# Transcendent Dependent Origination

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 59:21

Something else emerges from this general law that the Buddha detailed in the teaching of dependent origination with its twelve links. Those twelve links represent only one application of this fundamental teaching. Tonight I want to explore another application of this general law of cause and effect—this time showing the process of liberation.

The original chain also revealed the process of liberation, but it did so in negative terms: ending this, ending this, ending this, ending suffering. Now the Buddha describes the process of liberation in positive terms, which I find deeply inspiring and motivating. This is what I want to share with you.

This teaching is based on a sutta from the Samyutta Nikaya called the Upanishad Sutta. *Upanishad* means something like proximate cause or supporting condition. It's not strictly a causal relationship, but rather something that must be present for the next factor to arise.

The Upanishad Sutta begins by addressing what the Buddha calls the knowledge of the destruction of the taints. The taints represent the impurities within our heart and mind. When they are said to be destroyed, this is equivalent to saying that one has fully awakened—one is completely enlightened.

The Buddha declares: "I say, bhikkhus, that the knowledge of the destruction of the taints has a proximate cause. It does not lack a proximate cause. And what is the proximate cause for the knowledge of the destruction of the taints? It should be said: liberation." That is, after liberation one knows that the taints have been destroyed. Liberation is freedom itself.

He continues: "I say, bhikkhus, that liberation too has a proximate cause. It does not lack a proximate cause. And what is the proximate cause for liberation? It should be said: dispassion."

This reveals something profound: liberation itself has a precondition, a cause. Liberation in the Buddha's teaching is not something that happens randomly—it occurs according to prior conditions. This means that if we establish the proper conditions, liberation will naturally arise.

The Buddha then traces back this sequence of links from dispassion through a series of positive factors to the quality of faith. He continues: "I say, bhikkhus, that faith too has a proximate cause. It does not lack a proximate cause. And what is the proximate cause of faith? It should be said: suffering."

This statement appears almost as a non-sequitur—how did suffering become the cause of faith? The sutta then continues by showing that suffering also has a cause, tracing it back exactly like dependent origination: through birth, becoming, clinging, craving, feeling, contact, and so forth, all the way back to

ignorance.

What emerges is a complete teaching: the entire chain of dependent origination from ignorance to suffering, followed by a new chain leading from suffering to faith and ultimately to liberation and the knowledge of liberation.

This new chain has been given various names by different teachers. Ajahn Buddhadasa, one of my teachers in Thailand who specialized in dependent origination and wrote an extensive work on the subject, called this positive part of the cycle the Radiant Wheel, in contrast to the Wheel of Existence or the Wheel of Becoming. It has also been called the Wheel of Awakening.

Bhikkhu Bodhi, the American monk living in Sri Lanka who translated this volume and the Majjhima Nikaya, wrote a detailed exploration of this teaching and called it transcendental dependent arising. He noted that the commentaries named it transcendental or transcendent because it transcends suffering—it is the wheel that carries us beyond the possibility of suffering.

This sequence of transcendental dependent origination is what I wish to explore tonight.

So to transcend the need for Novocaine tonight, I'll go through the list of the factors that I want to explore in the talk.

It starts with this very surprising linkage of suffering with faith and then continues that faith leads to joy. Joy leads to rapture, to tranquility, to happiness, to concentration, to knowing and seeing things as they are, to disenchantment, to dispassion, to liberation, to knowledge of the extinction of the taints. So these are the twelve links that I want to explore tonight.

Suffering is the proximate cause of faith. This is a little hard to understand because we look around the world and there is lots of suffering and there is not so much liberation. So somewhere in the samsaric conditions of things, suffering is not leading to faith and the rest of the wheel for most people. So what is it that makes the difference? What is it that puts the wheel in a positive spin?

In the commentaries they say there are two conditions for suffering turning into faith. One is an awareness of suffering so that we stop denying it, we stop trying to avoid it, we stop trying to believe that it shouldn't exist, but we acknowledge it as part of our human experience. The second is that we hear the teachings. We hear the teachings and we find a way to transform suffering.

