Dependent Co-Arising Part 1 (Retreat at Spirit Rock)

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 1:03:08

It feels like such a privilege to sit here with you, with a gathering of processes of body and mind interested in getting to know themselves. What an amazing thing.

From this perspective that I have the privilege of being in—witnessing the unfolding of your practice and conversations with some of you, just watching, seeing you move through your day, sitting, walking, eating—I have the sense of the Dharma steeping us all.

I know from the inside, at least in my own experience of these retreats when I was on that side of the hall, sometimes it can feel like we get pretty wrapped up in the details of a particular struggle or stress. Maybe we lose sight of the bigger picture of just the way Dharma works, the gradual nature of the wearing away of greed, aversion, and delusion.

The Buddha talked about this path as a gradual path. One analogy he used was this: He said, as if there were a ship being dragged onto dry land after it has spent months on the sea, saturated with the sea water, the wind, and the waves—all of the parts of the ship saturated by all of that on the sea—and then dragged up on dry land and further saturated by the wind and the sand blowing across it and the sun baking the parts of the ship. He points to how, over time, gradually—and he particularly focuses on the rigging of the ship, the rope—how gradually over time that rope will wear away.

If you think about this analogy, on any particular day, if you look at the rope and then the next day and the next day, it's not going to look like much has happened in terms of the wearing away. But it is inexorably being weakened through the contact with the sun, the sand, the wind, the water. Until one day, maybe a year or two later, you walk up to parts of that ship and pick it up and the rope falls apart in your hand. Maybe you didn't even see the rope wearing away.

This gradual nature of the path—to me it's important to remember that regularly. We don't measure how our practice is doing based on what happened today and whether it was pleasant or unpleasant. Over time—I think it was the Dalai Lama who said—look back five years, ten years and see: Are you kinder? Is there a little less reactivity in your mind? The practice works on us slowly. So it is an exercise in confidence, faith, and patience to walk this path.

On the night of the Buddha's awakening, I found the quote of what is said to have happened in the Buddha's mind. How we know this, don't ask me. But he's telling the story, perhaps, and he says: "Then the

thought occurred to me"—telling the story of that night—"this Dhamma that I have attained is profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful, refined, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise. But this generation delights in attachment, is excited by attachment, enjoys attachment. For a generation delighting in attachment, excited by attachment, enjoying attachment, this-that conditionality and dependent co-arising are hard to see."

He goes on to say it's also hard to see the relinquishment of acquisitions, the ending of craving—Nibbāna. And it is said he doubted whether, as Greg mentioned last night, there would be anybody who would understand him. But for our great fortune, he did decide to teach.

I'd like to offer some reflections this evening on the teaching he said would be so hard for us to understand: dependent co-arising. This is, as he said, subtle, hard to see, hard to understand, profound, unattainable by mere reasoning. It's not a simple teaching.

There are actually multiple forms of it in the teachings, the suttas, but two key forms of dependent co-arising. One describes the process by which suffering comes to be. We can look at this teaching of dependent co-arising as an elaboration on the second noble truth, the arising of suffering—that with the arising of craving is the arising of suffering. This is a more detailed elaboration on that.

The second form of conditionality described in the suttas is conditionality that describes how our minds move towards freedom. There are conditions that support the mind to see the ending of suffering, the ending of craving, the ending of greed, aversion, and delusion. A set of conditions are described that are cultivated as we walk this path, wholesome qualities that strengthen.

This same process of conditionality—which this evening I'm going to focus on, particularly the part of the teaching that describes how it creates suffering—I want to say at the beginning that this same process in our minds, this "when this arises, that arises; when this ceases, that ceases; with the arising of this is the arising of that; with the cessation of this is the cessation of that"—that simple statement of conditionality doesn't simply take us into suffering. There are processes at work: wisdom, mindfulness, concentration, investigation.

that support the movement of the mind towards release from greed, aversion, and delusion. So that's rather good news—it's not as if this process of conditionality only works to create suffering. It also supports the creation of conditions for release.

There's a famous teaching, or I'd say an interchange, between Ānanda, who was the Buddha's attendant for many years, and the Buddha. Ānanda comes to the Buddha and—you get the impression he's rather excited. He says, "It's wonderful, it's marvelous how profound this dependent origination is and how profound it appears. And yet it appears to me as clear as clear."

The Buddha, knowing that at this point Ānanda is not yet awakened, says, "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 teaching, that this generation has become like a tangled ball of string, covered as with blight, tangled like coarse grass, unable to pass beyond states of woe."

