The Cycle of Suffering: Paṭicca Samuppāda (Retreat at Spirit Rock)

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 1:01:45

As I was walking up the hill this evening, I was hearing the frogs and the crickets and seeing the clouds in the sky. There was a lot of happiness and contentment in that. Greg said the other day it seems like it would be better to just let the frogs give the Dharma talk. I feel that way this evening.

And yet the topic this evening is dependent origination. So buckle your seat belts.

This teaching is a very fundamental teaching in which the Buddha describes essentially how suffering comes to be—a very detailed description of the processes at work in our mind which lead to suffering. It's a really useful teaching. To me it's been so supportive to have this process just laid out, helping the mind to see things it might not notice or recognize. I'm in awe of the Buddha's mind that he could articulate these things so clearly. We are the recipients of his understanding and his ability to communicate that understanding.

In the time of the Buddha, Ānanda really appreciated this teaching. It is said he went to the Buddha and said, "It's wonderful, it's marvelous how profound this dependent origination is and how profound it appears. And yet to me it appears as clear as clear."

The Buddha, understanding and knowing that Ānanda was not fully awakened, responded, "Do not say that, Ānanda, do not say that." I think he was responding to the "clear as clear" part of what Ānanda said. "This dependent origination is profound and appears profound. It is through not understanding, not penetrating this teaching, that this generation has become like a tangled ball of string, unable to pass beyond states of woe, continuing to suffer."

To me, what the Buddha is pointing to here is that there may be an understanding at some level of the content of dependent origination, of the teaching itself. For me this is supportive—to have a sense of the framework that it lays out to help us understand how suffering comes to be. And yet intellectual understanding is different than penetrative understanding, which is essentially seeing this process at work in direct experience. The intellectual understanding may support us in being curious about experience, but it's the seeing of it happening that frees the mind.

It's a teaching that's simple at heart in that it basically points to the conditioned nature of experience. The simple version of this teaching is: When this is, that is. When this comes to be, that comes to be. When this isn't, that isn't. When this ceases, that ceases. And yet this explanation of how suffering arises dives in and

points to how that process of conditioning creates the conditions for suffering to arise.

The teaching describes a pretty complex process in our minds that's often deeply under the surface, where it's not easy to see it at work. And yet hearing this teaching has been so helpful in my own practice, so I offer this evening in the hopes that some of it might be useful for your practice. I don't think of the teaching of dependent origination itself as a practice. Dependent origination describes the process by which suffering comes to be, and yet because it describes that, it may help us understand how we can practice to see this process unfolding.

The overarching understanding is basically this teaching describing the conditions that create suffering—a description of how suffering comes to be as a human pattern. The Buddha is describing something that applies to all of us. That to me is inspiring and helpful to recognize. The specifics of our suffering may seem very individual, but the pattern behind it we share. It's describing the human condition. It's not personal. For me it helps point to the impersonal nature of the arising of suffering—that it's just something that humans do when this being doesn't understand suffering, doesn't understand the cause of suffering, doesn't understand there's a possibility for suffering to release, doesn't understand that there's a way suffering can release.

This teaching can help us loosen the way we take our suffering personally, because we can see it's just following conditions, following habits and patterns that are common to all of us as human beings.

The other piece is that it points to the conditioned nature of suffering. There are twelve links in this teaching, this chain of dependent origination—twelve steps in this process by which suffering comes to be. This chain describes the conditioning for suffering to arise. It's important that we recognize it's describing conditions for suffering. And because it's describing conditions, it means that conditions can be changed. We are not locked into this process. The chain describes conditions that create the arising of suffering. Different conditions will lead us in a different direction.

And the main conditions that lead us in a different direction are hearing the Dharma and practicing in accordance with the Dharma—practicing with right view, right understanding, practicing the Eightfold Path, practicing mindfulness and wisdom. This changes the conditions and can take our experience in an entirely different direction, breaking into that cycle which habitually leads us to suffering and leading us to freedom instead.

So the links, just to start: ignorance conditions mental formations. Mental formations condition consciousness. Consciousness conditions our mind and body processes. Our mind and body processes condition the six sense bases. The six sense bases condition contact—contact with a sense door. Contact conditions feeling. Feeling tends to condition craving. Craving conditions clinging. Clinging conditions becoming. Becoming conditions birth. And birth conditions old age and death. As the Buddha often says at the end of this chain, "And thus the entire mass of suffering is created."

