Transcendent Dependent Origination

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 1:02:31

Transcendent Dependent Origination

The subject of this evening's talk is transcendent dependent origination. Don't be thrown off by the title—it's quite a mouthful, but the concepts are not that difficult, so don't be intimidated.

This is another example of a formula that the Buddha often used, which we might say falls under the general heading of dependent arising. Here's how he stated it in the most general case:

"When this exists, that comes to be. With the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be. With the ceasing of this, that ceases."

We have seen this kind of formulation in the teaching on dependent origination—that chain of twelve links that starts with ignorance, runs through craving and clinging, and ends up in suffering. This particular form is going to start from suffering and state a chain in positive terms that ends up in liberation.

What I find interesting is that these three—the general principle, dependent origination, and transcendent dependent origination—are all put in terms of cause and effect. If you look further, it seems all the Buddhist central teachings are put in terms of cause and effect. The Four Noble Truths are about suffering and its cause, the end of suffering and its cause. The teaching on karma is the cause and effect of actions with consequences. And then we have this general principle of dependent arising.

Why is causality so central to the Buddha's main teachings? These teachings are at the heart of what he had to say. I think there's an interesting question to ponder.

The basic thing, the first thing I would say, is that when you take the self out of the picture of the world, there's no agent in the middle who's causing it all to happen. When we see the unfolding of events as the process of cause and effect—of prior causes and conditions giving rise to the present moment experience, which then conditions future effects—we see the whole unfolding of our experience in a way that doesn't revolve on "I" and that can be explained in terms of cause and effect. This general principle of dependent arising really covers all of it. So I wanted to toss that in as a footnote that is kind of at the heart of the Buddha's way of seeing the world.

The chain we're going to look at tonight also consists of twelve links. It really describes the emergence of the path, leading from suffering all the way to liberation, described in positive terms. Because it's in positive terms, I find it an inspiring kind of map. It describes a lot of the journey that you've been on in the

retreat so far, so I'm sure you'll find your experience reflected in some of this list.

This was outlined in a discourse in the Samyutta Nikaya called the Discourse on Proximate Cause—how one factor becomes the proximate cause for the next. The commentaries call this "transcendent." The Buddha didn't call it that—that's a label from the commentaries because it transcends suffering. That's a nice way to think of transcendent: what transcends suffering, what goes beyond suffering.

I can't resist one bad joke: Why did the yogi refuse novocaine? It was in order to transcend dental medication.

We note that the original chain of dependent origination started with ignorance and ended in suffering. This one's going to start with suffering and move to liberation.

Here's an outline of the twelve links: suffering, faith, gladness, rapture, calm, happiness, concentration, knowing and seeing things as they are, disenchantment, dispassion, liberation, and knowledge of the extinction of the taints. I'll talk about each of those in detail—you don't have to remember them all right now.

The first linkage in this chain is that suffering is a condition, a proximate cause for the arising of faith. I think this may have been mentioned earlier, but this is pretty surprising because there's a huge amount of suffering in the world and I wouldn't say there's a huge amount of faith in the world. So something is happening here that's different from the usual tendencies of the world, because normally suffering leads to more suffering.

In fact, the Buddha said suffering results either in bewilderment or in search. This is interesting—I think it's kind of true. People either get totally confused and overwhelmed and lost in suffering, or they start searching for a way out, some of which are wise, some of which are not. You see a lot of worldly activity as a search for release from suffering, but not always applied with wisdom.

So what are the conditions for suffering to lead to faith? It's said that there are two: one is the clear awareness of suffering, and the second is that one has heard the teachings.

So I think it's very interesting that all of us are in that position—we have suffered and then heard the teachings and been motivated by that combination. This gives us belief that there is a way, with wisdom, to overcome suffering. We become open to looking at things in a new way when we suffer.

James and I saw this many years ago when we were invited to lead a class in meditation at a juvenile hall in the Bay Area. He had a contact who was a nurse there and thought it might be helpful to these young men who were in jail. For those who don't know the American system, juvenile hall is where young people under the age of 18 are held when they've been charged with a crime but have not yet come to trial. It's a holding place. They know they will be coming to trial in the future, but they haven't yet been tried, so they haven't been convicted.

