Dependent Co-Arising (Paṭicca Samuppāda)

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 1:02:53

Sometimes I wish we could all just sit here in silence for the whole time. It's just so lovely, the stillness in this room. I so appreciate it. I appreciate your practice.

Tonight the topic is dependent co-arising, sometimes called dependent origination. It's a teaching on the conditioned nature of the arising of suffering—a foundational teaching of the Buddha, fundamental, and yet also quite challenging. We could say it's an elaboration or a detailed exposition of the second noble truth: with the arising of craving is the arising of suffering. The origin of suffering is rooted in craving. Dependent origination is a detailed unpacking of that—not only how craving leads to suffering, but how craving comes to be and what follows.

This is a complex teaching. There are twelve links in this chain of conditions that the Buddha described as leading us into suffering, and we will cover them all, so fasten your seat belts. And yet, as Winnie said the other night, you don't actually have to try to track everything and hold onto it here. It's about letting the teachings come in. Let yourself be still, receptive, and listen. Sometimes in that space, things will land in a particular way of understanding. I think this is why the Buddha repeated himself a lot—because it helps to hear these things over and over. You might hear one piece of it one time and another piece of it another time.

The complexity and profundity of this teaching was pointed out by the Buddha at one point to Ananda, who came to the Buddha in gratitude for the teaching of dependent origination. Ananda 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."

The Buddha's response to Ananda was, "Don't say that, Ananda"—to the "it appears as clear as clear" part. Because Ananda at this point was not yet an arahant. The Buddha said, "Do not say that, Ananda. This dependent origination is profound and appears profound. And it is through not understanding, not penetrating this truth, 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."

So this understanding—penetrating, directly seeing, not at the conceptual level but at the experiential level—understanding this teaching is equated with full liberation. The full understanding of this teaching frees the mind.

The other thing Winnie pointed out the other night, which I always like to remember when I'm giving a Dharma talk, is the number of times that in the suttas it's described that people awakened, that people

experienced liberation while listening to a Dharma talk. This is one of the five ways that people can wake up—listening to the Dharma. Another one of those five ways is teaching the Dharma. We can wake up teaching the Dharma, so there's hope for all of us.

I hope to make this exploration of dependent origination tonight clear and practical—not just some concepts to think about, but pointing to ways you might be able to see this even in small pieces in your experience. I've found even just seeing little bits of this unfolding in my experience to be very powerful. I have found this to be very profound in my own practice. That's what I hope to convey: how can this teaching support our practice with looking at our experience?

This teaching is a very clear description of how suffering happens in our minds. It's a description of the unfolding of phenomena, and it's a human pattern. The Buddha is not saying some people experience this and others don't. So we can begin to understand our own suffering as conditioned. Just this is powerful. Even if we don't see how the conditions are unfolding, that understanding that it is conditioned can really support the mind to settle back and be willing to witness, to not take it so personally, to not think it's my fault that this is arising—to understand that this arising is conditioned. It comes about through past conditions of my life, past choices, choices and conditions of the mind right now. This is just the way things unfold. This description here is a general description of human suffering.

So we can begin to see the impersonal and human nature of this process and not feel like somehow we've been singled out to suffer.

The links in this chain traditionally begin with ignorance. With ignorance as condition, mental formations come to be. With ignorance as condition, thoughts, ideas, emotions—all of those mental tumblings come to be. I'll describe all of these links in a moment, but really what I want to point to here is that the foundation of this teaching is ignorance. This is where the Buddha begins.

Suffering arises in connection with ignorance—with not understanding impermanence, unreliability, and not-self, with not understanding the Four Noble Truths. This is a mental phenomenon. And this mental phenomenon of not understanding leads to other mental formations that are based in that not understanding: choices, actions, emotions, thoughts that are rooted in that lack of comprehension.

One important piece here is that suffering and its conditions are based in mental phenomena, not in the physical realm. Suffering arises in the mind. That may be hard to believe when we're experiencing a physical unpleasant experience. But we've been exploring this, looking at where the actual suffering is. There is unpleasant physical sensation, and then really, when we look at where the struggle lies, it's because we don't like that unpleasant sensation. We want it to go away, we feel like it's out of control. We are really reacting to the mind's relationship to that unpleasant experience.

