

Craving—it’s like if I had two magnets here and they’re drawn towards each other. This is the object and this is the mind being drawn towards it, so it’s like the whole towards it. *Upadana* is the next word up and it gets translated as attachment, grasping, clinging. It’s the solidification of that dynamic of craving. You solidify. I’m being drawn towards someone to fall in love with; I begin to tighten. My mind becomes inflexible, and I can no longer consider other options. It’s tightening around that obsession. It’s the tightening of the mind, the finding of the mind. So creating is one thing, clinging is another. And minds that begin to cling are hard to investigate, because it takes so much more of the mind and begins to bind it into a strategy that’s coming up with the craving.

So my mouth is dry, I want water. Because it’s pleasant, I really kind of want the water. And at some point somebody’s going to ask me a question and it’s like, “not now, I’ve got to find water because I can’t stand this taste.” So as the mind becomes un-flexible and caught and we go into *upadana*—and, again, that has many ways that *upadana* expresses itself. But it’s through only those we are attached to things being a certain way. But really grasping, really pursuing and we’re lost on a pursuit of something. We can’t even imagine there’s another strategy to happiness; it will only come when I get that or when I get away from that. And the mind narrows in what it feels is possible and becomes more further locked on to what it’s chasing.

Once the mind begins to stiffen in its attachment or grasping, it begins to birth what I’m going to call an “I” or “me strategy.” And this can happen so fast that you can’t even parse them apart. But the proliferation of romantic fantasy there’s the craving, there’s the stiffening of like I must have this. But even as I say I must have this, the “I” comes into it. So the *upadana* is just the mind stiffening up in relationship to what it wants. But then so quickly in order to solve that we start making an “I story,” an “I plan,” a “me plan” around my pleasure, around my strategies. I have to get away from this. I have to get towards that. I’ll only be happy in this. I’ll only be happy in that. And so the mind begins to produce an urge to become. It begins to conceive of how it can get its happiness, how it can get its pleasure or get way from its pain. And it begins to conceive of—and then work towards—becoming something else, something other than what’s happening.

Or even if I like what’s happening, I’m afraid it won’t last. I begin to hold on to it and then I’m like, “how can I keep this?” That motion of *bhava*, of becoming,

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leads to birth. And it can be an actual birth of a whole new life because *bhava* can be so strong. Craving, *upadana*, craving attachment and becoming can be so strong but that's what tells a whole new life. Or it can be more in this life that I really want something, so I imagine myself doing it and then I actually go out and do it. I want this and then I'm in the car driving for it. I can't go through the night without chocolate, yeah, that's true. There's a store, there's me in the car, that's becoming energy. And then I've got the key in my hand and I put it in and I'm actually taking the birth as the one driving in the car to the store, because I can't make it through the night without chocolate or whatever my obsession is.

There's a birthing moment where you actually begin to manifest what you had urges for—that's more of a psychological model of taking birth into a new identity. And that identity—eventually because of the permanence—has to change. It has to evolve. And usually that evolution means that it eventually has to pass away, whatever it is that you were striving for and trying to make permanent, make last, eventually goes through an aging process and a dying process—either as an actual aging process and dying process in the large scale or in the small scale. It's the self I tried to establish that fell apart and passed away.

Yeah, self-improvement means that I can play this selfing game and keep changing out the pieces, until I finally get to take birth as the person I've always wanted to be. And then that's a winning strategy. Self-improvement means there is a self out there I'm dying to become. And I can see it. I can want it. I can work on it. And now I am that self. I've finally done it, planted my flag, put up the badge, put up my feet. I am that self. I'm great. Oh my God, I'm aging. Wait, wait, this whole thing is horrible. I can't stop it. Wait, wait, now, it's lost.

Either it's lost long term because life ends, or that capacity ends because the conditions change underneath it. So these are the twelve links and getting a sense of how one set the conditions that not only does the next one arrive out of, but is influenced by, how it's arising. If I didn't sleep well last night, I would arise today and my body wouldn't feel good. So sleep preceded waking, but it also influenced the quality of the awakening. Each of these twelve links is the ground out of which the next one arises, but it heavily influenced the quality of that ground. Does that make sense? Good. Good. So we did the forward way.

In understanding dependent origination you'll see the Buddha go through the forward way, and then he goes through the backward way or the reverse order. And we keep going up and down them until you get a more intuitive sense of how

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they work. And then while you’re practicing—if you’re not too distracted—you then begin to see these twelve links begin influencing each other. You can see your mind get a little bored. Then the *vedana* is not as enthralling. Then the idea arises about the lunch he brought and the coffee you want to drink with it. That’s exciting. And then you begin to play on it. And then you look at the lunch—“I want to know what time it is. No, I don’t have to. Yeah, I do.” It’s not going to make any difference. So if I’m looking, “oh, wow, we’re getting closer.” And there’s a whole eyeing strategy around that that’s birthed out of the notion but, again, it comes down to managing your *vedana*. So, there’s the forward order in dependent origination, and there’s the reverse order. This is how the Buddha describes it: the experience of aging and dying, what does that grow out of? What’s a fundamental prerequisite for aging and dying?