He really points to this: not understanding how the process of suffering is created, not understanding how dependent origination can lead us away from suffering—this is a profound teaching, and through not understanding it, we stay caught. We stay stuck.

So perhaps we have to begin with hearing something about this teaching and begin to recognize some of what he's describing in our own experience.

I would say that the teachings of the Buddha have different flavors to them. Some of his teachings, and much of what we've been offering in this retreat, are instructional in nature—how to practice, how to meet our experience, the teachings on the four foundations of mindfulness. But some of his teachings are descriptive in nature. This one, the teaching on dependent origination applied to how suffering arises, is a description of the habitual nature of our minds. I wouldn't call it exactly a practice. It describes what our minds will do when we're not present.

This process the Buddha described about how suffering is created—it's the tendency of our mind when it is caught by ignorance, when it's caught by not seeing the impermanent, unreliable, not-self nature of experience. When we don't understand suffering, the arising of suffering, the possibility of the ending of suffering, and the path leading to the ending of suffering—not understanding that, as the Buddha said to Ānanda, we stay caught.

And so he described what happens for us when we remain caught. This teaching is really a description at a very detailed level of what goes on in our mind. It's his recognition, through his own exploration of his own mind, of how suffering comes to be. He described it for us with the hope of helping us understand how we get caught. So this teaching is a very clear description of how suffering happens.

Part of why it's helpful to talk about this is that we can begin to see suffering as a phenomenon that is impersonal, human. Recognizing how these processes work in our mind as he describes them, we might begin to feel a little less identified—less like "it's my fault that I have self-hatred arising," and more like we're beginning to understand that conditions have led to this. And so there's a recognition of the humanness of our patterns of suffering. We're not alone in this process. The Buddha described a kind of archetype of how suffering happens. When we look at our own experience, any particular flavor of suffering, we can start to see these patterns—these archetypal patterns, these human patterns—happening.

This teaching also points out the conditioned nature of suffering. Suffering arises when certain conditions are in place. If those conditions fall apart—and the teachings of the Buddha help us meet our experience in such a way that the conditions supporting suffering begin to fall apart—when those conditions are no longer there, suffering no longer arises.

So the conditioned nature of suffering means it's not destined for our minds. Somebody used the phrase the other day about suffering being optional. Well, in a way it is optional. When we begin to recognize these patterns and habits in our mind with mindfulness and wisdom, we can see that there's a choice, a choice point. We don't just have to follow the habitual tendencies of mind. Mindfulness and wisdom can release those habitual tendencies, and the releasing of them can lead to release from suffering, stress, unsatisfactoriness.

So this chain, this teaching, this description of conditions that lead to the arising of suffering—it describes conditions; we're not locked in some kind of inevitable process. When conditions change, and the practice of wise mindfulness, wise effort, wise concentration, the Eightfold Path, create the conditions for the mind to take the other trajectory that the Buddha pointed to—the trajectory of conditions that lead us away from suffering.

This description of the links or conditions that lead to suffering also describes, and I think this is interesting to know, how the sense of self is created and latched onto. The same process is at work: the creation of identification, the creation of suffering. This is useful for us to remember because sometimes, especially when we start talking about the teaching on not-self, people hear that teaching and think, "I need to find not-self, I need to see through self." But sometimes what's actually present is suffering—that's what's available to be seen, the dukkha of a particular habit or pattern. Looking at the dukkha, looking at the sense of self—sometimes one is more available than the other.

We don't have to think, "I have to see—oh, there's some kind of suffering arising, where's the sense of self in that?" We don't need to find the not-self there. We can simply be curious about the pattern of suffering as it's arising. Sometimes the sense of self is more obvious, more available to be seen. We don't have to find it if it's not there, if it's not obvious, if it doesn't feel accessible. It is there—it just may not be what is easily available to touch into experientially. We may have some concept about it, but the experiential touching into—"Oh, that's that sense of self, that 'turkey feeling' Anushka described the other day"—that's different.

This chain of dependent origination has twelve links, so it's a pretty detailed description of how suffering comes to be. This evening I wanted to explore a portion of this teaching, not trying to go through the whole thing. But I'll state the links now, starting with a kind of statement of this teaching:

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. With mental and physical processes as condition, the six sense bases come to be. In dependence on the six sense bases, there is contact. In dependence on contact, there is feeling. In dependence on feeling, there's craving. In dependence on craving, clinging. In dependence on clinging, becoming. In dependence on becoming, birth. In dependence on birth, old age and death—and therein, the Buddha says, is the entire mass of suffering.

