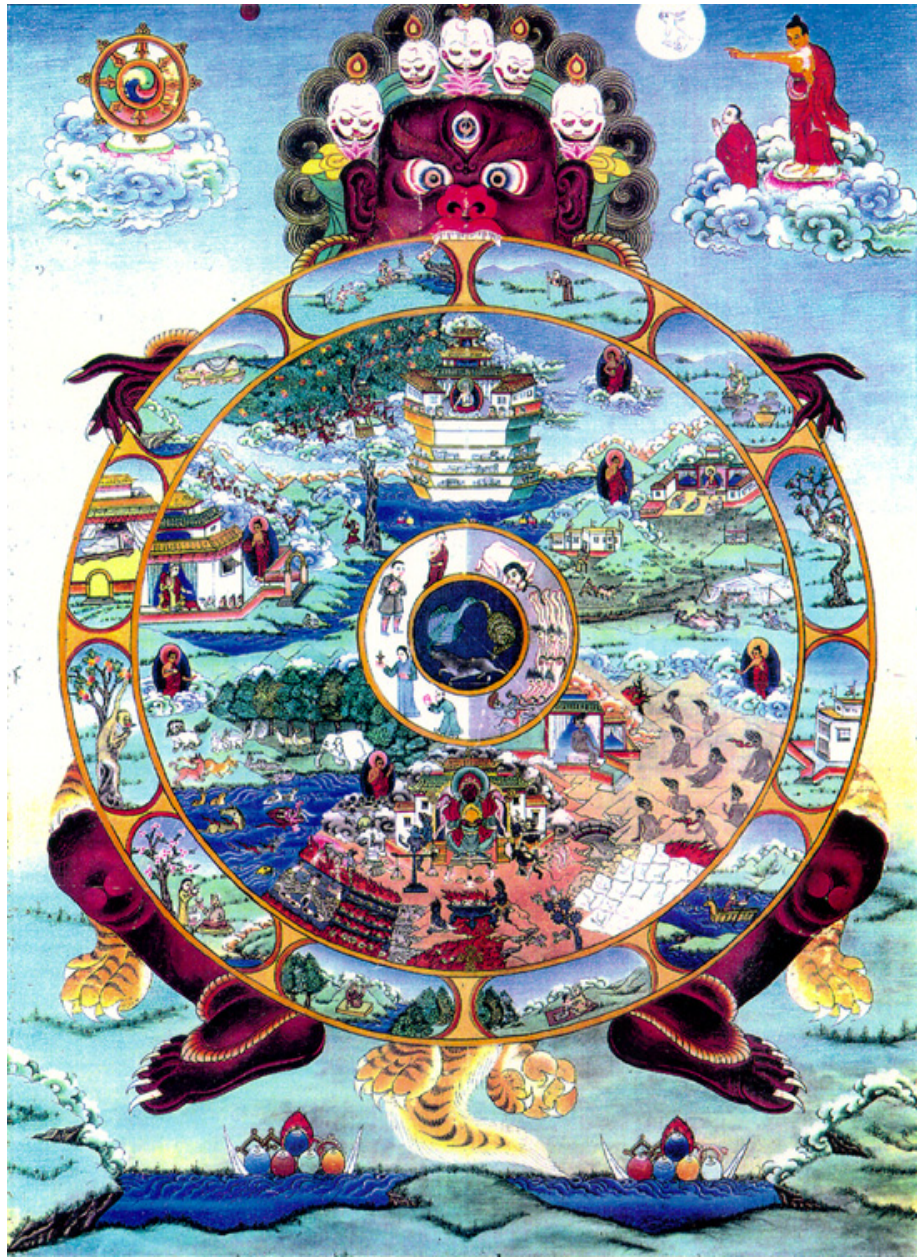


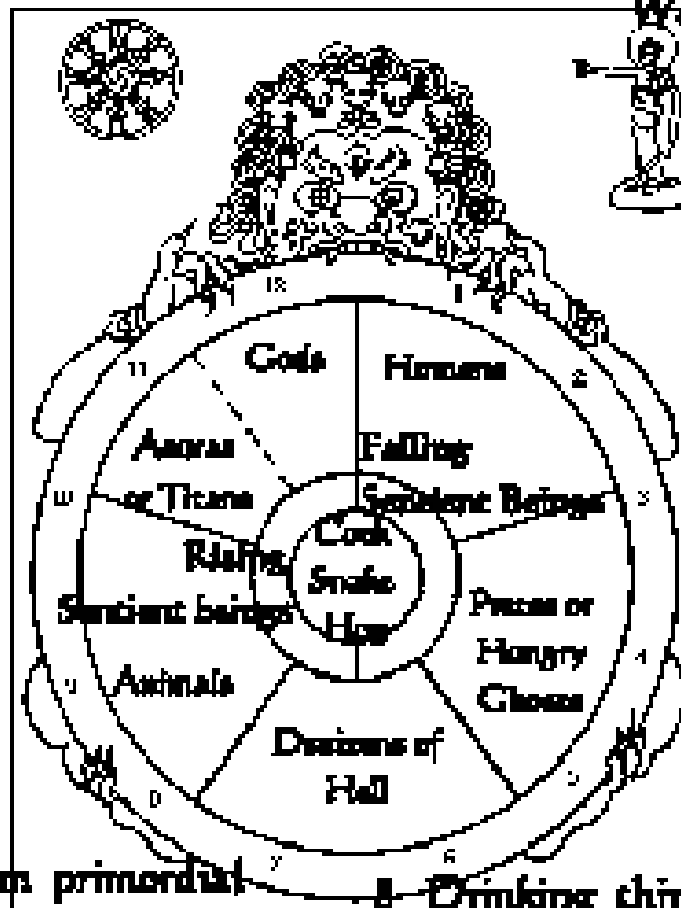
Wheel of Life



The Noble
Eightfold Path

Yama
Lord of Death

The Buddha
pointing the
Way



Key to the
Twelve
Links of
Causation:

1 Blind Woman primordial ignorance

2 A Potter fashioning

3 A Monkey playing with a peach impulses

4 Six empty houses six senses including mind

5 Two men in a boat personality

6 Love making contact

7 Blinded by Arrows feeling of pleasure and pain

8 Drinking chirst

9 A Monkey snatching fruit appropriation

10 A Pregnant Woman becoming

11 Childbirth birth giving rise to rebirth

12 A Corpse Decay, rebirth giving rise to renewed death and further rounds of Birth and Death.

The Wheel of Life symbolizes Samsara, the cycle of worldly states of existence. It depicts the self-perpetuating process of delusion.

The Buddha maintained that the universe is not the work of a supreme god, not a creation at all. Rather it is a delusion.

Primordial ignorance leads each being to suppose that he or she has a separate ego.

Clinging to the notion of ego and restlessly striving to satisfy its wants, sentient beings add momentum to the process of causation by which they are enchained; as their minds create fresh objects of desire the mists of illusion thicken about them.

Endlessly through this Samsaric circle of birth and death they traverse the six realms of existence which, though some provide transient joys, are none of them free from profound unsatisfactoriness. There is no way to break this karmic chain reaction until the being decides to set about negating its ego and striving for liberating wisdom.



