Dependent Origination (Paṭicca Samuppāda)

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Last week I talked about dukkha and how it comes to be in relationship to the basic truths of experience and our wishes. Tonight the topic is dukkha again—I actually like talking about dukkha—and the teaching the Buddha offered on how suffering comes to be: the teaching of dependent origination.

It's a fundamental teaching in the suttas. It's also quite challenging, we could say. For those of you who are not familiar with it, it consists of twelve links, twelve conditions that follow each other, that tumble forward, tumble onwards to the creation of dukkha. We could say it's a detailed elaboration of the second noble truth. The first noble truth states that there is dukkha, and dukkha should be understood. The second noble truth states that there is an arising of dukkha—that dukkha arises with craving. Sometimes that's framed as the cause of dukkha is craving. This teaching of dependent origination looks in detail at how craving comes to be and how it leads onward towards "the whole mass of suffering," as the Buddha says in the teachings.

Aspects of this teaching can seem obscure. There are certain parts of it that are easier to map onto our experience, and some parts that seem a bit opaque at times. The Buddha actually acknowledged that this was a challenging teaching. There's a famous story of Ananda coming to the Buddha saying, "It is 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." And the Buddha says, "Don't say that, Ananda. This dependent origination is profound and appears profound. It is through not understanding, not penetrating this, that this generation has become like a tangled ball of string, covered as with a blight, tangled like coarse grass, unable to pass beyond states of woe."

The Buddha was a little bit chastising Ananda for calling dependent origination clear, because the Buddha understood that Ananda didn't fully understand the teaching. There was some sense in Ananda that "I understand this," and the Buddha responded, "Well, I don't think so. It's very deep. It's very profound."

So we're probably not going to be able to understand it tonight. And yet, in my own practice, pieces of this teaching—even just little pieces—have been extremely powerful. The continuation of exploring and reflecting, of looking at how these various links play out in experience, has been transformative. And it's not just about thinking about it. It's about looking in experience. The encouragement really is, with each of these links, to understand experientially what's described and what the relationship is to the links around it. There are actually a lot of feedback loops in this chain, so there are many ways we can see the conditionality playing out.

The name of this teaching is dependent origination, or dependent co-arising. It is essentially a teaching on

the conditioned nature of suffering. We can begin to see how conditioning plays out in our practice, how conditioning plays out in the construction of our reactivity. It's a very clear description of how suffering comes to be as a human pattern.

For me, that's an important aspect I resonate with—that it's describing how human minds work. We can recognize this in our own minds. The fact that the Buddha looked at this and talked about it 2600 years ago, saying this is how human minds tangle themselves up in knots, and that it's still how human minds tangle themselves up in knots, means I'm not alone. The patterns being witnessed in this mind are similar to the patterns that have been played out for the entire duration of human experience.

So we can see suffering as human. It's not personal that suffering is arising here. It is the nature of our human experience when mindfulness and wisdom are not available. The tendency is for the human mind to fall into this pattern. All of us have experienced this, maybe not seeing it in this way exactly, but this is playing out over and over and over again. We can begin to understand suffering as human. It's described simply as what happens in our minds.

The other piece of overview is that what arises and is experienced as suffering is conditioned. Certain patterns—

And the other piece around this description is that it's describing suffering as arising from what's happening in our minds. The kind of suffering that we can be free of is the kind of suffering that our own minds put together. And that is actually what we call suffering.

We may not believe that at first. We've talked about this a bit—that we tend to think suffering is something happening out there to us. But when we start to look at the experience from this perspective, we see that it is our relationship, how our minds work, that creates what we call suffering.

Yes, there is unpleasant experience, pleasant experience. We've talked about the feeling tone of experience, and often our relationship to that is that we suffer around it. We feel like when something's unpleasant, there's no way to not suffer around it. But we can start to see that there's an option. We can see this in our own minds, in our own experiences.

I think Gil Fronsdal has said—and I don't know if it's original to him, but I heard it from him—unpleasantness, physical painful experience, that happens. Suffering is optional.

So given that the chain of dependent origination describes conditions that lead to suffering, and they are described as conditions, some of those conditions are stronger than others—in particular, ignorance. When ignorance is arising in the mind, feeling will lead to craving. When the mind does not understand that things are impermanent, unreliable, uncontrollable, feeling leads to craving. The ignorance is a very powerful condition for suffering. We will experience suffering when ignorance is present in the mind. It's almost more like a cause there.

