

# 2004-11-17 The Four Noble Truths (Part 2)

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

ease, suffering, people, second noble truth, buddhism, unease, peace, life, understand, sacrifice, first noble truth, attachment, meditation, letting, psyche, clinging, liberation, learn, notice, anxious

## SPEAKERS

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So one of the ways of developing a meditation practice is to learn from your own experience. So, learning from your own experience, one of the ways of doing that is to spend a little bit of time at the end of a city, every city minute, two minutes, just reviewing what that city was like. And there's the art to this kind of reviewing. Part of the art part of the way of doing it is not to do it in a way that is critical or judgmental. But rather just kind of very mad. Are effect kinda like you're a naturalist. This is how this is what happened. And the record recognizing acknowledging of what happened, supports and strengthens the tendency of the mind to pay more attention. If you know you're going to be kind of reviewing at the end of a sitting, that can be a little kind of almost unconscious nudge, okay, stay more present for your experience as you're meditating. Also, when you review your experience, you can learn a little bit about what happened in the sitting. Maybe you knew what happened, but acknowledge it in a deeper level. Oh. I was rather complacent. I had a lot of thoughts and I just kind of willingly went sailing off my thoughts freely. I didn't really, I wasn't that interested in meditating today. I could have probably very easily applied myself more. But I didn't use that bracket for recognition of that. In a matter of fact, way. Next time when you come to sit, you might have Little bit more. Oh yeah, I think I'll just apply myself more, I'm not going to let another sitting go by where I'm so complacent. Or maybe you notice by reviewing the experience that a lot of your experience was judgmental, kind of judging your experience every few minutes or 30 minutes or every few seconds, you know, this is not good enough for this is not right or I should be doing it better. And you notice that is Oh, that's a tendency I have, maybe next time I sit I should be a little more alert. Now to kind of buy into that tendency can be let go with quicker. So there's a lot you can learn about your meditation by reviewing it and letting it sink in and kind of take a whole bite. It's a way of taking meditation more seriously. learning from it, learning from your own experience. And then when you come back to sit, you come with more familiarity, more knowledge, more core experiences you can draw upon and they can help them Day by day, to let your meditative experience go deeper and deeper, kind of more fully enter that world of meditation into the world of being fully present for your experience.

So one of the things I said during the setting is that one of the simplest meditation instructions in Buddhism that I know of, is the instruction to set yourself at ease. And then notice what takes you away from that. That's all. And generally, if you really notice, well, what takes you away from a sense of ease, it kind of brings you back to some kind of ease. You studied. You get to know it. Eventually, maybe let go, let go. Lets go of itself where you can let go of it. So you really see it. I'm concerned about women having breakfast. I'm anxious about that. So I let go of that. Think about that. I'm meditating now breakfast and wait for tomorrow morning. So is a relative thing, if you're feeling a lot of unease, maybe he's not going to look very great the kind of ease you have, but you can kind of soften a little bit around what's going on. And then that softening, the noticing the tendency to kind of tighten up again, set yourself at some ease. Then notice what takes you away. You'll learn a lot about yourself. If you pay

