

Because of our activity with the world—I’m talking about making decisions—you actually have to think and plan and respond. That sets up a process where our minds develop a pattern of being engaged and somewhat active, maybe agitated by how we navigate our world. So first we invite our bodies and our minds into greater calm so we’re not in an agitated state. You then open up intimacy so it’s not just a calm being checked out, but a calm combined with being able to actually see what’s happening in your mind moment by moment.

The mind’s experience of hearing, the mind’s experience of the body—to be embodied, to actually feel this body—has intimacy. And, often, that’s how I talk about mindfulness: mindfulness is a greater capacity to be intimate with what’s actually happening. This model works for me, again, from my physics background. There used to be mathematicians that tried to figure out the movement of the planets. And they would watch them, and then sit down and try to figure out how they’re moving through the sky. But it’s actually when they developed the telescope that they could look at the planets and become much more intimate by what—with who they actually were—what they actually were. Who they actually were?

You could see craters on the moon. You could see the phases of Venus, like the moon. And it went through phases, changes like the moon did. You could see moons around Jupiter. And it changed our conception of the solar system through greater intimacy with it, through investigation. Not just intellectual inquiry, but actually coming to know our solar system better we change our fundamental view of it. And that’s what we’re out to do with this practice is to become so intimate that the truth reveals itself and then it’s not a belief system. It’s not importing a belief system, and then feeling comforted by a belief system. It’s an understanding that arises from intimacy with how things actually are. Through watching things arise in the past, we develop intimacy with *anicca*—with impermanence. Impermanence is its own thing: that things come and go. That’s impermanence. That’s *anicca*.

The process of coming and going, that is what we call conditionality is that coming and going. Things arise out of previous conditions or supportive conditions. So because this room is a little cool—at being kind of, this time of the year—there’s coolness on my skin. The coolness isn’t permanent, but that it’s cool on my skin is out of the set of conditions that I am in. So conditionality and

impermanence are two insights that we can develop through vipassana, through studying our experience. We don't have experiences that have no relationship to the conditions that we find ourselves in. All of our experiences are rising out of the conditions, and they arise and they don't stay. That's impermanence. Is this coming across, the difference between conditionality and impermanence? And because each of these conditions also rests on conditions and they rest on conditions and they're all impermanent, it creates a very impermanent field because it's built of impermanent objects all conditioning each other. So nothing is stable.

The temperature—the sun comes out, the room will heat up. That will change the temperature of my skin. If I interact with you more, biorhythms, our mind will wake up. I'll get tired; I'll eat lunch; I'll get tired. And then I'll wake up again and have tea. So it's all of these conditions influencing each other and none of it gets to be static. It's not like this bell gets to be static and influence us all. This bell is also arising out of conditions. It's metal, so it's conditions are supported by the fact that it's fairly rigorous. But eventually it will pass away because that's the law of impermanence. So this is one thing we begin to see in dharma: this relationship between impermanence and conditionality.

When taken all the way through, we find that there's nothing that we've taken for ourselves that is not a freshly arising experience and arising out of the conditions we find ourselves in. So that's what we're going to get into when we get into these twelve links. For many people, the first outline of his teaching were the four noble truths. The four noble truths are also a law of cause and effect—the simplified version of dependent origination, or dependent origination in its more intricate version of the four noble truths. They're the same thing, just one is in much bigger detail which as we can see here. But this is already a law of cause and effect. This is already dependently arising forces in these four truths.

That's the thrust of the dependent origination, is: how do we eradicate craving? First, how do we see all of these links? And then how do we interfere with them and how do we disrupt them and end them, so that we don't have the suffering that comes out of them. Not in this particular list, but drawn out elsewhere in many of the discourses is that the fundamental cause of craving is ignorance or not seeing. The word is *avidya*. And so, because, let's say I really was obsessing about this bell; if I felt this bell lasted forever, it would make sense to crave it because—when I got it—I would be happy forever. You know, my happiness

with the bell, the bell lasts forever therefore clinging to it is kind of a happiness strategy.

Because the bell won't last forever, I'll eventually lose contact with it. So all of that strategy to bind myself to it—to grab on to it—ends up being a set up for suffering. So the not understanding of *avidya* is the not understanding impermanence—thinking things are permanent as one of the reasons we cling and we grasp and we crave; thinking that the happiness of falling in love might be a permanent state. We don't even think to question it. So it's like, oh my God, it's been day one, day two, day three I found this person. Two or three weeks into it, that's wonderful. I've arrived. I have arrived at something I can always draw happiness from. I've now tested it for three weeks. I've tested it for two months and it's like no one has made me this happy for two months. Oh, six months we're happy. This is great—so much compatibility. I can see the problems only in other relationships. I've transcended that, because now I've just only received, now happiness over six months.

This is a permanent state and not, and we invest in it as that's what we're going to draw happiness from. And that stiffening up in your investment—“that's going to make me happy”—sets you up for pain and loss and suffering, as conditions shift and change and you can't adapt with them. So the strategy of clinging and craving for your happiness—and locking on—is always the set up for frustration and loss, but we keep marching on. So, as I said earlier, dependent origination is two parts and really equal parts—the conditionality, things arise out of conditions. Nothing arises on its own; it arises out of preceding and supportive conditions.