We went into the maximum security part of the juvenile hall, a men's unit. There were young men under the age of 18 who had been charged with serious crimes such as assault, assault with a deadly weapon, murder, and attempted murder. You can imagine these young guys, 16 and 17 years old, sitting in there not knowing what the next step in their life would be, not knowing what the judge or prosecutors would do. They were in this holding pattern for months sometimes, creating a huge amount of anxiety. Because they were all cooped up together, there was also quite a bit of aggression. It was a very difficult environment.

We went in to teach mindfulness, not knowing if this would connect for them at all. It seemed like an unlikely pairing. Yet it turned out to be a good fit for a number of them because they had time on their hands, they had a lot of emotions up, and they recognized their own suffering and were willing to look at it in a new way.

What we found most helpful to them first were the teachings on how to work with difficult emotions like fear and anger. They would practice with those in their cells because they had a lot of individual time and quiet time. One other exercise we gave them was to do mindfulness of breathing and see if they could tell if they went to sleep on an in-breath or an out-breath. They were really interested in trying to find this out.

We had to relabel the teachings—we couldn't call it Buddhism, and it had to appeal to a younger crowd, so we called it Mind Power. At the end, we gave them all a certificate that said they had completed the course in Mind Power. One of the young guys said, "Can I take this to the judge when I go up?" We said, "Sure, I don't know if it will mean anything, but you can."

When we get into difficult situations, our suffering prompts us to look at our experience in a new way. That's what opens us to new insight. Sometimes it's in situations of real extremity.

In the Thai forest tradition, it's very common for monks especially—I don't think the nuns were encouraged to do this because it's considered riskier for women to be on their own—to go out and meditate in the forest at night. They were specifically encouraged to go meditate where they heard the sound of tigers. If there were tigers roaring, Ajahn Mun, one teacher in the Thai forest tradition, would encourage his monks: "Oh, good night for meditation. Go dwell out there where the tigers are roaring."

The purpose was to evoke fear so that they could meet their fear directly and learn to work with it in their meditation. This was a situation of real life uncertainty—powerful teaching. Moreover, some forest monks recounted that as they made their way through forest paths, sometimes they would come upon the bones and robes and bowl of a monk who had been practicing there before them. They didn't know how the monk had met his end. It could have been a tiger, it could have been illness where they didn't have the strength to get treatment, it could have been an injury. But that was a real life situation with fear, and they were encouraged to engage with it.

Ajahn Chah was Jack Kornfield's first teacher in Thailand, also the first teacher of Ajahn Sumedho, the Western monk who brought that model over to England. At a point in his practice where he felt he really wanted to look at his fear, Ajahn Chah decided to go meditate all night in a charnel ground. This is one of the contemplations suggested by the Satipatthana Sutta: go sit where bodies have been brought, where bodies are decaying, and contemplate the decay of the body because one day your body will do the same thing.

Ajahn Chah went out there. He went out in the day and set up his place for meditation. Toward the end of the day, the local villagers brought a corpse to the charnel ground, built a funeral pyre, and burned the corpse. Ajahn Chah didn't know that was about to happen, but that's what was happening that day at this charnel ground.

So he was sitting in meditation, behind him the funeral pyre was lit, the flames rose, the body burned, the villagers departed, and night fell. He kept meditating.

You may know that in Thailand, as a culture generally, there's quite a fear of ghosts. There is the assumption that something continues beyond the death of the physical body, and ghosts are seen as mischievous or perhaps harmful beings that can appear to the living.

So there was Ajahn Chah sitting in meditation. The body had just been burnt behind him. And then he says, "I forgot about sleep. My eyes were rigid with fear. Then about 10 p.m. there came a sound of shuffling from the fire behind me, the sound of footsteps. They walked up behind me. The leaves crunched under the footsteps as it made its way round to the front. It got closer and closer until it stopped right in front of me and just stood still.

"This was really it. I forgot all about Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha. There was only fear welling up inside my chest until it completely filled me. The fear reached its peak and began to overflow. A voice inside me asked, 'What am I so afraid of?' A voice replied, 'I'm afraid of death.' Another voice said, 'Where can you run to escape death? Whether you are afraid or not, there's nowhere to escape death.' As soon as I thought this, all the fear completely disappeared. It was amazing. So much fear and it could disappear just like that. Non-fear arose in its place. Now my heart rose higher and higher until I felt as if I was in the clouds."