careful attention to what takes you away from a sense of ease a lot. And you should study that to get to know it well get to know what it is what are the forces in your psyche, to take you away and ease spiritual or mental or heart ease is not the same thing as physical discomfort. Whereas the way we relate to discomfort the way we relate to what's going on, ease and this season unease has to do with movements in our own psyche. And so by looking at where we lose our ease, we begin taking some responsibility for those movements of the psyche. I'm anxious about breakfast. Do I need to be? Is that just a given that I have to be? Am I supposed to be? are human beings required to be anxious about breakfast? Or is the anxiety about breakfast, something that's optional. So that you can let go of the teaching of Buddhism, in a kind of nutshell, is that the forces that take us away from a sense of ease are all forces that we can let go of that are optional. And so we learn to take take responsibility for that movement, study it, get to know it, get familiar with it, and in by getting to know it really well. Then learn how to either resolve them or dissolve them or how not to get caught by them how to be free of them. Free them are free from them to kind of take beginning to have a wise relationship to the world of unease as we do that, the hope of Buddhism, the promise of Buddhism, in essence, is that we can start living a life of greater and greater ease. Ease can be more normal part of our life. But yes, we'll learn about yourself first. One of the very interesting questions for every person I believe, is for what are you willing to sacrifice, your ease your peace, for what? You get up in the morning, you meditate? Yes, you you get some kind of peace, some ease some presence, through your meditation, your meditation sessions over and you're getting out of your meditation and you notice that you immediately get anxious. What was that about? You had this wonderful thing had some peace? Why are you willing to give up that peace and get anxious for what was that breakfast thing again? You know, you want to have the right breakfast. You know, if you don't have the right breakfast, then your coworkers are going to think you're not a good person cool. Because there's a right breakfast in California, low carb these days, high protein, and you don't have enough protein anyway, go on and on. Right? So you're willing to sacrifice your ease by the belief that you have to look a certain way to your co workers by idea that says to be you know, some all kinds of things. That's a silly example. But what are you willing to sacrifice your ease for? You get in your car. And you find yourself after a while that you're not as at calm as you were before you got in your car. And the only thing it took for you to sacrifice it was a desire to get to where you're going 10 seconds faster. And so you're a little bit tense at the steering wheel kind of pushing a little bit, and the mind is agitated. Is it worth sacrificing your calm and your peace for those 10 seconds.

So part of this exercise then is to begin questioning the beliefs, the values, the feelings, the motivations, that unconsciously justify sacrificing your peace. There's a what comes to mind right now is some families sister, maybe maybe other places also but from some family systems. The only way of expressing love between family members is if there's worry and you have to worry appropriately so people know your care. So people sacrifice their peace in the calm and so they can Worried properly? Is that you know, is it? Is it worth the sacrifice? Maybe it is. I'm not going to say it's not. But have you ever ever questioned whether it's worth it? What are you willing to sacrifice your ease for your peace for your calm for? You'll learn so much about yourself so much. There's a teaching that I do often around how you should be. You know, if you want to go to the savannahs of Africa, and be a nature photographer, take pictures of all the wild animals. There's two general approaches perhaps. One is you just wander around, wander around the savanna as the plains, looking for the animals until you try to get all the animals you can picture every single one. You might have to spend days and years kind of looking around and they're kind of some of them are kind of reclusive. That's one strategy and the Other strategy is to sit by the watering hole and wait. And all the animals in the savannas eventually have to come to the watering hole. Not they have to wait very long. this very thing about ease and the loss of ease, is the watering hole is a spiritual watering hole. Everything that you need to know about yourself that's spiritually important, will appear at that juncture, between your ease and your lack of

ease. So it's a very important place to pay attention. You might not want to spend a lot of time in meditation, reflecting and exploring all this. Maybe then you just let go. But after meditation or as you go about your life, it's be very useful to explore and question the authority of the unconscious beliefs that cause you to suffer Find your calm your peace, your ease. What's going on there? And the question deeply, look at it deeply and then begin exercising a particular muscle that every human being has, but often it's not very well developed. And so one of the things we're doing in Buddhist spirituality is learning to exercise this muscle so becomes a strong, becomes strong and becomes a strength. And that's the muscle of letting go. Learning to let go. You don't want to let go of everything and anything that you want to let go. You have the ability and the strength to let go of the things that you don't want to hold on to anymore.