When craving is arising, we will be experiencing suffering. We may not recognize that we're experiencing suffering. We can delude ourselves into thinking we're not experiencing suffering when we're experiencing craving around something pleasant—focused on the pleasant and missing that the craving is actually really painful. But that stress of the craving is part of the human experience and is creating suffering, even if we're not clearly aware of it.

Given that suffering is conditioned, the good news is that when conditions change—and in particular when mindfulness and wisdom are brought into the equation—a whole different process begins to happen. A whole different direction of the path. Faith can arise. Delight, joy can arise. The sense of confidence that this is possible, that there's a path. Concentration. Understanding arises. Leading onwards, there's a whole different teaching of dependent origination called transcendent dependent origination that points to the conditions that lead to freedom.

And so we're on that path here, bringing mindfulness and wisdom to our experience. And what do we see as we do that? We see these patterns, these conditioned patterns of the habitual ways that our minds have been caught in suffering.

One of the other things I'll point out briefly about this teaching, these links, this cycle—it does loop around on itself, and it's often pointed to as describing the arising of suffering. And yet the very same cycle, a certain piece of the cycle, also describes the process of selfing. So it's the very same process that leads to the arising of suffering and leads to the arising of selfing.

We can look at it this way: whether we are noticing the experience of suffering—of reactivity, of aversion, of confusion, of reactive mind states—we may experience that as becoming familiar with what it's like to be aware of suffering. And sometimes we can actually notice the experience of the identification in there. They're both happening. It's just that sometimes the interest in the mindfulness is oriented more towards noticing the identification and the selfing, the experience of selfing. And sometimes it's more interested in noticing the experience of suffering.

So the links, the twelve links. Typically the twelve links begin with ignorance. With ignorance as condition, mental formations come to be. With mental formations as condition, consciousness. With consciousness as condition, mental and physical processes come to be. With mental and physical processes as condition, the six sense bases. With the six sense bases as condition, contact. With contact as condition, feeling. With feeling as condition, craving. With craving as condition, clinging. With clinging as condition, becoming. With becoming as condition, birth. With birth as condition, old age and death. And there arises the entire mass of suffering.

That entire mass of suffering—the tendency of that entire mass of suffering is to lead onward into ignorance again. We typically meet our suffering with not understanding suffering.

And so the cycle loops on itself. While the classical teachings start the description of dependent origination

with ignorance, I find these first three or four links—ignorance conditions mental formations, mental formations condition consciousness, consciousness conditions mental and physical processes—to be some of the most challenging to both understand conceptually and understand in experience. So I'm going to start this description in a place where you've probably already been experiencing some of what's described here.

We have a conscious mind and body, mental and physical processes tumbling on. These include our five usual physical senses—seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, touching—and the sixth sense base of the mind. So we have this mind and body with these physical sense bases. Those are two of the links, and I'm not going to go into much detail about those right now. We just know we have a body and a mind, and we have these senses. That's fairly easy to connect with.

Each sense door, each sense base, is a very sensitive receiver, we could say. The eye takes in light waves. The ear takes in sound waves. The sense base is almost like an antenna—it receives the field of its base. The eye receives sight, the ear sound, and so forth. When that happens, that's called contact. In the physical realm, it's very clear: there's a sensation, there's a contact, we feel it. Contact is that meeting of the object of the sense with the sense base. There's contact with the sense door—the sight, the sound, the smell, the taste, the touch, the experience arising in the mind. That contact produces the experience for that sense base.

Each sense impression—contact—each sense base conditions contact. Contact conditions feeling, feeling tone. Each of those sense impressions, whenever there's contact with the sense base, there's a feeling tone associated with it. We've talked about this quite a bit, so just a quick overview here.

With each contact at a sense base, there's a feeling tone: pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. As we explored the other day in the instructions, that quality of pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral arises based on conditions. It's not inherent in the sense experience itself. Sometimes we might experience a particular contact as pleasant, sometimes as unpleasant, sometimes more pleasant or less unpleasant, just depending on the conditions. It might depend on the conditions of your own body and mind, or it might depend on external conditions. There's that feeling tone for each contact, and we can get familiar with this as an experience—the contact and then the feeling tone.

The understanding about feeling tone in particular is that it's just part of being human, we could say. The teachings point to arahants, people who are fully awakened, as still experiencing feeling tone—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. That's just part of having a human body. So up to this point in the chain of dependent origination, people who are fully awakened have the physical sense doors, the physical and mental processes, the sense doors, the contact, the feelings. These are all just part of being human.