When I looked at this in my own life, I found there was actually a lot of truth in this, of suffering leading to faith. Because I grew up in a fairly ordinary, middle-class household. I grew up in the Midwest and had just a normal amount of human neurosis, which was certainly enough to make my adolescence hell. But I started to get a little more together in my early twenties, and then I discovered the drug culture and the hippie years and the counterculture and all of that.

And I came out of the sixties with a lot of confusion, having had an excess of everything that the sixties

were about. And came out quite unhappy, quite confused, a lot of improprieties in my conduct, a lot of wrong understanding. And at that point I really was forced to grapple with my situation, my psychological state, seriously for the first time. I found myself living in California, and so I tried all the things that people living in California in the early seventies were supposed to try, like rolfing and encounter groups and EST and the EST follow-ups and many, many different kinds of techniques, and none of them touched my fundamental situation very much.

And then I happened to wander into and encounter the vipassana practice. And when I did, I really felt I had found something that had the depth to touch my suffering, to really transform it. Without having come into that kind of deep pain, I don't know that I would have had the motivation to find meditation and to follow it. But suffering for me was kind of the sand that rubbed the oyster the wrong way and through its friction produced the pearl.

When we're suffering we become very open to looking at things in a new way, to really throwing out all our assumptions because maybe we become a little bit desperate. And in my case, I was very desperate. I would have given anything to find my way through that mess. So this quality of being taken to an edge with suffering can actually make us really open to something new.

And I'm reminded of the time a few years ago when James and I got together and went down to teach a class at Juvenile Hall in San Mateo. We were thinking about wanting to start a service project out of Spirit Rock at that time. The board later told us they weren't ready. There were too many buildings to build, too many other things to do, so we shelved it. But as part of our exploration, we were invited by a friend of James who's a practitioner and worked there to conduct a series of classes.

I wasn't familiar with the justice system for juveniles in this country until I went, but what happens is that while young people under the age of eighteen are awaiting trial, they get put into juvenile hall. We were working with young men who were living in the high security unit, which meant that they'd done something pretty serious. People were in there for armed robbery, for assault, for attempted murder, and for murder.

And as you can imagine, like with most of the criminal justice system, the emphasis is not really on compassion and healing. So these young kids were kind of tossed into basically a holding tank with quite strong security guards to sort of keep them in place. And often they wouldn't know how long they would be in there until their case would come to trial. So you had sixteen and seventeen year old kids whose lives were now on hold, who knew that for their offense, they could be locked away in jail for years and years and years. And they were basically just bouncing around the walls of this holding tank hour after hour, day after day, with other young people who were in a similar situation.

So you can imagine that the levels of fear, anxiety, despair, and aggression were running very high for those young guys. And of course they didn't have the tools to deal with that stuff. So James and I thought we would go in and try and keep it really practical. And we didn't know if they'd be interested in

meditation at all, so James had a brainstorm. He said, we won't call it meditation. I mean, forget about calling it Buddhism. We weren't going to be that stupid. But even calling it meditation sounded kind of namby-pamby. You know, that's got to be for sissies. So James had the brainstorm that we would call it mind power. And that's what we did.

So we invited them to come to our weekly classes on mind power. With the support of one of the security guards, a bunch of them did come. We would have about ten young guys at every class.

I hadn't worked with young people in that situation before, and James hadn't either. So we went in not knowing what we were doing, not knowing if it was going to connect or not. These were pretty heavy-duty guys. We sat down and gave some instructions, trying to make it practical.

We found that the things they really responded to were the teachings on how to work with difficult emotions like fear and anger. We'd give them the breath as kind of a warm-up exercise, but then we'd say something like, "Imagine a time you were afraid. Imagine a time you were angry. Now go into your body and feel that. Where do you feel it? What are the sensations? Keep your attention there. Tell us what you're feeling." Then we would invite them as homework to continue to do the practice.

Some of them really took to it like ducks to water. They had a lot of free time and they had plenty of material to work with. They were some of the most motivated students I've ever encountered. Some of the shifts we saw were very moving. I don't know how many of them lasted—our class only lasted about six weeks. But some of them came in and told me that they were able to get relief from their fear for the first time. They were able to start to manage some of their feelings of anger.