It's amazing how in the very extreme of one of these difficult periods of emotion, based on perhaps a real world situation, that fear can just evaporate and turn into something wholesome. That's one of the beauties of impermanence—the impermanence of mind states.

Then there's also this poem from the Therigatha. The Therigatha is a collection of verses from the elder female nuns. These were nuns who were practicing in the time of the Buddha or shortly thereafter. It's part of the Pali Canon. There's a corresponding version of the monks' recollections, but this is from the elder nuns. This is the account of a nun named Siha:

"Obsessed by sensuality, I never got to the origin, but was agitated, my mind beyond control. I dreamed of

a great happiness. I was passionate but had no peace. Pale and thin, I wandered seven years, unhappy day and night."

You think six weeks is a long time? She wandered seven years, unhappy day and night.

"Then I took a rope into the forest and thought, 'I'd rather hang than go back to that narrow life.' I tied a strong noose to the branch of a tree and put it around my neck. Just then, my heart was set free."

Again, a beautiful story of someone brought to an extremity where, as I imagine, she just had to let go. And fortunately, she let go inwardly so she didn't have to physically let go of her body. Her heart was set free in that moment.

So even though none of us wants to suffer, and we don't want you to suffer, sometimes it just happens. And out of it can come these really wholesome developments of mind leading onward to faith.

This quality of faith—I know all of you have had experiences like this or you wouldn't be here. It takes a lot of faith to be here for six weeks or three months. The quality of faith, I think Bhante talked about it when he discussed the five spiritual faculties, is not a belief or a doctrine or a dogma, but the original word saddha, the Pali word that's being translated, has an etymology or literal meaning like "to place one's heart upon."

You see, everybody in the world has something that they place their heart upon. Everybody lives out of some core beliefs or some faith about how the world is put together. In the Buddha's system, this word means basically faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha—faith in the teacher, the teachings, and the community.

But it's meant to be experienced as a personal thing. It's not just something we believe in, but it gives us a confidence that we ourselves can put the teachings into effect, walk the path, and get the benefits of them. It's a belief that greater freedom is possible in our own life. And as it grows into confidence, it means we trust that we can do that. We can walk this path and find that happiness for ourselves.

This is a comment from the Buddha: "Endowed with faith, one receives the gladness associated with the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha." Some form of this, I think, exists in every spiritual tradition.

In the Bay Area, we have a Native American teacher who sometimes comes to Spirit Rock named Fred Wapipa. His ancestry is joint Kickapoo and Sac and Fox. One time he was speaking at Spirit Rock and said something that quite surprised me, but I was really struck by it. He said, "You know, there's no word for hope in our language. That's because we believe everything's already all right."

I thought that was an amazing expression of native wisdom. Everything's already all right. Beautiful.

So we have this faith or trust or confidence, and that leads onward to what the Buddha pointed to as gladness. The Pali word is pamoja. I might call it gladness or joy—I'll probably use joy mostly in the rest of

the talk.

This word joy is a little troublesome in Buddhism because there are about three words that sometimes get translated as joy. One of them is pamoja, which is the word pointed to here. Another is the term piti, which is in the Seven Factors of Awakening. And the other is the term mudita, which is often translated as sympathetic joy. In this case, I'm going to talk about joy as this pamoja or gladness.

It arises from the sense of faith. Once we have confidence that we can see the way out of suffering, it gives us a sense of gladness. We have conceptually solved the problem. We still need to do the work to solve the problem, but we know now how to do it. We've got the instruction manual and we just need to carry out the steps. So this gives a lightness and a delight to the heart.

A number of us have mentioned that joy is really an integral part of the path. James has talked about it a lot. Sally mentioned in one of her talks, quoting Bhikkhu Anāgārika, "The entire scheme of the gradual training can be envisaged as a progressive refinement of joy." So it's very helpful to find this factor of mind, to bring it in and let it become your ally. Let it become your support, because we all will run into times of difficulty. And if we have reliable sources for joy, that can help us persevere through those difficult times.

This really came through to me some years ago when I went to Burma to ordain as a monk. I'd been a monk in Thailand before, but I had disrobed before I'd gotten all my monk yearning out of my system. So I had this leftover "I'd like to be a monk again" kind of thing going. And I had the opportunity to go to Burma and ordain with Paok Sayadaw, who's a noted master of concentration and insight.

