Disenchantment and Dispassion

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 1:04:59

We've been talking a lot about conditioning and the conditioned nature of our experience, particularly the conditioned nature of suffering. The Buddha offered a description of the conditions that lead to the arising of suffering. Many of you are probably familiar with this teaching—the teaching of dependent origination. That is not the topic of this talk, and yet it's close.

This teaching of dependent origination describes a process by which suffering comes to be: conditions that basically support the arising of suffering. Feeling leads to craving, leads to clinging, leads to becoming or selfing, leads to birth, leads to aging, sickness, and death, leads to suffering.

Yet this teaching of conditioning, the conditioned nature of our experience of dependent co-arising, has a more general form, a more general frame. In one place the Buddha said that this teaching of conditioning could be described something like: When this is, that is. When this arises, that arises. When this isn't, that isn't. When this ceases, that ceases.

This understanding about conditioning—especially this part about the ceasing, "when this isn't, that isn't, when this ceases, that ceases"—allows us to recognize and understand that if there are conditions that come into play to create suffering, then when those conditions cease, suffering ceases. This is one way to understand how conditions might lead to freedom. The ceasing of the conditions that create suffering can lead to the ceasing of suffering. When we let go of the conditions that create suffering, suffering doesn't arise.

For example, in the chain of dependent origination, one of the ways I really understand it is that the head of that chain is ignorance. Sometimes this chain of dependent origination is called dependent co-arising, and we could say that when ignorance is arising, all the conditions co-arising with ignorance means that suffering is arising. So when ignorance is arising, suffering is arising.

We often think about this chain as: this happens, then this happens, then this happens, in a kind of causal link. But I actually understand it more as a co-arising. When ignorance is present, suffering is happening. When ignorance is not present—when feeling, for instance, when pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral is met with mindfulness and wisdom rather than ignorance—then the conditions are different, and feeling doesn't lead to craving. The craving not arising means the clinging doesn't arise, means the becoming doesn't arise, means the suffering doesn't arise.

This is one way to understand how the conditions and this teaching of conditionality can support us in freedom. In that exploration, the work is really to understand suffering and understand the ignorance,

creating different conditions so that that chain of suffering doesn't happen. It really is a kind of letting go of the conditions that lead to suffering. A lot of what we've been talking about here is how to cultivate conditions that support letting go.

This is actually another framing of dependent origination. The traditional teaching of dependent origination talks about how suffering is created. There's another teaching of dependent origination called transcendent dependent origination. This is the topic of the talk. It describes the conditions that support freedom—another way to look at it, the conditions that support the mind releasing, letting go.

The Buddha actually asked this question. At times he asked, what is it that makes suffering arise? There are teachings where he describes how he came to understand this chain of dependent origination almost by working backwards: when suffering arises, what needs to arise in order for suffering to arise? Birth needs to arise for suffering to arise. And what needs to arise in order for birth to arise? Becoming. He worked his way back to understand ignorance at the root of that chain.

But he also asked the question: what are the supporting conditions for freedom? He did a similar kind of reflection and exploration, working his way back, and came up with twelve links—at least in this framing—that lead us to freedom. Freedom has supporting conditions.

One of the things I find most interesting about this is that the first link in this chain is suffering. Suffering is a supportive condition for freedom. It's not just that suffering in and of itself will support the movement in the direction of freedom—we know that.

We see the world not naturally heading in the direction of freedom. And so understanding this as a supporting condition, there are some other things that come into play to create the conditions for suffering to be transformative, for suffering to lead in the direction of freedom.

The first piece is really meeting it, acknowledging it as suffering. Really understanding: yes, this is suffering. And the second is hearing some teachings, hearing essentially that there may be a path that would lead us to freedom, to the release of suffering.

The Buddha is said to have said that suffering leads to bewilderment or to search. And if it leads to search—if it leads one to, as in his own journey it is said, ask the question, "Does anyone know a way out of this suffering?"—if it leads to that kind of reflection, we begin on a journey to look for perhaps teachings or supports to help us find a path. And if we encounter a teaching, if the mind is receptive and able to hear that teaching, then suffering becomes a supporting condition for faith. And this is the first link in this chain.

Now, I'm not going to approach this talk on transcendent dependent origination in a typical way where I might go through all of the links in some detail. I'm actually going to skim over many of them and focus on two in particular in the later part of the chain. But I'm going to give you the broad brushstrokes, the big picture of this teaching.