If something's not useful to hold on to let go the image of someone holding on to hot air balloon and they are standing on the ground, the holding the rope with hot air balloon and the hot air balloons starts taking off, you're still holding on. It's not very useful to keep holding is dangerous. You know if the hot air balloon goes up, let go. Are you still standing? Not 10 2050 feet. So to learn to let go, is it fair to have the ability, if you have the ability to let go, then you may or may not let go as useful. But a lot of people haven't really developed that ability to let go at all to begin with. And so they don't have a choice. They don't have to be able to hear they don't have ability to use their wisdom. So part of Buddhist practice is to learn to exercise and develop that capacity to let go. So when we see some movement to unease, we'll be sacrificing our ease because we're attached to something that we have the ability that oh, I don't have to do that. Thank you and we can let go. Come back to some sensitivities. This is nothing that doesn't mean letting go doesn't mean living an irresponsible life. A life that doesn't respond to life situations, it means that we respond, we do so with some level of ease and peace. So if your family requires you to worry, maybe you let go of the worry. But you still, you know, drive your old dad to the doctor, but you don't, you know, worry all the way there, whether you don't kind of do this kind of, you know, cope, you know, coconspirators around worrying, you know, what could happen, you know, you stay calm and you're engaged, but you don't sacrifice your ease even though you're taking care of your responsibility drink be helpful. So that, in a nutshell, is all a Buddhism. Isn't that simple? You don't know you don't have to know anything about Buddhism. He's up, establish some sense of ease. Notice what takes you away. Question that and learn to let go. Isn't that great? In a sense, what I'm pointing to Here is a summary of the most important teaching of Buddhism, which is called the Four Noble Truths. And the Four Noble Truths is the Buddha's way, one of the Buddha's ways of trying to encapsulate this basic simple idea I was trying to get across today. And the word truth is frightening to people sometimes, because you know, it's a spiritual thing you know, I'm not sure I want to be a Buddhist these truths, you know, dogma, creed, and all that. But, so maybe do away with the word truth, but the Four Noble statements, the Four Noble perspectives, the four frameworks, for Look, it's kind of like an orientation for understanding our lives. Hear in the in the West we have the English system for measuring distance, and weight and all that. And much of Europe they have the metric system is one, ultimately better than the other. They're just kind of arbitrary how human beings have come up with this to some degree. And in each of them isn't necessarily each each. You know, each society needs to have a system of measurement so that people can talk to each other. The four noble truths are kind of a way orientation and perspective for helping us understand our lives. And it's so the first note first perspective, is it's useful to recognize when there is suffering and the word suffering and Buddhism is kind of like the key word. It kind of covers everything. That any movement away from our ease unease so we notice our unease. Once we've noticed our knees, then we try to understand what is it that has prompted that unease, that suffering. If some close, loved, loved person has died, and you feel grief, that's pain is kind of suffering. And that's what might be completely reasonable for human heart to feel that way. It's not,

you know, and you don't want to necessarily stop feeling that level of grief that might be there. But perhaps there's embarrassment about the grief or interview some people, you know, are embarrassed after a week or a month or a year. They don't want to show it. Or perhaps they're attached to something or they're frightened, or they feel some level of responsibility. They're clinging to some fear connected to the loss. And so the grief gets very complicated sometimes with a lot of extra thing that doesn't have to be part of it. The unease that we're trying to look at is all that extra stuff by our fears or attachment or you know pushing away of something. So we try to understand what is the nature of our knees? What are we holding on to what are we resisting? And that takes some time some very careful attention. It's not always obvious at first what what is we're holding on to. So for example, I might be attached to the clothes I wear. You know, as someone said, human, a lot of people pay more attention to what they wear. Then the words they use. They talk in a query, it's kind of casually appealing, but so am I attached the clothes I wear. And the fact that I have you know, an old shirt on or something might make me feel uncomfortable, I lose my ease in front of all these wonderful people here. You know, it's kind of embarrassing to be a Dharma teacher and have a shirt that has paint on it. And, you know, it's like not cool. You know, it should be more, you know, dignified or something right? Then an old shirt. So if I get anxious about what I'm wearing in front of all you, that's my knees. So what is that about? Well, on the surface, it looks like just, you know, anxious about how you see me. If you go more deeply into myself, it might be that I have a certain attachment to having a particular image of myself. I'm supposed to be a really cool dresser, or really cool something or other. And so I'm attached to something deeper. But if we go deeper than that, what am I attached to not simply the image of myself or some identity that I'm holding on to, but perhaps what's really there deeper, is that I'm attached to some level of some degree of wanting to be liked and the whole idea of holding on to it image is trying to get myself liked by a lot of people. And that's what I'm holding on to. And so I'm sacrificing my calm by the impulse to try to find how to be liked by other people. But then scratch the surface a bit further. What's that coming from? Is my discomfort by pulling away from feeling lonely, or feeling insecure. And so I'm sacrificing my ease, because I'm reacting uncomfortable or be uncomfortable with being insecure. The making some sense. So the first Noble Truth is, notice our unease. The second one is to then get to know what that's like. What's prompting that are nice. What's the causes of it? The Buddha gave four different primary causes. I don't know if they cover everything that you've experienced, but maybe it's useful just to give you that list and you can kind of see. The first is the attachment or clinging to sensual comfort or sensual, desire. sensual pleasure. The second is attachment to existence, to being someone to having an identity, a self image, to feel like you have to read present yourself in a certain way. We are what we are, then we present ourselves as something a little bit different. The third is a clinging to our opinions. Some people are willing to sacrifice their their ease because of their attachment to opinions. I think a lot of people lost their cool their calm their peace. After the election or before the election, because of that particular one and then the fourth is attachment to self clinging to self. It isn't that you're supposed to not be yourself be somebody, you know be a human being. But it's a clinging to it, which can cause is one of the primary forms of disease or unease, the arising of it.

