

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
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Tassajara

Let's continue to study about twelve links of causation. Causation of—
one understanding may be—more classical understanding is—
explanation of twelve links of causation is causation of life. And the
other is causation of suffering of our life. You know, how—why do we
suffer? Very different.

I said classical one—according—classical one, classical explanation, but
actually in *Āgama*¹ or more old scriptures, twelve links is not twelve, as
I said before.² And it does not refer to the actual life of ourselves: like
before we come to this world, and after we come this—to this world,
and after our birth. Three worlds: past, present, and future. And two-
fold of—three world—two-fold—twelve causation of life and death. This
is so-called-it "older" type of explanation of it. But in old, old scripture
this kind of understanding is not there. But after Buddhist divided in
many schools, this kind of so-called-it "classical" explanation of
causation of life and death in past, present, future, twelve links of
causation appeared. This is not so old one. The old one is rather
explanation of why we suffer. And they—we count the reason why we
suffer. Or we find twelve elements in our suffering. So this is very
different explanation, and this is more nearer to the teaching of Buddha
himself.

The other day Peter asked—raised this question. And did you—do you
have *Life of Buddha*, you know, written by some Frenchman—I forgot
his name?³ Do you have it? Someone else asked that same question
so she must have read that book. I don't know what kind of
explanation he gives to it, for the twelve causation of life and death. Do
you know? Have you read it?

Student A: I have the book but I haven't read it.

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh, I see. May be—may be interesting to compare—to
compare **Ui's** [?]⁴—Dr. **Ui's** [?] or his disciple Mizuno's⁵ explanation of it.

¹ The Mahāyāna name for an ancient collection of Buddha's sermons that are roughly equivalent to the Pali Nikāya.

² SR-69-08-21, p. 3.

³ A. Ferdinand Herold, *The Life of Buddha*, translated from the French by Paul C. Blum, Tōkyō: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1954.

⁴ Possibly Dr. H. Ui.

⁵ Probably Kōgen Mizuno (b. 1901): professor of Buddhist studies and president of Komazawa University, Tōkyō. His *Genshi-Bukkyō (Primitive Buddhism)* (1956), for example, has a detailed discussion of the twelve links of causation.

It is rather difficult for me to translate it, but I will try as much as possible.

And here he says—he refer to the *Sūtra of Sāti*.⁶ There was a Buddha's disciple named Sāti. He understood his teaching of twelve links of causation, like how we suffer who has a kind of soul, you know, in—during the past and present and future. And he was scolded by him, you know [laughs], by Buddha. And at that time he said—he denied the something like self.⁷ And he [Buddha] ex- [partial word]—he ex- [partial word]—the purpose of this teaching is to explain that we have no self and—but people who has, who is caught by idea of self, how they suffer. This is the purpose of the teaching.

And Buddha said, "You should not—you should not misunderstand my teaching," he said. Sāti—Sāti's understanding was—his teaching was about *ātman*. Something like *ātman*, will reveal—during in past and present and future how we suffer, how—what kind of process they take was the teaching of the twelve links. He understood in that way, and Buddha—and [was] scolded by Buddha.

Anyway, here Dr. Mizuno is trying to explain what is the twelve links.⁸ The—ignorance—I translated it ignorance—ignorance means—means that lack of understanding of our life. Because of lack of understanding of our life they will have—they will have some misconduct. Because of that, they will have suffering. That we have suffering in this world is because of ignorance.

And second one is action, you know. In Sanskrit, action [is] *saṣkàra* [J. *gyō*]. And ignorance in Sanskrit [is] *avidyā—avidyā—a-v-i-d-y-ā*. And the second one is action or *gyō*. Because of ignorance we will have misconduct. And here *gyō* is same as *kamma*—karma. Lack of right view of world and life will have various misunderstanding and misconduct. And once we make some misconduct or misunderstanding even, that will result [in] something bad. That is why we suffer. And this means also not only misconduct or action, but also accumulation of action which will result [in] next link, which is *shiki—vijṅàna*. So this means misconduct, misleading, or misconduct, and accumulation of misconduct. Third is *vijṅàna*, consciousness or conception as a consciousness.

