Dependent Origination (Paṭicca Samuppāda)

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 1:03:14

A few days ago in the morning I responded to a question about dependent origination, and following that there were quite a few requests for a talk. So that's what we're doing tonight.

I'd like to start with just offering what the Buddha's words were on this teaching. With ignorance as condition, mental formations come to be. With mental formation as condition, consciousness comes to be. With consciousness as condition, materiality and mentality come to be—nāma-rūpa comes to be. With nāma-rūpa as condition, the six sense bases. With the sense bases as condition, contact. With contact as condition, feeling. With feeling as condition, craving. With craving as condition, clinging. With clinging as condition, becoming. With becoming as condition, birth. With birth as condition, aging and death and the entire mass of suffering comes to be.

As I said the other morning, the Buddha described this as a teaching on how suffering comes to be. And this teaching is not just as simple as understanding causality as we understand it in the world, because what it really points to is the conditionality in our own minds that leads to the arising of suffering. It is pointing to an internal process, the conditions internally that lead to suffering.

It's a complex teaching in many ways. I think one of us referred the other day to an interchange between Ānanda and the Buddha. Ānanda came to the Buddha and said, "It is wonderful, it is marvelous how profound this dependent origination is and how profound it appears. And yet it appears to me as clear as clear." And the Buddha's response is, "Do not say that, Ānanda, do not say that. This dependent origination is profound and appears profound. It is through not understanding, not penetrating this doctrine, that this generation has become like a tangled ball of string, covered as with a blight, tangled like coarse grass, unable to pass beyond states of woe, unable to pass beyond suffering."

He was pointing out to Ānanda that what he thought was clear as clear about dependent origination—that he wasn't quite really penetrating the depth of the teaching. Conditionality can seem clear, cause and effect can seem clear, and yet what the Buddha is pointing to is subtle.

I think of this teaching as an elaboration on the second noble truth. The second noble truth states that with the arising of craving is the arising of suffering. Dependent origination goes into more detail on how that happens.

I found it useful in my own practice, not simply as a theoretical teaching. My understanding is that it is a description of how suffering comes to be. It's not a practice. Many of the teachings that the Buddha offered were practices about how to look at our experience, but this is more a description—and yet a very

penetrating description that helps us to see clearly. While not a practice in itself, it is a teaching that helps us to practice.

There are a couple of key pieces that for me have been really useful to reflect on about this teaching, just in a broad brush way. One of those pieces is that this description is about how suffering arises for human beings—the conditioned nature of suffering for human beings. This itself is useful for us to recognize: that suffering is conditioned, and it is human. Being born in this human realm, we are caught in this process, and until we see through it we will continue to struggle.

The other key piece of this teaching is that the arising of suffering arises in dependence on processes within our own hearts and minds. This is good news because it means that there is the possibility for releasing, shifting, changing this. Given that suffering is conditioned, if the conditions are changed—and just hearing this teaching is a condition that leads to something potentially different happening—then when the conditions change, there can be a different unfolding. Experience does not have to follow in this very habitual way of leading to suffering.

Another thing that has been useful for me, a way to think about dependent origination, is that it essentially points to ways that our mind habitually works. But it is not a description of the way our minds necessarily work. It is possible to change our minds.

Key conditions. One of the key conditions is hearing the Dharma. And for some of us, hearing the Dharma lands in a way such that we are inspired to engage. It doesn't land that way for everybody. It has landed that way for all of you. So here you are, cultivating mindfulness and wisdom—conditions which alter the habitual processes that usually lead us to suffering.

Another thing I think about is this description of dependent origination as a description of how suffering comes to be. It's kind of a description of the tangle that we get caught in. It describes this tangle. And so understanding something about how our minds get tangled helps the untangling.

So this teaching on dependent origination, as I stated it earlier—I'll just name the links one more time. Ignorance conditions mental formations, conditions consciousness, conditions mentality-materiality, conditions the sense bases, conditions contact, conditions feeling, conditions craving, conditions clinging, conditions becoming, conditions birth, conditions old age and death, conditions the entire mass of suffering.

And there's an understanding, although it's not so explicit in the teachings on dependent origination, but elsewhere in the teachings the Buddha points to how suffering conditions ignorance much of the time. And so this chain of dependent origination becomes a wheel or a cycle, with the suffering that arises often—but not necessarily—conditioning more ignorance, which leads us back through this chain again.