The other important piece around this teaching is that this chain of conditions unfolding toward suffering describes conditions—we're not locked into a causal process here. There is causality, but it's conditions

arising that tend to lead onward to other conditions. And a key teaching here, the good news, is that there are conditions that can support this process leading toward suffering to fall apart, to not lead to suffering but instead to lead to happiness, to the ending of greed, aversion, and delusion, to freedom, to love, to compassion, equanimity, and balance of mind.

So while this chain describing how suffering comes to be may sound depressing—it describes the typical human process when we are not aware of what's going on, and even sometimes when we are aware we just get to see this happen like dominoes falling—it is not the necessary result of these conditions arising. Up to a point, once craving arises, it's like the dominoes are tumbling toward suffering. But before that, noticing feeling tone, we can bring mindfulness to vedanā and not have the craving reactivity follow on from that.

This teaching points to the trajectory that our minds habitually take. But part of what it's pointing to is that it's not necessary for the mind to do this. It's just what it's been deeply conditioned to do. And the Buddha described conditions that can support a different trajectory altogether: hearing the Dharma—one amazing condition that supports the mind moving in another direction—mindfulness, wisdom, the practices that we're doing.

Let me read through these links without too much explanation, and then walk through them with you.

The traditional place it begins: With ignorance as condition, mental formations come to be. With mental formations as condition, consciousness comes to be. With consciousness as condition, mental and physical processes come to be—this is *nāma-rūpa*. With mental and physical processes as condition, the six sense bases come to be. With the six 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, old age and death. And the Buddha says that this is the entire mass of suffering.

This chain is understood to have a cyclic nature. With this unfolding of the entire mass of suffering, what tends to follow is more ignorance. Unless that suffering is seen with wisdom, our tendency is to keep doing what we've been doing. This cyclic nature, we could say, is the wheel of saṃsāra, the round of rebirth.

This teaching is described at times as certain pieces of it representing a prior life leading on to the conditions in this life, and the conditions in this life then tumbling forward if not seen, if not understood—

practiced with in the way that we're doing, tumbling on to a next rebirth. But the teachings and the suttas also speak to this teaching as a moment-to-moment unfolding. When ignorance is arising in the moment, the mental formations that arise with it tend to lead us on to crave when feeling is happening. This is the way I've explored this in my own practice, the way it feels very practical to me. And so this is the way I'm going to explore it tonight—to look at this as a process that's unfolding moment to moment.

I'd like to start our exploration a little bit in the middle of the chain, with some of the links that are easier

to recognize in our direct experience. For me, in hearing this teaching, starting with ignorance, I was immediately confused. And so it helped me to think about starting with where we can actually feel this.

We have bodies and minds—this link of mental and physical processes. As conditioned, the six sense bases come to be. Based on this mind and body, we have these sense organs: eyes, nose, tongue, skin, ears, and mind. We've got these six sense bases. Based on the consciousness that we have, and on our mental and physical processes and these six sense bases, we receive experience.

We've been looking at this. This is a foundational part of Vipassana practice—to look at what the contact is, what we're actually experiencing moment to moment. This is the next link: with the six sense bases as condition, contact comes to be. Contact with the sense bases: sight, sound, smells, taste, touches, and things arising in our mind. We've been watching this, so this part of the chain is pretty familiar. We have our senses, and when there is consciousness—well, actually, even sometimes when we are asleep—there is contact with these sense bases. Whether we are mindful or not, this contact happens. We experience these sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. And emotions, thoughts, mind states, moods arise through the sense door of the mind.

With contact as condition, feeling comes to be. This is a link we've talked about. Greg did a whole talk on feeling tone. Every one of these physical contacts, every sense impression that we have, has a feeling tone. It's pleasant, it's unpleasant, or it's neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

This feeling tone itself is based on conditions, as Greg mentioned the other night. What we've done in the previous moments may affect the pleasantness or unpleasantness of the sense object. For me, I found this interesting and fun to play with in eating—to see how the feeling tone changes in the same kind of food, taking a bite of the same food moment after moment, after eating other foods. One thing I've noticed for myself, something I did even as a child: milk after a cookie I experienced as pleasant. But milk after a pickle was unpleasant. Through this kind of example, you can see that the pleasantness or unpleasantness is based on conditions. It can also be based on moods or emotions in the mind, on things that have been going on. We'll get to this a little more in just a bit.

Each sense impression has a feeling tone. It is said that all beings—arahants and unenlightened beings alike—experience this pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Up to this point in what we're talking about now—the body, the mind, the sense bases, the contact, the feeling tone—the Buddha said that people who are awakened experience this, and people who are not awakened experience this.