One time after loving-kindness meditation, they were talking about loving-kindness to other gangs that they'd had fights with. One guy said, "I'm not going to practice loving-kindness to those other guys. They're trying to kill me." Another guy who happened to be a gang leader said, "Oh, but you know, those people have mothers and sisters also who really care about them." So there were some beautiful shifts taking place, and it came out of the extreme state of suffering that they found themselves in.

When we are challenged and suffering challenges us, we can reach deeply inside and open up in a way that we may not have any other time. We hear this every day in the interviews. I wish sometimes that we could pipe the interviews into the meditation hall—sort of like on Monday night, when if the room's full, Jack gets piped into the book room, the disembodied voice comes in. I sometimes wish we could do that here, because it's very inspirational.

The first couple of days, we sort of feel like we're giving the Dharma talks. But after the first few days, when your practice starts cooking, we just sit in there and receive the Dharma talks. You come in and tell us the truth of the practice, especially at this stage in the retreat.

Just thinking back about the interviews today, people come in and say things like, "I'm learning so much about what it means to accept the pain in my life, so much about opening to it and not being in conflict

with it." Or "I'm opening to fear in a new way and finding out that it doesn't have to control me, doesn't have to take me over, dictate to me." Or "I didn't even know that there was a gap between feeling and craving. I didn't know there could be a gap. I thought it was all run together all the time. And now I'm finding out I can rest there sometimes."

In all these situations, people are working directly with their difficulties, with their suffering, and finding a way to find some freedom. Finding, in fact, that our suffering is workable. That's really what we're hearing day after day. You're finding your own strength and your own faith coming out of looking closely at your own difficulty. Difficulty often is the greatest teacher in our retreat practice and in our daily life.

When I did my first meditation retreat, which was in 1976, I worked up to it through a couple of years of daily life practice and then took the plunge. It was at Lama Foundation with Joseph and Jack and Sharon. I had a very, very difficult time. I had a lot of pain in my body. I had a lot of wandering mind. There are people for whom the path progresses quickly and easily. I was not one of them. But in the middle of it, I started to see there might really be the possibility of an end to confusion and pain.

And that was so inspiring for me. It was so touching. Because before, my suffering had just been this thick mass that I didn't really see any way into. And with the precision of the practice, I could actually see its arising, and I could see the possibility of its disappearing. It gave me tremendous inspiration. I've cried, actually, with gratitude that this message has come to me—that there is suffering, it has a cause, and because it has a cause, it has an end.

So this is part of the origin of faith. I want to share a couple of other stories that illustrate this fact: when we get taken to an extremity of suffering, sometimes the greatest openings and the greatest breakthroughs come to us.

Ajahn Chah was, as most of you know, Jack Kornfield's first teacher. He was probably one of the greatest half-dozen Thai meditation masters of the last fifty years. As a young monk practicing in the northeast of Thailand near the Lao border, he decided that he would confront his deepest fear.

Culturally in Thailand, one of the scariest things for anybody at any level of society is the idea of ghosts or spirits. We kind of make fun of it on Halloween, but in Asia these things are felt to be very alive, very present, and of a possibly mischievous to malevolent temperament. So Ajahn Chah had a fear of ghosts, a fear of spirits that he'd never fully explored.

He decided as a young monk that he would take himself and sit in a charnel ground. These are the grounds where in Thai communities the dead bodies are brought and burned, then simply left there. If the fire goes out, there are parts of the body left. And of course the spirit is considered to stay close to the body after death.

He went there the first night and set himself up in meditation. As it happened, a child had just been burned at the charnel ground that day. He sat down to meditate, and he was really afraid. But he decided

what he needed to do was to face his fear, so he sat all night. All night long, he said, he was shaking. He was trembling. He was very, very afraid.

But then he made it through the night. He was okay. He thought, "Oh, there's nothing to this. I've got this mastered. Charnel grounds aren't going to scare me anymore." The sun came up. He enjoyed the warm day. He kept sitting and walking. And he decided to stay another night.

Near sunset of the second night, people from the village came carrying another corpse. But this was of a grown man. They put the corpse on a pile of wood and lit it, and it burned. The lay people stayed with it for a while and then they went away, and the fire kept burning, the corpse kept burning.