This teaching on dependent origination has multiple ways we can look at it. Both of these different ways are supported by what's in the texts, what's in the suttas. One of the ways we can look at dependent

origination is as a description of how suffering comes to be over a lifetime, or even over multiple lifetimes. The conditions from our past—ignorance from our past, mental formations from our past—are feeding into how we are now and in the future, creating suffering. Things from our distant past can be coming into our present, creating suffering now or perhaps creating suffering in the future. And so there's a kind of large time frame on which this teaching operates.

It is even understood as operating over multiple lifetimes. Conditions from previous lives may be arising, conditioning things in this life that we suffer in connection with. What we do in this life may condition suffering in a future life. And so the teaching is understood on this vast timeframe, describing how we are propelled through the cycle of suffering throughout our life here and also through multiple lives.

It is also understood in the texts as a description of how suffering arises right in this moment—the conditions in this moment that lead to suffering. The teaching also points to how we can release that suffering in this moment.

This perspective of dependent origination describing the arising of suffering moment to moment in our experience—this is the one that I have more direct experience with. I don't have direct experience with lifetime-to-lifetime understanding around this teaching. I have some sense of how things that happened long ago in this life, from my childhood, have played into how I suffer here and now. But at the same time, what I see is that play between past and present happens now, through the arising of a thought of the past right now. And so this moment-to-moment arising of conditionality is really where I'd like to focus this talk tonight.

I'm going to go through all twelve of these links, and I'm going to start not at the traditional beginning with ignorance, because in my own experience and understanding, these first four links were some of the most challenging to understand. What I'd like to start with tonight is where it's easier to understand—which is a lot of what we've actually talked about already. So I'll go through some of these links fairly quickly.

If we start with the fact that we are living, we are alive—we have a body and we're alive, we have consciousness and this physical being, mind and body—because of that, we have these sense bases. And with these sense bases as conditioned, because we're conscious, we experience contact with these sense bases. This is the six sense bases conditioning contact. We experience contact with the eye; there's contact through form and there's sight. With the ear, there's contact and hearing. With the nose, contact and smelling. These six sense bases—eye, ear, nose, tongue, the touch sense, and the sense base of the mind—with all of our sense bases there's this contact. We're alive and we experience contact.

With contact as condition, there is feeling—the feeling tone. We've talked a lot about feeling tone. Every sense contact, every sense impression on the five physical senses and in our mind includes this feeling tone: pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

With this feeling tone as condition—and we've explored this extensively—our habitual response to feeling is that when there's pleasant feeling, we like it, we want more of it. When there's unpleasant feeling, we don't like it, we want to push it away. We've also discussed how feeling tends to lead to craving, how it habitually leads to craving.

I want to point back to one of the early links that we didn't explore in depth. Feeling will lead to craving when there is ignorance in the mind—that very first link. When there is not understanding how suffering comes to be. This is what we sometimes call dependent co-arising. With ignorance at the head of our process, when ignorance is arising, feeling leads to craving. When ignorance is arising, feeling and craving come together; there's this co-arising where ignorance, feeling, and craving arise together.

But this is very habitual, very familiar. We're like automatons wanting to maximize pleasant and minimize unpleasant, usually missing the neutral altogether. So feeling leads to craving. You've all seen this—it's not mysterious. We've got our sense bases, there's contact, there's feeling, and often it leads to craving.

With craving as condition, clinging arises. In my sense, clinging is really an intensification of craving. The craving is like the leaning toward, the movement toward something, and the clinging is the latching onto it. Bhikkhu Bodhi offered a wonderful analogy: craving is like a thief reaching out to get something, and clinging is when they've picked it up to take it. That's the flavor of clinging.

Once something is clung to—and for me, at least experientially, this is something useful to become familiar with—we can sense the quality of these links, of each of these things. We know feeling, that quality of pleasant and unpleasant. Craving, to me, has a quality of leaning toward. Clinging has a quality of squeezing or constriction. The body almost feels like it squeezes around an idea, or it literally squeezes to pick something up. There's a feeling in there—clinging has that quality of holding, of contraction.

Once we have clung to something, the next link in the chain is becoming. This one we've touched on briefly. Becoming is in the realm of identification, the heading toward an identity. Once an experience is clung to, our whole system seems to rally in the service of that clinging—to have intentions and actions that follow through on it, to produce or to control. These intentions and actions that serve clinging, this is becoming.