So just to begin: suffering is a supportive condition for faith to arise. Faith supports delight. Delight supports rapture or joy. Joy supports tranquility. Tranquility supports happiness. Happiness supports concentration. That part is really what we've been doing on this retreat—those six links. Concentration supports knowledge and vision of things as they are, seeing experience clearly. This knowledge and vision of things as they are supports disenchantment—basically disenchantment with our usual ways of finding happiness, seeing that they're not really very reliable methods or ways to find happiness. Knowledge and vision of things as they are supports disenchantment. Disenchantment supports dispassion. Dispassion supports release. And release is followed by basically understanding that one has been freed.

The sutta in which this teaching is described offers an analogy about how this process works. It says, just think about a mountain. When rain runs down the mountain, it will naturally run downhill and find crevices and gullies. Those crevices and gullies will fill with the rain, and they will overflow and then run further down to the streams, to the rivers, to the ocean. Inexorably, the water landing on that mountain runs downhill because that is the nature of things.

Similarly, this unfolding of the path, this unfolding of these conditions, is a natural unfolding. As the conditions for faith arise, as suffering is met with some wisdom, some hearing of a teaching, and that hearing of that teaching inclines one to engage—that's really where faith begins, with the willingness to put these teachings into practice.

And so while there is a natural unfolding, it's not a natural unfolding where we sit back like a lump and let something happen. Because part of the natural unfolding is engagement. That hearing—yes, there is a way; here are some teachings; here are some practices; put these practices into place. As the Buddha said, "Here are the roots of trees. Sit, meditate, lest you regret it later." There are actions that we are encouraged to take up, and an inspiration that this heads us in the direction of freedom.

Some of us hear that and begin to engage. And so this path, this very natural unfolding—part of the natural unfolding is that our system responds and engages. It's not a path of non-doing. There is engagement. It doesn't mean that we don't do any work.

And yet as the path unfolds, as these conditions unfold, we can start to see how these conditions are like feedback loops between some of these links. Every pair essentially can be looked at this way. For instance, faith supports delight. When we have faith, delight can arise partly from the sense of, "Oh, maybe there's a possibility for freedom." So there can be some inspiration, some willingness to engage. And with that delight, and perhaps a little bit of engagement, it can feed back to support more faith. These kinds of feedback loops are everywhere in this teaching.

The first time we touch into really seeing something clearly—the other night I described that experience of cutting the apple and seeing how the mind was, how the memory arose and the mind was inclined towards jumping on that thought to think more thoughts, to get angry.

But then, seeing that that way lies suffering, the mind just dropped it and let it go. That moment was a very powerful confirmation of the power of the practice. I think I said I was kind of blown away. It's like, "Wow, this stuff works. I'm going to do this." So that experience really supported faith, supported more engagement. And there are multiple feedback loops in this process.

This first part of transcendent dependent origination describes the wholesome states that condition opening to understanding: faith, delight, rapture, tranquility, happiness, and concentration. Suffering supports the arising of faith when wisdom is applied, when wisdom is heard. That arising of suffering can lead to the arising of faith, and with that faith there's the willingness to engage, a delight perhaps in finding the path, the engagement in ethical conduct. The delight of seeing how being engaged with care with our fellow human beings in this relational field—as Brian was talking about—being engaged with care and love creates delight, non-remorse. The delight of non-remorse.

As we begin to engage more in the practice, joy can arise as we start to experience moments—maybe sometimes short moments, sometimes longer—when we recognize the hindrances are not so strong. Sometimes they fall away completely. This experience of the hindrances falling away is said to be—there's a term for it in the suttas—it's called the bliss of seclusion. We're secluded from those unwholesome states of mind, and very naturally in being secluded from those unwholesome states, there is joy.

And yet I've seen in my own experience of the practice that there are times when the wisdom of meeting experience, just the mindfulness and wisdom meeting experience, there's a joy in the engagement. Sometimes I've seen something arise like, "Wow, there's impatience. Wow." So much delight in seeing the mind able to hold this—joy in being able to meet what we previously got pulled under by. So it's not always that this sense of joy comes when there aren't any hindrances in the mind. Sometimes it's the ability to hold those hindrances with wisdom and mindfulness that can bring joy also. Amusement, delight.