I did that and arrived at his monastery the night before the rains retreat was going to start. As soon as I arrived, I went up to meet him and asked if he would be willing to have me ordained while I was there. He said, "Yes, okay. So tomorrow morning you go into town with one of the lay supporters, get your robes and bowl, come back, you can be ordained after lunch."

Well, that was a little quick. I'd just gotten to the monastery the night before. I was trying to settle in. So before lunch the next morning, I had my head shaved. All the hair was gone. I had lunch. And then I slipped into my monk's outfit in this ceremony right after lunch. There I was, about eighteen hours after arriving, back in robes again. It was what I wanted—it was just a little quicker than I'd expected.

It had been some years since I'd been a monk before, and in the meantime, I'd kind of forgotten how to tie the robes. I think you heard Bhante talk about how every monk is always a little worried the robes are going to fall off, because it's basically wrapping oneself up in a sheet. So I had that going.

I got there at the start of the rains retreat, and it was literally the start of the rains. For the next three weeks, I didn't see the sun. It rained on average three inches a day, which gave rise to a lot of mold in my room. The biggest spider I had ever seen was building a web on my porch. I was eating just one meal a day, as often happens in monasteries.

At this monastery, I was eating one meal a day. It was vegetarian, which I was delighted about, but it was mostly white rice and steamed vegetables. I was losing about half a pound a day on that diet. The meditation hall was a 15-minute walk uphill, often in the pouring rain. Once we got there, the shortest sitting was an hour and a half. The longest sitting was two hours.

The meditation was challenging. I was engaged in keeping the attention focused on the upper lip to notice the breath as many hours of the day as possible—the whole day long. Sitting, walking, eating, showering—just to stay here. I once went and asked the Sayadaw about how to practice with the hindrances. He said, "Hindrances? Oh, if you're sleepy, pull your earlobes. If you're aversive, do metta." That was all he had to say about working with the hindrances.

It was a very challenging practice, and the weather continued to be what it was. It became the most difficult retreat I had ever undertaken in my life. All the conditions were just so challenging. We had to report to the Sayadaw every day on our progress—a constant check-in.

I remember one day I went down for lunch. I was dressed in my robes, had my bowl, got it filled up. Hot food was on the bottom, and you know these metal bowls really transmit heat very well. The hot rice and veggies were on the bottom. I was holding that in my arm, walking back to my kuti. The lid of the bowl was upside down on the top because it held a little bit of dessert. I had my umbrella in my other hand because it was still raining like crazy. I was walking up this dirt track to go back and eat at my kuti.

In the path alongside, just to one side, a group of Burmese lay people were bowing down to me because that's what they do when a bhikkhu walks by. They're very reverent. While all that was going on, I felt my robe slipping off my left shoulder. That just epitomized my situation. I managed to keep it on until I got back to my kuti, but it was nip and tuck.

Through all this, my spirits were very low. It's funny now when I think back on it, but my spirits really sank. I had brought with me a photo of the Dalai Lama because he's always a great inspiration for me. I turned to the photo with a great deal of what I could only call supplication. I said, "Your Holiness, I'm really having a difficult time. Do you have any advice for me?"

Immediately this transmission came through. It was in his voice—that Indian-accented English he has, spoken in his tone—and it said, "Stay cheerful, optimistic, and confident. A positive attitude is the best support." Then the transmission ended.

I really tried to take that message to heart. Stay cheerful, optimistic, and confident. When would that not be helpful? This is the role of joy in the practice. Sometimes, unfortunately, I couldn't remember what cheerful felt like. But when I could, and I could bring that into mind, it really lifted my spirits and inspired me to go back and practice again.

This is the role of joy. When we have a channel to it, a reliable access to it, it becomes a tremendous ally for us when times are difficult. Here I think we're really lucky that we are surrounded by the beauty of

nature. That has always been for me a very reliable and deep source of joy in practice.

Here it's very available. I encourage you to really take advantage of that and open to that beauty. This is not foreign to the path. This is not antithetical to the path.

This is a quote from Ajahn Sumedho: "Sometimes in Theravada Buddhism, one gets the impression that you shouldn't enjoy beauty. If you see a beautiful flower, you should contemplate its decay. Or if you see a beautiful woman, you should contemplate her as a rotting corpse. That's a good reflection on anicca, dukkha, and anatta, but it can leave the impression that beauty is only to be reflected on in terms of these three characteristics, rather than in terms of the experience of beauty. This is the joy of mudita, being able to appreciate the beauty in the things around us."

