Dependent Co-Arising: Part 2 (Retreat at Spirit Rock)

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 1:02:34

Last week in the talk I gave, I talked about the teaching of dependent origination. I got through many of the links but not all of them, so I wanted to continue with that teaching.

Just a little bit of a recap at the beginning. This teaching is a description of the habitual or usual processes of our bodies and minds that keep us caught in the cycle of suffering, keep us caught in the cycle of becoming, of selfing, of identification. It's a complex description with twelve links, and just to remind you, the traditional form begins with ignorance. With ignorance as condition, mental formations come to be. With mental formation as condition, consciousness comes to be. With consciousness as condition, mentality-materiality comes to be. With mentality-materiality as condition, the six sense bases. With the six sense bases as condition, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, aging and death. And the entire mass of suffering, the Buddha says.

This is understood as conditions that support and move us in the direction of being caught. I take some hope in the description of it as conditions as opposed to cause, because with it understood as conditionality, it points to the fact that if conditions change, the process can head in another direction.

In fact, I did mention last time that there's another form of dependent origination in the teachings that the Buddha offered, one that describes a set of conditions beginning from suffering. When suffering is met with some degree of wisdom—even if it's just an intellectual kind of curiosity—when we hear a teaching, when we hear something that says it's possible to be free of suffering, that there's a way we can do that, it might spark our attention and lead to some kind of confidence or faith or a sense of interest: let me hear that teaching. And this is a condition that leads us—that kind of confidence, that faith—leads us to engage with the teaching, perhaps leads us to taste some of the benefits of that teaching, which then reinforces the interest in continuing on that path. And so there is another form of dependent origination called transcendent dependent origination that also talks about the conditions that move us from suffering to freedom.

And yet there is still this strong tendency for suffering to kind of hook into our usual habitual patterns and habits. Our familiar ways of relating to experience, our familiar ways to navigate the world—thinking if I'm suffering, the best way out of this is if I get something I want, if I get rid of something I don't want. This kind of thought pattern, this kind of belief, this kind of view is essentially the ignorance that begins to propel this chain. And yet right at the very beginning of this, from suffering, when suffering is met with

curiosity, with interest, with wisdom, it can head away from ignorance. I find this very inspiring and promising, a hopeful message in what the Buddha taught.

And yet he did want us to understand how we get caught. This is why he spent so much time to really describe this process. It amazes me how detailed this process he described—how we get caught in suffering—how detailed it is, how clear it is, how clear it can be.

This teaching on how we get caught in suffering can be understood in two ways in the suttas and in the commentaries. In one form it can be understood as conditions from our past lives propelling us forward into the next life. We tumble forward in this life and pick up these same habits and patterns and then potentially get born into a next life. So one way of understanding this teaching of dependent origination is how the cycle of rebirths comes to be.

Another way it is understood in the teachings, in the suttas and in the commentaries, is as something that happens in a moment. In a split second, when ignorance arises in the mind at the very beginning of that chain, it's already shaping our choices, our habits, our direction, what we choose to do, how we choose to engage. It's already shaping feeling leading to craving, leading to clinging, leading to becoming. In a moment, when ignorance is arising, it's like the entire suffering is picked up with ignorance. And if there can be a seeing through the ignorance—many of the teachings that Buddha pointed to in his teachings talked about how one uproots ignorance.

A couple of key pieces. A certain bhikkhu approached the Blessed One and said to him, "Is there one thing through the abandoning of which ignorance is abandoned and true knowledge arises?" The Buddha replied, "Ignorance is the one thing through abandoning of which ignorance is abandoned." That sounds a little recursive. So the person goes on to ask, "But Venerable Sir, how should a bhikkhu see for ignorance to be abandoned?" And the Buddha says, "When one knows and sees the 'I' as impermanent, ignorance is abandoned. When one knows and sees form as impermanent, when one knows and sees whatever feeling is impermanent, mental formation is impermanent"—basically the five aggregates of clinging as impermanent—"then ignorance will be abandoned."

In another place he offers a different perspective on abandoning ignorance. He says, "When one has heard nothing is worth adhering to, one directly knows everything." And I think it's more than just hearing—it's hearing and understanding directly. Nothing is worth clinging to, because it is impermanent. So over and over again the Buddha pointed to ignorance as being a key for us.

