

# 2001-11-04: Terror and the Four Noble Truths

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

suffering, people, buddha, arrow, world, four noble truths, worldview, fear, self expression, hearts, practice, individual, refuge, deep, engage, life, afraid, eightfold path, buddhism, stub

## SPEAKERS

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So the national crisis, the as I've said, a few times, I've never known our sitting group, the members of our sitting group to be experiencing so much anxiety as I have these last weeks. And if I go beyond our sitting group into wider society, I'm even more impressed by the level of anxiety there is. And you know, we can go through a long list of the kind of fears that people narrow living under which they weren't living under two months ago. And I mean, there are people not been told people are bottling up on water. very reasonable people are bottling up on water and they wouldn't have bottled up a water otherwise, but they are afraid of what might happen. People sometimes afraid of they look in the sky when an airplane overhead and they wonder, you know, what's that? You know, is that okay? here seven Okay, airplane. People are afraid of driving cross the day bridges and not only afraid of it, but I've known people who've been angry and confused. Kind of despairing over the fact that they feel threatened and driving across the Bay Bridge. people afraid of flying people afraid of their mail. The friend of mine who's a postal worker. He's quite you know, he's a postal worker up in Santa Rosa. And he's quite distraught not only about his work that he's doing, but also about his superiors the way the Postal Service's has been handling his point of view, his his livelihood.

And then people are quite afraid of the consequences of what's going to happen in the future. We international crisis that American government has had a merican country has a long history of being involved in all kinds of International Affairs, and then having those international affairs in some way or other sooner or later, sometimes sooner rather than later, sometimes later, come back and haunt the rest of the world haunt America, a long history of the mid America of, of being involved internationally in ways that many years later we realized how underhanded American involvement was. And so there's a history of that then. So is it same thing happening again? are we setting ourselves up for even greater suffering in 1020 years? are we setting ourselves up so that in 1020 years, we're going to learn, you know, the underhanded things that are actually going on in our names? I hope not. But the track record is has not been that great. So people are afraid of what's going to happen internationally. A lot of fear, and then there's the economic fear that a lot of people have, and I've known people in our

sitting group in the last week so you've lost their work. People who have been threatened with losing their work, people can't find Work they want to find work is all, you know, the whole economic situation is quite troublesome for a lot of people. And so the to those two fears, you know, somehow, you know, it's not, it's not a simple addition of fears, but often when you have two fears like that they multiply each other, rather than just, you know, simple addition of one plus one. So then the question is, is this new, this kind of fear? Is this is kind of danger and crisis that we're experiencing? Is it something new to human beings? And, and I don't think so, for myself, one of the one of the insights or the part of the insights that come, I believe, with Dharma practice, that certainly I feel I've come with my practice is that there's a kind of a parallel development of insight or understanding. On one hand, there's a greater understanding and appreciation of peace, of joy of love and possibility. For those, the experiences of those, but it seems to be that they almost go hand in hand with a greater insight or understanding of the tremendous amount of suffering in oneself and also in the world around us. And so the question, is it worth? Is it worth doing Dharma practice, if you're going to have a greater insight into suffering than you had before you did it? My hope is that a healthy dumber practice, the two go together, you know, that is I actually have greater peace and greater love and compassion to hold the greater insight into suffering. It's kind of like that a little saying that I've heard I think comes from the Christian tradition. That I don't exactly remember it now. But so something like the what there's a minor irritant to a ordinary person is like, you know, a needle in the eye of a saint that someone who's well developed spiritually, it's actually much more sensitive and tuned in to suffering. One of the great shocks for me, from my practice was the moment where I realized the amount of suffering in my own mind that I had to unaware of, until I paid careful attention to subtle ways in which you may not know not just, I mean, I was aware of plenty of suffering in my own life. But when I started noticing that the subtlety of the underlying kind of foundational clinging and suffering irritation kind of resistance and fear, there was kind of at a very, very foundational level and just the way my my thoughts worked, how I thought how I was engaged. And then I saw that and then I extrapolated, I said, Oh, this is just like everyone else. This kind of foundational stuff. And then I kind of was kind of shocked to realize that we have a world of billions of people with the same level of this underlying kind of wound that is often goes on even unacknowledged unrecognized by most of us. So let alone the suffering of war, there's a suffering of the conflict within our own hearts and minds. So there's a remarkable