So being open to that, let that joy come in and lift us up. It's intrinsic in the nature of things. When you tune in to the way things are, there is joy there. I often tune in to the way light strikes things. Whether indoors or outdoors, there's a brightness, there's a brilliance, there's a radiance in light that reminds me of that joy and beauty.

This is from Thomas Merton: "There is in all things an inexhaustible sweetness and purity, a silence that is a fountain of action and of joy. It rises up in wordless gentleness and flows out to me from the unseen roots of all created being."

So this access to joy or gladness is one of the central links of this chain to liberation, and it leads onward.

The next link in the chain is rapture. The Pali word is piti. This has been described already on a number of occasions—it's in the Seven Factors of Awakening. It's the kind of joy that comes when we're connected to our meditation. When you find you start enjoying the meditation object, that is piti.

It's a mental factor, but it has an expression in the body. And the expression is one of energy—sometimes strong energy, sometimes uncomfortably strong energy. But in its initial stages, it's quite pleasant energy that comes out of the joy of the meditation itself.

Then rapture leads on to the next link, which is calm, or passadhi in Pali. Rapture in its energetic manifestation can sometimes feel a little turbulent. So as the path deepens, the rapture gets mellowed out, gets moderated by the arising of calm.

Sometimes this word passadhi is translated as relaxation—it could also be translated as ease or serenity, but mostly I'll call it calm. The combination of the pleasantness of rapture and the factor of calm really allows us to settle into the moment in a new way. We find it's easier to be here because there's not as much turbulence, and there's a sense of peace that's quite appealing.

Sometimes when we first discover this factor of calm in meditation, it's like new territory because this is not a common factor out in our fast-paced world. So one meditator who was finding this for the first time wasn't sure what was going on and noted it as calm, hardly believing that this is what it was. So it takes a

little while to get to know it, but it becomes a comfortable place to be after some time.

It's as though in the initial stages of meditation, the hindrances are so strong and the thoughts are so active. When we come to this place, it's like we've crossed the stormy ocean—it's had big waves and pirate ships and an attack from a giant squid. But all of a sudden we've landed in this safe harbor, this big safe harbor, and we can just cool out for a while into this calm.

There's a poem by Emily Dickinson that expresses this feeling. It's a poem called "Wild Nights." I'm only going to read a little bit. If you're not a native English speaker, there are two words I want to point out beforehand in this poem. The word "futile" means useless, not of any benefit. And here the word "chart" is used to mean a map—it's kind of an archaic use of the term, a map like sailors would use in navigation.

"Futile the winds to a heart in port, done with a compass, done with a chart, rowing in Eden."

That's kind of what it feels like when we land in this big safe harbor. "Futile the winds to a heart in port, done with a compass, done with a chart, rowing in Eden."

The mind discovers, or you could say rediscovers, its own natural peace and ease. This is something that is a natural part of our being, but we've lost touch with it by covering it over with so much stimulation, so much activity and so much thinking. When we find that it's there, we can use it as a meditation technique. This is an instruction given by Ajahn Amaro:

He's the abbot of Amravati now. "Rest in the natural peace and ease that is the natural peace and ease of mind and body. And then pay attention to whatever disturbs that."

I love this instruction—rest in the natural peace and ease that is the natural peace and ease of mind and body when we're not stirring it up. A number of people have reported experiences in interviews that really point to this. I often suggest that a nice place to rest at that time is to put the attention in the heart center, just having a sense you can rest the attention there, and then you'll notice whatever comes along that disturbs that kind of peace.

This access to peace is a lot of what we've been looking for all along. We have been looking for a way to calm the heart and mind and body from the overstimulation of a fast-paced modern society. When we discover this aspect of calm through meditation, there's something very satisfying about it.

So the journey continues. The access to calm leads to the next step, which is happiness. The Pali word is *su kha*. I like this term *sukha* because it sounds so much like sugar, and *sukha* has a quality of sweetness in it. The quality of rapture has an enjoyment, but it's subtle. The quality of calm has a pleasant feel, but it's a little neutral. But when the element of *sukha* starts coming in, there's an emotional flavor there that's very sweet. It's kind of touching. So this is recognized as one of the factors of concentration—it helps collect the mind, as we'll see.