And he actually points out, I think maybe one of us talked about this: What is the difference? He actually asked his disciples at one point, "What is the difference between someone who is awakened and experiences feeling tone and someone who's not awakened? Someone who is free from greed, aversion, and delusion and experiences feeling tone, and someone who is subject to greed, aversion, and delusion and experiences feeling tone—what's the difference between them?"

And he goes on to say: well, if somebody who is not awakened feels an unpleasant feeling, they beat their breast, they weep, they wail, they say, "Woe is me! Why me?" And they suffer. Basically, craving arises, clinging arises, identification arises, suffering arises—in dependence on that feeling tone. But someone who is awakened, someone who does not have greed, aversion, or delusion in their mind—when they feel a feeling tone, they feel a feeling tone. When they feel a pleasant feeling, they feel a pleasant feeling.

So this is the place where the tumbling on towards craving happens. Craving is the next link: with feeling as condition, our habitual response arises—not just because of how we've been raised in our families, but simply because of our humanness.

Our habitual response is when something pleasant happens, we like it, we want more of it. When something unpleasant happens, we want to get rid of it, we want to push it away. We've talked about this a lot too, so I'm not going to dwell on this part too much. It's simply the habitual nature of our minds to go in this direction.

It's like we're a simple automatic automaton that wants to maximize pleasant experience and minimize unpleasant experience. So we go towards pleasant, away from unpleasant. Even single-celled creatures do this. This is deeply evolutionarily natural—that we move towards the pleasant and away from the unpleasant. Our minds add stuff to it: the desire for it, the holding to it, the craving, the clinging.

So we habitually—again, this is the habitual process in our minds—we habitually want to act on this wanting and not wanting, this craving. With craving as condition, clinging comes to be. We want to figure out how to keep it. The craving is a kind of leaning towards something. The clinging is the picking it up.

We could say that craving is the reaching out or heading in the direction of that pleasant thing, whether it's a physical pleasant experience or some idea of a kind of person we'd like to be. There's a leaning towards it. And then the clinging is when we've picked it up. We've reified around it. We have it.

Bhikkhu Bodhi talks about this distinction between craving and clinging as being almost a matter of gradation. He says the craving is like a thief reaching out to grab something, and the clinging is when they've picked it up.

The process of clinging also functions with aversion. It's the clinging to "not this." I was struggling with that at one point in my own practice. How is this clinging? How is this aversion clinging? And I realized I was clinging to anything but this. Just give me anything but this—a kind of holding to "this is not okay."

In fact, what I discovered in the way aversion works is that it's like, if I didn't like this table, the aversion is like being stuck to this table trying to get rid of it. Like I've got sticky glue on my hands trying to push it away. That's the clinging with aversion. We can't just let it go.

With feeling as condition, craving comes to be. With craving as condition, clinging comes to be. With clinging as condition, becoming.

Now, becoming—Thanissaro Bhikkhu had a great phrase for this. Becoming is kind of like the intention towards an identity, an intention towards the one who has control. Thanissaro Bhikkhu describes becoming as the intentions and actions that rally in the service of clinging.

So we've got this thing, and our whole being starts to shape itself around the having of this thing, the needing to control this thing, the idea that it's mine. Intentions and views come into being here. This experience is actually pleasant—it's a feeling. This is the place where it feels like we've got something, we've picked it up, and there's just this moment of "I figured it out. I've got this under control. I know how to get there."

So this is that becoming. We like it. We like the feeling that we know where we're headed, that we know how we'll get there. It's like the intention towards—we're not there, but we feel like we know we're going to get there. It's like anticipation or something. Pleasant, a pleasant feeling in that rallying of "I'm going to be able to control this thing."

This just came up—I just remembered this. In the stories of Winnie the Pooh, Piglet asks Winnie the Pooh what his favorite thing in the world is.

And Winnie the Pooh said, "Well, honey is a really wonderful thing, but there's a moment just before I eat it that's even better."

That's that sense—"I'm gonna, I'm gonna."

So this is becoming. Following on from becoming, there's a kind of reification. Birth is the next link in the chain—a reification of an identity. Things become much more solidly mine. *This is mine. This is who I am.*

This can be obvious or subtle. It might be something like, "This is my cup. This is my sitting spot." You find somebody sitting in it and you really feel how much it's *my* sitting spot. If you walk in and see somebody else sitting in your sitting spot, those feelings of congealing around mine, me, myself arise.