little discourse by the Buddha is remarkable because it claims to be one of the few so called records, probably records of the Buddha speaking about himself his own life and biographical autobiographical, and it talks about what he was like before he was enlightened. And he talks about a very important insight that he had, as he was struggling with some of these kinds of issues himself. So he begins by saying, fear results from resorting to violence. So the consequence of violence is greater fear and you could also Say turn around and say that vile that violence is a result of fear, the kind of the kind of self perpetuating cycle. Fear results from resorting to violence. Just look at how people Quarrel and fight. That was his 2500 years ago. I think it's been continuous ever since. But let me tell you now of the kind of dismay and terror that I have felt. So here's the Buddha talking about his own dismay and terror. Usually, we think of the Buddha after, you know, we have an image of him after he was enlightened, and someone who was very peaceful and serene and calm and unfazed by anything,

perhaps. But here at least before he was enlightened, he was filled with dismay and terror that he felt over what he saw in the world around him. Much like how many people feel today Seeing people struggling like fish riding in shallow water, with hate against one another, I became afraid. Sounds familiar. I became afraid. At one time, I had wanted to find some place where I could take shelter. So that's pretty familiar. Also, we want someplace where we can find shelter be safe. And so where are the places we look for safety. And sometimes we take we've we've kind of kind of a safety comes from knowing who to blame, if we actually know who's responsible, and there's a very clear and sharp distinction between self and other they are to blame. Some people have a illusion perhaps, of being safe. Or if it's very clear who's to blame, then it's easy to kind of to go out and attack that person. And it kind of try to just obliterate them from the face of the world. Which is some of the language it's been coming out of some Americans that we should treat someone out there with nukes. There's some people out there but people in Washington if you use the word nuke should nuke them. Some people become very defensive. As a result, you know, they would just defend ourselves, shut down our borders, shut down myself, locked myself in my house, then I can be safe. So many, many ways in which we react now, looking for safety, looking for security, trying to protect ourselves, we're trying to protect our family or neighbors. So I wanted to find someplace where I could take shelter, but I never saw such a place. So I assumed that he looked around then he tried to find something and he couldn't find it couldn't find no place for shelter, no place for safety. There's nothing in This world that is solid at base, and not a part of it, that is changeless. And this is this is the reason that Buddha wants to give his own words, at least his own view of things, why there's no shelter to be found in the world, no protection, no ultimate protection, because nothing, it's none of it is solid. And it's always everything's always changing. There's nothing which is not changeless. And because nothing has changed, because everything is has the potential for change, or is going to change sooner or later. You can't rely on it for ultimate and lasting happiness. So, you know, if you if you trust your government, if you trust your banks, if you trust your bank accounts, if you trust there's all kinds of go through the list of things that people think of only if I had that then it would be safe. And it's certainly reasonable to try to create some security in some sense, sense that sense of well being. But if we have absolute dependence And this is going to be at once I have this, then I'll be safe wherever more than when that is taken away, then our sense of blame and anger, confusion, despair, will, you know, get kicked up big time.

But if you know that these things cannot be relied on ultimately, then perhaps there isn't quite the same surprise when things disappear or things change, you still need it doesn't mean that you're happy about it. But But there isn't the kind of existential anxiety that arises when you're actually your whole identity perhaps was built into having it this way. One of the things I see around around now listening to people talk about terrorism in Afghanistan, and also in bin Laden, is if you listen carefully, you see how much people self identity tied into what they're talking about. Part of what we do when we state our opinions, sometimes we're defining who we are in we're trying to show people you know, I know, you know, I'm smart, I'm clever. I know what's going on. This is my opinion, this is my stance. And I've heard people who are completely uninformed, seemingly and I listen to them. I'm not that I'm so informed but, you know, uninformed, come down with a very categorical opinion about how stupid those people are. How could they be so stupid to do that? It seems odd to me when you're not