The second part of dependent origination are these twelve links. And I'll show you the list, by the way, it just feels like a lot information to a lot of people. So be prepared for that response, if you have that response. So I'm saying these twelve links is how they relate to each other, is the second half of dependent origination. So these are the twelve links. If you see down at the bottom we have this pali word *avidya*. And I've translated it as “not understanding.” It often is translated as “ignorance,” but I found “not understanding” to be a little bit more useful on the translation—and we'll get into that. The next link-up is a pali word *sankhara* which has many translations mental formations, mental volitions. *Sankhara* is the activity of our mind that releases energy towards action. So *sankhara*'s form our next experience. So anger can form a next experience. Love can form a next experience. It's mental formations. It's what is forming our next experience.

Audience member: What’s the root of the word *sankhara*?

Tempel Smith: *Sankhara*, *san* means together and *khara* means construct—so constructing together or bringing something together. The imagery, often with *sankhara* in some of the paintings, is of a potter and a wheel intentionally making the bowl a certain shape. So let’s say anger arises in your mind, and it begins to form you and to form your actions. So anger that doesn’t lead to any type of action is just sort of you being kind of angry. But the anger that begins to surge and become volitional, it leads to action. It’s not the action itself, but it’s the heart and mind that are moving towards action. That’s *sankhara*.

Audience member: <inaudible>.

Tempel Smith: It often is because anger often carries with it so much charge that, even just having it, it’s an active process that usually you’re angry at somebody and it’s a very active process. So it’s forming actions. It’s the mind and heart—the energy of the mind and the heart—towards some action. And it can be the way we think, the way we speak and the way our bodies move—are moved by the *sankharas*. They tend also to be trends or habits or tendencies. So these are volitional tendencies, is another translation. Again the addiction, yes, addiction patterns would be *sankharas* but so are patterns of love. If you have a pattern of generosity that guides your action, that’s a *sankhara* in a way. So it’s sort of the guiding force behind action. And the fact that it’s a pattern—the fact that it’s sort of well worn—that it itself is constructed. Through a lot of use, we construct habits of anger. We construct habits of kindness. We construct patterns of patience.

Audience member: Is judgment one of them?

Tempel Smith: Judgment is—if you feel your mind actively judging and you start building a case against somebody—that’s the *sankhara* of judgment. If you then start speaking, that’s the *sankhara* of speech that is the unleashing that negativity into speech. The action is speech, but *sankhara* is you’re constructing this speech out of anger.

Audience member: Prejudices.

Tempel Smith: And prejudice can be like that. So there are a negative quality of heart and mind that are *sankharas*. Plus beautiful qualities of heart and mind are also *sankharas*. In terms of dependent origination when you have not seeing, *avidya*, a not understanding as a root, most likely the *sankharas* growing out of that are conditioned by that not seeing, which means that they tend towards pre-hatred and delusion. Some form of it, through not really seeing, but more likely to relate to the world with either a light ignorance or a profound ignorance. And that ends up turning into aggression or rage or greed, a greedy mind.

In all seriousness and in complete levity, the entirety of the Buddhist path is to get rid of the *a* in front of *avidya* [laughs]. If you can remove the *a* in front of *avidya*, either capitalize then make it small *a*, then make it *a*-dash and then turn the font gray. If you can actually keep reducing the *a*, dependent origination gets weaker and weaker and weaker, the smaller that *a*. And it gets more and more powerful and entrenched, but more powerful than *a*. We can almost walk home at this point [laughs].

Fundamentally, it's not until that *a* is gone that we are free from—we are fundamentally free of dependent origination. Buddha and arhats do not have an *a* in front of their *vidya*. And therefore everything conditioned down the stream does not contain the capacity for suffering. That's fundamentally what this is all aiming towards: this getting rid of that *a*. Instead of getting an *a* on the path, you are now getting rid of the *a*. So not-understanding influences our *sankharas*. *Sankharas* shape our consciousness and there are a lot of spiritual teachings that teach a lot about consciousness, and they can take on large forms of God-consciousness or Jesus-consciousness or unity consciousness of the entire—here *vijnana* just means that knowing can happen. It's not as a very profound consciousness. It's just knowing can happen. So how we know something just to be aware of my voice or just to be influenced by your *sankharas*.

If your *sankharas* are angry, it will affect how you're conscious of what I'm saying. If your *sankharas* are peaceful, it will affect your *sankharas* of higher conscious. Not how you cogitate and think about, but just how do you receive it? If I'm impatient and you ask me for a question I don't have the room for an engagement with you. I can't really know you. My knowing is very shallow. My *sankharas* are very agitated and unproductive. Whereas if my *sankharas* are actually benevolent and patient and caring, then there's a big field of knowing that's available. So *sankharas* set the conditions for consciousness. And, again, consciousness might not be the right word.