This *sukha* is a deeper flowering than the joy of *pamojja*. It's joy that has risen to rapture and become

more intense, then been mellowed out through tranquility to land in this place of happiness or *sukha*, which is really a state of contentment. Contentment might be a closer translation, but it has elements of both. The sweetness gives a sense of happiness.

The joy of *pamojja* depends on conditions—we reflect on nature or reflect on Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha. But as this happiness comes about, it doesn't depend on conditions. It is the quality of our own natural development of heart and mind. In that way, it's more reliable. It's the happiness of coming home, coming really into the present moment with both gladness and peace.

I think about this line from Rumi. When Rumi says "you," he often means the divine, and in this case, *sukh a* has a kind of similar flavor to this divine:

"Come to the orchard in spring.
There is light and wine and sweethearts in the pomegranate flowers.
If you do not come, these do not matter.
If you do come, these do not matter."

When that sense of deep happiness is there, the conditions aren't so important. There's an unconditional contentment that is settling in.

But the practice doesn't stop here. It continues on, and the Buddha himself said when he was a practitioner, when he was the Bodhisattva: "Two things I never lost track of in my practice. One was not to be lax in my efforts. The other was not to settle merely for wholesome states of mind."

I find this a really beautiful and challenging statement. How many times would we settle merely for wholesome states of mind? That might be a pretty good outcome for us. And yet the Buddha said: Don't settle just for wholesome states of mind. The path continues.

So the next stage in the links is concentration, or *samadhi*. This is really the unification of mind where the attention, the energy, the awakeness is brought together into the present moment. When that attention and undistracted quality is brought to the present moment, we find the mind becomes strong. It's like we've given away all our mental energy, sending it out in fragmented ways to past and future, to thinking and memory and regretting and anticipating. We drop all that, call it into the present moment, collect in the quality of *samadhi*—the mind becomes strong, steady, stable, and firm.

It's pleasant in itself and gives us the ability to accommodate what's difficult. Have you noticed that when the mind takes on some of this quality of concentration, something that was felt as uncomfortable or unpleasant a few minutes before or earlier in the day all of a sudden is kind of neutral—not disturbing, not problematic? This is one of the strengths of the mind of *samadhi*, because it's based in happiness. In fact, happiness is the proximate cause for concentration. We may have thought when we started meditation that the proximate cause of concentration was striving energy—pushing hard, pedal to the metal and all of that. But truly, the proximate cause for concentration is happiness.

When there's the sense of this natural peace and ease, the mind can just rest in itself in an effortless, unforced way. And that settling brings along the quality of peace and rest.

So the mind settles in concentration, but this is not the end of the path either. As the Buddha said, the purpose and benefit of concentration is to know and see things as they really are. This is the next step in the unfolding: knowing and seeing things as they really are.

The Pali is *yathābhūta-ñāṇa-dassana*. *Ñāṇa* means knowing—it's the same root as the word "gnosis" in Greek. *Dassana* means seeing. You may have heard the Sanskrit word *darshan*, which means seeing, basically the teacher. And *dassana* is the same root as *vipassana*—they both mean seeing or insight. And *y athābhūta* is things the way they are.

So what is it to see things as they really are? When the mind is concentrated—and that means it's not being swayed by the hindrances, by the forces of greed, aversion, delusion—there's some steadiness. What do we see as the way things really are? We see impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, selflessness. We see the three characteristics. This seeing is where *vipassana* or insight takes off in the classical teachings of the Buddha.

In the West, we've expanded the field of insight to include psychological understanding, and those are very important understandings, and in my view, very important insights. But in classical Buddhism, *vipass ana* refers to the seeing of the three characteristics, and it is when the mind is steady and focused and concentrated that those really become apparent, very clearly apparent.

Once we see that things are impermanent, we see that they're unsatisfying and they aren't to be taken as "I" or "mine" in a permanent ongoing way. So this seeing has a transformative effect in the heart and mind.

Most of our life we have grown up thinking that if we could just get the outer circumstances correct, if we could line up the objects in the right way, our life would fall into place and we would find happiness or satisfaction. The right job, the right income, the right relationship, the right community, the right place to live, and so on.