Night was falling and Ajahn Chah realized he had to take his seat again near the burning corpse to face his fear again. So he sat down to meditate and he said, because it was a grown person, this time he was much more afraid. The fear was even stronger. He sat and he could hear the flames flickering away, licking on the wood, licking on the body. He could smell the pungent smell of the burning flesh as he sat with his back to the corpse. He was full of fear. Night fell, but he kept sitting.

As he sat, he started to hear a noise over by the pyre. His ears pricked up. What is that? Is it a dog who's come to sniff around the corpse and take some of the flesh? And then he heard very near the pyre the sound like footsteps on leaves. The steps started coming toward him. He kept his eyes shut. He just kept sitting. It was pitch black. He couldn't see a thing. He didn't even turn around to look. The footsteps came right up toward him, walked around, and stopped right in front of him.

And he imagined that this spirit, half disembodied, maybe half with the burned flesh, was staring at him as he sat with these really intense eyes. And he said then his whole body just filled with fear. He said he'd never felt anything like it in his life. He said he became so afraid he didn't know what else to do. He was practicing saying "Buddho, Dhammo, Sangho" as a way to focus his mind. He couldn't even get a hold of his meditation object. He was just filled with fear.

And he said it was like when you pour a pitcher of water into a jar—every little bit of the jar gets filled with the water. He said his whole body was just pervaded with the fear and he was paralyzed with it. And he said he sat there filled with this fear and then this thought came to him: what's the worst thing that could happen? And the thought came: I could die. And then the thought came: well, everybody has to die. Suppose I meet my death now. That's the worst thing that could happen.

And he said when he came to that understanding, the fear in a moment transformed. And that energy that was filling his body became very, very blissful. Full of blissful, radiant energy. And then the footsteps went away. They walked away. And he sat through the night with this great joy that he said really marked a turning point in his practice. Having opened to the fear, opened to the fear, and it transformed.

So he tells this story in a book called Food for the Heart. If you're interested in reading, it's very moving. And then he goes on and talks about the insights that he took from it and the strength that that gave his

mind to face the fear of death and then continue through it. So out of this really close encounter with our suffering, with our pain, we come away with a strength and a certain degree of faith.

So the second link in the chain is this quality of faith, or in Pali the term is saddhā. Saddhā in Pali means to place one's heart upon—where we place our heart for rest, for ease. So faith in the Buddhist sense doesn't mean what you believe in. It doesn't mean an intellectual, conceptual thing. It's really a gut check. What's your level of trust in the world? Or what's your level of confidence in yourself? It's really a pointer to this inner experience that we have.

Traditionally, faith is based on hearing the teachings, hearing the truth, hearing the Dhamma, and checking it with our own experience and coming to believe in it. And then it's said that faith becomes like a gem, that as we rest with the quality, the purity of the gem, it clears the hindrances from our being. The Buddha said: "Endowed with faith, one receives the gladness associated with the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha."

So traditionally, faith is talked about as faith in the three gems—the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha. But I really think it's important that we each come to our own connection to what our own faith lies in. It may be the three gems, it may be something different. It may be a trust in nature, or the basic goodness of the universe, or God, or something else. So to look within and find out where that faith is for us.

But in very practical terms, as faith grows, we start to realize that, yeah, I can check out these teachings. They are verified in my own experience and therefore I have the confidence that I can walk the path, that I can walk the path to greater freedom based on the teachings. So out of that confidence then we take up effort. We apply ourselves through the practice, the formal practice of mindfulness and the rest of the Eightfold Path.

And then going into the practice, we find that even though it's difficult at times, there are moments, there are times of great joy. And this is the next factor. The Pali is pāmojja and it's often translated as joy or gladness. It's really, really important that in our practice, in addition to looking at the quality of suffering, we also look at these beautiful factors along the path. The factors in this sutta talk about qualities like joy, rapture, serenity, happiness, liberation.

It's easy to get focused on what's difficult in our life and in our practice. And if we become too focused on that, we kind of turn our mind that way and we overlook the moments of joy. So can we hold ourselves in kind of a middle position where we're open to a moment of joy or a moment of difficulty without a built-in bias. Some people come from an ecstatic tradition of spiritual practice or psychological view of the world that everything should be happy.

They come to a practice like this and think, "No, too much focus on suffering. Suffering is not really that real." And they miss the First Noble Truth. They miss the deep significance of that truth.