So, the first noble truth is unease, stop, look at it, get to know it. The second Noble Truth is, understand the causes of it, what prompted it. The third noble truth is the letting go. The possibility of letting go and coming back to the ease of ending the causes of seizing the causes of letting go of that clinging that holding whatever it might be. That sounds very simple in principle, notice the suffering the notice the clinging and let go of it. It's not so simple. Some in some areas of our life, it's very simple to do, like breakfast breakfast thoughts, maybe. But some years of life, it's very hard to do. And it's, and it's very hard to do it thoroughly, completely. You do it thoroughly, you become a Buddha. So do it really thoroughly is very hard. So because it's not so easy, the Buddha offered a path What do you call the path? And it's the path which supports or makes possible, deep letting go. And so as the Buddha's, you know, eight eight step program Yes, every human being Until there, you can say, Yes, I am Gil. I'm a

recovering addict. Yeah, that's Buddhism is trying to deal with a deal with addiction. Some of you are addicted to your thoughts. That's the primary suffering, addicted to all kinds, all kinds of things. And so there's just a, you know, eight step program. And I've heard that in recent years has been developed further. Now they have a 12 step program, which is very, very effective I hear but is eight step program of the Buddha. And the first of these eight steps is to understand the first three truths to understand how to do that to us just to understand that principle to notice your bunnies. Notice the cause. And notice the possibility of letting go. Just to know that in principle or study it or get to know that to look at your experience that way. And that's not always so easy because often we want explanations, we think it's more complicated than it is. We're not going to let go until we understand all the intricacies of the Buddhist teachings of emptiness or whatever and we feel like we have to understand a lot. So the first step of the Eightfold Path is to learn to train oneself, to tune into unease, the cause, and the possibility at least of letting go. That part of our experience, to be inspired by that to be informed by that, to be encouraged by that, to find our way forward. Find the path of practice by recognizing the simplicity of it. Right here with those three things. The second part of the path is called the right attitude. Or no actually better right intention or right motivation. And this has to do with the approach disposition that we have as we engage in this exploration of suffering. And it turns out if you really want to engage in exploring suffering and free yourself from suffering, it helps if you have an attitude, which is non violence, which is not, you know, adding more suffering and more harm. It kind of goes across purposes if you're trying to be violent or conflictive, with your experience or yourself or your neighbors. How can you study how can you really focus on studying the source the root of suffering, if you're causing suffering, so, there needs to be some attitude of non non harming. The second is a willingness to let go the attitude of letting go or simplicity The third is kindness. It helps to be kind. So kind to oneself kind to one's neighbors just kind of a disposition or attitude of kindness. It's a lot easier to engage in this whole area of suffering and freedom from suffering, understand it to get there's kindness as part of a cut of friendliness in the whole thing, a friendly, nice warm kind of attitude towards it all.