so well informed yourself to, to be judging people who are you know, probably much, much better informed than you. But in part of that is because we're trying to prepare but is we're making a claim and who we are as a self. And if we know if we have some understanding, then there's an existential kind of sense of secure your well being. There's nothing in this world that is solid at base and not a part of it that has changed was I've seen I've seen them all tracks. In mutual conflict, and that is why I had felt so repelled. It's a very strong language the Buddha uses. I felt so repelled. But then I noticed something very deep in their hearts. It was, I could just make it out an arrow influenced by this arrow, when runs in all directions, having pulled out the arrow, when neither runs nor sinks. So this is the resolution of this little quote, where the Buddha feels this dismay and about this insecurity of the world and the conflict and the Wars of the world. can't find any security, which leaves you kind of hanging what do you do then? But then through careful insight, more careful kind of studying. What he saw was buried in the hearts of all these people who quarrel or a fighting is an arrow and that arrow is undefined, the Buddhist tradition as being the arrows of greed, of hate, of sell of clinging to self identity. And, and it's possible then to extract that arrow. And the language that the Buddha often used for the process of enlightenment was pulling out the arrow that's in the heart. Influenced by these arrow, this arrow is sometimes called the barbed, it's deep in the heart. People run in all directions, people often looking outside themselves for security, and we run around looking for it. Having pulled out having pulled the arrow out, when neither runs nor sinks. And I translate neither runs nor sinks is being eaten either agitated or depressed about how things are. So then what a lot of a lot of what the Buddha then tried to teach was how to take that arrow out. And you might ask, so the arrow resides in individuals The only place it is. So then the focus in a sense of Buddhism tends to be on the individual, because that's where the arrow resides. And how do you get that arrow out? It's not so satisfying for everyone, because of what good is it for me to take my arrow out? In my own heart? If there's all these people and all this violence and all these people dying and being killed halfway around the world, how does that stop the violence? I think it's a beginning. If there is no one who does that work, then the perpetual cycles will just continue on and on. And so we need to start somewhere. That process Someone has to begin the process of clarifying their hearts and pulling out their Oh, so they don't influence us anymore. There's another verses from the Dhammapada that speak to this whole issue very much the same way. The Buddha says People that threatened by fear, go to many a refuge to mountains, forests, parks, trees in shrines. No so I guess in America we do different things, but

no such refuge is secure. No such refuge is supreme. Not by going to such refuge is one freed of every suffering. But what but one going for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and sees with right insight, the Four Noble Truths suffering, the arising of suffering, the overcoming of suffering, and the Eightfold Path, leading to the appeasing of suffering. This is the secure refuge. This is the supreme refuge by going to such a refuge when is released from all suffering. So here the Buddha says Same thing and that people are threatened by fear. They go for refuge in the normal refuges we seek are not ultimately satisfying and then our supreme is in language here, then ultimate or Supreme. If you want the supreme refuge, then you go you go to refuge in the Buddhist language, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. But more importantly, the whole point of doing that, as you can you yourself can see, with deep insight, the Four Noble Truths and the Four Noble Truths and are understood to be the ultimate

form of refuge, that's a supreme refuge, which is reliable. So why is that reliable? The Four Noble Truths and how I understand that is that the Four Noble Truths are reliable, because they focus on where we can make it where we know we can make a difference. Hopefully, we're and that's a difference that we ourselves can make with the choices that we make. We're not really in charge of what happens in the world outside of us, we can try to engage that as responsibly as we can. But what happens in the external world is, there's no way of having any lasting or absolute guarantee that you can change it for the better or make the world a safe place for yourself. But at least you can make your own heart to safe place, at least you can make your inner life a safe place. So that intuitively at least it's possible to find peace, well being love and compassion. And so the story I like to use my introductory class, for this is the story when the Buddha addressed his monastics and he said, if a man is hit if a man is hit by an arrow, is that painful? And probably the most kind of roll their eyes and say, yeah, that's pretty painful. be struck by narrow And then he said, if they're struck by a second arrow, is that even more painful? And they said, Yes, that's even more painful. The first arrow is just what life gives you what happens in life, you can't have any absolute control over that. The second arrow is what you add to that, how you respond to that, and how you respond to it, you have some control over that's, that's your responsibility. So, if you if you stub your toe, and you go and attack the rock, then you know add it, you've added a second arrow, you have this you've added your own aggression to the to the equation. If you attack yourself and say, Oh, how could I have been so dumb and stupid? Every time I kind of get even close to a rock, I seem to stub my toe and I'm just the worst I'm the world's worst a walker. Why didn't I get the right kind of walking instruction when I was one years old. And suddenly we get involved in this inner world of conflict. And tension and suffering, which is in a sense extra was not required, it's possible to stub your toe, and just let it be painful. It's painful enough, that's the first arrow. And we don't have to add the second arrow. And that principle, which is very, maybe maybe somewhat simple to see, in relationship to stubbing your toe, is meant in Buddhism to be extended out to even the most terrible things that could happen to you things that shouldn't be happening. What is the second arrow that we add to it? And, and then to look at that, and try to find the arrow there, the second arrow that we can pull out, so we no longer agitate the whole situation, exasperated more than it already is. So the first note, the first noble truth is suffering. And part of what that means in Buddhism, is that there's some people some teachers say is that there's a nobility To suffering, or there's a nobility to being present for it, there's something