I'd like to review these first few links in the chain. Last time, we really started where it's easy to see these links clearly. We have our sense bases, and we can know that we've got contact. We have a sight, we notice the feeling tone of that sight, and then we might notice how we tend to like pleasant feeling, how we tend to want to get rid of unpleasant feeling—the craving that tends to arise based on feeling.

That's where we began last time, and we went through those links up through suffering. We explored how

the process from the point of contact with the "I" and the habitual tendency of craving, clinging, becoming, identification, and birth will ultimately lead to a sense of struggle and stress. Why? Because we cannot hold on to something that is impermanent. It will fade. It will fall apart.

The whole project of trying to hold on to something—or actually, the motivation through which that craving and clinging happens—is believing that holding on to it will bring some lasting happiness. And then it's proved over and over again that it doesn't. This belief that holding on to something will bring lasting happiness, holding on to the pleasant, getting rid of the unpleasant—this is one way to understand the beliefs shaped by ignorance.

It is ignorance—not understanding the nature of experience as impermanent, unreliable, uncontrollable, not understanding the nature of suffering—that leads us to think having what I want will make me happy, getting rid of what I don't want will make me happy.

This ignorance, this first link in the chain in the description of dependent origination, is also conditioned. It is conditioned by suffering. Sometimes suffering, if it's met with some wisdom, or if it's met with a kind of questioning—is there someone who can tell me a thing or two about why we suffer?—can lead somewhere different. The Buddha said ignorance and suffering will lead to either bewilderment, confusion of mind, or it will lead to search: Does someone know a way or two out of this suffering?

If that search happens to come upon teachings that offer a way out of suffering, then faith can arise. That whole process of wholesome qualities can arise and lead us towards the letting go of the habits and patterns that lead to suffering. But much of the time, suffering leads to bewilderment, to confusion. We just stay stuck in our traditional familiar habits and patterns, trying to get what we want, trying to get rid of what we don't want.

The greed or the aversion, the wanting or the not wanting, is the action or the tumbling forward of the mind that believes that action will be somehow beneficial to us. So it really is the beliefs or views that underpin greed and aversion. Those beliefs or views are delusion. They're rooted in ignorance. They're rooted in not understanding that experiences are impermanent, unreliable, not self.

This is the kind of flipping on its head that our minds typically do, what Bhante talked about the other night—the *vipallāsa*, the perversions. We tend to take what is impermanent to be permanent. We tend to take what is unreliable to be reliable. We tend to take what is not self to be self. We tend to take what is not beautiful to be beautiful.

In another place, the Buddha describes meeting somebody who was saying things like, "Oh, I found the permanent, blissful, eternal state." And the Buddha responded, "Alas, sir, Brahmabhaka is immersed in ignorance, insofar as he will say of what is actually impermanent that it is permanent, and will say of what is actually unstable that it is stable, and will say of what is actually non-eternal that it is eternal. He is immersed in ignorance."

This perversion, this standing on its head of the way we tend to meet experience—this is where the ignorance is rooted. We have talked some about how to see through this. But what we're going to explore tonight is what happens when we don't see through it—the kind of mess we get ourselves in, what happens there.

Suffering tends to condition ignorance, this not seeing things as they are. Not seeing that the nature of experience is impermanent, unreliable, uncontrollable. Not seeing the truth of suffering, the truth of the arising of suffering, the truth of the ending of suffering, and that there is a way to the ending of suffering.

With ignorance as condition, the next link in this process of our being caught in this cycle arises: mental formations. *Saṅkhāra*, as Anushka spoke about the other night in the teaching on the five aggregates. Mental formations are the mental processes that tend to shape our choices, our actions, how we engage in the world. There are many of them. This is a really big category. In the Buddha's division of our experience into these five aggregates of body, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness, mental formations is huge.

It contains all of our emotional life. It includes mind states—sleepiness would be one of those. Actually, love and mindfulness are also mental formations. So mental formations can be both wholesome and unwholesome. Mindfulness, concentration, wisdom—all mental formations.

And essentially our project here, what we're doing here, is to explore with mindfulness the mental formations that arise. We begin to see that the wholesome mental formations tend to move us in the direction of more happiness, ease, and peace. Essentially, this puts us on that alternative dependent origination chain—transcendent dependent origination. And we see that as we engage with unhelpful, unskillful habits of mind, unskillful mental formations, it tends to create more suffering.