I'll go through each of these links of necessity fairly briefly, but there are a couple of pieces about the bigger picture here. Often this chain of the creation of suffering—beginning with ignorance, leading through our mind and body, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, old age, and death—is understood as a cycle where suffering at the end basically conditions further ignorance. We tend to stay caught in this cycle unless something new happens.

Greg pointed the other night to something new that can happen at the point of contact with suffering. If we hear the Dharma and engage with it, if faith arises in contact with that suffering, the condition of faith arises in dependence on suffering. When we hear the Dharma, when we connect with that understanding and have the inspiration to engage with it, it takes us in a completely different direction. And yet, much of the time we forget that. We have suffering and we feel like, "Oh, I'm struggling with this. What am I doing wrong? How can I fix this?" The whole process in which we engage when we meet suffering often takes us right back to ignorance, and the process just reinforces itself.

For this teaching this evening, I'm not going to start in the traditional place. The teaching starts with ignorance—ignorance leads to mental formations, leads to consciousness, leads to mind and body. All of those, in my own experience, were the last ones to really fall into place in terms of being able to understand them. So I'm going to start where it's a little easier to understand this cycle: with the fact that we have a body and a mind. We're conscious, and there's a body and mind here. Because of this body and mind, within it, we have these six sense bases: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, contact with the skin, and our minds.

Because we have these six sense bases and we're conscious, we experience contact with them. We experience seeing. There are sights. Sights contact the eye. Sounds contact the ear. Smells contact the nose. Thoughts, moods, and mind states contact the mind door—the sixth sense being the mind door. So the arising of sense experience includes the entire range of our experience, not just our physical senses.

We have these six sense bases, and because of that we experience contact with the world. Each of those contacts—every single contact, every sight, every sound, every smell, every taste, every touch, every arising in the mind—has a feeling tone associated with it. This aspect of our experience is vedanā, which Amana talked about the other night. Every sense contact has a feeling tone. It's either pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

These feeling tones arise based on conditions. They're not inherent in the experience. They are conditioned based on many things: our own bodies, our own experience from the past, our ideas—a whole host of things will condition the feeling tone. A simple example of this: perhaps some of you like the taste of milk, especially following a cookie. The condition of drinking milk after having eaten a cookie—there's a pleasant feeling tone there. But now imagine having eaten a pickle and then having a drink of milk.

Even the idea of it, to me, is unpleasant. So the contact, the feeling, is not in the milk. There are conditions—in this body, choices that have been made—and the experience of that contact, of the taste on

the tongue, will be different depending on the conditions.

And feeling tone, too, is simply feeling tone. It's not skillful or unskillful; it's just feeling. In fact, it is said that a fully enlightened being, an arahant, will experience pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. There's one teaching where it says an ordinary person experiences pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral—and so does an arahant. What's the difference between them? I'll get to that later.

Based on feeling tone, there arises a habitual tendency, a habit of mind that's very human—again, not personal to any one of us individually, but almost built into being a human. We tend, when something is pleasant, to like it, want it, want to move towards it. When something's unpleasant, we don't like it; we want to push it away. We don't want that.

This may be built somewhat into our biology. Even single-celled creatures have this tendency to move towards things that will nourish their life and away from noxious chemicals—moving towards what could be called pleasant, away from unpleasant, for that single-celled creature. And yet in our system, this movement towards pleasant and away from unpleasant is not hardwired in us as human beings as it may be in some other beings. We have this capacity to look at our experience and notice, to make choices. There's an agency in our being; there can be choices made about how we engage with the world. So while there's a tendency to move immediately towards the pleasant and away from the unpleasant, different choices can be made at times.

But generally, when we're not consciously aware of things being pleasant, we kind of automatically move towards them. This is the aspect of craving, this next link in the chain. It's like we're this simple machine that wants to maximize pleasant and minimize unpleasant. And habitually, we act out of that wanting.

What I'd say too is that our minds are a little bit short-sighted in that we act out of wanting to move towards pleasant and away from unpleasant at a range, at a sense of what's going to give me the next quick hit of something pleasant or get rid of something unpleasant. We might try to construct our lives to have these threads of getting pleasant and getting rid of unpleasant, and we might think that's as good as it gets. If I can construct my life to get what I want and get rid of what I don't want, that's as good as it would get.