**Audience member:** Birth.

**Tempel Smith:** Being born. So it’s many things and people are trying to fight the aging process. They’re hoping they can stop the aging process and the dying process. But the Buddha said, “preceding aging and dying, comes birth.” Birth does not arise out of nowhere. It arises very specifically on conditions coming together that initiate birth. And all of the processes coming together are the processes of *bhava*, processes of becoming. For the Buddha in this investigation, it’s the urge to become—it’s the urge to take birth that precedes birth.

So most of us feel kind of passive about that in the Western perspective. There’s a perception we went from one little cell to many cells. We were born and then found ourselves kind of haphazardly alive and making the best of it. But preceding conception, in this model, is an urge to take birth. You may also find yourself in the psychological identity of, “I am my parent’s son.” But there was some point where if that entity was very important to me, I’m investing in it. I was investing in the self. By the time it becomes well formed and solid and rigid, preceding that had to be a strong urge to produce that type of self.

This one takes investigation before it ends up being a belief—either an investigation of how you go from one life to the next, or the investigation of preceding identities that you’ve tried to conquer that. The “I am”; the security I draw from the “I am” and that grows out of an urge to have a type of security, to become that type of person. Let me show a few more of these links and I’ll turn through them again, and you can see them forward and backward. The urge to become—preceding that and call it and influencing it—is the type of grasping and

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attachment, stiffening up of the mind, that’s preceded by and grows out of craving; that’s preceded and grows out of *vedana*, that’s preceded and grows out of contact.

So we went through the forward order. And the Buddha, one time, just investigated what precedes this? And if I could stop what precedes it, could I stop what arises out of it? And that was one of the—that was his investigation on dependent origination. So here’s an example: two-and-a-half years ago I moved from one house in Oakland to another house out by Berkeley. Before I moved into this house, I had no relationship to it. And then I saw the ad and walked around it and liked it and began to kind of like it. But I wasn’t sure we were going to get it, so I wasn’t that attached to it. It turned out we liked the landlord, he liked us, we moved in. And then I changed my driver’s license and my checks and my Facebook status. And it started growing and I unpacked my boxes. Now, if the house had burned down one month into it, it would have been troubling but I wouldn’t have invested so much in my relationship to the house.

But over time—and I’m good at this, I’m watching for this. I’ve been burned so many times by dependent origination that I’m watching for this stuff. I’m scanning for it. What I didn’t notice is that in loving the house, in loving being there, and trying to be—cleaning it, I enjoy it. I’m vested in the address that is on my checks, and everybody knows where I live. And so all of that work begins to accrue. I like it. I want to live here. This is my home. Me and this house, we work well together—like this is good living. And I try not to be attached. I know that’s a set up. But still I came in, and then we got a call from our landlord—who was actually anxious about pulling the house and wanting to sell it—and some people were going to come in and look at it. And we had to clean the house up and be out of there at a certain day and people walking through like oh my god, like oh my god. I don’t get to live in this house. That doesn’t work.

So I watch my mind go into a panic around it and get disturbed by it. And I tried my best low-grade wisdom, like all of the “I’m not attached.” But it’s like: If you’re not attached, then why does your mind keep cycling back to it and cycling back to it and strategizing? Like, how do I get to live here? And I learn and really at some point—and this is my investigation—I am suffering anxiety about losing this house. When did I take birth in this house? When did me and this house fuse?

Oh, that’s right: as I let myself want it and cling to it, I began to stiffen my relationship to it. It was so pleasant, I didn’t mind that. It was actually kind of

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nice and snug to wrap the house around me. I finally found a house I really like. And so that feels good in the moment, but it’s a set of conditions. And when those conditions shift, if I can’t shift with them I’ll suffer pain and loss. So the setup it was hidden in: the pleasure of it, the attachment, the identification, people coming to visit, “I love the house you’re in, wow.” It’s like, “well thank you very much. Yeah, I did choose wisely and this house does say a lot about me.”

I thought it was funny, having those thoughts, but they actually started to kind of creep into my mind more so that that house is not a permanent refuge. But I was relating to it as if it was. That’s one of the things I was going to rely on. And in that I was stiffening up, in that I can’t be without the whole. So the opposite isn’t better: “well, like screw that house and I’ll never live in a house. I hate this house.” I could try the opposite. That’s not it either. How can you be intimate with the house when you know it’s impermanent? And still clean it and love it and appreciate every day you’re there, without it fusing into an attachment, stiffening into an identity?

My Tempel strategy—for his happiness—stiffened and got caught up in the house. All I had to do was break that up—go back into an intimate and dynamic relationship. “Hey, this house and me, we’re not permanently fused.” Okay. I’m going to breathe here and talk to the landlord and say I love this house. And she’s like, “Well, if you want to live there that’s great. I was afraid you didn’t like it. If you want to stay there we love having you there”—“Oh my God, I get to live here, great.” So it turned out, in that situation, I was willing to move out because it might have happened. But I didn’t have to.