And it's not a mistake to see that. In seeing that with mindfulness, it's very different to see unhelpful mental formations with mindfulness than it is to simply be caught in unhelpful mental formations, which tends to reinforce them—just dig that groove deeper. "Whatever one frequently ponders becomes the inclination of the mind." I believe Bhante mentioned that earlier today.

When we are pondering unhelpful mental formations, the pondering is a kind of picking up the belief inside of them and following it: "Yep, that's what's going to make me happy." But the mindfulness of it is a different thing. We may feel the suffering that comes with those unhelpful mental formations, but we're seeing it with wisdom instead of believing it—believing that this is the way I need to act or engage in order for happiness to follow.

So mental formations includes much of our emotional life—both wholesome and unwholesome emotions, both wholesome and unwholesome mind states. It includes thoughts. It includes beliefs. It includes agendas—things that we wouldn't think of as emotions. It includes intention and motivation. It's a big category. These are the kinds of things that arise in our mind that impel us. Anushka used the word

"drive" the other day. I like the word "shape." Mental formations tend to shape our experience. They tend to shape the rest of our experience. They tumble forward and shape our experiences.

In the chain of dependent origination, with ignorance as condition, mental formations come to be. In this particular chain, the mental formations that are described are already informed by ignorance, already shaped by confusion—the belief that having something will make me happy because I think it's permanent, reliable, that there's something out there that will be permanent and reliable. So in this chain, the mental formations that arise tend to be unhelpful. They're already shaped by ignorance.

Out of ignorance, because of the ignorance arising, we take the most obvious move to get rid of the unpleasant, to hold on to the pleasant, based on what we've believed in the past—all that we've known. And that's all that we've known: that getting something I want is going to make me feel better.

We talked about this the other day, noticing the feeling tones of the links. When we get what we want, the having brings us some happiness. But also, the momentary alleviation from the wanting feels good because the mind is released from its association with the unpleasantness of wanting for a few moments. That feels good. And that's all that we tend to know: if I get something I want, I'll feel better. We don't think about or understand the possibility of a different way.

We've been talking about that in probably almost every talk—that if we look at the craving with mindfulness instead of acting on it, being curious about it, we may see the craving fall away without having gotten what it wants. And we experience the release from the suffering of that wanting without ever getting what the wanting wants. I described that experience of feeling like, when the wanting to look at people who were walking with me fell away, it felt like being released from a vice grip.

But based on ignorance, the ideas, the habits, the patterns of "I've got to do this"—it's just assumed. We take those misperceptions to be truth, and we tumble forward into these mental formations.

So I want to explore mental formations a little bit from a perspective slightly different than what Anushka offered—similar, but with different teachings. In the teaching on the five aggregates around mental formations, the Buddha offered a definition of mental formations different from the one I just offered you, where I described emotions, mind states, thoughts, beliefs, views, agendas, motivations—these are all mental formations.

But the Buddha describes it in a different way in one place. He describes it as a process instead. What do sankharas do? What do mental formations do? Somebody asked him, why do you call them mental formations?

In this particular translation I'm going to read, the translator rendered the word sankhara not as mental formation but as fabrication. And it makes the translation work to translate it as fabrication, so I'm going to use this translation for now.

Someone asked the Buddha, "Why do you call them fabrications?" The Buddha responds, "Because they fabricate fabricated things. Thus they are called fabrications. What do they fabricate? They fabricate form as a fabricated thing. They fabricate feeling as a fabricated thing." So here he's going through the aggregates. "They fabricate perception as a fabricated thing. They fabricate fabrications as a fabricated thing. And they fabricate consciousness as a fabricated thing."

When I first read this, my jaw dropped. I could see that the word "driver" is good. This is the engine of creation of the aggregates—mental formations, fabrication. The process nature of these mental formations is to fabricate the aggregates over and over again.

So how does this work? Let me give two examples, starting with an unhelpful fabrication: anger.

How does anger shape—again, I like that word—how does anger shape our form? Well, when anger arises, often there is an experience of pressure, of heat. There's bodily sensation that arises. Anger can actually distort our face, physically changing the shape of our face when it's arising. So anger shapes our body.

When anger is arising, feelings often become unpleasant. So it shapes the feeling. Occasionally I've noticed at the very beginning of anger, just as it's arising, a little bit of the sense of becoming and a sense of pleasantness, like, "Oh yeah, I'm in control here." There's a little hit of pleasant sometimes at the beginning of anger, and then quickly it can go right into unpleasant. So the anger shapes the feeling tone.