As we start to see the three characteristics of things, we see that there is not stability in the external things of the world at all. And so we stop so much pinning our hopes on getting all the conditions of the world to line up exactly right. We start to understand that the world can't give us the lasting satisfaction that we're really looking for. And this is the kind of pivotal understanding of seeing the three characteristics. It teaches us to let go a little bit.

So this first step in letting go is the next step in the sequence of this chain, and it's called disenchantment. The Pali term is *nibbida*. Disenchantment here doesn't mean we become cynical or we fall into despair or we think everything's worthless. It's not that at all. It's a recognition that the bright objects of the world have enchanted us. They have put a spell on us and made us run after them as though they were capable

of really satisfying us. But at this point in the development of insight, we see that that promise was false. The things of the world—whether it's other people or objects or locations or money or jobs—aren't capable of giving that deep satisfaction. And so there's a way in which we start to give up that illusion.

So there's a freedom in that. Okay, that's not going to do it for me. What is? So this is the motivation, the real genuine motivation for renunciation. There's a turning away from external objects and we look for something else.

Renunciation is not about telling ourselves, "As a good practitioner, we should give up everything that's pleasant." This is the way it's described in the Dhammapada: "If by giving up a lesser happiness, one could experience a greater happiness, the wise person would renounce the lesser in order to find the greater." This is the significance of renunciation.

So it's not a painful penalty. It's a movement of wisdom when it comes. And we all renounce different things at different times. It's not that every one of us should be renouncing X, Y, and Z at this point. The wisdom has to grow for us to see what will bring satisfaction and what won't. And then step by step, we all renounce at different rates in different ways.

In this renunciation, it doesn't mean that we scorn the things of the world or even scorn the sense pleasures that we're still engaged in. We just recognize they aren't going to do it for us. And so the Buddha said, "The beauty of this world remains the same, but the wise do not hanker after it." So this disenchantment doesn't mean that things get grim or gray or ugly or even neutral.

The beauty is even more apparent because the heart isn't burdened by greed, aversion, or delusion. And so the beauty is very clear to see, but there's no hankering after it because ultimately it won't finally satisfy.

This leads into the next link, which is called dispassion. The Pali term is *viraga*, which literally means without lust. It has also been translated as without attachment, but I think without lust is the better etymology. There's another sense in which *viraga* is used in the Pali: it means fading away. Like when you take a shirt that's a bright color and wash it many times—little by little, the color in the shirt fades away.

What this is pointing to is very interesting. The movement of dispassion doesn't happen all at once. There is a fading away of lust. The more our minds get purified in the understanding of the way things really are, the understanding of disenchantment, the moving away from the false promise, the more that desire gradually fades away out of our system. Craving fades away, and we encounter more and more of this quality of dispassion.

The initial meaning of dispassion is more or less synonymous with equanimity, as Annie spoke about earlier. It means the mind is not so moved by the ups and downs of changing pleasure and pain. There's a balance. Even though pleasant and unpleasant continue to alternate, we're not so moved by desire or aversion for those changing conditions.

But this word dispassion sometimes doesn't sound appealing in the West because it suggests we're not supposed to feel any passion anymore. We might think, "Wait, my passion is what I really care about in my life." So we need to make a language distinction here. When dispassion is used in translations of Buddhist texts, it has one specific meaning: an unwholesome state based on greed, lust, or craving. That's what passion means in these English translations of the Buddha's language.

There are other words in the Buddha's language that refer to this quality we in the West call passion—which we rightfully regard as something important and beautiful in our lives. Someone might have a passion for clarity, a passion for truth, a passion for justice, for social justice, a passion for non-cruelty. These are all fine things to have. What we are removing are only the unwholesome factors of lust, greed, and craving.

There are many words in the Buddha's vocabulary that point to what we would call passion: words for ardor, for zeal, and enthusiasm. The word for ardor is *atapi*, based on a word meaning fire. So this is a fiery quality of heart. Does that sound cold or hot? Turned off or dead? No—there's a fiery quality of heart in ardor.

Here are some quotations. In the *Satipatthana Sutta*, it says the practitioner dwells ardent, fully aware and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. In another discourse, Sariputta said very clearly: without ardor, one cannot awaken. So this ardor is passion directed toward the path, toward awakening.

There's the term zeal, which is a common translation of *chanda*. *Chanda* can also be translated as desire. When it's considered one of the four *iddhipadas*—the bases for spiritual success—it's often translated as zeal. This denotes a quality of strong energy toward the path, toward the achievement of liberation.

