

Truth Week 4: more on 'Dharma truth' from David

An essential ingredient that will supercharge our practice, our liberation, is *love for the dharma, love for truth*. Who wouldn't love such a good friend (to say the least) who protects us from all the heartaches of our harmful deceptions, who gives us medicine that relieves all of our ills, who is our constant guardian and refuge.

The best known Buddhist teaching on "truth" is perhaps The Four Noble Truths: the truth of suffering, its cause in craving and clinging, the potential for its cessation and the path leading to its cessation.

As Gil explains, *"The Four Noble Truths are not meant to be truths in the sense of a creed that a Buddhist must believe. They are pragmatic truths, much like how it is true that if you cut yourself deeply with a knife, you will hurt and if you keep the wound clean, you promote its healing. The Four Noble Truths is the Buddha's way of saying that, if you cling or grasp to anything, you will suffer; if you let go of that clinging, that suffering will end. The Four Noble Truths have no value in the abstract. They are verified through direct experience, by discovering how to be directly honest about our suffering and its causes."* You may read his whole (short) essay on the Parami of Truth here: <https://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/books-articles/the-perfection-of-truth/>.

The Four Noble Truths tell us that all of our troubles are caused by craving and clinging. The Buddha said, *"A person who has heard that nothing is worth clinging to, that person directly knows everything. Having directly known everything, one fully understands everything. Having fully understood everything, whatever feeling one feels, the person observing the impermanence of these feelings, observes them fading away, observes their cessation, and then observes the relinquishment of the drive to hold onto them. Observing like this, a person does not cling to anything in the world. When one does not cling one is not agitated. When one is not agitated, one personally attains Nibbana."*

Ah, if it were only that easy. The **Eightfold Path** provides us with step by step direction to a life based on relinquishment of clinging. The second step of the Eightfold Path, is to be kind in our thinking, to be loving, to have a mind of non harming, and to relinquish selfish concerns. Ajahn Chah said that we may not be able to realize no self, but everyone knows what it is to be not selfish. He follows this by saying if we let go a little of this selfishness, we will have a little peace, if we let go a lot, a lot of peace. If we let go of it completely, we will have complete peace.

Dipa Ma, a great Indian Buddhist teacher, was asked whether it is better to practice mindfulness or loving kindness. She answered, *"From my experience there is no difference. Love and awareness are one. When you are fully loving aren't you also mindful? When you are fully mindful, is this not also the essence of love?"*

Another lesser known list of Truths found in the suttas are the Four Brahmin Truths. The first truth here is the truth of non-harming, the truth of kindness. *“All living beings should not be harmed...One practices simply out of compassion for all beings.”* Out of the four, this is the only positive truth he states that tells us what is true---how we should think, be, and do if we are to be in alignment with truth. The rest of this discourse tells us all about what is not true, what is deceptive, and the nature of the delusions that keep occurring in our minds that cause us stress, suffering and pain.

The second of these truths is that sensual pleasures are fleeting, impermanent and not satisfactory. The poet W. H. Auden wryly said that vacations are an expensive inconvenience. :) There is so much stress in the effort, the planning, the expectation of getting what we want, that when we get it there is often a letdown. Buyer's remorse. I am really not happier with this than I was without it.

The third is about “becoming” or taking on identities. We receive the praise we want, and we are on top of the stack. We think we are wonderful, and with that thought we immediately fear it will slip away. The same is true of momentary successes, gains, and sensual pleasures. Failure, loss, discomfort and neutral experiences are always waiting in the wings of success, gain, and pleasure. We are so fragile when we attach to identities and sensual pleasures. We are blamed and then we are at the bottom of the stack, feeling despair, anxiety, and other painful feelings. We are in between and we suffer from the stressful wanting of praise, reputation, success, sensual, pleasures, and belonging, and fear not getting them. There is no resting place when placing our value in identities and sensual pleasures.

The fourth is about letting go of conceiving of oneself in terms of possessing.

In the refrain of this discourse the Buddha warns us about the suffering involved in adopting any and all deceptive ideas of me, myself and mine, even conceiving of ourselves as special “spiritual” beings because of our practice.