Based on feeling tone, our habitual response—the response of the mind that does not understand suffering—is that we want to hold on to, lean into, or get pleasant experience. We want to get rid of unpleasant experience.

We may not notice neutral experience. It may not rise to the level of awareness. Or if it does, we may react to it with a kind of boredom—again, a wanting it not to be neutral. We like the highs and the lows. We don't particularly like it when it gets neutral. This is the habitual response.

Now, a person who's fully awakened would not have this habitual response. It would not lead from feeling to craving. And yet this is our habitual response, and it happens over and over again. We get to see this over and over again—this craving, this wanting. Like we're a simple automatic machine that automatically moves towards the pleasant, moves away from the unpleasant, and ignores the neutral. The neutral is not important, so we ignore that part. This is craving: the wanting to move towards the pleasant, to move away from the unpleasant. And again, this is very human, and yet it is not necessary. That's hard to understand, so you might have to just take that on trust or faith for a little while. A long while sometimes.

We often habitually act on this craving. The craving can arise just in the mind—you know, just "I want, I want, I want, I want." When it rises to the level where we start to take action on it, that's when it moves to clinging. We begin to hold on to something or actively start to push something away. Bhikkhu Bodhi talks about the distinction between craving and clinging using an analogy. He says that as a thief is going through a house to steal things, the reaching out to something is like the craving. When they actually pick it up, that's the clinging. So it's almost an intensification, but there's a range there from craving to clinging. The clinging is where we have picked it up. We hold on to the experience. We try to hold on to something that's pleasant. Sometimes we can get stuck to something that's unpleasant, trying to get rid of it. That's clinging.

I didn't initially understand what it meant to cling to something that was unpleasant. That language didn't make much sense to me. But then I realized, as I looked at my experience, when it was really unpleasant, I was clinging to "not this." It's like, "anything but this." And I would find myself—if this table were the thing that I didn't like—I would find myself stuck to the table, trying to push it away. Actually clinging to the thing I wanted to get rid of, thinking that was going to be how to do it. That's clinging.

The next link is becoming. This one I'll describe a little bit more. One of the monastic teachers in the Thai forest tradition, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, says that when we cling to something, it's like all of our intentions and motivations start to—he uses the phrase—"rally in the service of clinging." Our intentions and motivations kind of join up and say, "Yep, we're going to go with this one." That's becoming. There's a sense of congealing or a movement towards "Yes, this is me needing to do this." There's the beginnings of a movement towards a sense of self. You can say becoming is like the intentions toward a self.

We like becoming. Becoming can feel good—that sense of "I know what I want and I know where I'm going and I know how I'm going to get it." That movement of becoming feels like I'm in control, like I've figured it out. We like that feeling. I think this is one of the sticky links here, because it feels good.

Following on from becoming is birth, this full-blown movement into identification. Something becomes

mine, or me, who I am. I'm in control. This thing is mine.

I am the person who does this or that. This is the birth of a sense of self. It can take obvious forms, like "this is mine," or it might be more subtle, like "I'm the kind of person who does this."

Following on from birth—this full-blown taking of "this is who I am"—suffering inevitably follows. Actually, suffering follows inevitably from craving. Craving itself is already suffering, in my experience. But suffering also follows from birth because there's no way to sustain the clinging. There's no way to sustain that identity forever. It will fall apart.

Sometimes this feels good. When my self-hatred identities fell apart, that was pretty good. But when there's an identity that we feel attached to—like "I figured it out"—it's different. The flip side of my self-hatred identity was this sense of "I figured it out, I can do this." And then when it was proven, perhaps ten minutes later, that I didn't have it figured out, self-hatred arose. Because it's like, "Well, if I can't control the figuring out, if I can't keep that, then I must be a failure." Those identities—the "I figured it out" and the self-hatred—were kind of two sides of a coin. I began to see that. Suffering inevitably follows this whole process.

Let me offer an example, something I have actually experienced, as a way of thinking through dependent origination. Contact with the sense door: an idea from hearing teachers, an idea arises in my head about what it might mean to be a good yogi, what kinds of experiences I might have. So thoughts arise about that. There's the contact with the thought: "I could be a good yogi, maybe." For me, this arose with the frame of a fantasy—telling the teacher that I had seen something, that I had discovered some insight. I hadn't discovered any insight, but I had the fantasy. That was a pleasant fantasy.