It shapes our perception, how we recognize things. When we're angry, we tend to be perceiving things through a lens of anger. We may interpret—you know, maybe somebody is looking at us with an expression on their face, and we interpret it as them having some kind of judgment about us. We don't know what's going on in their mind. Maybe they had some gas! But we may be seeing through that lens of anger. So our perception takes in, "That person is judging me. That person is angry at me." Anger shapes how we perceive experience.

When anger is arising, our consciousness tends to be shaped by this. We will tend to land on things that confirm what makes us angry, not to see things that disconfirm it. So it actually creates these gaps in what we experience, what we become conscious of. It shapes our consciousness. And it tends to construct or shape more anger.

A wholesome mental formation—love—may shape the face, shape the body to have pleasant feeling. It may shape the body to feel light, create a softness of the face. Often it creates a feeling of pleasantness. Our perceptions are shaped by the quality of kindness. We're more connected to other people. It creates conditions for more connectedness.

So this description of the sankharas, the mental formations, as being what shapes the aggregates—fabricates form, fabricates feeling, fabricates perception, fabricates fabrications, fabricates consciousness.

The next two links in the chain of dependent origination are consciousness and mentality-materiality. I'll explore this more deeply later, but essentially those two links serve as shorthand for the five aggregates. This definition of mental formations as the shapers or constructors of the aggregates can be understood as an elaboration of these links: mental formations condition consciousness and nāma-rūpa, mentality-materiality.

Not only are emotions and mind states mental formations, but also views, beliefs, and ideas. All of our mental formations not only tend to shape our lives forward, tumbling on, but they have been shaped by our past, by our conditioning. This is how the cycle becomes circular. What arises as a mental formation doesn't simply arise out of nowhere—the ignorance that shapes mental formations has a long history in our lives, in our own personal experience. It actually has a long history through our cultures, through our family dynamics.

Views, opinions, and beliefs also belong to this realm of mental formations. This is an important area to explore with curiosity. What is the mind believing? When we're caught in some kind of trap or struggle, there is always some view operating within it. According to this teaching, all such views trace back to some form of ignorance at the deepest level—some belief in something being permanent, reliable, controllable, some sense of self. But there are countless flavors of beliefs that each of us holds based on our own lives, our personal conditioning, and our cultures.

When we start to get curious, we can investigate what's being believed when we feel caught or stuck. This has been tremendously useful in my own practice. When there's a pattern or habit of being really stuck in something, I'll sometimes drop in the question: what's being believed right now? Because beliefs, when they're not seen, function as if they are simply fact. We're not aware that they're beliefs—we take them to be truth. If we can be curious about what's being believed and actually see it as a belief, something shifts.

In my own practice of working with anger and self-hatred, one of the beliefs operating was "I'm unworthy." When I could see that—oh, that's the belief that's happening, there's a believing of unworthiness—something became possible. I find that often in such places we might think we're supposed to counter the belief. I certainly did plenty of this: "Oh, I think I'm unworthy? Well, I'm worthy." Trying to convince myself I was worthy, trying to convince myself I was doing good.

Sometimes that approach can be supportive. As Bhante was discussing the other day, we can remind ourselves: I'm on the path, I've got right view, I'm looking at things in a wholesome way, I'm following the precepts, I'm not failing. Sometimes that kind of reflection helps. But when there's a deeply entrenched view—like this "I'm unworthy" feeling in my experience, this sense that somehow I'm inherently unworthy—trying to convince myself I wasn't unworthy just didn't work. That part of my mind that believed I was unworthy would simply respond: "You can't fool me. I know I'm unworthy."

What I began to recognize was far more helpful: seeing it as a belief. I didn't have to stop believing it, but I needed to see that it was a belief. And that was possible. I could see that "I am unworthy" was a belief. I

still believed it, but I saw that it was a belief. This recognition creates a small crack in the mind, opening the possibility that as a belief, it may or may not be true.

This exploration of beliefs can be extraordinarily powerful when we're suffering, when we're struggling.

Some of our views come from personal conditioning—how we grew up, our own lived experiences, the circumstances that shaped us. And some of our views come from our collective or cultural backgrounds: family culture, workplace culture, school culture, the broader society, what we absorb through television, through what we watch, through the internet. We are shaped by the mental formations of the world. Those fabrications are not just our own—they come in and start shaping us.

Often these mental formations from family and culture arrive at such a young age that we never question them. These kinds of views can be even more difficult to recognize as views, as beliefs, precisely because we tend to share them with people around us.