This is also understood as a cyclic process. When suffering is met with habits of mind, with our familiar ways of meeting experience, it tends to lead to more ignorance, and we just go round and round in this cycle. This chain or cycle is said to describe the process of samsara, how we stay caught in suffering. There's also the understanding that if that suffering is met with wisdom, with mindfulness and wisdom, it can lead to faith. It can lead to delight and joy. It can lead to concentration and seeing things as they are—that direction towards freedom from suffering.

So there are points in this process where there can be a shift. Actually, anywhere in this process we can bring mindfulness and wisdom, curiosity to what's happening in this moment.

I'd like to start the exploration of this teaching today not at the beginning, where it starts with ignorance, because those first few links are some of the more challenging to really see in direct experience. Instead, I'd like to start us where it's easier—start the teaching where we really can contact our experience.

We have a body that's conscious, and this body with its consciousness has six sense bases: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin, and mind. Because we have this consciousness, the sense bases are contacted by sense impressions. Contact with the sense doors results in sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Contact with the mind door is the recognition of thought, emotion, mind states—a whole host of things going on in the mind.

This is much of what we've been looking at. Bhante did the exploration on the sixth sense basis, looking at what contact is, what happens with contact. This is the simple impression: we have these senses and there's contact with our senses. Right now you may be noticing hearing. You may be noticing seeing. Body sensation—heat perhaps, or contact points. This is contact. This is the sensitivity of the sense base being contacted by its sense object. Light waves for the eye, sound waves for the ear. The sense object comes in and makes physical contact with our physical sense bases.

So these are the first two links I'm exploring: the six sense bases, and in dependence on the six sense bases, contact. The six sense bases condition contact with the consciousness that's available to receive experience. And contact conditions feeling, the next link.

Greg talked a lot about feeling last night. And as he mentioned, every single sense impression that we have—every sight, every sound, every smell, every taste, every touch, every contact with the mind—has a flavor of a feeling tone. Pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

So we see the deer outside. Contact of that with the senses. There's perhaps a sense of pleasantness there. Doesn't have to be—could be unpleasant. Each of these sense impressions has a feeling tone, and that feeling tone is itself conditioned based on our prior experience. So as Greg said last night, the feeling tone itself is not inherently in the object itself. It partly depends on the conditions in which the object is touching our sense bases.

An example of this might be: maybe you find the taste of milk pleasant after eating a cookie, especially a

chocolate cookie. For me, that's true. But if I taste milk after eating a pickle, it is not pleasant. So the pleasant or unpleasant is not in the milk—it's in the conditions. This is a simple example of how different conditions may shape the feeling tone. Greg talked a lot about that last night, so I'm not going to repeat too much of it.

Based on the feeling tone, which is already conditioned based on our prior experience, we tend to respond with the habitual tendency of wanting more pleasant, wanting to get rid of the unpleasant. This is the next link: feeling conditions craving.

I think it's important to recognize that this feeling-conditions-craving link is really leading from feeling to craving. It's conditions, not causal. Feelings don't have to lead to craving, as Greg pointed to last night. They don't have to. Seeing things with mindfulness and wisdom, we may be able to just notice the feeling tone and it not lead onward to craving.

When we don't see it with mindfulness and wisdom, basically we could say the mental function or the mental formation of ignorance is acting in our minds. That very first link in the whole chain of dependent origination—it's like the ignorance link tumbles us forward into this chain. And so when ignorance is arising with feeling, it's really strongly going to lead to craving. When we are unaware of the impermanent, unreliable nature of experience, we think there's something to hold on to. And so feeling will lead to craving in that case, with ignorance being present.

One of the ways this teaching is framed, or translated—sometimes we call it dependent origination, sometimes it's called dependent co-arising. And when ignorance is co-arising with feeling, craving comes right along for the ride. So really, a lot of our work here is exploring bringing mindfulness and wisdom to whatever is here, whatever is happening. If we bring mindfulness and wisdom to the experience of feeling, it doesn't have to follow into this link of craving.

And yet often mindfulness and wisdom aren't necessarily strong. The movement, the habit, the pattern of this cycle is so fast. It's like in less than a split second this whole thing can unfold. This whole twelve steps can happen in less than a split second. So there is a tendency for craving to arise around feeling tone—craving to want something pleasant, to want to get rid of something unpleasant.