holy, sometimes it's called the four holy truth to me holy or sacred or noble about suffering itself. Not that suffering is good or condoned, or he was a search it out. But what's noble about suffering is our ability to pay attention and notice it. And the turn to turn away from suffering, to ignore it, unless it's strategic, because, you know, we need to take a break for a while and get, you know, regroup our strength, to turn away from suffering tends to just add more suffering to our life. And the call of the Buddha's is to requires us to look very honestly, and name, what our suffering is. This is what's going on with me. This is what's become sensitive to where our suffering resides, be sensitive to it very, very, even very subtle things. So even as I was sitting here with you to this morning, part of what I was being sensitive to was weird. The suffering was within me. And even as I was sitting here I was getting quite calm and sometimes quite joyful sitting here, I could still were in the corners of my being corner,



my eyes and my forehead and different places. Still some subtle tension or clinging or in my mind, a little bit of reaching out, wanting to hold on to various preoccupations and worries that I have had to be very sensitive, very honest about seeing those. I didn't want to let go that I'm pushing them away, very quickly, maybe kind of, maybe sometimes the first tendency of many people, but to see them very honestly, and then seeing them find a way to relax to let go of the causes of them. So, the cause of suffering then also is a noble truth. There's a nobility or sacredness in recognizing what is the cause of suffering. The definition of the cause in Buddhism is tanhā. Tanhā is the cause of suffering. And we're tunnel and Pali means thirst, which is a very powerful kind of immediate word. And I take it to be like compulsion. When you feel compelled, and when there's a, you're acting out of a compulsion, when you have a desire, and isn't simply a nice simple desire that floats up and you can take it or leave it. But it's a desire that has an element of compulsion built into it, you feel impelled by the desire to act on it to have it has to be there. And when that compulsion is built into the desire, then it's a setup for frustration, because the momentum is to want it and if you can't fulfill it, you're going to suffer even the compulsion itself is has suffering within it. So that can take all kinds of forms, not just simply the compulsion, desire but the compulsion resistance of anger is one of these primordial or primary arrows of suffering that the Buddha talks about the important to pull out so we say sometimes in Buddhism, are you attached? What you What are you attached to? And if you're suffering to look and see see us, you're inside us your ability to calm and quiet enough to see what is it that you're attached to. If you're attached to getting a fancy car, maybe you can see that attachment and what it does for you pretty easily, hopefully. But there's very, very difficult attachments to address. It's very hard to see some of our deepest attachments to sell to security to our worldview is often a worldview that's built into our culture, as with any culture, that is becomes kind of like the, you know, the air we walk through, we hardly ever see the or notice the year, but it's always around and we depend on it. When I was in, I mean some of these are very personal, some of them are cultural. In offices, the best example but that's probably not an example at all, but occurs to me. The many years ago, I was at a panel of two people. And I was going to be the I was the Buddhist priest of the Zen priest. And so I was the Buddhist priest. And then there's this Christian minister. And we were supposed to talk about what brought us to our respective locations. And, and I started off and I talked about how what brought me What brought me to my then Zen practice, to Buddhist practice was, I found it to be the most the most satisfying or deepest form of self expression that I'd known in my life until that point, that somehow when I sat in meditation, it was a form of self expression, the way an artist would maybe express herself on a on a canvas sculpture.