Now, in my experience, becoming actually feels good. It's like this place in our minds where we feel like we've figured it out: "I know how to keep this thing. I know how to navigate my life. I know how to do this." There's a feeling of being in control, of having figured it out. This is becoming. Becoming feels good.

So it's this heading in a direction. We haven't quite landed yet, in a way, with becoming and birth. Birth, in this understanding of the moment-to-moment teaching of dependent origination...

Birth refers to birth into an identity—really landing in "this is who I am. I am this person." It's a solidification of that becoming. In a similar way to how craving and clinging exist on a gradation, I see

becoming and birth, or becoming and identity, as being on a gradation from one to the other. We're reaching towards something, we think we've got it figured out, and then we land in the birth.

Sometimes the birth can feel like we've really got it under control, but with birth comes the recognition that now I have to make sure I stay here. This is that vipariṇāma dukkha, the suffering of change. And sometimes we can take birth into something unpleasant. We definitely can take birth into unpleasant identities. I got really good at that with self-hatred, seeing that process. Sometimes it's amazing to think that we actually have intentions that rally in the service of self-hatred, but we do. We can see this. We can see that there's a wanting to have that, because we think it serves us in some way.

With this birth, there will either be suffering in the nature of the birth itself—in my experience of taking birth into self-hatred, it was just unpleasant in and of itself—or even if we take birth into something we think is a good identity, in that moment of taking birth there's a recognition of "whoa, this is not very stable." Some piece of us understands it's not very stable and that it is destined to fall apart. This is old age and death. Once we take birth, we inevitably will suffer, either through the nature of the identity itself being painful, or through the understanding that this identity, even if it's a great one, is not going to last.

Let me offer an example to make this clearer. One thing that's been coming up for a lot of you is this notion of being a good practitioner. So an idea of maybe being a good yogi arises in the mind. This is contact—contact with the sense base of the mind, the idea of being a good yogi. The feeling of that, like an idea or a fantasy in the mind, the feeling of being a good yogi—that feels pretty good, so it's a pleasant experience.

Based on that pleasant experience there's a wish, a desire, a movement towards wanting to make that a reality, wanting to follow through, to have that fantasy or idea become a reality. That's the craving. And then with that comes the clinging, the intensification of that, which would be the fixed idea or belief that in order to be happy, in order to be okay, I need to be this good yogi. There's a belief that it's necessary—I will not be happy unless I get this, unless I can be this good practitioner, whatever this idea is we have in our mind about what a good practitioner is.

And then the becoming—from that clinging, that sense of necessity, comes these intentions and actions to make it happen. Intentions rally in the service of that idea, that thing we think is a necessity. We start engaging in behaviors, maybe sitting long hours or walking really slowly or whatever we think being a good yogi is.

Let's say for simplicity's sake that these activities have you seeing some things and create the sense of "oh, I am a good yogi." Birth. We take birth in that. "I am a good yogi." We have this distinct feeling of having accomplished or created what we wanted in order to be happy. This creates the sense of self, this birth into identity, and augments the distinction between self and others. In this sense of being a good yogi, we may also be checking everybody else out as to whether they're good yogis or not, and whether we're the best yogi.

And yet, even if this lasts for some time, having taken birth into this sense of being a good yogi, at some point something's going to happen. Many of you have reported this kind of thing where something happens. Suddenly we don't seem to be able to stay with our breath as long as we want to. Something has shifted, and there's a crash. Based on what our idea of being a good yogi is—and I think this is where a lot of the suffering comes from, the idea of what a good yogi is—we're not measuring up to that anymore. We're not measuring up to our own sense of what that is, and then we suffer.

I went through this over and over again. Taking a step and feeling "oh, I can be right with that step," and step, and right with that step, and then suddenly the mind wanders and within seconds it's good yogi, bad yogi, good yogi, bad yogi.

So much pain, so much suffering around this.

The cycle of this chain reinforces itself in certain ways, and one of those ways has to do with the feeling tone associated with some of these links. Wanting, for instance—when we actually touch into the experience of wanting, that feeling of leaning that I talked about—when we notice that feeling too, we recognize that craving is a mental formation. It has a feeling tone, and it generally feels unpleasant when we actually touch into it.