From this place—well actually, I think from craving, starting from craving—suffering is going to follow. When craving arises, there's already suffering arising. When we feel into the feeling of craving, there's already suffering there. When we're not paying attention to the feeling of craving, we may miss that it's suffering because we are focused on what the craving wants.

This was a very useful way for me to understand this in my practice. When I noticed craving and could feel the experience of "this is what it feels like to want"—doing walking meditation and watching myself want to look at people, the feeling of the pull, the instability—not following through on the wanting, but just feeling the wanting. Feeling that sense of tension and tightness. Watching to see how this wanting unfolded, I saw that there was suffering with the wanting. But when the person went out of my field of vision, the wanting to see them disappeared. And the suffering disappeared. So there was this really clear understanding that the wanting itself was suffering.

Noticing how these links unfold—the exploration of this process of sense impression, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, identification—wherever you notice yourself, wherever you notice what's happening in the present moment, you might notice it's in that terrain somewhere. And noticing what's here in that moment: craving is suffering, clinging is suffering.

Becoming has a pleasant feeling tone. This, I think, is part of how the cycle propels itself—why we get hooked here. First of all, we can get hooked in this cycle partly because, when we don't see the craving as craving, we are focused on what the craving wants. We're focused in the future. We're focused on this idea: "I will get this thing." We're focused on that idea of the thing that we're going to have. And that idea is pleasant. So we're missing the fact that we are suffering in the present moment because our mind is pleased by the idea that it might get the thing.

When we can actually begin to see craving as suffering, this is an insight. We don't like it—we don't like the unpleasantness of it—but it's an understanding. The Buddha pointed this out to us. Understand suffering, he said. See that craving is the cause of suffering. With craving, when the craving arises, suffering arises. So that's one reason why we tend to get caught in this cycle: delusion masks the suffering of craving. Delusion convinces us that getting that thing will make us happy.

And lo and behold, when we get the thing and cling to it, what happens there too is that the wanting ends when we have a hold of it. At that point we're kind of in the becoming piece. "Ooh, I've got it. I've figured it out." The becoming itself is pleasant—the idea of "I'm in control. I'm going to make myself have this happiness for the rest of my life."

So there's that pleasantness of becoming. There's also the pleasantness of the wanting going away. That's a huge piece of how this cycle perpetuates itself.

When we don't see that craving itself is suffering—when we don't recognize the suffering nature of the craving—and then we get the thing we wanted, the suffering goes away. What we come to believe is that the only way to make that wanting and suffering go away is to have the thing. That's what our minds believe, because that's what we've learned. That's how we've engaged for our whole lives. I get something I want, and it feels good.

And then what our minds do with that—because of the impermanent nature of what we've gotten, or the impermanent nature of the identity that was born there, the happiness of that identity of having something—how long does that last? Usually not very long. So there's a feeling of dissatisfaction when the pleasure of the becoming goes away. When the pleasure of having that thing gets less enticing, what does our mind say? Well, when's the last time I felt good? It was when I got something I wanted. So what do I want to want? We go searching for something to want.

You can feel this in spades. I sometimes call this "Google mind"—sitting in front of the computer, thinking, what do I want to look up? Just this feeling of subtle dissatisfaction, a sense of, I'll feel good if I get some

information about something. What can I think of to get information about? Our minds only habitually know that getting something we want is what will make us happy, and so we're propelled on this chain.

Fortunately, there is understanding the Buddha offered that can help us step out of this cycle.

So these are the pieces of the chain we've talked about in many dharma talks. This is just putting them together in a different way.

Now I want to go back to the beginning of the chain. Since this is a cyclic pattern, there's a way in which ignorance is itself conditioned by suffering. We went through the cycle to the point of becoming, the birth, and then that birth leading to the entire mass of suffering—old age and death. Something that comes into being will fall apart. There's no way around it. Something that has a condition for arising cannot stay together forever. It will fall apart. And because we cling to what has come together, that falling apart is experienced as suffering—the entire mass of suffering. This pattern, this cycle we're in, tends to perpetuate the ignorance.

The Buddha points to suffering being one condition for ignorance. He said suffering results in bewilderment, which is essentially ignorance. When we're suffering, there's this sense of, why me? Why am I singled out for this? A kind of confusion. This is the terrain of ignorance, or it leads to search.

The main definition of ignorance is not understanding the Four Noble Truths—not understanding suffering, not understanding the cause of suffering, not understanding the possibility for the cessation of suffering, and not understanding that there is a way to the cessation of suffering. This ignorance is also defined by not understanding the impermanent, unreliable, not-self nature of experience.