But it showed me how I had come to take birth and stiffen up in that relationship—that my self-identity had gotten wrapped up in the house. And although I had to break that up, I still get to live in the house. I still get to enjoy it. I don’t identify myself and the house. It’s not a permanent situation. I don’t get to kind of just take it for granted. And that actually helps me appreciate it every day, because it’s not taken for granted. Digging back down again, through this list, we had contact because of the six sense-door process. The six sense-door process is active because there’s this underlying capacity of cognition. Underlying capacity of cognition arises out of awareness or consciousness. Consciousness, the capacity for consciousness, rises out of *sankhara*—field of all elemental formations, mental activity.

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And the ones that are in this particular chain because they’ve led to aging and dying. They’ve led the clinging and craving following this down, down, down, we find *avidya*. And *avidya* is the root cause—you don’t have to—*avidya* begets *avidya*. Not-understanding perpetuates itself. Being lost in dependent origination, keeps you lost in dependent origination. Not seeing depending origination is why we can’t see dependent origination. So *avidya* begets itself.

**Audience member:** Is *avidya* something that we begin to sort of have this and become comfortable with it? <inaudible>

**Tempel Smith:** Yeah, *avidya* is sort of like either you’re working hard to propel your own ignorance, and you really work hard to misunderstand things; or you’re trying your best but you don’t know the hidden assumptions you have that are wrong. And so a child growing up into a wise adult will love, around sunset, to walk out and see the colors of the sky and see the sun setting below the horizon. The *avidya* there is that you, just in common sense, you just cannot imagine. It wouldn’t even occur to you that you’re on a massive ball orbiting an even more massive ball—more massive ball held by this invisible force of gravity. And you’re not actually watching the sun move through the sky, you’re watching the earth rotate. So who would think of that? Who would—if the sun is moving against the trees, against the buildings so that’s the moving object and you look around this thing isn’t moving. So it wouldn’t even occur to you, oh, that’s the *avidya*.

Common sense *avidya* is just you do look around but you have the wrong fundamental view. If you can see the world as it’s either slowly changing or rapidly changing, you have destroyed one type of *avidya*. But in our common sense, you look at the bell, you look away, you look at the bell. You know, from this level of intimacy, it seems like the same bell. So I get to say permanent. It’s permanent. And I knew there would be a bell here because last time there was a bell here and it was made of metal, so it wasn’t going to break like a glass bell or something. So I counted on it being and lo and behold, there’s a bell here. It’s about the same bell when I came last time. So this bell is actually proving to me permanence. This bell, if I’m not very intimate with it, reinforces my sense of permanence.

Every time I go home, my house reinforces my sense of permanence. Every time I go to my car it reinforces my sense of permanence. So all day long we’re reinforcing this felt sense of permanence, because I’m not that intimate with my

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world. I’m intimate with my car. Every time I go to it, it does have a new scratch. And if I was that intimate with it, my car would prove to me *anitya*. It would prove to me impermanence. When you’re intimate with your world, very intimate with your world and you know to look for it—not look away from it—your world proves to you impermanence. But we don’t like it so we don’t look there, and that’s the active ignorance. Where we’re willing to look, but the habit of thinking things are permanent is just so strong that we’re not really working at it. Like I love the fact that my parents are alive. It’s great news that every day they’re alive, that’s great. And they’re changing slowly enough that I’ve grown this sense of they’ve always been here. It’s like the sky, the moon and the sun; they’ve always been here. So it’s always troubling when people we love pass away because you have to work so hard to be so intimate with them, that you would have seen them changing all of the time, that you would never have gotten confused if they were permanent or not.

What part of your mind understands these sounds as English? There’s some part of your mind. It’s there, but how do you touch it? This is just vibration. And yet to you and me and everybody in the room, it’s words. Some part of your mind is interpreting vibration into English. Some part of your mind is interpreting sights and sounds and smells and tastes, interpreting the world through a filter of permanence, through a filter of “things are lasting.” And then we get disoriented when it doesn’t actually play out that way. So bringing our intimacy into the world could actually teach us, all of the time, that it’s impermanent. And that’s the role of vipassana; the role of mindfulness in vipassana. Mindfulness gets us intimate. And vipassana begins to build that willingness and then that insight to, like, everything I’m intimate with is constant change. And you steep in that. You let yourself steep in that. And it slowly begins to spread out through your worldview and it gets to touch places that are anxiety provoking, like the fact that my parents are *anitya*.

So my mind glances off that. But then I spend time with it, like the sound is *anitya*. This body is *anitya*. These talks are *anitya*. It’s all *anitya*. It’s true for me. It’s true for you. And then, all of a sudden, it’s global. Wow, it’s all impermanent. It always has been. That’s the nature of things. Oh, the earth goes around sun. That’s not a sunset; it’s an earth rotation. Oh, oh, oh. And so that’s what we’re trying to practice, is so much intimacy that our paradigm shifts, our understanding shifts towards reality. I think I have a good relationship with reality except that it’s relying on things being permanent, so when I walk out my car’s been backed into—or I saw my parents getting older and I watch myself get older, my landlord

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wants to sell my house—that’s troubling. But if I had been aware of  
impermanence and conditionality all along, that’s just how the universe works.