mixes the personal with the academic; but this book provides a very good introduction to the subject that steers this difficult path well. It is sympathetic and very well-written, with an underlying attention to scholarly detail and with good referencing to a wide range of primary and secondary sources. It is recommended for those introducing this doctrine to students who are coming to Buddhist theory for the first time, those whose interest in Buddhism is more general, or those who would just like to think about this elusive doctrine a little more.