We often miss that unpleasantness because we are thinking about what we're going to get. We're not really clearly seeing the unpleasantness of the wanting in the direct moment's experience. This wanting is unpleasant. Then when we get what we want, when we cling and move into becoming, that's pleasant. There's something pleasant there—the pleasantness of having the thing that we want, the pleasantness of the feeling of control in that becoming. There's also the pleasantness of the unpleasant wanting going away. And that's actually a really powerful driver.

That wanting, that quality of leaning in, that unpleasantness of wanting, the feeling of offness around the wanting—that goes away for a moment when we get something that we want. And yet, getting the thing that we want isn't very reliable. It kind of falls apart relatively quickly. In that falling apart, our minds go something like, "Well, the last time I felt pretty good was when I got something I wanted. So what can I want in order to get it so that I can feel good again?"

This perpetuates the cycle—basically wanting to want in order to get rid of the wanting. That's actually what's going on. We want to want in order that the wanting go away.

So that's the kind of easy part of the chain in a way, the part that maybe we have a little bit of experience with in our practice so far. But we actually have experience with this other part too, at the beginning of the links. Let me come to the beginning here and review these first parts of the chain.

With suffering, once suffering has arisen, as I said earlier, that suffering tends to condition ignorance. The definition of ignorance in the texts is not knowing about suffering, not knowing about the arising of suffering, not knowing about the cessation of suffering, not knowing about the way leading to the

cessation of suffering. This is called ignorance. Ignorance here is not ignorance about how to drive a car or how to cook a zucchini, but ignorance about this process of suffering.

The Buddha said that when suffering happens, it leads to either bewilderment, confusion, more ignorance—or in certain situations, it leads to search. This is said to be what happened for him when he met suffering. It's said that he had the thought, "Does anyone know a way out of this suffering?" And so this is the beginning of search, this searching for a way out of suffering.

If we hear some teachings and gain some faith in the teachings, this puts us onto the process that leads us, in the same kind of conditioned nature, toward freedom. Suffering can also lead to faith when it comes into contact with some curiosity and search and hearing a teaching. This is pointing in the direction of transcendent dependent origination, toward freedom.

But very often, suffering leads right back to ignorance. Because we don't understand suffering. We think we need to adjust the world to deal with suffering. We have to get rid of what's unpleasant. We have to get what's pleasant. This is just the fundamental misunderstanding, and this is the driver of this chain.

Ignorance—suffering not being understood—this is why mindfulness is so powerful in our practice. When mindfulness is present, it has the capacity to see into suffering in a new way. Ignorance generally thinks that having what we want will lead to happiness, following that kind of belief. And we've seen this doesn't go very far toward a deeper kind of happiness. It can lead to a certain kind of happiness—that happiness of sense pleasure, the happiness of getting what we want. It is a kind of happiness.

The Buddha pointed to it as a kind of happiness. But he also said it is pretty much the least kind of happiness that's possible for us as human beings. Caught in this ignorance, we think that kind of happiness is as good as it gets. And so we stay stuck on that wheel.

Ignorance conditions what we do with our minds—this ignorance about not understanding suffering. Based on not understanding suffering, we make choices. We decide how we're going to engage. We tend to go for what we want, get rid of what we don't want. We think this kind of happiness is as good as it gets. That's how we organize our lives. And this organization is mental formations.

Not understanding suffering, we choose things, we decide things, we act based on conditioned habits and patterns. Due to ignorance, we usually take the most obvious move to get rid of unpleasant sensations and to have pleasant sensations. We go for the quick fix, the quick hit. And while we think we're making ourselves happy, this is actually digging us deeper into the cycle, because we're reinforcing this pattern: I got something pleasant, that felt good. Oh, it goes away. Well, find something else to want. It just reinforces that. This ignorance reinforces that. And so with ignorance as condition, mental formations come to be.

I want to talk a little bit about this link not just internally, not just in our own minds. Because the ignorance that we have in our minds around how happiness comes to be, what we can do to make

ourselves feel good—this is not simply what's happening in our own hearts and minds. We learn from our families, our cultures. We're taught this same pattern. And so there's a way in which it's not only ignorance in our own hearts and minds, but a kind of collective ignorance that leads to collective mental formations around how we engage in the world.

We can think of culture as being shared mental formations—shared views, shared ideas, shared beliefs. And we teach these to each other. So our ignorance is not just our own. It's coming to us through conditioning, through our families, through our fellow playmates on the playground, through what we see on media. We learn what to believe, what to think.