So there was contact with the sense door, and then the pleasantness of that fantasy. There was a desire to have that fantasy become reality so I could go to that teacher and tell them I'd had an insight. The clinging results in movement toward "Okay, what are things I could do?" and the belief that this is necessary in order for me to be happy. "I will accomplish this. I will do this." That's the clinging.

The becoming is like the whole priorities of behavior and thought that arise in dependence on this idea of what it's going to take to have this insight. Ideas arise: "Okay, what do I need to do? I need to move really slowly—lifting, moving, placing—being sure everybody thinks I'm doing it well, looking really good, sitting long in the hall, being the first one in the hall in the morning." All of those things, born from that becoming.

Taking birth might be, for instance, if this does lead to some kind of success and there was some understanding that arose. There was that sense of "Oh, I figured it out." That's birth. "I've got it. I'm a good yogi." There's that sense of "Yep, okay, got it figured out."

And then, as I said, I experienced at times a fluctuation between "I'm a good yogi" and "I don't know how to meditate"—within seconds. I would experience feeling a step: "I can feel that step. I'm such a good yogi."

And then the mind would wander: "Oh, I'm such a bad yogi." Flip, flop, flip. Identification. It's all just identification. It's all the mind making up the idea of being a good yogi and being a bad yogi.

It's just experience.

So the suffering of the bad yogi is immediately apparent—the kind of self-flagellation, the beating myself up around that was immediately apparent. The suffering of the good yogi was not as immediately apparent until there was the sense of failure. And then there's a falling apart of that identity, the not being able to be in control of human experience.

So let's come back to the links earlier in the chain. We've gone through basically body and mind, physical sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, aging and death. That's the last of the chain, and from there arises suffering.

The first link in the chain is ignorance, and it is conditioned by suffering. This is where the chain becomes a cycle. The arising of suffering tends to lead to ignorance. We don't know how to relate to it. We've been caught in this cycle of ignorance around suffering for our whole lives, for multiple lives perhaps. Certainly all of humankind has been perpetuated by these confusions around suffering.

So suffering often leads to confusion. What did I do wrong? How can I fix this? Why is this happening to me? Why me? Why my family? This is related to suffering—the sense of "why me?" The feeling of the struggle, the stress. It's suffering.

A main definition of ignorance is not understanding suffering, not understanding the Four Noble Truths: not knowing about suffering, not knowing about the arising of suffering, not knowing about the ending of suffering, not knowing about the way leading to the ending of suffering. This is ignorance.

Another way to understand what it means to not understand suffering is that we are caught by misperceptions. We tend to take what is impermanent to be permanent. We tend to take what is unreliable to be reliable as a lasting source of happiness. We tend to take what is not self to be self. This is also ignorance—when we're caught by these misperceptions, when we are acting as if things are permanent, reliable, and self, we are caught in ignorance.

So the basic condition for suffering to lead to ignorance, the loop of this cycle, is for suffering to not be understood. If suffering is not understood, it perpetuates this cycle. We are lost in our views and ideas and ignorance, believing I can control things, believing things are permanent, reliable, self.

Because the condition for suffering to lead to ignorance is not understanding suffering, understanding suffering is a key to break this cycle. When we bring mindfulness and curiosity to our suffering, we are actively undermining this perpetuating pattern. And yet we don't undermine it enough, so we get caught in the cycle. There's ignorance that follows from suffering—we're kind of living in that. By the time we come to practice, we have lived many, many lifetimes of suffering leading to ignorance. We have

cemented this process, habituated this process.

So suffering has led to ignorance. With ignorance as condition, mental formations come to be. Not understanding dukkha, that ignorance, taking things to be permanent, reliable, self—we choose things, we decide things. The whole framework of not understanding suffering leads us to choose and decide to act in certain ways, usually to choose and decide to act to keep pleasant, get rid of unpleasant, to follow our habitual tendencies around that. This is choosing, this deciding based on our conditioned habits and patterns. This is mental formation.

Mental formations includes a wide range of experience. It includes all of our mind states. It includes our thoughts. It includes emotions. It includes views and beliefs. And I think views and beliefs are some of the most—

sticky and unseen aspect of mental formation.

And then, ignorance leading to mental formation—even the ignorance of "this thing is permanent." That's a kind of view. This idea that there's something permanent that I could get and hold on to, that's a view, a deeply conditioned view. "There must be something reliable out there. If I found it, I could have happiness." Those are views embedded in that ignorance. And these views really shape our choices. They shape how we relate to things.