And yet, as we begin to explore our minds and begin to recognize that that process actually just keeps us hooked to doing that—believing, thinking that that's what's going to do it for me, that if I get what I want I'll be happy—this whole process is based in that kind of belief that's embedded in wanting. Wanting itself has this view, this idea, this delusion embedded in it: that if I get that thing, I'll be happy. Aversion likewise has embedded in it this delusion: that if I get rid of that thing, I'll be happy.

And yet what we see as we drop more deeply is that the wanting itself has a kind of suffering in it already. It already has a tension and a tightness. The movement towards a different relationship with pleasant and unpleasant can create an understanding that there's a different kind of happiness that's possible.

This can be very interesting to explore in your experience when you notice wanting happening. Maybe explore a simple wanting—a wanting around wanting to get seconds, or go back for a second bit of dessert, or some special fruit that's offered. Maybe just notice that. Notice the wanting. Feel into the wanting.

Wanting, when we're caught by it, doesn't reveal to us, doesn't point out to us, how painful wanting itself is. Wanting itself actually is pretty unpleasant. It's already got this feeling that something's off or something's wrong in it. It's a feeling of lack. As soon as there's wanting that springs up, there's a feeling of lack.

And wanting, having this view that getting that thing is what's going to make me happy—caught by that view, that's its only option towards happiness, to get that thing. Wanting, when we're caught by wanting, is not going to tell us that if you hang out, wanting will go away and there will be no problem.

And so this release from wanting—this is one of the ways we can explore dependent origination: looking at these links, watching them, exploring them. Look at this experience of wanting. If you watch it, see it go away at some point.

I had an experience at one retreat where I was watching a repeated pattern of wanting. It was coming up regularly, a similar kind of pattern around wanting to look at people. And I watched it over and over again, and at some point I saw the wanting let go—just by watching it over and over again.

Actually, it let go the first time when, seeing through dependent origination essentially, I recognized that when the conditions leading to the wanting disappeared, the wanting disappeared. The condition was seeing somebody—somebody was in my field of vision, and that was a condition for wanting to look at them. When the person disappeared into the building, the condition for wanting to look at them disappeared. And the wanting disappeared. I never looked at them, but just saw that condition vanish. And the wanting vanished.

The release from that wanting felt like being released from a vice grip. The release, the ease that came with that, were way more in line with well-being than looking at a person to see who they were. Way more deeply satisfying—deep happiness, deep ease and peace from watching the wanting let go than from following through on the wanting.

Wanting tends to habitually lead to following through on that wanting—to look, to grasp, to fix, to change. We try to hold on to or cling to something that we want. We try to do something to get rid of something. The wanting, I'd say, is more the movement towards something pleasant, the movement away from something unpleasant. And the clinging is where we land on it. We either hold on to it to try to keep it, or in the case of aversion—as in my own experience—I notice many times being stuck to it, trying to push it away. Essentially clinging to it, trying to get rid of it. The mind clinging to it.

Once something is clung to, once there is that clinging, then essentially our system rallies. Once there's this

sense of, "Oh, I've got this thing, and this thing is what's going to make me happy," it's like our system kind of mobilizes: What are the things I can do to make sure I keep this thing? Or what are the things I can do to make sure I can keep controlling the situation so that I don't have the unpleasant happening?

Thanissaro Bhikkhu points to this link as *bhava*, becoming. He says becoming is the intentions and actions that rally in the service of clinging. We've clung to something, and then whole views and ideas and intentions come into play: "Oh, I've got this thing. Okay, better make sure I keep it. How do I do that? How do I make sure I keep this thing? How do I make sure I'm not in contact with that unpleasant thing?"

This is becoming—this movement towards a goal. We know where we're headed. We know what we want to do. We like this feeling, actually. It's a pleasant feeling, this becoming. It's the sense that we know where we're going, we know it's going to make us happy, we've got our plan in mind, and we're headed there. That's becoming.

And from becoming follows birth into some kind of identity. Things may feel like they become mine; ownership happens. Or I feel somehow like I am the one who does things right. And suffering inevitably follows, because this sense of self, this sense of ownership—because of the impermanent, unreliable nature of experience—there's no way to maintain that. Things will fall apart.

In that falling apart, there's sometimes a sense of failure, sometimes a sense of loss. There can be grief, fear, confusion, anxiety—a whole host of relationships to the recognition that things fall apart. This is suffering.