Other people may immerse themselves too much in the First and Second Noble Truths and miss the

moments of joy, the times when wholesome qualities are actually coming into their practice all the time. So can we keep our minds in the middle, where we're ready to go to happiness or joy, or we're ready to go to suffering? Either one is within our range.

One teacher said that another word for mindfulness is readiness. Can we sit in that moment ready for anything that's going to present itself, ready for anything that's going to come without preconception?

So in retreat, this can mean tuning into the really simple pleasures of the day—like coming in cold for lunch and having that steaming bowl of chili to eat. Finding that the council house has a fireplace and that somebody's lit the fire on this raw, wintry day, and just being able to sit in front of the fire and feel its warmth and its light. Being able to lie down in our bed at night and feel the body relax and the mind relax. Getting up in the morning and feeling refreshed, feeling rested. Having a warm shower at the start of another chilly day.

Because we're so sensitive through this practice, these pleasures can become really heightened. I've had cups of tea and apples on retreat that have been more delicious than expensive meals in restaurants. Sometimes it can seem we're living like queens and kings even when we're eating very simple things and enjoying very simple activities.

The Buddha pointed to this too. He said, "Bhikkhus, your robes, alms food, hut, and straw seat will seem rich and luxurious to one who is renounced." And this is a beautiful thing to discover—that as we simplify our lives, the things we do enjoy can become even richer.

There's the joy of nature. Even on a day like today, appreciating the quality of the fog, appreciating the way the trees look shrouded in that mist, appreciating the swirling patterns that the fog makes. And even that chilly breeze—the air is so fresh, so clean in this kind of weather.

Nature has sustained me a lot through my practice. I think back to the time I was newly ordained as a monk in Thailand and went up to practice in a little monastery up north near Chiang Mai. It was a monastery set at the bottom of a deep river gorge, with high hills on both sides lined with trees. There were caves up in one of the hills. The river was meandering through the valley, and the monks' huts were on one side of the river, the nuns' huts on the other.

Because I was a Westerner and kind of a rare animal up there, I was actually given the best hut in the whole monastery—the most remote hut that was furthest up the gorge. It was apart from all the others, sitting right next to the river. It was a really beautiful place to practice. I was completely alone.

I did a three-month period of practice there, an intensive retreat just like we're doing here, and didn't have dharma talks in the evenings or interviews because the Ajahn, the teacher, didn't speak English. But he was a very sweet man, and he'd come up to check on me from time to time. I'd look up from my sitting and he'd be peering in through my window. He'd catch my eye and say, "Oh, dee, dee"—that means good. "Oh, good, good." He was really happy I was practicing.

Occasionally he would come up when I was doing walking meditation, and the one instruction he always would give me was to take off my sandals. He'd point to my feet and I got it—he wanted me to walk barefoot. I can't remember why I was always walking with sandals, but I always seemed to be. And he'd go, "Dee, dee, dee maak"—very good. He was really happy that I was practicing.

But I never really got to talk with him. Looking back on that time, I was very motivated in my practice. I was very glad to be there and have this ideal practice setting. We only got one meal a day at eight in the morning, but the food was vegetarian and suited me really well. I had a very rewarding period of practice there. It wasn't easy, but looking back on that time, I see that the thing that really sustained me was the contact with nature.

because I was quite isolated. I actually had a friend at the monastery who was a nun, but I couldn't speak with her because monks and nuns weren't allowed to mingle. They were quite strict about that. So I wasn't supposed to cross that bridge over to the nun side of the monastery. I really didn't have much of a conversation with anybody for that three-month period.

But the river was so wonderful, the hills were so beautiful, the trees way at the top of the hill, the sun as it struck the trees in the morning when it was rising. There was a mango tree just down the path from me and it was mango season, so the aromas of the mangoes were coming in and we'd get those for breakfast in the morning. So even though I look back and see it was quite isolating and a difficult period in that way, the contact with nature really sustained me. And it's one of the things we can always touch on here, one of the beauties we have.

There's the joy of increasing peace. Almost everybody has talked in interviews about touching some deeper place of peace in your practice over the course of the retreat. If you can think back to the start, which seems so long ago, you remember how uncomfortable the body was? Remember how scattered the mind was and how refined you are now by comparison? You've really all come a long way.