So this is mental formations. Our mental formations come into being not just here in our—I mean, it sounds like this is just something happening inside a human mind and body, but we are social beings, and many of our views and beliefs... some of them are human, like the misunderstandings around "there must be something permanent, reliable, self"—those kinds of things are human delusions, human confusions. And yet also in our social lives, we absorb views from our families, we absorb views from our cultures, that shape how we relate to things.

This is where so much suffering comes from. The ideas about who we are, who others are—the whole selfing and othering thing. The realm of political division right now, like "us and them." All of that is views. And a lot of our views come in not because somebody sits down and says, "This is what we believe." Some of it does come that way. But a lot of it comes from just how the people we're around behave. Our views are absorbed in that way.

So this is where a lot of our mental formations come from. I didn't choose to have the views that were inculcated in me in grade school and in my family. That's just what my conditioning was. And yet it's crucially important to understand our views and to see how views, when clung to, lead to so much suffering in the world.

I like to encourage people at times—when you're noticing some kind of reactivity in your experience, when you can hang out with it and really feel into that space of reactivity—it can be useful to just acknowledge, "Okay, yep, I'm feeling this. I don't like this. This situation is not good." And just feeling into

that not-goodness. When you can really feel that, drop in the question—not trying to find the answer, but just drop it in: "What is being believed?"

Beliefs are so under the surface. They're often not visible, but they are sometimes amenable to being seen if you invite them. Sometimes they show up. I talked about one of those the other day—a view that was shaping the whole aversive experience in the walking hall. A view of somebody being weird, and realizing, "Wow, that is based on nothing. It's based on bare feet." And seeing when that belief was seen, when that view was seen, it fell apart.

Now that doesn't always happen. Sometimes when we see a view, we recognize, "I am on board for that one. I believe that one." Notice that. Even just seeing that a belief is a belief is different than just taking it to be true. "So that's a belief, and I really believe it." And you might see too that beliefs—it's not like on or off with beliefs. There's a gradation. Sometimes it's a little, sometimes it's medium. Just recognizing that, noticing that, is very powerful.

So mental formations shape consciousness, the next link in the chain. Ignorance shapes mental formations. Mental formations shape consciousness. Our views, our habits, our patterns, these perspectives that we've absorbed—they condition what our consciousness receives.

An example of this, a really simple example: My mind has a very aversive tendency, and early on in my practice, when my teacher taught me this open awareness practice that we have been exploring the last couple of days...

And he did it for me in a guided meditation during an interview. He said, "Just let go of directing the attention and notice where the attention lands." I did that silently for a while, and after two or three minutes he asked, "So what have you noticed?"

I said—and he had used the term "choiceless attention" or "choiceless awareness"—I said, "I don't see how this can be choiceless, because every single experience that my attention landed on was unpleasant."

I understand now that this kind of tendency is shaped by the deep pattern of aversion. I wasn't experiencing aversion in the moment—it wasn't like I was feeling aversion. But the tendency of the mind to be aversive means that the mind orients toward looking for things that are unpleasant so that it can get rid of them, so that it won't have aversion. That's its orientation. So when I stopped making choices about what to attend to, the habit that was conditioned by aversion found all the unpleasant experiences. Or maybe not all of them, but each one it landed on was unpleasant.

This is mental formation—the tendencies of the mind, the habits of the mind—shaping what comes into consciousness, shaping what I became aware of. It was kind of amazing. I know intellectually that the entirety of my experience is not unpleasant. But when I just let the attention land on experience, everything was unpleasant. This is the shaping that mental formations do to consciousness.

Based on emotions, states of mind, agendas, and views, our mind tends to orient toward looking for information that confirms those views, that reaffirms those emotions. The modern psychological name for this is confirmation bias. When we have views, we tend to look for things that confirm our views. This is a very sticky kind of pattern.

To see how this works, to recognize when these views are happening—this is one of the values of recognizing that there's a view present. It orients our minds to look for certain things, to recognize certain things. It creates a filter that screens certain things in and other things out. We will notice certain things and we won't notice other things. Consciousness will not become aware of certain things with some of those perspectives operating.

And the perspective that we're bringing here—curiosity, mindfulness, hearing the teachings of wisdom—these begin to put new views into the mind to help us see things. Like I saw: "Wait, everything was unpleasant. What's going on there? I know everything's not unpleasant. What's going on?"

With consciousness as condition, our mental and physical processes are in turn shaped. That's the next link—nāmarūpa in Pali, meaning bodily and mental processes. Consciousness shapes feeling, perception, mental formations, and body.