There may be, for instance, mental formations related to the concept of race. Beliefs, ideas, views that we have all been shaped by through our own upbringing. What our beliefs are around race—they're all ideas. And yet the shaping of that, when it's not seen... those beliefs, those views around race can lead to racism. So much suffering has come from this kind of unseen ignorance. Unseen beliefs, just taking the fabrications, the mental formations that we were swimming in, that we were stewing in as children in our cultures, taking those to be the way it is. So much suffering generated by this.

One scholar has a beautiful way of framing this, of speaking to this, tying it back to the vipallāsa, the distorted perception. The professor is a professor of Sanskrit at a university in Sri Lanka. His name is Professor Mahinda Palihawadana. And I got this from a paper that he wrote, which is a great paper. I recommend you read it after the retreat. It's called "Theravada Perspective on Causation and Resolution of Conflicts."

He says, "This process of distorted perception, of placing every bare perception into a framework of emotions and beliefs that have come out of our past, our history, our conditioning, robs the freshness out of our experience. But we are not aware of this constant interference of the past. Because of this unawareness, which is our ignorance and our delusion, we see humanity as fragmented—as me and others, us and them—and in various other stereotypes: skin color, ethnicity, language, ideology included."

This is where wars come from. This is where hatred comes from. This ignorance.

And so we are shaped by our mental formations and we begin to see our world through this. As Professor Palihawadana says, we don't see the interference of the past. We are receiving information, but it's like we've got these lenses on with our beliefs and our views. We tend to take in information that confirms those beliefs and views, and we tend to not take in information that disconfirms them. This is a fairly well-studied phenomenon in psychology in recent years.

So with mental formation as condition, consciousness comes to be. Based on our views, our ideas, our beliefs, our perceptions, our emotions, we will take in certain information and not take in other information. This filtering mechanism does seem to be pretty deeply built into our psyche. There's a process in psychological terms called selective attention, which if you have some kind of agenda, a thing you need to do, that agenda is supported by a process of mind that will select information useful for that purpose and screen out information that is not useful.

There's a famous study—many of you may have heard about this—about selective attention. I'll describe it anyway because it's such a great example of this filtering mechanism and how even something as simple as an agenda can have us see certain things and not see other things.

In this study, they had people watch a video of people passing a basketball between other people. Two teams of people, people in one color shirt and people in another color shirt. They were asked to count the number of times a basketball passed between the hands of people with one particular color shirt. So a pretty focused kind of agenda. You have to track it—they're passing the basketball pretty fast—you have to track it pretty closely. At the end of the video, they were asked, "Okay, how many times did you see the basketball pass between the people?" And most of them could answer correctly.

And then, occasionally, somebody would say something like, "Was there like a gorilla in that video?" And indeed, while this had been happening, a person in a gorilla suit had walked right into the middle of the people passing the basketball, danced around a little bit, beat its chest, did gorilla-like things, and then walked off. Very obviously—I mean, if you are looking at the video without an agenda, you are not going to miss the gorilla. And yet the vast majority of people do not see the gorilla.

And what's even a little more scary: sometimes they would play the video back after somebody asked, "Was there like a gorilla in there?" They'd play it back, and yep, there's a gorilla there. Some people would say, "You switched the video on us. That has to be a different video because I would have seen the gorilla."

That is ignorance. There's a kind of ignorance in the not seeing, but the deeper ignorance is believing our own sense perception is reliable. We can see with this kind of example that mental formations do shape what we see. We do not see everything that's out there. We tend to think our minds are like video cameras and our eyes are like video cameras and our ears are like tape recorders, and that we see and hear everything that's here. But that is not the way our minds work. Believing that is the way our minds work is ignorance, because we are definitely shaped by these agendas. Even something as simple as an agenda can shape what we see and what we don't see.

And then think about something more than agenda. Think about a whole view or pattern around

around race and how that shapes what we see and what we don't see and how we see it.

It's humbling. It is humbling to see this and to recognize this as the way our minds work. And yet knowing that it is the way our minds work can be helpful, because then we wouldn't be like that person who says it

has to be a different video. We would say, "Oh, I didn't see that. I missed that." And we can perhaps learn from something that we didn't see.