And he referred to the—some more—our experience in our everyday life

⁶ *Majjhima Nikāya 38 (Middle Length Discourses 38), Mahātanhāsankhaya-sūtra (The Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving)*.

⁷ Sāti believed that consciousness was a concrete substance that transmigrated from birth to birth. To the contrary, Buddha explained that consciousness is dependently arisen, and in the above sūtra expounded the twelve links of causation to the assembled disciples.

⁸ For convenience, the twelve links are summarized at the end of the lecture.

before, and, whether it is good or bad experience or physical or spiritual experience or intellectual experience or emotional experience.

Whenever we experience something. And that experience will create some—some force. And that force will result, in some form, good or bad result. And it may be the—this next kind of conduct will be accelerated in good way and in bad way too. And it will—we will have some—a kind of custom or—what was the word he said? A kind of accelerated action. If you get up early, next morning—this morning if you get up early, next morning it may be easier for you to get up early.

Student B: Habit?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, habit, like a kind of habit. If you do something bad, you know, it—it will create some nature in your—within yourself. And in this way the action will create something, some result. And if you take the idea of reincarnation in consideration, in this way we will reincarnated in various form of life.

The next [third] one is consciousness or *viññāna*. Consciousness or *viññāna*. And this is the subject, you know, of the cognition. And this subjective something, you know, which is called *viññāna* or consciousness, a kind of consciousness, is—include past experience. So it is resulted—this kind of consciousness we have is the fruit of our past experience of various action and experiences. This is consciousness.

And this consciousness is actual—is not actually in—like the state of white paper. This is the—this consciousness has some color resulted by past experience. Only when this consciousness is like a white paper we can see things as it is. But we cannot—our consciousness is not pure white paper. Because it is tainted various color we will have various suffering. And this is—this color comes from ignorance and actions from ignorance. This is the consciousness.

And third [fourth] one is *nāma-rūpa*, name and form. Name and form means—"name" means our spiritual being or—and "form" means our body, our physical body. So this means actually our five senses and five sense objects.

Next [fifth] one is six—next one is *ṣaḍāyatana*—*ṣaḍāyatana*, the six sense organs—six sense organs. This is quite simple, you know: sense organs like eyes and nose and mouth.

And next [sixth] one is *sparśa*—*sparśa*, contact or touch. It means that, you know, our sense organs and our subjectivity or consciousness and objective world become one and start some action that is touch, you know. So actually this is—this is touch. And this is actually sometime intense, you know—intense caution—cautiousness will appear

when subjective and objective—sense organs and sense objects come together and some feeling. That feeling will be many different feeling. And this also include the intensity or less intensive touch.

And the seventh one is *vedanā*, sense action—excuse me, sensation. Sensation means, you know, when we—we just accept sense objects by sense organ, we have some touch or we have—there we have some intense sensation. But that sensation at the same time may be discrimination of good or bad. Good son, bad son; good form or bad form; or good car or bad car. When we start to discriminate the sense objects in sense of good or bad that is next one, sensation or *vedanā*.

The next [eighth] one is *tṣūḍā*, or thirst or desire, you know, strong desire like when you work in the sun, you know, you will be thirsty. Thirsty desire, you know, is next one. And as soon as we have some good feeling or bad feeling, you will have strong discrimination, and you will have thirsty desire for good things. That is next one. And it—this is different from love in its true sense. It is strong attachment to something. So this is—you know, we are very strict with our, you know, love between man and woman, whether it is thirsty desire [laughs] or, you know, true love, you know. When it is thirsty desire it is not—it is a kind of ev- [partial word]—not evil but—we say *katsuai*.⁹ *Katsuai* means thirst. *Ai* means love. And purpose of zazen is to cut off thirsty love and to purify our love is our purpose of practice. And I think your cultural background is not so strict with this point [laughter]. So to me your love is thirsty, you know, thirst desire. When you start to love someone you feel very thirsty [laughs], strong thirst for love [laughs, laughter]. Dr. Mizuno didn't say so [laughs, laughter].