And then, as the mind settles further, it begins to recognize that sometimes that joy, that rapture, has kind of an energetic quality to it that feels just a little bit agitating. As the mind begins to get more attuned to even a subtle agitation—the subtle agitation contained in joy—the mind just... it's not that it's agitated by hindrances, but it's just agitated by energy, maybe slightly restless with energy. Then the mind begins to release that, and tranquility follows. The mind settles even further, and then very naturally happiness arises—a sweetness of being present. These three together can interconnect in our practice.

One time I was sitting at my kitchen table, just having a meal and present for what was happening, and there was this upwelling of joy, a really powerful upwelling of joy. My mind was like, "Whoa, that's intense. I don't think I can handle that." There was a little bit of trying to hold it down because it was so intense. A little bit of wisdom just whizzed through my mind in that moment, which said something like, "Well, it's okay, it'll pass." At that point, the mind that had been pushing down to try to contain that joy just let go. Then the joy got really strong—it was like this huge wave—but in not being either repressed or fed,

it just arose and then ebbed. That ebbing was experienced as a releasing and a tranquility, and on the other side of that was just sweet happiness. So these three—rapture, tranquility, and happiness—can have this kind of interrelationship at times.

Another thing I really love about this teaching is how much it's pointing to the conditions leading to freedom. It starts with suffering, and yet faith, delight, joy, and happiness are part of our journey, part of our path. Jill talked about the brahmaviharas the other day. This is similar terrain in a way—this terrain of beautiful wholesome qualities. They're a very natural part of our path. Sometimes they come as we incline the mind towards the qualities, and sometimes they're just naturally arising as a consequence of meeting experience with wisdom.

Sometimes minds will tend to orient more towards the cultivation of the beautiful qualities, the brahmaviharas, and the wholesome qualities of love and joy. That's an easy doorway for some. For others, the doorway may be more the wisdom doorway. But all of the doorways that lead into this teaching meet somewhere in the middle. The path of orienting around love and joy can point us towards wisdom, and the orientation from wisdom can also point us towards compassion and love. They're not so separate.

And then happiness is the supporting condition for concentration.

This is useful to remember. It was certainly not what I had in mind when I started my practice. I thought the supporting condition for concentration was simply slogging effort—forcing my mind to stay put. But it's much easier for the mind to gather and collect when it's experiencing a kind of delight in being present.

This happiness of the path is not our usual kind of happiness. It's not the happiness of having something that we want. It's more a happiness related to wholesome conduct, ethical conduct, to letting go, to relinquishment. It's a pleasure that arises in the mind as disturbance is released. And the release of disturbance in the mind creates the conditions for happiness—a different kind of happiness. Sometimes it's a flavor of happiness we have to acquire a taste for.

But that non-disturbance, that condition of non-disturbance in the mind—one way of understanding concentration is as non-distractedness. And non-disturbance supports non-distractedness. So this is concentration: the non-distracted mind.

Different kinds of concentration are possible in this practice. There is one-pointed concentration, where the mind allows itself to connect with one experience and other experience falls away. The teachings talk about this form of concentration as a supportive condition for freedom, but not sufficient in and of itself. It is the power of that mind that can settle and stabilize that can then see things as they are. The concentrated mind is turned towards noticing things as they are.

The other form of concentration is moment-to-moment concentration—noticing just this moment, this moment, this moment, the continuity of mindfulness that we've been talking about. The term for this in

the Pali is *khanika samadhi*, moment-to-moment samadhi. It's a samadhi where the mindfulness is not pulled out of the present moment, so in that way it's not distracted. Each moment the mind lands on experience and it's not distracted to start thinking about it and proliferating about it. The next moment there's an experience and it knows that one, and the next one, and the next one.

Sometimes this kind of samadhi feels unfamiliar to people if you've been mostly doing one-pointed concentration, and it may feel like the mind is distracted because it's not staying with one thing. But the question there is: Are you aware? Is the mind stable in awareness? Moment after moment, is there an awareness of what is happening?

This kind of concentration essentially develops the next link in the chain: knowledge and vision of things as they are. The moment-to-moment concentration develops through meeting moment after moment, and it is developing that capacity to know and see things as they are.

In the one case, where the mind settles into one-pointed concentration, at some point in order to continue on the path towards freedom, there needs to be a turning of that concentration towards understanding experience in its changing nature. Essentially that's the shift we make to transform a concentration practice into a vipassana practice. We turn that mind that's been stable to noticing changing experience. In the moment-to-moment concentration practice, we're already noticing changing experience. So both of these forms of concentration can be used in the service of liberation.