This kind of ignorance and mental formation that comes through our culture is hard for us to see because it's shared with people around us. We share beliefs and values and we think that's what it is to be human. That's what a good human being is—what I've learned to be. But it's just these views and opinions and beliefs that we've been shaped with.

These mental formations—we have so many that we have absorbed through our culture. Some of these really create suffering not only for ourselves but in our culture as a whole. Views and beliefs around race, around sexual orientation, around climate change. These are mental formations, shared mental formations. And yet we sometimes think of mental formations as just something happening in my own mind. But these things that happen in our own mind affect how we engage in the world, how we meet each other, care for each other, hate each other, hurt each other. This is an important piece to begin to be curious about—these mental formations that are shaped collectively.

With mental formation as condition—whether mental formations coming from our own habits and patterns, based in ignorance, some of them our own particular flavors, like my own flavor of self-hatred that was my own, and some of them more cultural or collective mental formations—with these mental formations as condition, the next link arises: consciousness comes to be.

My understanding of this is that with these views, these ideas, these beliefs, with the arising of a particular state of mind that's a mental formation—such as anger, for instance—that shapes what consciousness becomes aware of. We seem to think of ourselves as being like cameras and microphones just picking up everything that's out there. But that's not quite the way our minds work. Based on our views, based on whatever our mind state is, based on even something as simple as an agenda, our consciousness is shaped to select some things out of the vast incoming data and not select other things.

One term is selective attention. When we have a focus on something, have an agenda to do something, our minds tend to focus down on that and we will not see things that are not relevant to that agenda. Really not see them.

I was watching a show on perception—I think it was on PBS, a television show about how the brain works and perception. They did a lot of experiments helping you to see these things in your own mind. There

was one where they said, "Okay, watch this magic trick. They're going to do a magic trick and you need to figure out how the keys get out of the cup." He put some keys in the cup and then later the keys were gone or something. It was a pretty simple kind of magic trick.

I watched really closely. I was focused on that magic trick, trying to see what he did. Maybe I saw it—I'm not sure really that I saw what it was. But I was really focused in on that magic trick. That was the agenda: see how that magic trick works. Then they said, "Okay, did you figure that out?" And they showed us how it worked. Then they said, "And did you see the guy in the giant bunny suit that walked by?"

I had not seen the guy in the giant bunny suit. It was really obvious. Selective attention had consciousness seeing some things and not seeing other things. This is important to recognize—that we are not seeing everything that's out there.

Then there's another term, confirmation bias, which has been in the news a lot lately. Given particular views, opinions, beliefs, given particular perspectives, we tend to—this is well studied psychologically—we tend to pick things out of the environment that confirm those beliefs and not see things that disconfirm them. These are ways that our minds function. Knowing that our minds do this can help us to not assume we know more than we do.

So with mental formation as condition—with beliefs, views, emotions—we see certain things, we don't see other things. Consciousness. And with consciousness as condition, what is arising in our consciousness with these views and beliefs and ideas or emotions tends to shape the rest of our system, our mental and physical processes.

Just imagine the arising of anger, for instance, a mental formation shaping our consciousness. We're picking certain things out of the environment with that anger, not other things. The quality of mind, the consciousness, is filtered by this quality of anger. This tends to shape not only what we perceive, what we pull out of the environment, what we know—it shapes what we feel. When we're experiencing anger, we tend to orient towards things that confirm that anger or reify that anger.

At one point I was practicing walking meditation, and I was experiencing aversion. I often experienced aversion doing walking meditation with other people in the room. I was just noticing the aversion, just doing my back and forth walking, and at one point I turned around and somebody had put their shoes at the end of my walking path. My mind just exploded with aversion to these shoes. This was very unpleasant. The anger was shaping how the mind perceived the experience. If I'd been experiencing love and connection—I can imagine there were a few times I experienced that—if I had turned around and seen the shoes in that situation, very different experience shaped.

When mental formations are arising in the mind, it shapes our bodies, it shapes what we perceive, what we think, what we feel. And so here we are with a body and a mind. And there's contact. We're back where we started—contact. Only now we see that it's not just a simple "oh, there's a sight coming into the

eye." It's already been filtered and chosen and pulled out based on views and ideas and opinions.

This is another way the cycle tends to perpetuate itself. Because those views and ideas that shape our mind tend to have us orient towards receiving information that further shapes those same things. The cycle tends to reinforce itself.