My first teacher, Zentatsu, would often say, **“Comparisons are odious.”** How much human pain and suffering is created every day by comparing oneself to the other. There is so much oppression involved with identities, who we think we are, who we want to be, what do others think of us, hiding, defending, asserting. Comparisons to others automatically set up barriers which prevent the relaxed flow of openness of heart that is essential to freedom. Even the thought, “We are equal,” is a lot of work, installing the stress of a conception of me and you. Why bother with that? In the mind of awareness, in the open flow of the heart, there needs to be no thought of me, myself and mine, of how I measure up to you and you to me. That is so much hard work. This is our easeful practice---to feel the truth of kindness and to release the separation of deceptive dualistic conceptions. Even if you can't do it, to make the gesture is the right direction and feels better than to be intransigently stuck in the comparison.

The Buddha tells us in this refrain, *“One does not misconceive I am better, I am equal, and I am worse than others.”* What a relief to let go of concern about any and all self identity. We can

simply relax and be what we essentially are, kind awareness. We can relax and be the Eightfold Path. And yet the Buddha warns us of the danger of identifying even with these spiritual qualities. Anger arises, fear arises, jealousy, vengefulness, shame, conflict, lust. These are true too. Where is our spiritual identity then?

When the mind quiets in meditation, we see the ever changing stream of sensations, energies, thoughts and feelings. It is a great and healing insight to see the impermanence of things. Where is this spiritual being, or any identity? If we are holding onto an identity of ourselves, it will soon elude our grasp. By the time we reach for it it is already gone. A bird in the sky leaves no traces. It is just thinking, impermanent process, content coming and going, "painting with watercolors on a river (Gil)." Our identities are already flowing away. We are best off just leaving them alone, to not get too involved, to not take them seriously. There is so much peace and well being in the gaps between thoughts, in breathing and body where identities are not operating. What is true is when there are no thoughts to tell us what is true, the space around and / or between the thoughts is peaceful, easeful, and sane. Truth tells us to observe and accept all change, that we are change, yet we are always held in knowing, in loving awareness. This is what we all share: a heart of awareness.

Here is the sutta. You may find the refrain tedious. It is there for a reason. I suggest you let go of resistance to it, embrace it like a song, and let it seep into you and comfort your heart.

Seekers, these are the four truths that I have proclaimed, having realized them for myself with direct knowledge. What four?

1 Here a seeker says thus. All living beings should not be harmed. Speaking thus, the practitioner speaks truth, not falsehoods. The seeker does not on that account misconceive oneself as being spiritual. One does not misconceive: I am better, I am equal, and I am worse than others. Rather, having directly known the truth, one practices simply out of compassion and sympathy for all living beings.

2 Again, a practitioner realizes all sensual pleasures are impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change. Speaking thus, the seeker speaks truth, not falsehood. The seeker does not, on that account, misconceive himself as being spiritual. One does not misconceive I am better, I am equal, or I am worse than others. Rather, having directly known the truth in that way, one is practicing simply for the disenchantment with sensual pleasures, for their fading away and cessation.

3 Again, a practitioner says thus: All states of becoming (identities) are impermanent, not satisfactory, and subject to change. Speaking thus, the seeker speaks truth and not falsehood. The seeker does not on that account misconceive oneself as being spiritual. One does not misconceive, I am better, I am equal, and I am worse than others. Rather having directly known the truth in that way, one is practicing simply for the disenchantment, fading away and cessation of becoming (identities).

4 Again, a practitioner says thus: I am not anywhere the belonging of anyone. (Is conceiving of relationship as a possession, or an obligation conducive to the deepest peace and well being possible? Maybe comfort and identity is found there. The quiet free mind questions so many ideas.) **Nor is there anywhere anything and anyplace that is mine.** (This questions the idea of possession, proposing it as a deception.) **Speaking thus, the seeker speaks truth and not falsehood. The seeker does not on that account misconceive oneself as being spiritual. One does not misconceive, I am better, I am equal, and I am worse than others. Rather, having directly known the truth in that, he is practicing the path of nothingness.**