So in touching those moments of peace, sometimes it's such a delight, it's such a relief—there's a joy in that. When I think about my own practice, the course of it, somehow I think touching deeper and deeper experiences of peace were a lot of what kept me coming back. I kind of wanted to see where all this peace would lead. What was the potential for the depth of peace that I could find in meditation? Where was that going toward? What was the possibility?

There's the joy of being with the truth. Even when it's difficult to touch something that's really true and deeply true in our lives, it does have a joyful quality. We may not feel it at the time because it may be painful. But if we start to tune into it, if we start to look, there is a very deep kind of satisfaction in touching that.

Somebody was talking in interviews today about an insight of seeing into a very subtle way that the notion of self was being fabricated, was being created and sustained. It had to do with subtle mind states

that created a kind of familiar mood that created the sense of self. These subtle mind states probably weren't all that pleasant. But in being able to see them, there was a great delight in the release of bondage, of thinking that they constituted an enduring sense of I, an enduring self.

So when your insights come, take a look. One yogi in a retreat last year said, "One of the most joyful things here is being able to be with the pain and open to it." Especially when we feel it's kind of a core part of our being, a core issue that we've worked with outside, that we've struggled with. It might be fear, it might be anger, it might be our self-judgment. Being able to touch it really directly gives us the possibility of release, of freedom.

This joy is never very far away. It's always just there if we want to tune into it.

You probably remember a Hindu teacher named Swami Satchidananda. He was quite famous in the early seventies, well throughout the seventies. And there was this great poster of him—I'm sure it was an amalgam, but a picture of him on a surfboard with the ocean waves breaking under him. And the caption was, "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf." And of course, Swami Satchidananda is an older man dressed up in a white robe with long gray hair and long gray flowing beard. The picture of him on a surfboard itself brings a lot of humor.

But his name is actually a teaching. In the Hindu tradition, it's a key pointer to the reality of things. Sat, chit, ananda. Sat means being—you can see it in the Pali word satta. Bodhisattva is an enlightenment being. Sat is being. Chit means mind or consciousness, like our Pali word citta. And ananda means bliss.

Satchitananda then means being, consciousness, bliss. This is the kind of inseparable trinity in Hindu teaching. These things go together to make up every moment. Or you could say these three qualities are present in every moment—being, awareness, and bliss. So at any moment you can tune into that bliss, the joy of creation, the divine play.

And the way I often do it is I look at the quality of light. For me, the quality of light—even just now reflecting off this book cover, the glimmer of it, the radiance of it—reminds me of that delight, that play, that divine quality. So when the mind is relaxed, the amount of joy in just a really ordinary moment can be huge.

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

Joy then intensifies as we become more and more accustomed to it in our practice. It intensifies into the next factor, which is rapture. Rapture is sort of defined as a rapt attention in what we're experiencing, in what we're paying attention to. So rapture really has this quality of wholehearted and full connection with what our experience is. It's very much associated with meditation, very much associated with the practice of mindfulness and also of concentration. The wholeheartedness of attention on our chosen focus is the

quality of rapture.

The Pali term is pīti. This is one of the jhanic factors that is associated with strong concentration. Rapture is a mental factor, an aspect of the mind. But it often expresses itself in bodily energy. So you'll often hear people talk about a trembling, an uprising of energy, a lifting of energy as being manifestations of rapture. So though it's a mental factor, it's one that's often felt in the body. And it often has, even as it gets strong, a very turbulent quality in the body. It can feel almost overwhelming or a lot to handle as it becomes intensified, as it becomes strong. But it is actually the growth of joy or gladness.

Then rapture, as it gets accommodated, mellows out into the next factor, which is called tranquility. The Pali term is passaddhi. And this calms down the turbulence of rapture—sometimes translated as relaxation, calm, ease, or serenity. So this allows the waves of turbulence to settle down into some kind of quietude within our being. And as that bodily settling happens, the mind is also settling.

And that leads to the next factor, which is happiness. The Pali term here is sukha. I really like this word sukha. It reminds me of the root of sugar or sucrose. It has that same ring and maybe they're connected, I don't know. But sukha really first refers to a sweet quality of mind, a pleasant quality of mind. It's another of the jhanic factors that lead to deepening concentration.