That framing—those words—were very supportive for me at various times in my practice, particularly when I was doing concentration practice and wondered, why am I doing this? Then I remembered: right, this is in the service of freedom. This is in the service of liberation. That is the purpose here.

The concentrated mind, when turned to changing experience, begins to reveal the impermanent, unreliable, not-self nature of experience. This is the mind beginning to touch into knowledge and vision of things as they are—understanding the impermanent, unreliable, not-self nature of experience.

All those first conditions—faith, delight, rapture, tranquility, happiness, concentration—they're creating the mind in a place, in a state where it can meet experience, where it can meet impermanence, it can meet dukkha, and be interested in understanding it rather than trying to fix it or change it.

This is a key tipping point in this chain of transcendent dependent origination: the shift to knowledge and vision of things as they are. The next several links in the chain begin to point to how suffering is released. Knowledge and vision of things as they are supports us in beginning to be disenchanted with our usual framing of living our lives.

This is the next link in the chain: disenchantment. I'm going to spend a little more time on these next two links—disenchantment and dispassion.

Disenchantment is a natural consequence of beginning to recognize at a very deep level the impermanent

and unreliable nature of experience. We also see the conditioned nature of experience—that there's no one doing, choosing, deciding. There are decisions made, there are conditions arising. And so we become disenchanted with our sense of self, and we become disenchanted with the habits and patterns associated with that sense of self that have been our usual way of engaging in the world.

I like this translation. The term is *nibbidā*, and I like the translation "disenchantment" because it really does point to how essentially our minds have been caught up in some kind of magic show, believing its story, believing delusion's story that getting this is what's going to make me happy, or getting rid of that is what's going to make me happy. As we see with our own direct experience, that is not very reliable. That kind of happiness—yes, there is a kind of happiness that comes from getting what we want—doesn't last very long. And we see that. We see that unreliability very directly.

We see that we have been caught in this illusion, this enchantment essentially. Ignorance, delusion, creates an illusion that we can be happy in these ways. And the clear seeing, knowledge and vision of things as they are, begins to burst that bubble. We clearly see: yeah, that's not the way. That doesn't seem to work very well.

Bhikkhu Bodhi has a description of the experience of disenchantment that I'll read to you: "*Nibbidā* signifies, in short, the serene, dignified withdrawal from phenomena when their illusion of permanence, pleasure, and selfhood have been shattered by the light of correct knowledge and vision of things as they are."

That makes it sound pretty peaceful—a serene, dignified withdrawal from phenomena. In my experience, it's not necessarily so serene, nor does it even feel very dignified. It can feel pretty messy at this point in practice. This is the point where the mind begins to see the ways that it had been used to finding things to land on, ways to find happiness. When the rug gets pulled out from all of those, the mind is not very happy about this.

In another teaching, and primarily in the commentaries, there's discussion of a whole range of experiences that happen around this point—a whole range of relationships to seeing that things are impermanent, unreliable, uncontrollable. This is the terrain of disenchantment. It's not simple, like: "Oh, see things as they are. Oh, I'm disenchanted." Deep, deep inside of us there's this deep response: "No, it can't be that way. No, there's got to be some place to land. No, I need my security." Some of those come from a very non-verbal place. And so sometimes at this point in the practice, when we're starting to see just how unreliable things are, our mind goes through something like clinging on to the cliff with our fingernails. No.

There are many different emotional flavors described in the teachings around how the mind responds—these last gasps of deeper clinging around the release into deeply letting go into the impermanent, unreliable nature of experience. Sometimes this experience, starting to feel into that—and I've heard some of you talk about these things—some language that gets used here is: it feels like there's

just nowhere to land, nothing to cling to, nothing works, groundlessness. That kind of language comes to us as we recognize that the way we had landed on things is not really a landing. It's not really reliable.

There are different ways the mind relates to this. Groundlessness, nothing to land on, nowhere to cling. Sometimes it can be experienced as disgust or revulsion—that's another translation of the word *nibbidā*. So that can be an emotional flavor that happens at this point, this flavor of "ugh." Sometimes this can have physical effects. Nausea, for instance.

The main work is in the mind, to begin to recognize. And what I will say here is that in this phase of disenchantment, it's not so helpful necessarily to try to say, "Oh, okay, well, yeah, this disgust is happening, but I need to just be with this feeling of groundlessness or this feeling of being nowhere to land." The path here lies in recognizing the relationship. In this place where we really start to have emotional responses to impermanence, reactive emotional responses to impermanence, the path is actually just the same.