In the center of the wheel are three creatures representing the basic motives or root causes which generate the wheel of conditioned existence: **a red cock stands for craving**, passionate desire, and attachment; **a green snake is the embodiment of wrath**, hatred, and aversion; and **a black hog symbolizes the darkness of ignorance** and ego delusion, the blind urge that drives beings round and round in the unending cycle of births and deaths.

Tibetan paintings show these creatures against a blue ground, meaning that these powerful mind afflictions have no real substance - are void.

Around this center is a narrow circle half filled with **happy-looking people** going up and half with **naked wretches** falling down.

As a result of relative victories or defeats in their contest with the ego, sentient beings rise or fall within Samsara's round, each rise succeeding by a fall if evil karma is acquired; and each fall succeeded by a rise when bad karma is worked off or merit is gained.

These beings (we) endlessly revolve among the six realms (Lokas) shown in the middle circle which depicts conscious experience.

These may represent different psychological states in the life of man as well as forms of embodiment.

FROM BODHIDHARMA'S TREATISE
ON CONTEMPLATING MIND

If sentient beings indulge the mind of the three poisons and do nothing but evil deeds, they will fall into the three heavy planes of existence. If their deeds of greed are serious, they fall into the plane of hungry ghosts. If their deeds of anger are serious, they fall into the plane of hells.