Audience member: Awareness?

Tempel Smith: It could be awareness here. Really, it's almost that simple: how we are aware—just the act of awareness itself that my voice is landing somewhere. It's landing on awareness. Even awareness sometimes has taken on very large spiritual ideation. Consciousness—how we are conscious, the flavor of our consciousness at the moment—influences the arising of *namarupa*. And *namarupa* is the process of cognition. It's how we take in an experience, perceive it and respond to it. It's really the cogitation of the mind is *namarupa*. It's influenced by what's preceding it. Consciousness is a part of *namarupa* but in this particular chain of events, how we are taking on information has a big influence on how we cognize it and how we work it and respond to it. That's the role of—that's the activity of *namarupa*.

It's really cognition and response. How we are cognizing and responding to what's actually going on, the machinations of our mind, influence how we've taken data through the six sense doors—the five senses that we're aware of and then the mind is a sense door. So, again, how I'm cogitating in my mind will influence my relationship to what I experience in my six sense doors. To say this to an audience that hasn't meditated before—this is usually where people start to dim out, because I'm bifurcating things that people don't have a lot of direct experience to and holding information that's not that intuitive; and so people begin to kind of buzz out here, but because you all have some experience, I think of you being more present than most people are at this point. So congratulations.

How we are relating to our six sense doors, influences the type of contact we have. And so the contact I'm going to have with my ear, the hearing depends on how I relate into that sense door. If I'm relating to my body sense door with a lot of dedication and I develop that capacity, then when I contact with my body I'll feel a lot. If I have been numb to my body through years of not really giving it a priority, when I go to feel contact with the body very little comes through, mainly just pain and kind of neutrality. So how our six sense doors are functioning is the conditions out of which arise the quality of contact we're having. All contact produces something on the scale of pleasure or pain: to give you very painful, mildly painful, neutral, slightly pleasant, very pleasant. All contact, it's just aware how our systems are.

We have pain receptors that you can't meditate your way out of it; and we have pleasure receptors. Our pleasure processing in our mind is hardwired into our nervous system, so that all experiences come with this tone, some tone. It's not an evaluation like, “oh that was pleasant, or I didn't like that so much.” It's right in the experience. You can feel this is painful; this is unpleasant; this is slightly present; or this is very pleasant. It's right in the flow of experience, as are all of these links. This is not the intellectual. We've got to hold it intellectually but it has to come down into how we're actually experiencing the flow of our present intimacy with our world is really where this guides us down into. That aspect of pleasure—neutrality or pain—that scale sets the conditions, combined with the original *avidya* and what is downstream of that pleasure-pain; it sets the conditions for if we crave and how hard we crave.

So you can have pain and not crave its absence. You can have pleasure and not be attached to it. You can have neutrality, and it doesn't lead you to wishing things were different. That's possible. Or you can have each of the three that lead to a lot of craving and with pain, and often have people wishing things were different. Pleasure often leads people to wishing they had more of it, unconsciously being drawn to fantasies about “how do I get more of that because that was clearly pleasant.” Neutrality often bores a restless mind. So the craving comes up for something other than this because it's just too darn neutral. So this one factor of a pleasant quality—and the unpleasant quality and the neutral quality—of our own experience, is the ground out of which our craving arises. It's heavily conditioned by and arises out of that.

If you're having craving for something and if you can be conscious within the craving, you can see that you're actually obsessed about the pleasantness. When I was in high school and college, the fun <inaudible> really magnetically locked on <inaudible> like me or didn't like me. It was all about them and it was all about the story, and how did I make this happen and blah, blah, blah. I had this huge complicated drama, but really I just wanted to taste that pleasantness, again. It's so pleasant when they smile and it's so unpleasant when they don't smile. And my fantasy is so pleasant, I'm actually wrestling a lot with this quality of pleasure and pain. But I'm completely lost in the drama around it. So craving, for me you're chasing and managing your pleasure and craving.

And, again, I learned this when I was in high school. I took a world religion class and someone put this up on the board: craving for pleasure, yeah, maybe, maybe not. But I have a lot of experience to come down into the flow of my mind stream

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and seeing. While I’m obsessed with something and really wanting it, what am I really chasing?

If I really tease it apart there’s very little I’d be chasing—worth chasing—except this wanting of that pleasantness again or really trying to avoid the unpleasantness. I still have a lot of fear about public speaking. As soon as I sit in front of you guys, it’s not so bad. But the fear of it reminds me of back in high school, when I had to read aloud in class and I said a word wrong and people started laughing—the embarrassment. So that’s all complicated, but what I’m really not wanting is just a taste of the unpleasantness. And I can bear that it’s unpleasant. I can usually bear the experience. You guys not liking me, you know, whatever, but if I can bear the fact that it’s unpleasant. I can bear the experience. Being able to bear the *vidyana* and that right relationship to *vidyana*, determines whether you’re going spill forward in craving something else. Or be able to meet your experience as it is and then respond as you are, but not because you can’t handle the *vidyana* of the experience as it is.