So the basic condition for suffering to lead to ignorance is for suffering to not be understood. That first noble truth—the Buddha said suffering should be understood. I love that. There's the framing of this in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: There is suffering. Suffering should be understood. That itself is an insight—when the mind turns and recognizes, this is worth understanding rather than just reacting to. Suffering should be understood. When suffering is not understood, ignorance arises.

On the other side, the Buddha said suffering can lead to search. If we meet teachings at this point, when we're in that space of suffering—if we meet teachings that talk about the possibility for freedom from suffering—this is one of the weak links in the chain. There's another teaching that says with the arising of suffering, suffering is not only a supporting condition for ignorance, but suffering is a supporting condition for faith. This understanding that there is a way, even at a reflective level, just that willingness to step in, to practice, that feeling of confidence, of capacity—that is a supportive condition for the unfolding of a different set of conditions leading to freedom, a natural unfolding towards freedom.

This is also the good news. What we're doing here is directly supporting this movement towards freedom. It doesn't happen on our timeframe. We don't get to control that process. But we cultivate the conditions, and the process naturally moves in that direction.

So we're going to continue talking about ignorance conditioning mental formations here, because we're talking about Paticca Samuppada, not the transcendent version of that.

With ignorance as a condition, mental formation comes to be. One of my understandings here is that ignorance in the propelling forward of this chain—when ignorance is arising, basically feeling will lead to craving. When ignorance is arising in the moment, feeling... I mean, it's not like ignorance arises and then feeling arises later. In every single moment, feeling is arising. When ignorance is arising in the moment, feeling leads to craving. Because the mind doesn't understand. The mind is caught by believing that something impermanent, unreliable would be permanent and reliable. So in some ways I feel like ignorance is kind of like the thing that would pick up all twelve links simultaneously. With ignorance as condition, this whole thing comes to be.

But ignorance comes and goes. In this practice we see that. Sometimes ignorance is arising. We feel the way that feeling leads to craving. We see that. But that very process of seeing it is helping to undermine the ignorance.

So ignorance shapes this not understanding suffering, the belief that there are things that are permanent, reliable, self. Taking things to be permanent, reliable, controllable, our mind kind of orients in the world towards choosing, acting, deciding based on those beliefs. Based on not understanding suffering, based on the belief that there's something permanent out there to hold on to, something reliable that will make me happy, a me that I can control navigating through this world in a reliable way. We choose things, we decide things, we act based on those beliefs. And these are mental formations. These choices, these actions, the emotions that follow—this is mental formation.

So due to ignorance we take the most obvious move to get rid of unpleasant and move towards pleasant, which simply leads us through this cycle over and over again. We think we're acting to alleviate suffering, but we're actually reinforcing the patterns of this cycle.

With ignorance as condition, mental formations come to be. Now, there are a lot of these mental formations. We each have our own personal mental formations based on our own conditioning. I talked about this when I talked about delusion, how we have our own views that arise based on our familial, our cultural upbringing, all of that. We have our own views that arise from what we've experienced. But there are also views that we just absorb, cultural views, a kind of collective misunderstanding. We don't go at this, we don't come at this all by ourselves. We are surrounded by people who also are misunderstanding things to be permanent, reliable, and controllable, also misunderstanding the nature of how suffering comes to be. And so there are views that come from our cultural background.

These views can be a big source of suffering—ones that we didn't opt into, but were just steeped in the soup of. Mental formations, for instance, around the concept of race. These are simply ideas, beliefs, views. There's quite good evidence in the DNA of our bodies that there's no reality to race. It's a belief, it's an idea. Mental formations. And here we can really touch into just how much suffering occurs based on

ideas. This collective ignorance can condition a kind of collective picking up of mental formations. So it's not just internally that these mental formations are created. They're created in conjunction with how we live in the world. These are hard to see. These kinds of mental formations are hard to see.

With mental formation as condition, consciousness comes to be. This one is a little bit confusing perhaps. The way I understand this is that our views, our habits, all of these mental formations, what's arising in our mind—these mental conditioned patterns in our mind, whether views, beliefs, or emotions, thoughts—these shape what our consciousness picks out of experience to pay attention to.

You might get a sense of this from looking at what you've seen when you're caught in a particular emotion. For myself, I worked with a lot of anger. When there was anger arising in the mind, the mind would tend to look for things to be angry about. It would be like a filter on the mind. Or perhaps if I was angry, I would see somebody looking in a particular way.