Craving is embedded in both greed and aversion. Aversion is the craving to get rid of. Greed is the craving to hold on to. And then there's delusion embedded in all of it. Because the mind wanting the pleasant, the greed, is kind of like the movement towards the pleasant. And that movement towards pleasant is predicated on, or based on, or founded in the belief, the delusion, that having that pleasant thing will make me happy, will do it for me. Or likewise on the flip side with aversion—the belief that getting rid of that unpleasant thing will make me happy. Those beliefs are delusion at work.

Sometimes we just see the leaning towards. Sometimes we can actually recognize the idea in the mind: "Yeah, I need that. That's what will make me happy." So based on the feeling tone, we tend to lean towards

pleasant, lean away from unpleasant.

When mindfulness is not around, we're like an automatic machine—get pleasant, get rid of unpleasant, maybe just space out around neutral. Given this tendency to lean towards, this kind of idea of "Ooh, I need that," craving becomes this whole movement of picking up an intention or momentum to go towards something.

The next link is clinging. With craving as a condition, clinging tends to arise. I think of clinging almost as an intensification. There's a kind of gradient from craving to clinging. Craving is the leaning towards, the reaching out for something. Clinging is when we actually pick it up.

This might be craving and clinging around some particular sense pleasure—food, a sight—that leaning towards. It might shift. For instance, you might notice a kind of pleasantness seeing particular flowers or a particular plant. "Oh, I've not seen that plant before." So maybe there's a sense of curiosity, something pleasant there. And yet there may be this feeling of "let me look a little closer." There's a craving, a wanting to see it or get a little closer. Then maybe it becomes, "Oh, I need to take a picture of this," and we kind of land on it. Or maybe we want to get out some pruning shears and take some of it back to our room, really actually physically possess it.

This happens a lot—craving, clinging, picking it up, holding onto it—around physical experience, but it also happens around mental experience. For example, we might be listening to the teachings or seeing somebody doing walking meditation really mindfully. There's a sense of "Ooh, maybe I could do that too," a little sense of what it might be like to have that kind of experience. So there's this idea born in the mind—a kind of fantasy of being the best yogi here.

That fantasy might have a pleasant feeling tone to it. The idea is, "If I was that, that would feel pretty good." So the feeling tone comes in. Then there's the desire, the wanting, to have that fantasy become what happens to us. That's the craving. Then there's the potential of picking up that idea—"Oh, I need that. That is what is going to make me happy." We've latched onto that belief that if I can become that good yogi that's in this fantasy in my mind, then I will be happy. That's where we've clung to that idea.

The next step from clinging is becoming. With clinging as condition, becoming tends to happen. Thanissaro Bhikkhu has a beautiful phrase around becoming that I like as a description. Becoming, he says, are the intentions and actions that arise in the service of clinging.

In this case, the idea of "I need to become a good yogi"—that's the clinging. This is what's going to make me happy. We've clung to that as being necessary. And so in that becoming necessary, there's this arising of "Okay, what do I have to do? How do I have to practice?" The intentions, what am I going to do to make this happen? This is becoming—this movement towards our goals that have come up through the clinging. The sense of "It's mine, I'm going to make this happen."

So becoming is the intentions and views that serve our clinging. We tend to like becoming. Becoming feels

pretty good because when becoming happens, we're buying into the idea of "I'm in control, I've figured it out, I know what I'm going to do and I know how I'm going to do it and it's going to get me there and it's all going to be great when I get there." That's the feeling of becoming. We've picked up this belief in the controllability of experience. Sometimes we can control experience, but ultimately what tends to happen is that at some point we notice we can't.

So we tend to like becoming because it feels good. And then, following on from becoming, the next link is birth.

At times this is talked about as being an actual birth into a subsequent life, but it's also pointed to as the birth into an identity. Certain teachers have really emphasized this—Bhikkhu Buddhadasa in particular pointed to this understanding. Birth can be looked at as a birth into an identity. Like, "Oh, I am a good yogi." So it's no longer just the wish; there's some sense of having gratified that.

There's a kind of gradation between becoming and birth in a way—the movement towards an identity. At some point it may feel like we've landed there. Or maybe it feels like we don't land there and we experience suffering immediately: "I failed. I haven't figured out how to do this. I can't do this."

I've experienced this around the idea of being a good yogi—the sense of the fantasy of what it means to be a good yogi. The whole project of "I could be continuously mindful." That's what the good yogi identification thinks.