If you want to do this work, it also helps if your behavior is aligned with not causing more harm or without aligned with the principle of learning to let go of our deep clinging. And so then the fourth, fifth and sixth steps of the Eightfold Path has to do with our behavior. The fourth one is right action. which involves, you know, not killing or stealing, or harming people through our sexuality or lying or speaking in unwise ways to paying attention to our actions. So our actions are aligned with this movement to stay with our ease. And if you study ethical behavior, what you probably discover is that most of the movements to be unethical entail a loss of our ease entail some kind of unease somewhere in our psyche. I don't think you can anybody can lie or steal or kill without some kind of feeling of unease. So, it goes you know, to move towards greater ease or peace. You need to kind of support that By refraining from those actions, which are opposed to it just makes it makes perfect sense right. So right action so in a sense Buddhist ethics is not so moralistic as it is pragmatic. This is what helps and supports the movement towards peace. The fifth of these eight full steps is right speech. speech is such an important part of learning to be free and become peaceful. That learning to pay attention to your speech and be wise about it is indispensable. The sixth step is right livelihood. Most people spend a huge majority of their day engaged in their livelihood. And so hopefully there are people's your livelihood is in harmony. Without movement towards peace, towards freedom. And then the sixth, seventh and eighth step, the sixth step is right effort. The seventh is right, mindfulness in eighth is right concentration. And these are the trainings of Buddhism is we have to make it that you start applying yourself as inner life. So, four, five and six has to do with behavior. No, three, four and five has to do behavior. And 56345 and 678 have to do with then beginning to work on our inner life or mental life or a psychic life or spiritual life. Beginning to work with it adjust to change it. Make the effort to do something about it. And as we do something about it, to learn How to get one of these we can do about it is to cultivate our mindfulness and cultivate our stability of mind. The more stable you are, the easier it is to

see the movement from ease to unease, and from unease back to ease. Part of the value of becoming very deeply concentrated meditation is in very deep states of concentration, that you can have a very deep qualitative experience of ease. That's qualitatively quantitatively very different than the kind of peace that most people can attain in daily life. And in a deep concentrated state, you get a very different perspective on how deep the possibility is for liberation in the psyche to let go more deeply

So, one of my favorite little kind of analogies. It's probably something you've heard before from me is that an alert from a yoga teacher many years ago that he can't get into the triangle pose, which involves kind of bending over and trying to get one hand down on the ground really low. You can't get to stretch far enough down to get that hand down. You get a whole bunch of telephone books. And you stack them up until you can rest your hand in the telephone books. And you do the pose every day. And every day you pull up, you tear out one telephone book page. And one page makes almost no difference. Your telephone pages are really thin But if you keep doing it every day, eventually, all the pages we will be thrown away and your hand will have reached the floor, your body was stretched out, almost imperceptibly, you'll feel the stretching, you know, stretching will be imperceptible each day. But definitely it will develop over the time. The possibility of spiritual growth the possibility of growing in the freedom from unease, freedom from attachment from clinging, the possibility of growing into a heart which is unbounded is free is open, relaxed, at home with itself liberated. The past as possibility is something we can all attain. And it's I think it's helpful to think about it is something as attainable if you want in small little steps. He put Stick together enough they'll steps you'll go really far. If you keep it up, maintain it. So to engage in the mindfulness practice day after day, to engage in this reflection, this exploration of the Four Noble Truths or engage in the reflection, the study of peace and the loss of it to take that's really serious. Take it as it were the watering hole. Everything you need to know everything you need to experience it's really necessary for the spiritual life. We'll come visiting you, if you hang out right there. That's I'm sure that watering hole take that seriously. Cultivate and develop different qualities of the path.

So those are my thoughts about the Four Noble Truths in the way they support mindfulness practice, they're integral to the whole process. You have any questions or any thoughts about that? Now sinwar pass out the mic someone does our talking stick you don't need it but someone else does.