And yet it is not hopeless. Because this chain—it's a chain that describes conditions—it's not lockstep, it's not cause-effect, cause-effect, cause-effect. It's conditions.

And if the conditions change, the whole cycle can shift. The main conditions that help change this cycle, that help it move in a different direction, are understanding—understanding suffering, that root point of the chain, the ignorance. Shifting the conditions so that we understand suffering. Mindfulness and wisdom are really the tools that support a change of this pattern.

The teachings emphasize in various ways—there are many teachings in the suttas that point to mindfulness of feeling as a very powerful tool that helps to shift the conditions of this unfolding. Feeling leads to craving, leads to clinging, leads to becoming, leads to birth, suffering. When we bring mindfulness to the feeling tone of experience, we have the opportunity to see that as an arising, to see the feeling. Seeing the feeling itself, just the seeing of the feeling with mindfulness, helps the mind to not necessarily do its automatic shift to craving. Sometimes just the awareness of feeling can short circuit that movement towards craving, towards greed and aversion around pleasant and unpleasant. Clearly experiencing the feeling tone with mindfulness is bringing wisdom to feeling tone. It's bringing wisdom in there. And so that's often a place where there's an emphasis around breaking this chain of dependent origination at this feeling-craving link. There definitely are a lot of instructions around feeling tone—looking at feeling tone, understanding feeling tone—in the suttas that really help us orient towards this as a very crucial practice.

And yet there are also teachings—one particular teaching that I really have resonated with. It's in the Majjhima Nikāya, Majjhima 9, called Right View. In that text, it looks at every single link of dependent origination. It doesn't exactly talk about dependent origination as such, but it talks about every single link. And it points to how you can practice with that link so that there can be freedom. Any link, any place where we notice, any place where mindfulness can join—whether it's with craving or clinging or becoming or ignorance—the teaching says, around clinging for example, that one can understand clinging, one can understand the arising of clinging, one can understand the ending of clinging, and the way leading to the ending of clinging. And in that seeing, in that clear seeing, freedom will be right there.

When I first learned about dependent origination, I thought I had to stop the experience at feeling, and that that was the only way to come to an end of suffering. But this teaching just spoke right to my heart. It's like, wherever you wake up, if you're noticing anger, notice that. Freedom is possible right there through the seeing of how it arises, how it ends. Understanding it. This really is uprooting the ignorance that's coming along with whatever's happening—that co-arising of ignorance.

When we're caught in this chain, this cycle, ignorance is arising. To me, this is the co-arising. It's like when ignorance is arising, the entire twelve links are picked up all at once. When ignorance arises, we are already suffering. And so the real medicine is seeing through that ignorance. And wherever we are, mindfulness and wisdom can penetrate that.

I had this really shocking experience. I mentioned my self-hatred retreat at one point, where I was seeing self-hatred. It was a three-month retreat where self-hatred was really predominant, and so I was looking at it a lot. I watched it from many different ways, many different perspectives. I had the belief that, well, I guess this is my self-hatred retreat and enlightenment will have to wait. That's kind of what I was thinking. And yet I was pretty dedicated about looking at the self-hatred.

One evening, in being right there—there had been a lot of freeing around the self-hatred that had allowed me to be able to meet it—I was watching it arise, watching it arise, just seeing these little weavings of self-hatred coming together and just noting it immediately. Oh, there it is. That's it arising. It's unpleasant. Contact unpleasant. I was actually using that note: contact unpleasant. As soon as I noticed this little flavor of self-hatred, contact unpleasant. And as the mind sat with that, at one point it saw so clearly—the mind saw that this was just an arising. It was just an arising. It was just a thought. And in an instant, with that wisdom—it's just a thought—that whole pattern just fell apart. Not completely. But that moment was really powerful.

It was like a tree was uprooted. But I still see just little wisps of that pattern every now and then, just little wisps of it. But the belief is not there anymore.

And so that understanding—what was uprooted really was the belief that it was me.

That mindfulness and wisdom, meeting whatever's arising—that was a moment that really changed my life. That moment. Right in the midst of self-hatred, deep understanding. Deep understanding.

And so truly, wherever you are, whatever you are meeting, that is where freedom is possible. And that, to me, is the good news of this teaching.

We are not stuck with this cycle. Freedom is possible.

Let's just sit for a moment.

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