And then there is *viriya*, which you probably know as energy or effort. One explanation I like is "delighting in what is wholesome, turning our energy to what is wholesome." One of my favorite translations for *viriya*, although it's not used very much, is enthusiasm. When you're feeling enthusiastic and inspired about your practice, about the path, about the meditation, this is *viriya* coming into the mind, and it's what leads us to take the next step, to come to the next sitting, to investigate the teachings.

So there are all these words that point to this deeply caring, deeply motivated quality of heart and mind that in the West we might call passion. But *viraga*—this dispassion—refers to the fading away of lust, of greed, of craving. In its initial stages, it resembles equanimity. In its maturity, it is a synonym for *nibbana*, a synonym for the unconditioned.

We talked about *nibbana* last week, so I don't need to say much more. One other quote from the Buddha: "Insofar as the practitioner has abandoned greed, aversion, and delusion, insofar is *nibbana* realizable, immediate, inviting, and attractive."

So this is the deeper meaning of being without lust. One has completely set aside greed, aversion, and

delusion, and in that moment opens to the unconditioned. This is the movement that leads to the next step, which is liberation.

The Pali term is vimutti. This is what we talked about last week as that unshakable deliverance of mind. This is peaceful. This is sublime. That is the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all attachments, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbana. The mind has been freed in full liberation from all the fetters and completely from the forces of greed, aversion, and delusion. And there is, it's said, a happiness of peace and lack of disturbance that is the most deeply satisfying kind of happiness that's possible to us.

This uprooting of the fetters happens in the moment of liberation, and then there's a reflecting back which is called knowledge of the destruction of the taints. This is the last step in the twelve links of transcendent dependent origination. One reviews what has just taken place in the mind and knows that the most deeply conditioned tendencies of mind have been uprooted. These are the taints of sense desire, of becoming, and of ignorance.

So this is the culmination of transcendent dependent origination—the three links leading from suffering through different kinds of joy to the stilling of concentration, the turning away from sense experiences and relinquishment of attachments to the touch of nibbana and the liberation of heart and mind.

When I first heard this teaching, I went to one of my interview teachers at the time and I said, "How long is it going to take?" And of course the answer is nobody knows for each of us, because it's different. But if we continue along this path, these factors are not only possible but inevitable. Each one leads naturally to the next. That's what the Buddha said. You don't actually have to make an additional volitional effort to go from one to the next. They unfold as part of nature.

I like this. There are a couple of analogies that the Buddha used for this process. He was talking about if you're a carpenter and you have an adze, which is a woodworking tool like an axe. He said if you use it for a long period of time, the handle of the ax will wear away from the contact of your hands and fingers with it. You can't say how much of the handle has worn away every particular day, but as you keep using it, you know the handle wears away. He said it's just like that with the fetters. We can't tell how much of them have worn away today, but if you keep practicing, they do wear away.

The other analogy he used was the riggings of an ocean-going ship—the sails and ropes. He said this ocean-going ship has been affected by the salt of the sea. It's been affected by the wind, the air, the sun. It's brought up on land and left there. And while it's up on land, the impact from all the elements is going to cause those riggings, the sails and the ropes, to rot and fall away. He said it's just like that with our fetters. Our fetters rot and fall away in meditation, just like the riggings of an ocean-going ship that's exposed to the elements. We don't know how long it takes, but it only goes in one direction.

This is from Ajahn Chah: "As a result of his experience, the Buddha taught that the practice has to develop

naturally according to conditions. You allow things to develop according to your accumulated wholesome karma and paramis. This doesn't mean that you stop putting effort into the practice, but that you continue with the understanding that whether you progress swiftly or slowly, it's not something you can force. It's like planting a tree. It knows by itself the appropriate pace to grow at. If you crave to get quick results, see that as delusion. Even if you want it to grow slowly, see that as delusion."

I'll close with another quotation from the Buddha. A questioner came to him and said, "How did you cross the flood?" This means the flood of becoming, the flood of selfing again and again, leading to repeated birth. Basically, how did you become liberated? And the Buddha replied, "I crossed the flood by not tarrying and not hurrying. When I tarried, I sank. And when I hurried, I was swept away."

Let's just sit for a minute together. I crossed the flood by not tarrying and not hurrying. When I tarried, I sank. And when I hurried, I was swept away.

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