So for me, sitting in meditation was a form of self expression more than a form of self discovery, that you let go of all the other all the preoccupations, all the extra stuff, all the inhibitions and fears that kind of get in the way of some deeper self expression arising. And, and then that the self expression comes up and, and that can be a feeling of great freedom. So, for me, that's what kind of what kept brought me to practice and kept practicing was this connection with some very deep core sense of freedom of self expression. So in the minister who was next to me, it was her turn to speak. And, and as she was speaking, I was kind of amazed that how different it was, it was like they actually almost almost the opposite for her what had brought her into her Christian faith in her Christian calling, was a sense of

community. For me, it was you know, very individuals very personal, and nothing to do with community in a sense, but it had for her was all about community and nothing about herself. Nothing about her, you know, discovering herself what was inside it was sense of being connected to this community of heartfelt people. And, and it struck me to that, you know, two different instance of worldviews. We do have ways of seeing the world. And sometimes we get it, it's very difficult to see how we're attached to our worldview. The story I've told some times is another place where this where I was shocked by this when I was in a monastery in Japan. And every morning, we had to do a temple cleaning. It was almost like a ritual where everyone had to clean for about 15 minutes together, that'd be done very vigorously to kind of show everyone that you were wholehearted, hundred and 5% you know, into the cleaning, you know, and your whole body, your mind, everything was engaged. And it didn't really matter if it needed to be cleaned or not. Here's what's just Clean, like you have to rake rake, the rake the leaves off the pass even, there's even there's no leaves there just have to rake. It was a ritual it was, you know, we just have to you have to do it. And so I was often assigned to the ceremonial ceremonial Hall. And there are all these pillars in the hall. And we had these wet cloths, we had to kind of dust them down every day, they were in the most clean columns in the world. because there wasn't, you know, there were 10 of us cleaning this hall. And there wasn't that much to do after a while. 15 minutes, we kind of did the you know, and so we would often be repeating things. So I'd clean a column, someone come right behind me and clean the same column. And so I was doing, you know, engaged with these 10 guys kind of doing this cleaning over many days, same thing over and over again. So sometimes we do the same thing over and over again. Sometimes you can you can notice perhaps something that obvious the first two or 310 times and suddenly, one day Do middle of it, I kind of woke up a feeling of waking up kind of suddenly, suddenly kind of it dawned on me. I was living in different universe than these other guys. That mean different worldview different social universe. I was cleaning the hall as an individual, among a group of other individuals. They were cleaning the hall as a group. They were walking their cleaning going around the hall cleaning, very tuned in to where everyone else was. And they were doing a kind of like a dance as a group together like this group mind operating. And I was doing as individual. They were two radical different worldviews, cultural views of what an individual is coming into play. I had come from this Western individualistic worldview. And they come from a Japanese you were the group the social group is actually has a greater prominence in the individual. That who you are as an individual is defined by the group, which is not something Americans would like to admit very often in America, that you define yourself self made person is the American dream for some people. At that moment, I didn't have a feeling that one was better than the other one was, you know, more right than the other. I thought they were both valid in their own way. But I was really struck by how radically different they were. And they both were valid, and how I had been invisible to me. The paradigm that I've been working under when I was in the West, so I say, Oh, this is an example that our attachments are very difficult sometimes to see. Because we can be attached to a whole worldview that we haven't even noticed yet. We're attached to things being a certain way. And the way they are is often a paradigm of cultural understanding what it means to be an individual and we don't want that threatened.