On one retreat, I almost flipped back and forth between these identities on a regular basis. I'd take a step and think, "Oh, I can really feel that step. I'm a good yogi"—birth right into that. "Yeah, I'm a good yogi." And then the mind wandered. "Oh, I'm a bad yogi." Split second, one to the other, and believing both of them. This is becoming and birth. Seeing that process—it's really useful to begin to see this happen.

I found for myself, in terms of exploring this particular dynamic, that sometimes strong identities have a kind of grip. The good yogi identity was pretty strong for me. I was pretty identified with that—like, "Yeah, I'd better be a good yogi. If I'm not a good yogi, it's a problem." But then, proof: I couldn't be a good yogi. With my idea of what a good yogi was, I couldn't be that all the time. I didn't have control over the mind wandering, and that was evidence that I was a bad yogi.

Instead of actually exploring the process of picking something up—picking up the identity—I began to see, as I looked at this, "Okay, I'm just going to notice these identities happening. Good yogi, bad yogi, good yogi, bad yogi." Watching that back and forth, I saw something: the bad yogi actually depends on the good yogi. The bad yogi doesn't even exist if the good yogi is not an issue.

At first I thought what I needed to do was get rid of the bad yogi and just be the good yogi—that if I could just not have the bad yogi, there wouldn't be a problem. But I began to see that the bad yogi identification depended on, was intimately connected with, the good yogi. These two identities were locked together.

So the exploration of these processes at work can begin to help us weaken the identification.

The next step from birth is aging and death. As I just pointed to in that example, you take birth into some kind of identity, and the inevitable, impermanent, unreliable nature of experience will shatter that identity—will shatter that sense of "I have that thing." If it's having a physical possession, the impermanence of physical things means they break, they get lost, and we can suffer with that.

But I think much of the time we're suffering around the identities that we hold on to, feeling like we need to control those identities. Yet the uncontrollable nature of the arising and passing of experience means that we don't have control. We can't always be the identity we want to be. And so we will suffer. When it's proved to us—in my case, "You can't always be the good yogi"—there was a lot of suffering around that.

So this cycle of dependent origination, this is as far as I'm going to go today—kind of the middle of the chain: sixth sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, identification.

aging and death—or the entire mass of suffering. The aging and death of that identity, the impermanent nature of it, means it will fall apart. And therein lies the suffering that results.

I'll save the rest of it—the early links of ignorance, mental formation, and consciousness—for my next talk. But there's plenty in this part to reflect on, in what we've explored a little bit tonight.

One piece I want to point to is how strong this pattern is, and partly why it's so powerful for us, why we tend to get caught in it over and over again. Part of this has to do with the feeling tone of each of these links. Because each of these links is some arising experience—craving, clinging, becoming, birth, identification, the taking up of a sense of self. It's all mental formations at work. And so if we think about what the feeling tones of those are, because they are mental formations, they have a feeling tone.

Craving—that desire when we have a pleasant feeling and we want to hold on to that pleasant feeling. We may not notice this initially, but the craving itself... In fact, we might think that it's pleasant because we're so focused on the idea of getting that thing or getting rid of that thing. We might think that craving is pleasant. But if we look at the actual experience of craving, if we feel into the actual experience of craving, it's unpleasant. Craving as a mental formation tends to have an unpleasant feeling tone.

Becoming, as I mentioned a few minutes ago, tends to have a pleasant feeling tone because there's a sense of knowing where we're going, knowing where we're headed. And so with that craving and clinging and becoming, if we get what we want, if we have that thing, that part feels good. The clinging, when we've gotten the thing that we want—the phrase is, we're "in association with the loved." That feels pretty good. We've gotten something that we want, so there's some pleasantness there too.

And we tend to go for pleasant. We tend to crave that pleasant. So we get something we want, and because of the inevitable process of impermanence, the pleasure of that fades over time. What happens is we think, "Well, the last time I felt pretty good was when I got something I wanted. So what do I want to

want?" You could call this Google mind. Sometimes I find myself sitting in front of that Google screen thinking, "What do I want to know?" Not just wanting information, but that sense of wanting to have something to find, to get that hit of "Oh, I figured something out."

This cycle tends to reinforce itself. It also has a kind of power in that when we get the thing that we want, not only do we have the pleasantness of the association with what we want, but we also get the perhaps more hidden pleasure of the feeling of the dissatisfactoriness of the wanting going away. There's a double hit of pleasure when we get what we want—because wanting is actually really unpleasant. And we don't quite know how driven we are by that wanting, wanting to get rid of that feeling of unpleasant. The only way we know how to get rid of that feeling is to get something that we want.