They'd have a kind of funny expression on their face and I'd think that they hated me. Who knows, maybe they just had some gas. But the mind will interpret reality and pick out of reality all of the sense impressions, things that confirm or correlate to the moods, the views, the mind states, the emotions we're having, reinforcing them.

This is related to what I talked about the other night: confirmation bias. Our minds tend to find things in the world that agree with what we believe, maybe even based simply on an agenda. Our mind orients to picking out of experience what we need to see in that moment. It's a useful pattern, this kind of focused attention based on an agenda. And yet we need to understand it because this is really where delusion comes in. We think we are seeing experience, meeting experience as simply microphones and video cameras that are accurately taking in the information around us.

So these mental formations shape what our consciousness pulls out of the environment. And with consciousness as a condition, our mental and physical processes are shaped. The state of our consciousness affects our mental and physical processes. Flavored by anger, for instance, our body may become tense—the mind state shapes the physical body. We tend to experience things as unpleasant when we have anger arising; it shapes the feeling tone of experience. We perceive things as being directed against me when we're angry.

So now in this chain we're back to where we started: with physical and mental processes as condition, the sense bases and contact arise. The conscious body-mind organism experiences input from the six sense bases and there's contact with the world. But we see now that we are not starting from a neutral place. The mind is already flavored with mental formations that have been shaped by views, opinions, ideas, beliefs that are shaped by ignorance, confusion, misunderstanding. And so these filters, these views tend to reinforce our existing perspective. The cycle tends to reinforce itself.

Now we can be curious about all of this. One of my teachers, Sayadaw U Tejaniya, offered a really simple

way to explore this—you don't even have to think about all the links. He said, just see if you can understand what the job description of your mind states is. This is the mental formation. What do these mind states do? How do they act?

I just went through it with anger. Anger tends to shape our physical body to have tension, tightness, heat. Anger tends to shape our experience as being unpleasant—we could say that's part of the job description of anger. So how does anger affect us? Curiosity about that question, "What is the job description of this?"—that was a fun way for me to begin to explore. So what's the job description of depression? Let's watch this one for a while. How does this one function? What does it do in the body and mind?

Now the good news here is that the processes of mindfulness, what we're practicing here, creates conditions that break this chain apart. There's a big emphasis on looking at feeling tone. Over and over again in the suttas, the Buddha emphasized the feeling tone of experience. Notice the feeling tone—and that points to feeling tone being the place where, if you see it with mindfulness and wisdom, it short circuits that link to craving. This is a place where we can be very curious. Feeling tone is a hugely helpful tool in exploring where the mind tends to tip into craving.

And there are also teachings that point to this: we don't have to try to work our way back to "What's the feeling tone here?" If what you're experiencing in the moment is confusion or anger or a sense of identity, a sense of self, a feeling of becoming, there's a teaching that points to every single link of this chain. Seeing that factor...

The framing of it is like the Four Noble Truths—it's an understanding structured around that same pattern. So he says, for instance, if you're noticing clinging, you can see in that moment: this is clinging; this is how clinging comes to be; this is the arising of clinging; this is the ending of clinging, if you see it ending; and this is the path leading to the ending of clinging. He goes through that pattern with every single one of these links.

All of these links are simply arisings. Contact is an arising, feeling is an arising, craving, clinging, becoming—they are arisings. And so whatever arising you are seeing, it's not like we have to work back and say, "Well, where was the feeling tone? Let me go back to that and then I'll be able to be free." He points to the freedom that's possible just through clear seeing, right in whatever is arising.

This points to me too, to that kind of cutting through of ignorance. In the moment, seeing, "Oh, this is craving arising"—it cuts through the ignorance that believes that craving. And it gives that possibility of some freedom. You may even feel a shift, an insight, an understanding, a kind of taste of wisdom there. "Oh, this is just craving. I can be with this."

So in this teaching from the Majjhima Nikaya, seeing with each link, noticing the impermanence of each link essentially, is what he points to. One here and now makes the end of suffering. Seeing the arising of craving, understanding craving, the arising of craving, the ending of craving, and the way leading to the

ending of craving—seeing the impermanent nature of any of these experiences. One here and now makes an end of suffering.

This is possible with the practices that we are doing here.

May the benefits of our practice together be the supportive conditions for the freedom of our own minds and for all beings everywhere.

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