Next [ninth] one is strong attach- [partial word]—excuse me. Next one is *upādāna*, grasping—*upādāna* or grasping. I will write it down to the blackboard if I—if I have time tomorrow. Next one is *upādāna*, grasping. So this is something similar to the eighth one, but this is stronger urge we feel in this element—more strong urge of desire.

The next [tenth] one is *bhava*, the being, you know. Here we have the idea of self or being. When we start to feel strong urge to love, you know, we—we understand already someone in a sense of, you know, complete self. "There is my," you know, "friend," you know, "and he is always—he—she loves me always," you know [laughs]. "She will not change her mind," you know. In this way you will have strong idea of self of someone. But actually she will not love you always [laughs], you know. She will change, of course. But we—we—we think she will not change and she will be always young and pretty, but I don't know. She may love sometime someone else, maybe. But we think she is always loving you only [laughs]. This is, you know, to have strong self of

⁹ *katsuai* (Jap.), *taōhà* (San.): thirst; to wish the five desires fulfilled in the same way a thirsty man wishes to quench thirst

others and strong self of ourselves. And this is almost, you know—we have already completed when we came to—when we come to the idea of existence, or *bhava*, and we complete—we have completed—complete foundation of suffering of this world, you know. You are completely qualified [laughs, laughter] to have various suffering. And this is how, you know, Buddha explained why we suffer.

And next [eleventh] one, the eleventh one, is *jāti*, birth. And he explain here, you know. This is—here—here we—we have completed good foundation to suffer and, you know, again after completed those foundation we will have new experience of suffering again. This is next one: birth—birth of real suffering.

And last [twelfth] one¹⁰ is—as this kind of experience—experiences resulted from ignorance and various mistake and mistaken action, so this new experience will bring us the same suffering like birth and death, or old age, or various suffering—we count sometime four, sometime eight. This kind of suffering will be created.

This is the rough explanation of twelve links. This is combination of classical experience and—classical explanation and more primitive, Buddhistic understanding of Buddha's teaching. [Sighs audibly.]

Do you have some question? *Hai*.

Student C: Rōshi, then am I right [that] the twelve links of causation are each separate, each is—is a cause, is a separate entity? I mean, it's not, like, twelve links, each one linked to another?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Yeah. It is linked to it. It is more, you know, analytical, you know.

Student C: Each one separate?

Suzuki-rōshi: Purpose of, you know, this kind of teaching is to—is, you know, to—is—is, you know, to—is—what do you say?

Students: [2-3 words.] Classification? Join them? Category? Discrimination? [General discussion.]

Suzuki-rōshi: To, you know, to—this is head, this is arms, this is body and—

Student: Analyze?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, yeah—a kind of analyze, you know.

¹⁰ *jarà-maraṇa*: old age and death.

Students: Discern? Discriminate? Dissect, Rōshi?

Suzuki-rōshi: Discern or—yeah, maybe. Anyway, you know, we have idea of self, you know, and the idea of self has various, you know, combination of various elements, you know. You can analyze the idea of self psychologically. Psy- [partial word]—Buddha's way is very psychological, but not only psychological. He is more, you know, analytical understanding of our psychology, more like, you know, he knows why we suffer, and he has experience of suffering, and experience of getting out of suffering too. And he—accordingly, he analyze our psychology in that way, not only scientific way but also it include the way to get out of suffering. The, you know—some way to get out of suffering, knowing that—why you suffer. Why—to know why we suffer is, at the same time, how to get out of suffering. And he has—he pointed out various element of suffering.

Actually suffering is—become actual suffering, or idea of self become idea of suffering, when those elements, you know, come—combine together. So I—he pointed out this way, but this is a kind of analogy of suffering or idea of self. So those twelve links are closely related to one another—one another—one to the other. [*Sentence finished. Tape turned over here.*] Uh-huh.