Notice the relationship. Notice that reactivity. It's like revulsion to nowhere to land is happening. That's just another phenomenon in our mind. It's a phenomenon—it's kind of deeper forms of clinging that are related to the letting go around impermanence. And so with all of these different relationships, the path is: notice the relationship.

Sometimes the relationship to seeing this impermanent, nowhere-to-land quality is fear. The feeling of security is gone. We've had this illusion of security—*I can create something to land on and I'll land there.* We've had that as an illusion. And when that illusion is burst, when we see that there isn't anywhere to land, our mind isn't just ready to say, "Oh, nowhere to land." It gets terrified at times. Terror can be a response here.

There can sometimes be a sense of overwhelm at how fast we're seeing things change, and that can also lead to fear. It's like, *I can't keep up with this.* Fortunately, you don't have to. The mind will do it. That was one exploration for myself in that place—I felt like I had to somehow try to keep up with the fast pace of the change. *I can't do that.* And then stepping back, it's more just recognizing: wow, instead of trying to remember or recognize all the different things that are changing, there's more just, *wow, this is the experience of change.* It feels like streaming. It feels like popping. It feels like dissolving—different flavors of that. And so not feeling like you have to keep up with all the things that are dissolving or popping or streaming, but just this experience of streaming. That was helpful for me in this kind of place.

Another experience, another relationship that can happen at this point, is something like homesickness. One of my teachers, Sayadaw U Janaka, named it this way. He said you can feel homesick. And my understanding of that is we're homesick for the familiar, for the way our mind was used to being. It's like that's not there anymore. We're not home in our familiar home. So there can be that sense of feeling a little bereft. Again, notice the relationship. Notice the relationship. Homesickness is arising. A feeling of bereftness is arising.

This point of practice is not pleasant. And this is partly why I'm talking about it, because we do sometimes believe that if we were doing it right, it would always be pleasant—or at least it would feel like the mind was balanced. But this point in practice can feel spectacularly unbalanced.

Another flavor of relationship at this point can be boredom. Like, enough already. Had enough of this seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, touching. Just feeling like you're constantly being impinged upon. It can have a flavor, initially perhaps, of oppressiveness. Seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, touching. Ugh. Ugh.

At one point I was on retreat and I was in this terrain, and it was like every sense impression was so strong, so overwhelming. And a frog—this is at Spirit Rock—the frogs were out. One night a frog started croaking. At first there was one frog, and it felt like this screeching through my whole system. And then another frog, and then another frog, and then it was like a whole chorus of frogs. I could barely hang in there.

It was so unpleasant, so oppressive. And I didn't really know at that point to notice that oppressiveness is happening. I was trying to stay with the frog sound, which isn't so helpful. But recognizing "Oh, oppression—the feeling of oppressive experience—that's what's happening" changes everything.

After that kind of feeling of oppressiveness passes, sometimes what remains is just boredom. It's just more seeing, smelling, hearing. Is this everything? Is this all there is? Seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, touching, stuff in the mind? Yes. And as Joseph says, only six things ever happen. That's all that goes on. At a certain stage it can feel like there's disinterest—the mind loses interest in phenomena. That's another flavor of relationship at this point.

What can arise here too is not wanting to practice. The mind just gives up. If you notice that, that too is just an arising. When I finally recognize, "Oh, not wanting to practice is arising," I can practice with that. What a relief! The mind might believe "not wanting to practice." It's just a thought. But if it believes that thought, at least initially in my mind, I felt betrayed. I felt like I either had to change that state—because if I didn't want to practice, it meant something, it meant that my mind was betraying me somehow—or it meant I should stop practicing. The middle way is recognizing that "not wanting to practice" is happening. That can be known.

So the mind goes through this variety of relationships at this point—a variety of relationships to the impermanent, unreliable, uncontrollable nature of experience. As our minds get more balanced around this, the mind comes into more of a sense of equanimity. Then a deeper letting go can happen. This is where the mind moves into dispassion.

The Buddha talked about how this kind of fades—this word *viraga*, translated as dispassion, actually means fading away. It's a fading away of our desire, of our clinging, of our craving. The Buddha talks about this: "I abandoned craving for sensual pleasures. I removed the fever for sensual pleasures and I abide without thirst, with the mind inwardly at peace. I see other beings who are not free from lust for

sensual pleasures being devoured by craving, and I do not envy them. Why is that? Because there is a delight apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, which surpasses even divine bliss. Since I take delight in that, I do not envy what is inferior."