If sentient beings do not comprehend the correct basis for enlightenment and cultivate goodness with the mind of delusion, they do not avoid the triple world and birth in one of **the three less grievous planes of existence**.

This means that if in delusion they cultivate the ten virtues and in falsity they seek happiness, they will not avoid the realm of greed and birth in the plane of the **devas**.

If in delusion they uphold the fivefold discipline and falsely create love and hate, they will not avoid the realm of anger and birth in the plane of **human beings**.

If in delusion they cling to contrived belief and wrongly seek blessings, they will not avoid the realm of ignorance and birth in the plane of the **asuras**.



The **god realm** (devaloka) is shown in the upper left combined with the **jealous god realm** (asura loka). This realm of the gods is dedicated to aesthetic pleasures; a carefree life of heavenly joy and euphoric self absorption. On account of this one-sided dedication to their own pleasures the gods forget the sufferings of others as well as their own transiency. This state of temporary harmony comes to an end as soon as the cause which led them to the happy state is exhausted. Being a temporary state of ego hood, sooner or later the absorption in the blissful existence wears out and the being begins to panic. He feels threatened, confused, vulnerable, and plunges into the realm of the **jealous gods**. Through trying to protect his realm preoccupied with competition and striving for supremacy, the anxiety and envy of the jealous god realm is overpowering and the being becomes preoccupied with figuring out what has gone wrong.

This intellectual effort characterizes the **human realm**. The **human realm** is seen to the right of the god realm. The world of man is the realm of purposeful activity and higher aspirations, in which the freedom of decision plays an essential role. Here the qualities of all the realms of existence become conscious and all their possibilities are equally within reach. This is the realm of passion and intellect. Although with intelligence the world can be manipulated to achieve some pleasure, still this pleasure cannot be held on to or at all times obtained.

Beings in the human realm are plagued by illness, old age, death - by frustrations and problems of all kinds. These aspects of the human situation are portrayed pictorially:

a woman in childbirth (birth),
a doctor and patient (sickness),
a man with a crutch (old age),
an official on a horse (temporal government),
a man toiling in the fields (labor),
and a corpse being carried to the funeral grounds (death).

Religion is represented by a temple placed above all other habitations with a Lama and monks performing worship and studying. The human realm is the only one in which the Dharma (spiritual teachings) can be clearly heard. Through insight into the true nature of the world there is a chance of ultimate liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

In contrast to the hesitant and critical perspective of the human intellect the **animal realm** is one of surrender to blind destiny of natural necessities and uncontrollable instincts.

Animals lack the faculty of articulate speech and reflective thought, which could liberate them from the darkness of subconscious drives and the sluggishness of an undeveloped mind.



The **preta realm** is one of restless spirits filled with unsatisfied passions.

Hungry ghosts are depicted with spindly, dried up limbs and bloated bellies, tortured by insatiable hunger and thirst without being able to satisfy them. Each time the preta seems about to achieve pleasure he is rudely awakened from his idyllic dream. He fantasizes numerous ways to satisfy his hunger, reaches out for it, and is always quickly disappointed.

The **hell realm**, in the lowest sector of the wheel, is a situation of continual torture. It is the solidification of a psychological state in which every facet of the world reflects aggression.

The infernal sufferings are not 'punishments' that have been inflicted upon erring beings by an omnipotent god, but the inevitable reactions from their own deeds. The hallucinations of hell are generated from an environment of claustrophobia and aggression. When an entity's aggression becomes so intense that the environment around him responds with equal aggression, an atmosphere of heat and claustrophobia develops and that being finds itself in hell.

While the six realms depict the unfoldment of the samsaric world under the influence of those basic motives which form the center of the Wheel of Life, its outer rim shows the unfoldment of these principles in individual life.

The twelve phases of **Dependent Origination**, *nidanas*, are links in the causal chain of neurotic mind.



They represent the psychological mechanism of the process of karma, which is the chain of cause and effect which governs existence.

The twelve *nidanās*, moving clockwise are as follows:

(1) **Primordial ignorance** - here represented by a blind woman with a staff. On account of spiritual blindness beings create illusory pictures of themselves and the world. This mental state of delusion obscures reality's pristine beauty. Ignorance gives rise to -

(2) **Fashioning** - A potter throwing a pot on a wheel denotes motivating energies which propel the mind from one relative position to another. Just as a potter creates the shape of pots from formless clay, so do we form our character and destiny, our karma, through deeds, words, and thoughts. Out of the still unformed material of our life we create our future consciousness.