But this practice, what we're doing here, helps us to recognize or see that there's another way toward ease or peace of mind, rather than having to get what I want to fill that gap, that hole of dissatisfactoriness. Craving itself is a mental formation that is impermanent. And so if we have some interest or curiosity about what the experience of craving is—this unpleasant feeling—and watch what happens, we'll see that craving can vanish without getting the thing that craving wants. The craving can vanish.

I watched this at one point in walking meditation. I was doing this back and forth, walking outside, and I wanted to be away from people. I had a lot of aversion when people were around, so I was kind of out by myself. But I began noticing that when somebody would walk into my field of vision—and I was doing a kind of secluded walking practice, so not looking up, but I would see somebody pop into my field of vision, in my peripheral vision—there was so much wanting to look at the person. So strong.

Initially I was really just like, "I am not going to look," putting the blinders on. There was aversion in the mind around looking, and I just forced myself not to look. It felt like I was feeling that craving and pushing it down, as opposed to really feeling the craving. I got to see this a lot.

This was a three-month retreat, so over the course of multiple weeks I got to look at this pattern a lot. And one day it finally occurred to me, well, craving is happening here. Maybe I should look at the craving.

So looking at the craving, I began to see that it arose—and this is the dependent origination piece—it arose when the person popped into the field of vision. There was the contact, contact of seeing. Then the idea arose: I'll be happy if I look. There was that process going on. As long as the person was in my field of vision, I felt the pull. It felt like wanting, like this tractor beam of *you are going to look*.

But instead of holding my mind with blinders on, I used mindfulness to not look and just watch the craving. Feeling the craving, feeling it, feeling it. It got really strong as the person walked right in front of me. All I would have to do was just briefly flip my eyes up to see who they were. So strong. But I just watched the craving.

And then the person went around the corner and vanished. When the person vanished, the craving vanished. That feeling of the craving vanishing felt like I was released from a vice grip. It was so much

freedom.

Then for a little while I started getting interested—it was so much fun to watch the craving vanish. I was waiting for people to come around so I could watch the craving and then watch it vanish when they disappeared. And then I realized I was holding on to the craving in order to see it disappear. And then the craving just went away.

There's so much we can see by looking at what our minds are doing. In this case, sometimes people ask, "I've heard you can cut the chain of dependent origination at feeling. It doesn't have to go to craving." But in this case it had already gone to craving. That doesn't mean freedom can't happen. There's another teaching that points to every single link of dependent origination. It describes how freedom can be found by being aware, being mindful, noticing the arising of craving, noticing the ending of craving. Freedom can happen anywhere, whatever we are knowing in the moment.

I didn't have to go back and say, "Where was the pleasant feeling? Can I go back and cut it off at the pleasant?" Craving is arising. Mindfulness of the craving. Mindfulness of the clinging. Mindfulness of the becoming—that sense of "I'm in control." Mindfulness of that. Wherever we are, the teachings point to the mindfulness and wisdom that can essentially cut through the delusion, the ignorance around things being permanent, reliable, controllable, me. It's that ignorance arising with the craving that is seen through and cut through with mindfulness and wisdom. Wherever we are, whatever is arising, that is where mindfulness can open to wisdom and possibly to freedom in a moment—right in the midst of craving, right in the midst of self-hatred.

The last piece I'll say is this: this description is pretty complicated. All these different pieces, remembering all of them. Can I see each individual piece? Sometimes the mindfulness can get very strong and quite detailed, watching these things unfold moment to moment. But there's also a power to just understanding that something is conditioned without needing to know how it was conditioned.

For me, with the self-hatred piece—I talked about self-hatred last time I spoke—there was real power at one point in simply recognizing, "Oh, right. This is deeply conditioned based on past history." Not knowing all the details of that conditioning, but just knowing: yes, self-hatred is conditioned. It arises. Of course it arises. That understanding was supportive for being able to meet that pattern. Before I really understood it was conditioned, I felt like I was to blame for it.

You know, I should be able to control it. I should be able to stop it. But when I began to understand—oh, it's conditioned, it's a conditioned arising—everything shifted. That reflection, "it's conditioned, it's nature, of course it happens," created the conditions for me to have less struggle, to meet the pattern with mindfulness when it arose.

So just knowing that something is conditioned can be really powerful. If that's all you remember from this talk, that's enough.

Let's sit for a moment.

Thank you for your practice. The world needs it.

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