This points to some of the ways that the fading can happen. He points to the fading away around sense desire—that craving toward wanting to have pleasant and get rid of unpleasant in the sense realm. That attachment to sense pleasure begins to fade. And that may be replaced by a little bit of attachment to meditative states, to the bliss, the delight, the joy, the happiness—those first parts of this chain of dependent origination where there may be some attachment. It's almost like we can let go of the attachment to sense pleasure by picking up this attachment to these wholesome states.

And yet the whole of the practice leading to non-attachment points us at some point to also letting go of those wholesome states—the fading away of attachment to any state. When the Buddha said there's a delight apart from sense pleasures which surpasses even divine bliss, that's what he's pointing to. The divine bliss is the delight of concentration. There's a delight that surpasses that, which is the letting go of attachment to any state. This is the fading away, this dispassion. And even the term "fading away" points to how this might be a gradual process.

Cloth fades when left in the sun. The dye in the cloth fades gradually. And so this fading away—maybe initially there's a fading away of certain levels of attachment or clinging. Perhaps we do pick up an attachment to concentration or happiness that helps us to let go of attachment around sense pleasures. And so there's this kind of fading happening almost in a staged fashion—not necessarily, again, just like, "Oh, disenchantment, dispassion, done, done." It's not like that in my experience. It's much more gradual, this awakening.

And sometimes the fading away experience, the sense of understanding that letting go—even that can come and go. There might be times where we recognize, "Yeah, nothing to cling to," and we feel, definitely recognize, a kind of sense of balance and equanimity around that. A clear seeing of that. The mind really lets go. But then delusion returns. At a later time we might find ourselves caught in the grip of wanting again. And so my sense of this unfolding isn't that it's like a continually deepening linear progression. It has much more ebbs and flows.

This dispassion is understood really as being the release of attachment. Bhikkhu Bodhi, in a commentary about this sutta, says this is really the taste of freedom—this mind opening to releasing attachment. And this word *dispassion* is sometimes used as synonymous with nibbana, with freedom. There's one definition of nibbana: "This is peaceful. This is sublime. That is the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all attachments, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbana." And so there are these similes for nibbana: the destruction of craving, dispassion, the relinquishing of attachments.

Another definition for freedom is the absence of greed, aversion, and delusion—we could say the non-arising of greed, aversion, and delusion. And to me this points to the fact that freedom is not an

acquisition. The releasing, all of these descriptions—relinquishing of attachment, the destruction of craving, the non-arising of greed, aversion, and delusion—freedom is not about acquiring anything. It's all about letting go.

We might feel into this a little bit, this quality of dispassion. Very naturally as we age, we become dispassionate about things that we used to be very passionate about. What was your favorite toy when you were five years old? Maybe when you were seven, you held onto it a little bit. But at this point, until I mentioned it, there wasn't interest or disinterest in that. It just didn't arise, this idea of that favorite toy. This is the kind of dispassion.

The other piece of this is that it's not about non-feeling either. That word *dispassion* maybe evokes for us a sense of not feeling. But dispassion—the releasing of greed, aversion, and delusion—leaves space for compassion, for love, for joy.

I'll end with this quote and one little comment about it regarding freedom, realizing freedom. Another framing for this—and this is kind of a paradox of this teaching—is that we are looking at conditions that support the arising of freedom, conditions that support opening to freedom, I should maybe say, as a better way to frame it. Conditions that support opening to freedom. Because freedom is understood to be unconditioned. Nibbana is sometimes described as the unconditioned. And so there's a kind of paradox here: we are creating conditions that allow us to open to the unconditioned.

Here's how Bhikkhu Bodhi speaks of this: "Though the realization of the unconditioned requires a turning away from the conditioned, it must be emphasized that this realization is achieved precisely through the understanding of the conditioned. Nibbana cannot be reached by backing off from a direct confrontation with samsara to lose oneself in a blissful oblivion to the world. The path to liberation is a path of understanding, of comprehension and transcendence, not of escapism or emotional self-indulgence. Nibbana can only be attained by turning one's gaze towards samsara, towards suffering, and scrutinizing it in all its darkness. The understanding of the conditioned is the way to the unconditioned."

We turn towards suffering.

That is the path to freedom. Suffering itself becomes a supportive condition for liberation—when met with wisdom.

Let's sit for a minute.

May our practice together be the condition that supports our own freedom and the freedom of all beings.

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