Student D: —and this has come up several times. I know that [1-2 words] people have asked you about desires: should we eliminate them or—or what? And I—I've given it a lot of thought, and it seems the twelve links are like—in the West we might call it a bogeyman, you know, something to be avoided. And I don't personally understand why desire should be avoided. And it is—it—in most of the Buddha's sūtras he says, you know, that you cut off desire. And the image that I have in my mind is of two men seeing a beautiful woman. One is very thirsty with desire, and the other is, you might call pure desire. The man with the thirsty desire sees the beautiful woman, and the man with the pure desire sees the beautiful woman, and they both desire her, and they move towards her, and they get closer and closer [laughter]. And she smiles at them and they get closer and closer [laughter]. And the—

Suzuki-rōshi: And finally— [Laughter.]

Student D: They embrace her.

Suzuki-rōshi: What will happen?

Student D: They both embrace her. And at the time they embrace her, she disappears. And the man with the thirsty desire starts crying and pulling his hair and shaking himself, and the other one just smiles and embraces *shūnyatā*. He's okay, he's okay. But he had the desire like the other person, but he didn't attach himself to it. And there's a

confusion between this kind of desire and the other kind of desire. And we keep saying "eliminate desire," and sometimes I keep saying any time I have any feeling I want to stop it, you know, and it causes confusion in me. And I know that desire on another level is okay. Could you talk about this?

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] You talked it! [Laughs, laughter.] Like Buddha did, you know. That is okay, if you understand that much. But it does not mean, you know—it—but you have to make a great effort to keep your love in pure form. This is very difficult, very difficult. But you have to do it, you know.

Student D: How do you do it? [Laughter.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm?

Student D: What kind of practices could you advise us in order to keep ourselves pure?

Suzuki-rōshi: Zazen practice [laughter]. There is no secret.

Student E: Do you think it would help if you do understand "form is emptiness and emptiness is form"? If you understand that, even you see a very beautiful lady, if you know "form is emptiness and emptiness is form" [laughter]—

Suzuki-rōshi: You know that [laughter].

Student E: I hope so.

Suzuki-rōshi: But, you know, actually not so easy [laughter]. Yeah, it is easy, but here it is not so easy. That is why you, you know, you have to make some effort.

Student F: Rōshi, could you substitute maybe the word "expectation" for the word "desire"?

Suzuki-rōshi: Expectation, yeah. It, you know—desire—or desire or thirst, you know—thirst, expectation, and suffering have—all those words has nearly the same meaning because, you know, when we suffer there's—when—suffering in this sense here I mean—I don't mean, you know, physical suffering, you know, when you cut your fingers or something like—or some philosophical suffering comes from some pessimistic philosophy, or suffering, physical or material suffering. But suffering which comes out some—because we expect—because we impro- [partial word]—try to improve ourself, you know, we cannot help—but helping—but trying to improve ourself. This is our nature, you know. It is rather difficult for us to stay in same stage always. We

want to improve ourself, and—and we don't want to go back, you know. We want to go on and on.

So here already [is] a kind of expectation we have already. So this is actually why we suffer and why we seek for truth and why we seek for religion—religious life. The suffering is not so—here the suffering is not physical suffering or psychological suffering. Maybe—yeah, most part of psychological suffering will be included. Do you understand the difference? Expectation or desire? Desire mean thirst—thirst or some urge—to feel some urge, or suffering. Those words are very close—meaning is very similar.

And so-called-it, you know, [1 word] explanation of it is—ignorance means, you know—ignorance which comes from beginningless past, you know—ignorance—ignorance—the terminology of ignorance is something which—which is beginningless beginning and which will have some end. That is ignorance. It is possible to put an end to it. When we realize that this is ignorance then that is not ignorance any more [laughs]. That is wisdom already. So you can put an end to it. But no one knows when ignorance started. And ignorance is some inherited passion from beginningless past.