If we reflect on this: when the state of our consciousness has been shaped by anger, for instance—or in my case, as I was describing, the state of my consciousness was shaped by a habit of aversion, even though I wasn't experiencing aversion in that moment—what happened was that physical and mental processes tended to notice unpleasant experiences.

But if we look at a more striking example: when there's something like anger in the mind, the mental formation of anger is shaping consciousness. How does that affect the body and mind? It tends to make the body tense, maybe distorts our face. It tends to make feeling tone unpleasant. It tends to have us perceive things through the lens of anger. It tends to shape more anger. The state of our consciousness affects our mental and physical processes.

And now we're back to where we started in the chain. When I began, I said we've got a body and mind, we see things, we hear things. We might think initially that we're seeing and hearing things like cameras and microphones—just taking in everything. But now you can see that this place of the inputs, the contacts, it's not like cameras and microphones. It is completely shaped by the qualities in our minds. We're not starting from a neutral place when there's contact. There's already conditioning playing out.

Our filters, our perspectives tend to reinforce themselves. And so it's no wonder we tend to cycle in this chain. It takes a lot of commitment and dedication to begin to see through it.

It's not easy. And yet we can see through it. The conditions can change. What we are doing here is changing the conditions of our conditioning.

This chain describes conditions that support the arising of suffering. Bringing mindfulness and wisdom to what we are experiencing adds something new to this whole process. The main way the conditions are changed is through mindfulness, wisdom, and love.

The teachings often emphasize mindfulness of feeling, and I'm sure many of you have heard that aspect of the teaching. Mindfulness of feeling is a kind of place to break the chain. Certainly the Buddha emphasized this—that when we really get to see feeling, to know feeling, that can short-circuit the process. If you see feeling with wisdom, it won't lead on to craving. It's just, "Oh, there's feeling." When wisdom is meeting feeling... whereas, as I said earlier, when ignorance is arising with feeling tone, it will lead to craving.

That head of the chain, ignorance, is continuously arising with all of those links. When ignorance arises, it's like the entire twelve links are picked up in a split second. When ignorance arises, feeling leads to craving and craving leads to clinging. Clinging leads to becoming—all of that in a split second. And so seeing actually any one of the links with wisdom can change the whole pattern.

There's a teaching in the Majjhima Nikāya, a teaching on right view—Majjhima number nine. It describes a process or a practice around each of the links. For each of the links, it's a similar pattern. I'll say it for clinging for now, but it's the same for all of the links: One understands clinging. One understands the arising of clinging, seeing how it arises. One understands the ending of clinging. And one understands the way leading to the ending of clinging.

That's the framework of the Four Noble Truths. Actually, it's pointing to the Four Noble Truths as practices or understandings that can arise with experience. With each of those links—it doesn't matter which one it is—becoming, birth, sense of self arising: when one understands the sense of self arising, one understands the sense of self, understands the arising of the sense of self, the ending of the sense of self, and the way leading to the ending of the sense of self, one here and now makes an end to suffering.

So while, yes, there's a strong emphasis on the feeling-craving link, this teaching points to something important: it doesn't matter where you wake up. Maybe you've been lost in a chain of thoughts and you wake up into a sense of self, or you wake up into stress and suffering. The mindfulness right in that moment—"Oh, this is suffering. This is craving."—that begins the process of dismantling the suffering.

The last piece I'll say is that this chain is fairly complex, and there are times when you can kind of see it playing out. Occasionally you can really see feeling, craving, clinging—you can see the little way it's happening sometimes. You can see the cycle unfold at times. But I found in my own practice that if I'm not seeing it from that perspective in that moment, even just the reminder and the deep knowing, the deep understanding, "This is conditioned"—that's really helpful.

Sayādaw U Tejaniya would use a phrase: "This is nature." That one really resonated for me. This is what's arising right now. It's arising because of causes and conditions. This tree is what's growing right now. This

blooming bush of anger and self-hatred—that's what's arising right now. That is nature. It's arising in dependence on causes and conditions.

Just understanding that can create so much space to be able to then have some curiosity about, "Well, what is that experience of that dukkha?" You begin to see into where you are in the moment. And that's all that's needed. We don't have to back up and say, "Where was the feeling? Where was the feeling that I was craving about?"

It doesn't matter. Right now, you can see this.

Let's just sit for a moment. Let the words go. You don't have to remember any of it.

Thank you for listening.

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