(3) **Consciousness** - This consciousness which stands at the beginning of a new life and at the start of all new situations (which is every instant) is represented in the third picture as a monkey. Just as a monkey jumps from branch to branch so does conscious awareness leap from object to object. Consciousness, however, cannot exist by itself. Besides having the property of constantly moving from object to object, consciousness has the capacity to crystallize and polarize itself into material form and mental functions (form and name).

(4) **Sense Perception** - The psycho-physical organism is further differentiated through the formation and action of the senses. These faculties are like windows of a house through which we look upon the world outside. The six fields of perception (five senses plus the mind) structure the world into sights, sounds, smells, tastes, textures, and concepts.

(7) **Feeling** - Contact gives rise to feelings of pleasure and pain. We are blinded by feelings as a man blinded by an arrow. Feeling is classified as pleasant (that which we would like to feel again), unpleasant (what we would like to get rid of when it is present), and indifferent (where neither of these two desires occur).

(8) **Craving** - The man drinking in the eighth picture symbolizes the thirst for life, or craving caused by agreeable sensations.

(9) **Grasping** - From craving arises the grasping and clinging to desired objects. This is symbolized by a monkey snatching fruit from a tree.

(10) **Becoming** - Craving and grasping lead to new situations in the world, strengthening the bonds of life, this constant becoming, the continuity of existence, is symbolized by a pregnant woman.

(11) **Birth** - A woman in childbirth indicated the arising of a new being, for each moment is a new beginning.

(12) **Death** - Decay and death are the inevitable culmination of any situation in the world of phenomena. A man carrying a corpse illustrates the last of the twelve links of the formula of Dependent Origination which says that all that has been born leads to old age and death.

The sequence of the twelve nidanas is not a simple linear relation. The twelve occur simultaneously in each instant of thought, like layers around a core of unknowing. The resulting illusion expresses itself in six specific styles, yielding the six realms.



The entire Wheel of Life is in the grasp of **Yama**, Lord of death, who symbolizes the relentlessness of time and process, the inescapability of cause and effect.

Aeon upon aeon it fashions its own rewards and retributions. Every thought, word, and action produces karma, a force which brings results directly in accordance with their causes.

Whatever tends to diminish the ego-illusion loosens the grip of karma; whatever strengthens it draws tight the bonds. The remedy to this situation lies in freeing oneself from Samsara by destroying the last shreds of egohood.

According to tantric Buddhism, seeing through the ignorance aspect, by examining illusion's game, reveals enlightenment in every moment.

Near the top of the picture, away from the endless circle, stands the **Buddha** pointing not at the Wheel of Life, but at another, more simple wheel with eight spokes. The **Wheel of the Dharma** comprises the universal and spiritual law and its ethical application in the life of the individual.

Right View

Samma Ditthi consists in the right understanding of suffering (dukkha), of its causes, and of the way to its annihilation.

Right Intention

Samma Samkappa is the conscious intention, founded upon the knowledge of the previous step, and therefore, it counteracts the subconscious tendencies (sankhara) which are based on ignorance. (avijja).

Right Speech

Samma Vaca is the right formulation of thought (discursive thinking) and its expression (right speech). Thus it implies the control of the conscious mind (vinnana; in contradistinction to the subconscious: sankhara).

Right Action

Samma Kammantra implies the control of the psycho-physical apparatus (nama-rupa) and its sense organs (salayatana).

Right Livelihood

Samma Ajiva concerns our external life and the control of our associations and contacts (phassa).

Right Effort

Samma Vayama is the conscious effort, or energy directed by knowledge, which counteracts uncontrolled emotional impulses (vedana).

Right Mindfulness

Samma Sati is opposed to craving (tanha) and clinging (upadana).

Right Concentration

Samma Samadhi is that state of perfect concentration and unification of all creative forces, which controls the process of becoming (bhava), determines rebirth (jati) and eventually makes an end of it, together with all the suffering with which it is inseparably connected



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Sources: Lama Govinda, John Blofeld, Bodhidharma