So our consciousness is shaped by mental formations, and the mental formations shape not only our consciousness but also the next link: mentality-materiality. Mentality-materiality is essentially defined as the other four aggregates—form, and the other mental aggregates: feeling, perception, and mental formations. There's such a close dependence between consciousness and these other aspects. They inform each other. Fabrications shape our consciousness. What we take in tends to shape what we feel and perceive and think—how we feel our emotions.

And so at this point we're kind of back at the place where we started last week. We've got a body and a mind—a conscious mind in a physical body that perceives and feels. And we're receiving input, contact: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch. But you can see at this point, it is not a neutral experience. It's already shaped by past conditioning.

The unawareness of that past conditioning is—as the quote from Professor Paliha Wadana says—our ignorance. The unawareness that we are placing every sense contact, every bare perception, into a framework of emotion and belief that have come out of our past, our history, our conditioning. That's what's happening.

So it's very humbling to see this. And yet the teaching here that the Buddha is offering is ultimately hopeful. It's a very humbling teaching to hear how much we miss and how much our conditioning shapes what we're even seeing and hearing and perceiving. And yet to know this information is a way that we can begin to move in a different direction.

The wisdom that can come from being curious about—well, what is human experience? How is this experience shaped? How is it shaping my next experience? The seeing of that with mindfulness begins to uproot and undermine that ignorance. So this is our exploration here.

Last time in the talk I said that there's a teaching pointing to any of the links—a way the Buddha said, "See that, wherever you are, whatever you're noticing." If it's the arising of confusion, know that. There can be freedom right there in meeting that with curiosity, with mindfulness, with a sense of allowing it to show itself—not to follow it or believe its story, but to be curious about it. See what happens as you notice it.

You have all talked about in your meetings seeing something like this. Seeing how being mindful of something creates a different perspective. More space, a little more ease. When we can see, "Oh, what's happening? Oh, it's anger that's happening. It's just anger. I can be with that." Or sadness: "Oh, it's sadness that's happening." Sometimes it feels like a relief to actually acknowledge, "This is what's happening."

And so we begin to taste the benefit of mindfulness and wisdom. We feel in the moment—we can feel this does lead in a different direction. We gain some sense of faith and confidence, maybe even joy and delight. Some of you have talked about that, a sense of, "It's so delightful to see this in such a different

way." Even if it's frustration or something that we think of as unpleasant, to see it—"Oh, it's frustration that's arising." Several of you, many of you, have talked about laughing upon seeing these habits and patterns come up. That's the delight and joy that arise in connection with this mindfulness.

And those are some of the steps on the path of transcendent dependent origination. From faith, the engagement with confidence—and that faith is a kind of motivator that gets us to act on the teachings.

With faith as condition, delight arises. With delight as condition, joy arises. With joy as condition, tranquility arises. I may be missing a few steps here. With tranquility as condition, happiness arises. With happiness as condition, concentration arises.

That was not what I thought! Happiness is a supporting condition for concentration? I thought concentration was about holding on to something.

With concentration as condition comes knowing and seeing things as they are—beginning to see impermanent, unreliable, uncontrollable. And that leads to a kind of disenchantment with our familiar beliefs, our familiar habits and patterns. We get disenchanted with our idea that having something will make us happy. It's a good kind of disenchantment.

And then the mind begins to let go—a sense of not being bound up with all of our greed and aversion. The word is *virāga*, dispassion. The word may not have a flavor that sounds appealing, but it's very much a sense of release and letting go. And then release, freedom.

Right in the middle of looking at some pattern or habit—I talked about being with self-hatred and seeing something so clearly, seeing the belief, noticing the self-hatred coming up, seeing a thought and seeing the thought conditioning a belief being believed. And then recognizing: this is all just a constructed thought in the mind. It's nothing. It's just a construction. And it fell apart. Such a deep seeing, right in the midst of looking at something so challenging. The mind shifting and moving towards letting go. Bliss, ease, peace.

And I'll tell you—if I can do it, you can do it. There was a lot of self-hatred, a lot of miserableness. I was such a miserable person. This practice has transformed this mind and this body. It is possible. It takes confidence and commitment and willingness to be with wherever we wake up in this process of arising conditions of suffering.

We don't have to find the end of suffering. We don't have to find some kind of place of not having suffering in order to then see some insight into *nibbāna*. Suffering is the condition—when met with wisdom and mindfulness, suffering is a condition that leads to freedom.

So let's sit for a moment. Freedom is possible. The Buddha said, if it wasn't possible, I wouldn't ask you to do it.

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