And it will lead back to ignorance. We may believe, "I did something wrong that things fell apart," as opposed to recognizing that this is the nature of things—to fall apart. This is the way it is. That recognition might lead in the direction of truth. It leads in the direction of potentially faith and engagement, to recognize, "Oh, things fall apart. This is truth. It's not my fault that things fall apart. This is the way it is." And yet we don't often recognize that.

So an example of this part of the process from my own practice, from one of my first long retreats: I am hearing in the Dharma Hall about certain states of experiences that can happen in meditation. There's the contact, the hearing, and then from that there's this idea that's born in the mind of what that state might be. The description of these states, some of them, sounded pretty pleasant. And so the idea led to this notion that, oh, that would be really nice to have that, and this led to craving, wanting to experience the experiences that the teachers were talking about. There was clinging in there in that I felt like I needed to have these experiences. My happiness depended on having these experiences. And the becoming was the intentions that served that purpose of trying to have that experience—a lot of effort put towards having those experiences. That was the becoming.

And as I wasn't having those experiences, the birth, multiple times, was a feeling of not succeeding. The birth of being the one who can't do this. A feeling of being a failure. I'm not doing the practice right.

Something must be wrong. I've not got the right teaching. I've not got the right teacher. If I had the right teacher, I'd get this right. All of this suffering. The birth itself was suffering. The birth itself was painful—the sense that I was doing something wrong.

So this happened a lot, this sense of not doing it right. I'm not getting these experiences. What am I doing wrong? How can I work harder? At some point I began looking at the suffering of that. I began being curious about it. And what I noticed actually was that I saw at some point that this pattern of suffering was born based on contact with an idea. And it wasn't the idea that I thought it was. Actually, I hadn't really clearly seen that there was this contact with this idea of a state. I knew that I was trying to get to these states, but I hadn't really clearly seen that contact and that feeling and that pull towards doing that.

But at some point I saw a thought arise in my mind, and that thought was: in an interview, telling my teacher that I'd had one of those experiences. And we were laughing and just so happy, and it was so great that this teacher saw that I was such a great yogi. This was a really pleasant thought. And I also saw it was really ludicrous—that what I really wanted was not the state, but to tell somebody I'd had the state. I had no idea what the state was because I hadn't experienced it. But that didn't mean I didn't want to be able to tell somebody I'd had it.

When I saw that, when that contact was seen, and just how silly it was, that pattern of suffering fell apart.

So that's a flavor of dependent origination, and yet there's a set of the links that we've not touched on yet, and those are the first ones. We've come from body and mind, from the six sense bases through to suffering, how that suffering is basically created based on feeling leading to craving. Basically, when feeling is not really clearly seen, the tendency will be to lead to craving, and that leads us on to suffering. And then the suffering reconditions or conditions ignorance.

As I mentioned earlier, that not understanding suffering, not seeing or not understanding that suffering is created by conditions and what those conditions are, will just tend to perpetuate the cycle. So the basic condition for suffering to lead to ignorance is that suffering is not understood. The First Noble Truth: there is suffering, and suffering should be understood. That actually is enough for a whole lifetime of practice. Suffering should be understood. You should understand how it's created. Suffering arises in dependence on craving.

So ignorance basically thinks that having what we want, getting rid of what we don't want, will lead to happiness. This ignorance is the ignorance that's embedded in wanting and aversion. When wanting arises, when aversion arises, ignorance is arising with it. So this first link of the chain really is the linchpin of the whole chain. Because when ignorance is arising, there is the belief in wanting. When ignorance is arising, wanting believes that getting what I want will bring me happiness. Having the pleasant will bring me happiness.

And so when there is ignorance in the mind and a feeling of pleasant arises, craving will follow. The work

really is to understand this ignorance—these beliefs that I need certain things to make me happy, that I need to get rid of certain things to make me happy.

So with ignorance as condition, mental formations come to be. Again, not understanding suffering, that lack of understanding is not simply a passive kind of experience. It's a very active process in our minds, this ignorance. When there is ignorance in our minds, it shapes us, it points us towards choosing certain ways to act, engaging in things based on our conditioned habits and patterns. We choose things, we decide things based on this misunderstanding about where happiness might come from—not understanding that wanting itself, aversion itself, is suffering. Not understanding the release, a deeper kind of happiness that's possible.

So with ignorance we're probably going to take the most obvious move to get the pleasant, get rid of the unpleasant. And we are reinforcing our habits and patterns. Mental formations essentially are these habits and patterns that keep this cycle going. Ignorance is this lack of understanding, and that creates or leads to choices based on that lack of understanding—choices to engage in the world in a certain way. We think we're trying to act to alleviate our suffering because we don't understand that we're actually reinforcing the very patterns, the very habits that keep us locked into this cycle.