Because they have a threatened means that our sense of self gets threatened. But they cling to a sense of self is one of these arrows, that adds second level of suffering on top of what goes on in life. And you see that with a crisis, national crisis, the degree to which people want, you know, national pride is at stake. You saw it very explicitly during the Gulf War, where people were very happy about the goal for some people were because it was reasserting American pride. American pride had been destroyed and Vietnam. We lost this war and a number of things after that. And finally, America's national pride was reinstated. And we it was a it was a pride thing. I was horrified when I heard these kinds of statements to justify war on issues of personal identity like pride. But I think often these kinds of national crisis, touch a nerve for people in their self identity. And one of the things people are protecting is their sense of self and then radiating out from That all they think they need in order to maintain that sense of self. So the suffering, the arising of suffering, and the overcoming of suffering, the ending of suffering the seizing of suffering. What the Buddha claimed is, it's possible to remove the second arrow to move this arrow from our hearts, and to live a life of peace to live at least without any inner conflict within us. It's not easy to do that. And so the Buddha then taught the Eightfold Path, and a full path lays out a number of different practices and approaches that he said, are helpful, supportive for this process of letting go of the causes of suffering for ending them so that they simply say they're suffering. There's a cause of suffering and desire. And there's a possibility to end suffering by letting go of this compulsive desire ism too simplistic, sometimes it's so simplistic. It just can be like adding salt to your wounds. Because it sounds that makes it makes it sound like it's so simple. But the third, the fourth noble truth, the Eightfold Path, then becomes really crucial. Because it's not easy to do this, it's very important to start living a life, which is supportive for the possibility of doing this, to develop the right understanding, to develop the right intention, to have the right kind of speech, speech is very important for the level of your suffering, to develop the right kind of action to live a moral life, to have the right kind of livelihood to have a livelihood, which doesn't cause greater harm to the planet than to others. And to practice effortfully to make an effort now don't expect your inner life to change by magic. There's somehow or other things are gonna change for the better. You have to apply yourself and then practice of mindfulness in the practice of concentration. And these things, you know, can seem like a daunting task to undertake. But to engage with them slowly, bit by bit, everyday to engage in small way with them, let them grow over time. They bring tremendous fruit, and over time doesn't mean so you don't look at what the benefits are in matter of you know, one day or one week or one retreat. But you look over what with benefits over a year, two years, 10 years, two years will pass very quickly. And to sit every day in practice every day and have that momentum building over two years, or in two years will be a great change. So the Eightfold Path allows you to slow and slow change. It's like if you do something like yoga practice, and your hamstrings aren't incredibly tight, it will never stretch out Stretch Stretch out. But in fact, you know, there's something like hundreds of millimeter stretch, you know each time you do it. And if you do it you know every day then for a year, then you get three millimeters difference. And that's a big diff difference for your hamstrings perhaps. So in the same way so that with enough with enough drops the bathtub is filled. So the Four Noble Truths the so in a sense, the usual way of understanding the Four Noble Truths is that they focus on the individual, the individual in ending the war and the conflict in the hearts of each person pulling out the arrows in each person. If we need some people to do that, as tick not Han writes so well.



The boat people said that every time their small boats were caught in storms, they knew their lives were in danger. But if one person on the boat could keep calm and not panic, that was a great help for everyone. People could listen to him or her and keep serene, and there was a chance for the boat to survive the danger. Our Earth is like a small boat, compared with the rest of the cosmos, it is a very small boat, and it is in danger of sinking. We need such a person to inspire us with calm confidence to tell us what to do. Who is that person? The Buddhist sutras tell us that you are that person. If you yourself, if you are your best, then you are that person. Only with such a person calm lucid aware, Will our situation improve? I wish you good luck. Please be yourself. Please be that person.

So that's probably a good ending of the talk. But I like to have a little Appendix to the talk. So the Four Noble Truths are usually understood to be to address the issue. individual with the arrows in the individual heart and how to address that and deal with that. It's very important to do that. But the way the wording of the Four Noble Truths, there's no pronoun, to them didn't say, your suffering or my suffering. It is simply sufferings there in the world, the cause for suffering, there's possibly to end the suffering, and there's a path for ending it. The four noble truths are wonderful categories, frameworks to apply to the external world also. There's suffering out there in the world. What is the cause of that suffering? What is attachment and desire? That's a cause of the suffering in Afghanistan? Is it and is it possible to end that suffering by understanding what those causes are? And is there a path or bringing the end of that suffering? So I actually I see that the mindfulness practice you mindfulness practice in the Buddhist tradition uses the Four Noble Truths, these four categories as a framework for helping us understand Present Moment experience. Whether that present moment experience is in our own hearts, or halfway around the world, we can use these categories not as kind of philosophical truths, but as kind of a useful categories of exploration, discovery. Where's the suffering? Can we then understand the cause of that suffering? Can we understand the thirst to the compulsion that resides ultimately, and its origins in individual people's hearts? And then can we address that?

To me, each of you discover whatever arrows are in your own hearts and meet it with great compassion, generosity, and love. And in doing that, perhaps, extracted Thank you