Sukha, of course, is really connected with our practice because you could frame the Third Noble Truth in other terms. You know, if the Buddha was growing up in California today, I'm convinced that the First Noble Truth would not be the truth of suffering. I think the First Noble Truth would be something like: "Bhikkhus, I say to you, there are many opportunities for growth in our human existence." So if this is the California First Noble Truth, then I think the Third Noble Truth would not talk about the end of suffering, but the possibility of real happiness.

The Third Noble Truth really is a pointer to happiness. When suffering ends, obviously that is immense joy. I can't even imagine the kind of joy that would be—great happiness. That's really the pointing of the whole practice.

And happiness is considered to be a deeper flowering than joy is. It's been refined and stabilized by intensifying into rapture and then pacifying through tranquility. So it's kind of taking the joy and suffusing it through our being in a relaxed and harmonious way. Joy has a sense of depending on conditions, being a momentary appreciation of the beautiful. Happiness has a sense of being independent of conditions and something that's pervading the mind and the being. It has more of a sense, a flavor of contentment, acceptance, and peacefulness.

In some ways I think the way that the practice leads is not so much to an ecstatic, exuberant happiness, but a kind of happiness of settledness, of coming home. Trungpa Rinpoche used to talk about finding through practice our basic sanity. And when that returns, that is so sweet. It's so dear. You know, those moments when you just feel like: I'm totally back in the present moment. I'm unburdened from the past.

I'm just here. I'm fully inhabiting my body.

Life is okay. If we could live from that place of basic sanity, we could accept anything. We could work with anything. It's the clouds of disturbing thoughts and emotions, the fantasies, the unreality of the thoughts and emotions that make life so difficult. So there's a great happiness in this process of coming home.

Sometimes we distort it or we misunderstand it by trying to make it permanent. And then we tie ourselves up in knots. But happiness can only be found in the moment. The problem is we try to assure it for the rest of our life. And that is impossible. So we feel frustrated. "Oh, well, I could be happy now, but I can't guarantee I'm going to be happy the rest of my life, so I can't be happy now." Nobody can guarantee that happiness for the rest of their lives except a fully awakened one, maybe. So if we lower our aim and just say, "Can I be happy in this moment?" Just take care of this moment and you take care of all time. Much more doable aim.

But it's interesting that practice doesn't stop here. The chain doesn't stop with happiness. In most Western teachings, I think this would be considered to be the end of the road. When you reach happiness, phew, done with the path. But in the Buddhist teaching, we're still walking. There's further to go.

The Buddha actually said two things I never lost track of in all my own years of practice: never to quit my effort and never to settle merely for wholesome states of mind. I find this tremendously inspiring. There have been so many times in my own practice that I would have given everything I had to settle for wholesome states of mind. I would have rolled up the mat, I would have called it the end of the path, I would have been glad to be home. But the Buddha said there's further to go. Not just hanging out with the wholesome, but to continue, to continue toward liberation.

The next factor is the factor of concentration. And it's very interesting that in this sutta the Buddha says that concentration has a proximate cause. And the proximate cause of concentration is happiness. This is fantastic. Because I always assumed the proximate cause of concentration was intense striving. And if I hadn't gotten it yet, I just had to strive more and harder after that breath. And if I could stay really on top of it every moment, then I'd get concentrated. So this is really radical. The proximate cause of concentration is happiness.

When that peacefulness and easy feeling pervades our being, then we can give up the struggle. Then there's the sense that in a really, really deep way we can let go. And in that letting go, the mind can just settle into itself. That's how the unification happens, the mind settling within itself instead of trying to reach outward in this divided way to past and future.

The image that came to me was—I don't know if you remember the old Prell commercials from the 1950s, when the pearl was just gliding down this thick, viscous, green fluid coming to the bottom of the bottle. Just that slow, peaceful glide. That is the mind settling in concentration through happiness. It's great. If you think of it as green, that's okay. But it has about it that kind of effortless quality. You just let gravity

take it. You don't have to do anything at that point. In fact, the less you do at that point, the better. Because the mind knows its own way home. It knows its own way to rest. So you just let it go there.