Views, ideas, and opinions are also mental formations. And these mental formations that come about based on ignorance, they're not just coming about based on our own minds. We are embedded in a collective. We are embedded in relationships with people. We learn things from our families. We learn things from friends on the playground. We are embedded in our culture. A lot of what comes in as mental formations, a lot of what feeds our views comes from our own personal conditioning, but also from our culture.

Our culture also has this collective ignorance that creates collective mental formations. By collective mental formations, I mean mental formations that we teach each other—beliefs, ideas, views that we teach each other. And because so many people around us might share those views, beliefs, and ideas, we don't see them as beliefs or views. We just take them to be truth. This is ignorance. Taking a view to be truth is a fundamental kind of ignorance—not seeing a view as a perspective. And yet, because of the way our cultures work, because we tend to be surrounded by people who view things the same way we do, it's reinforced. These views get reinforced and it's hard to see them sometimes. It's hard to see them as views. The ignorance of the culture, of what we're taught, the mental formations—those reinforce themselves.

An example of this are mental formations related to the concept of race. Views, ideas, beliefs around something that is not—the concept of race, from what I understand with looking at our DNA, there is nothing in our genetics that has anything to do with what we call race, basically meaning color of skin. There's nothing. It's a concept. It's purely a construct, a construct of our culture. And yet there are many, many mental formations—views, ideas, beliefs—around this concept. A concept, an idea in the mind glommed on with all these views and ideas and opinions—this creates suffering in the world. These things

are no more than arisings in the mind, and yet they have a deep impact on the world. So much suffering in our world comes from this kind of ignorance and this kind of collective mental formation.

Not seeing it is a huge way that the suffering of racism, the suffering of so many kinds of discrimination, oppression, and privilege come from this kind of collective formation. We have the possibility through our practice to recognize and see through these deeply conditioned—not only internally, personally conditioned, but culturally conditioned—patterns that lead to suffering. Not only suffering in our being, but in our society.

come from the broader culture. With mental formations as condition, this shapes our consciousness. This is the next link.

Views, habits, patterns, choices, ideas condition what consciousness receives. What we end up experiencing, what we know, what we recognize, is filtered through these views and ideas. There's a quote, I think from Anaïs Nin: "We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are." And that is very true—those views, ideas, and beliefs shape what we actually meet.

For example, if we have a habitual pattern of responding with anger, then that habitual pattern might predispose us to look for things, to have things come into consciousness, to take things in that will make us angry. As an aversive person, as one with an aversive tendency, my mind has that kind of inclination. I began to notice at one point—my teacher said, "Just let your attention roam through your body. Just see what it lands on. What's the first thing? What comes into your consciousness? Don't choose. Just see. What does it land on?"

And I did that for a few minutes. He used the word "choiceless," I think. "Just don't choose. Let it be choiceless." When I had done it for a few minutes, I said, "Well, I wasn't choosing, but it surely couldn't have been completely choiceless, because every single thing my attention landed on was unpleasant."

What I began to understand over the course of my practice is that this tendency towards aversion predisposed me—it's like the mind was a search beacon for unpleasant. If I find the unpleasant things and get rid of them, that'll be okay. So it's like searching for the unpleasant in order to get rid of it. This is the conditioning power: mental formations condition what we take in, what we experience in consciousness.

And then consciousness conditions and shapes our mental and physical experience. How our consciousness is—perhaps predisposed towards anger—if consciousness is predisposed towards anger and anger is arising, that shapes our being. Our body, our face may become contracted or distorted with anger, an expression of anger. We may feel pressure and heat in our body. It has an effect on our body when consciousness is colored with one of these mental formations. This is mental formation coloring consciousness, and then that mental formation coloring consciousness affecting other mind and body processes.

It affects our body. It affects how we feel things. It tends to make things unpleasant. It affects how we

perceive things, how we recognize things. And it tends to encourage more anger.

So now in this chain of dependent origination, we're back to where we started: we have a body and mind, there are things arising in body and mind, and there's contact. But we see now that this isn't like our eyes are cameras and our ears are microphones or receivers picking up sound. Our sense doors are already filtered, conditioned by ignorance, views, opinions. We don't simply receive things like a blank slate. We are receiving what we have been conditioned to receive. Our filters, our perspectives tend to reinforce our perspectives. And so the cycle reinforces itself.