Just have a close to your mouth. Yeah, that's fine. I was just gonna say that I like, why is disease better than saying like the suffering looks a lot better with me. So, the she said that the statement life is this sees works better than the statement life is suffering. It's a common misperception that the Buddha taught the plight, the suffering as the first noble truth and then it seems like Buddhism is just a party pooper when we when you know if life is suffering what you know What's left? But he never said that, what he what he said in the first noble truth. He said, there is suffering, basically said there is suffering in life, but he didn't equate life with suffering. And it's hard to argue with that there is suffering. But the first Noble Truth is, you need to pay attention to it. You didn't notice it. But I agree with you that sometimes it's better to translate it as an ease or disease than suffering. I think it kind of talks more to the point. There is a nice there is this ease and there's a possibility for ease. Yes. The fourth noble truth is the Eightfold Path.

Pass it over here to George. Oh,

was wondering, also heard, you know, the second noble truth is greed or aversion and ignorance, or, I don't know, ignorance or delusion or sometimes I just hear that and kind of clear about, about the illusion of ignorance what exactly is that entails or in the teachings, the, the literal word that Buddha used to define the second noble truth, which is the cause of suffering is the word thirst to be thirst,

thirst, like a thirst for power, something like that. The So, thirst is not a very technical word, so, it kind of lends itself to kind of different interpretations or meanings. But sometimes true thirst is translated to English as desire. The second noble truth is desire but the problem With that is that not all desires are problem at all desires cause suffering, some desires cause suffering. The ones that are thirsty are the ones that are addicted, or those that are driven yes or compulsion behind the desire. So sometimes I like to think of the second noble truth is driven this, we're driven in certain direction, or we're driven, we're not free. And there's a kind of suffering as part of that. So Buddhism has a lot of different lists of this, the nature of attachment, the different kinds of attachment, and one very common one is greed, hate and delusion. Those are the forms that it takes. And usually the second noble truth is not described as greed, hate and delusion as being the cause. But it could. And so the question is, what are they? What is delusion? ignorance. ignorance. Ignorance is usually in the Buddhist tradition. Understood Understood is the act of ignoring, not not not simply the absence of knowing something, but its act of nuts, ignoring what's really going on. So it doesn't have a movement of turning away or something. And it's primarily one of the things is is that ignoring of the Four Noble Truths? People don't, you know, I don't want to notice that I'm suffering. I'm not gonna pay attention to that. But if you don't notice your suffering, how can you do anything about it? delusion is a little bit different than ignorance. delusion is, you see what you see. But you overlay what you see with a projection that's out there. That's not true. To were diluted to the oversee Sophie. Yes.

We're gonna Get a second mic. And that would be easier for passing it around. liberation is my question. I understand that once you return to the ease, you feel liberated. And my question, is there more to liberation than just then returning to ease? Well, yes, I know. There are layers and layers of these. So you know, someone who has been out in the hot sun all day working hard and thirsty, and they finally come in in the shade, there's a nice cool drink of water, they feel a certain level of ease. But after a while, they get a bit cheery to that. They realize that actually, there's other layers in their psyche, where they're actually very worried about something else, you know, and it's been put on hold for the time being, because they've been focusing on the heart to heat and relief from it, but it's still there. Kind of underneath so what we find establish some sense of ease. And it's always going to be for a long time, it's gonna be quite relative to where we have been. And from that platform of some level of ease modicum of ease, then we have the possibility of seeing where the attachment is, it keeps us from a deeper level. And so we go deeper and deeper, more more thorough, more complete, or bigger or higher. You know, it depends on how you were talking about. And so it's very important and important, but it's important not to get too complacent. And some people settle for too little. They get a little bit of relief, they feel like they're coping better in a life and that's fine. And that's not you know, liberation in from the from the Buddhist point of view, liberation is a radical transformation of the consciousness of psyche. And what is that transformation of consciousness it's the complete and thorough Letting go of every possible clinging in the mind or the heart. The outcome is liberation, liberation, freedom happiness, well being peace joy sounds good

enough I was planning to have a city again a little while that was the plan. But I'm not gonna sacrifice my well being for that. That agenda and let go of it since it's nine o'clock and I hope this little three week course has been useful for you these these things and I hope that it serves you and helping you find a greater peace and well being in your life. And if it doesn't, that should be very interesting to understand why. So, thank you