Then from that place of great settledness and peace and contentment comes the next link, which is knowing and seeing things as they truly are—knowing and seeing things as they truly are. And this essentially means seeing the three characteristics of existence, seeing the truth of impermanence, of dukkha, and of anatta. We see clearly that the world is unstable, that the phenomena of the world can't give us that lasting happiness that we crave. We see that more and more clearly. Whatever is born also dies.

Continue beautifying this talk (part 10/11). Maintain the same tone and style as previous parts.

Whatever comes together falls apart. The Buddha said the world is disintegrating. Everywhere we turn our attention, we see it.

This true understanding leads to the next phase, which is called disenchantment. I like this term because it's actually not a negative term. It means the spell of enchantment is being cut. This promise that the world seems to offer—that its beautiful things are going to give us lasting happiness—is the spell. It's the spell of illusion. It's not quite true.

So at this stage, we cut that spell, we break the spell, we wake up to things as they really are, and we see that we're not going to find it out there. We're also not going to find it within the process of change of our own mind and body. We're not going to find it in changing phenomena.

This is not to depress us. The purpose of the seeing is not to get discouraged. It's to encourage us to let go, to stop grasping at anything, anywhere. And in that letting go, there's the settling into even deeper peace, which is the next link in the chain called dispassion.

The Pali term is virāga, and the literal meaning is "without lust," without craving. So this sense of dispassion is not that we lose our warmth or our caring or our commitment to life or to the path, but it means that we give up the craving that seeks to find its happiness in what can't give it.

There are actually many, many terms in the Dharma that refer to the wholesome qualities that in the West we might call passion. People often hear this term dispassion and say, "Do you mean I'm supposed to become really cold and aloof and all my feelings cut off and no more warmth? Am I supposed to become as glossy as a Buddha statue?" Not at all.

There are many, many terms that talk about this quality of warmth. In the Buddhist jargon, passion is usually used to refer to this force of greed, desire, lust that's unhelpful. So that's just kind of a vocabulary adjustment that I hope you can make as you listen to this term dispassion.

But there is the emphasis on ardor. Sāriputta said one cannot attain enlightenment without ardor, this inner fire. In the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the meditator practices ardently to be aware. There's the quality of

zeal, which is one of the bases of power. There's the quality of vīrya, which is often translated as courage, energy or effort—delighting in what's wholesome.

So virāga is actually the quality of abandonment of greed, aversion and delusion. And as such, it's synonymous with nibbāna. It means the real letting go of the distorting passions of mind, the things that lead us astray. So it stands for coming in touch with nibbāna, with the deathless, with the ultimate.

And out of that comes the next link, which is liberation—vimutti—often described as the unshakable deliverance of mind. For one who has attained to this level, the mind is no longer capable of being shaken by any occurrence.

And that is what leads to the final link: knowing the destruction of the taints. One realizes at this stage of full liberation that all the underlying tendencies to suffering, to ignorance, to desire have been ended. So after that moment of liberation, one realizes, "Lived is the spiritual life, done is what had to be done. The taints are destroyed."

So this is the process of transcendental dependent origination.

When I first heard this whole scheme, I went to my teacher and said, "How long is it going to take? When's it going to happen for me?" And my teacher, of course, said, "You know, there's no way to tell. You just keep walking. And if you keep walking, you have to get there. There's no alternative. If you keep on this path, it only leads in one direction. There's no other way. But we don't know how long it will take. It develops according to our own individual natures."

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 kamma and pāramīs. That doesn't mean 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. It knows its own pace.

I'll close with this dialogue from the Buddha. Continuing this image that Silvia used in last night's talk of crossing the stream as a symbol for coming to freedom, somebody once asked the Buddha, "How did you cross the flood?" Which is basically another way of saying, "How did you become liberated?"

The Buddha replied, "I crossed the flood by not tarrying and not hurrying. When I hurried, I sank. And when I tarried, I was swept away. I crossed the flood by not tarrying and not hurrying."

This perfectly captures the middle way of practice—neither forcing nor being passive, neither rushing ahead nor holding back. The path unfolds naturally when we engage with it skillfully, with patience and persistence balanced in perfect harmony.

Let's sit for a minute in the silence of this teaching.

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