And the next [second] one is good and evil karma. *Saṣkàra* is good and evil karma. The third one, *viṣṭàna*, is conception as a form. This is more, you know, concrete—concrete version of the twelve links of causation. And fourth one—and, you know—the first and the second one is the life, our past life, you know—our past life belongs to our past life. And the reason why we come to this world [is] because of ignorance, which started [in the] beginningless past. And because of the good and evil karma we came to this world. And as a—first step will be the conception as a form. When, you know, we came into our mother's womb we will have some conception. I don't know. [Laughs.]

But next one is body and mind. More and more we will have, you know, some body like mind and body. And we will have, naturally, in the womb of our mother six organs—six organs. And as soon as we come to this world from the womb, we will have first contact with the outside world. And then we will have receptability or discrimination. And then we will have boyfriend and girlfriend like thirsty desire. So it is age of puberty. And next one will be the urge of sensuous [?] existence. And we will be a perfect human being who has fully qualified to have suffering. This is, you know [laughs, laughter], how classical version of it goes. And we will have next life, and in next life we will have birth and death and same problems. So this is so-called-it the twelve links—teaching of twelve links in the three words: to follow [?] way.

As I said last night, at first Buddha's teaching was very—not so, you know, complicated, not so philosophical, and not so special teaching.

But as his descendant studying his teaching more and more, and their purpose—their motto is how to preserve his teaching, you know—how to remember his teaching and how to understand his teaching is more complete form. So—and they have—they felt some urge to explain it more, you know, easier and clear way. This version of, you know—is too clear [laughs]; not much meaning in it, you know. Easy to understand, but, you know—

So how to preserve our teaching is very difficult. If you try to understand in some form, or in some form of teaching or some form of philosophy, you will lose the essence of the teaching. It is like a—it is like to take off, you know, two horns from deer. This is—this is too much, you know, too long, so may be better to cut here so that people may like it [laughs]. More and more you will lose the feeling of the deer. And after that, you know, he—we shouldn't cut his horn so much, you know, but it is too late. When people feel too late, you know, they start to study something they had before. That is so-called-it Mahāyāna Buddhism. They missed original, you know, teaching of Buddha rather than philosophy.

Some of you may feel, you know, Mahāyāna Buddhism is very difficult to study. But Mahāyāna Buddhism is more—has more feeling of Buddha in it. But it is rather difficult to study—much more difficult than to study Theravāda Buddhism. Theravāda Buddhism is very systematic, very well-arranged, so that we can—everyone can understand intellectually. But if you, you know, study it, that's all. And if you remember it, you will be a good speaker, maybe [laughs]. But you will lose your spirit of study—practice because you think, "I already know everything about Buddhist. Ask me," you know. [Laughs, laughter.] "I know everything about Buddhism!" That may not be so good.

Oh! [Laughs.] I brought my watch just to set it [laughs, laughter]. If I set it, I feel very good without seeing it.

That is, you know, Theravāda Buddhism [laughs, laughter]. Okay! [Laughs, laughter.] [Claps hands.] But we have to s- [partial word]—watch it—[1 words] to watch.

Thank you.

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Sara Hunsaker.
Checked by Diana Bartle and Bill Redican (9/14/01).

TWELVE LINKS OF CAUSATION

Jūni-innen (Jap.)

Dvādaśāiga-pratītyasamutpāda (San.)

English	Japanese	Sanskrit
1. ignorance	<i>mumyō</i>	<i>avidyā</i>
2. action	<i>gyō</i>	<i>saṣkāra</i>
3. consciousness	<i>shiki</i>	<i>viṣāna</i>
4. name and form	<i>myōshiki</i>	<i>nāma-rūpa</i>
5. six senses	<i>rokusho</i>	<i>ṣaḍāyatana</i>
6. touch or contact	<i>soku</i>	<i>sparśa</i>
7. sensation	<i>ju</i>	<i>vedanā</i>
8. desire or thirst	<i>ai</i>	<i>tṣūḍā</i>
9. grasping	<i>shu</i>	<i>upādāna</i>
10. being	<i>u</i>	<i>bhava</i>
11. birth	<i>shō</i>	<i>jāti</i>
12. old age and death	<i>rō-shi</i>	<i>jarā-maraḍa</i>