What's the possibility of not being caught by this process? If we look at this as a chain of conditions describing how suffering is created, then perhaps if the conditions are changed, something else can happen. As I said earlier, the main condition that supports a different thing happening with this process is mindfulness and wisdom.

The teachings point to the link between feeling and craving as a very central place for mindfulness to support allowing this chain to fall apart. If we can bring curiosity and interest to feeling tone—because that's the link where feeling leads to craving. Craving in the second noble truth is understood to be the cause for suffering, but the Pali term actually makes it more translatable as something like "with the arising of craving is the arising of suffering"—the arising of craving is already suffering.

If the understanding of feeling can bring in some wisdom that helps to break through the ignorance around wanting and aversion, which is our habitual response to craving, then we can simply recognize, as the Satipatthana Sutta says: "When feeling a pleasant feeling, one understands, 'I feel a pleasant feeling.'"

When feeling an unpleasant feeling, one understands, "I feel an unpleasant feeling." When feeling a neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling, one understands, "I feel a neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling." Simple contact with feeling and understanding—this is what's arising. This kind of meeting of that experience is essentially, again, recognizing: oh, this is a human experience.

We talked about this really early in the retreat, in the beginning of the March retreat. We talked about recognizing experience as human experience and not necessarily as something to do something about, but just: oh, this is what's arising. When that can happen with feeling, it tends not to lead to craving. When feeling is felt as feeling and craving does not arise, clinging does not arise, becoming does not arise, birth into identity does not arise, and suffering does not arise.

This place of feeling is one of the places where the difference between the enlightened person, the arahant, and the ordinary person is described. That text I mentioned earlier asks: what is the difference? Someone who's awakened experiences pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. Someone who is ordinary experiences pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. What's the difference between them?

The Buddha responded that when an ordinary person experiences a painful bodily feeling, they worry and grieve, lament, beat their breast, weep, and become distraught. They thus experience two kinds of

feeling—a bodily one and a mental one. But the noble disciple, when touched by a painful feeling, will not worry nor grieve nor lament, will not beat their breast and weep, nor will they be distraught. It is one kind of feeling they experience—a bodily one, not a mental one.

We could say that a noble one, when touched by a painful bodily feeling, knows they're experiencing a painful bodily feeling. This kind of contact, this recognition, this meeting of feeling, can short-circuit that movement to craving, leading to release—a sense of the recognition of the non-arising of suffering.

Even seeing feeling at times, at least in my experience, sometimes I would notice: yep, that's unpleasant. Oh, I still don't want it. Still want to get rid of it. Sometimes we can know that things are unpleasant but still want to push it away. The momentum of the ignorance behind aversion and wanting can be stronger than our ability to meet that pleasant or unpleasant feeling.

And yet there's not hopeless for us. Because there's another—one of my most heart-connected teachings in the suttas—where the Buddha, or actually Shariputra in this case, points to something profound. For every single link in this chain of dependent origination, it says one can see that, one can understand. For instance, it says one can understand: if, in seeing the arising of clinging, one knows that clinging is there, one recognizes its arising, one sees the possibility of its ceasing, one understands how one practices to see its ceasing—right there, there can be freedom.

Every single link in this chain, no matter where you are in this process, whatever is arising, this teaching points to each as being a doorway to freedom. It's in the Majjhima Nikaya, called the Teaching on Right View, Majjhima 9. Every single link of the chain is pointed to as being a doorway to freedom.

It doesn't matter if we're experiencing hatred or self-hatred or rage or confusion or irritation—as we've been saying, it doesn't matter. With mindfulness and wisdom meeting anything, meeting whatever is arising, right there is the possibility for freedom. We don't have to somehow back up and find where the contact and unpleasant feeling was, or where the contact and pleasant feeling was that made me want this. Right here, if there's already wanting, we can see through the wanting. As in my description of seeing the wanting just release, the feeling of release there—that was a kind of freedom.

So seeing, understanding this process at work is helpful. Understanding how the process works, and anywhere we notice, anything we are noticing, wherever we're noticing in that cycle—freedom is possible. Our work is recognizing it as an arising. Clinging is arising. Sense of self is arising. Self-hatred is arising. Fear, confusion is arising. Freedom is possible in a moment.

And patience. Patience is necessary.

So let's sit for a moment.

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