

## The Four Noble Truths - (Part 4)

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So what I like now is for you to go around the circle, and each of you has about two minutes, and maybe one of you can be the time keeper for your group. As a person has about two minutes to speak, I'd like you to speak about two things. One is your direct personal experience of the goodness or the beauty or the advantages or what's great about letting go. What have you known about this? What have you learned about what you can let go in? When you let go, you let go into something. What are the wonderful things that come from that, that you've really experienced for yourself?

Don't worry that maybe you haven't let go very profoundly. Just whatever you've done, whatever comes to mind. It's more important that you simply describe something than that you necessarily remember the most profound experience—just whatever comes to mind. That's one thing, and the other thing is—well, maybe simply do that first. So each person spends a couple of minutes talking about your own experience of what you've known and what you've experienced. As always with these members, you're not necessarily trying to explain to your group, as you are trying to explore the edges of your understanding, memory, and experience of something.

So we do that, and then two minutes for each person. Groups with three have a little extra time. When your group has finished going around, if you can sit silently so that I know when the whole group, everyone's finished, then we do the next round of something. Okay, so please go ahead. I hope I didn't cut anybody off.

The next now I'd like to do just a little bit quicker, just a minute each person. Again, if you could even make sense, but you can go a little bit if you want, but each group can time themselves. It's a very simple question. Maybe a simple question, maybe. That is, using your imagination, your intuition, whatever capacity you have, what do you think is the extreme or most complete and most profound possibility of letting go that's possible for you?

Does anybody need clarification for the question? You have to admit that the first question was about what experience you've had about letting go. Now, it's more like in the future: what do you think is the outer edge of the most thorough possibility for you—how much you can let go, how deeply you can let go, or how fully you can let go? Then, when you come, you know, go around and now, relatively briefly, just state what that is. Then we'll do the next round of something.

Please, Chasayes, you didn't get a chance to do it because you—what you'll do is figure out how to integrate this question into the next question, because the next question, everybody gets two minutes. So it's a lot of time. Remember, as always, this is not about telling someone else something. It's about trying to discover something for yourself you don't know yet, maybe about yourself. That's the kind of spirit of this kind of talking.

So now the question is, what do you think is—what do you believe are the main obstacles for attaining some deep letting go, some deep freedom? What are your main obstacles to letting go? See if you learn anything about letting go. Some people haven't learned to let go yet. It's time to let go. It is time to let go. Some people need to let time that we like. We're letting go into silence. Now we're letting go of talking. We're trying to let go of talking. Now for you guys, time to let go. Are we back now? Is it hard to let go? Obstacles are operating. Okay, thank you.

So one more round, the last round, and this next one is—I don't know how long, it may be a minute or two. Maybe I shouldn't take too long, but maybe, who knows? The question is, how motivated are you to walk the path of freedom, of a deep cessation, deep letting go of clinging, of suffering? It's a comparative thought, a comparative question. On one hand, compared to other things you're motivated to do—like maybe playing chess is much more important for you. So in the scale of things, it's important, but maybe chess is more important, or shopping or something.

It also sorts in comparison to that, but also relative, perhaps, to what you can imagine, a range of motivations, strength, or motivations you might have. It might be that you're not particularly motivated for anything, but you are motivated a little bit, you know, to be free. But it's not you, Kiyoshi. Oh, it's not easy come easy go, you know. If it happens, fine, but you don't see nothing else is going on, but this is what you're on to do. So you could say it's what you're most motivated to do. But actually, there's not much umph behind it, right?

So hopefully by describing it this way, I give you a little sense of where to go with this question. But the question is, how motivated are you? What's your sense of your motivation? How important is this for you? Is that enough to go with? Okay. So I hope that you all had a

chance to speak. Finished.

So now we have touched on three of the *Four Noble Truths* and that leaves the last one. The first three, for some people, lend themselves to being almost offensive in how simplistic they are. You've got a problem? Just let go is lucky, *nāsa*. No problem. Just let go is easy, you know? And sometimes it is easy. But I think all of you probably have a fair amount of respect for what a difficult task it is to really let go in a very deep way, in a very transformative way.

Some issues are not easily dealt with and take a long time to work through. Because letting go is not so easy, and because actually there's a duty right to each of the *Four Noble Truths*, the duty or the activity related to the first noble truth of suffering is to understand suffering. The duty with the Second Noble Truth, clinging, is to release it, to let go of it. The duty with the Third Noble Truth, cessation, is to realize it. Now, all those three things are not easy to do. It is difficult to actually understand suffering really deeply and well. It's difficult to let go, and it's difficult to realize the full possibility of realization, of cessation.

So, because the letting go is not so easy, the fourth noble truth takes that into account—that it is difficult—and then it offers the path, a path, the conditions you can put into place that make it possible to do this very deep, transformative work. This is called the *Eightfold Path*. The duty in relation to the *Eightfold Path* is to develop it, to cultivate it, to cultivate the path. The path, the *Eightfold Path*, is not something that exists apart from you. You can't—like, I can't point, you know, give you a map, and go down Alcenzo, and turn right, and, you know, read a certain book, and there it is all. Memorize a certain list or something. The path doesn't exist outside of you, and it only exists in our making it. We make the path as we walk it.

So not only do you have to look for it apart from your engagement with it, you're walking in it during your involvement with it. It requires something of us, requires us to be motivated, and we have to step on that path. The path begins with right view, right understanding, right orientation. This is to begin appreciating and understanding, orienting our life around the *Four Noble Truths*. There are many different ways to understand our experience, to frame our experience. One of the ways that makes things a lot easier is to be sensitive to the presence of suffering, of clinging, and the possibility of releasing from it. To use that as a reference point is a right view, or the right reference point that the Buddha recommends—a right, not in terms of right and wrong, but right in terms of the right tool.

You're not morally righter, you know. But there's the right—what's the right tool for walking this path? So this orientation, this reference point, this tool of understanding our experience from the *Four Noble Truths*. Then there's the right intention or right attitude that you're engaged with when you take the path. Then there's our behavior, how we live our life. That's

important. You can't, you know—some people just like to continue lying and stealing and everything and then get enlightened. That'd be very nice, but you can't do it that way. So we have to come and look at our behavior and make our behavior align, or harmonious, or compatible with letting go.

As it turns out, practicing Right Speech, the precepts, right ethics, and right livelihood are indispensable for making the conditions, laying the ground for being able to let go in a really deep way. Then there's cultivating, developing meditation, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. So these eight different steps have many different aspects to them, and they're something that can be studied and developed over many years. They deepen and deepen and deepen, the different aspects of them. As we create and make the path within us, that path becomes easier and easier to walk because we make it by laying down the bricks for it, until at such a point that the path is not something we have—the path is what we are. We become the path. Rather than having a path to walk, our life becomes so integrated that we're inseparable from these eight elements as we walk it. That's when release or letting go has become quite deep, quite thorough.

So that's a whole topic for itself: walking the path, the *Eightfold Path*. In fact, it's the theme for the next year's *Dhamma* practice series. So I think maybe starting in September, we'll do—over the year, we'll do eight months. It won't be continuous months, but eight months. We'll go through the *Eightfold Path* one by one. So that's the topic for the Fridays for next year, starting in September.

The most important point I want to get across here is that there is a path, there is development, there is cultivation, there's preparing, laying the conditions in place, and having the wisdom, the understanding that you can't just snap your fingers and let go and that's it. Thank you, and now I can go on with my life, the important things. But there's a path of engagement. So the issue of motivation is very important. I have a lot of respect for whatever motivation someone has. I think there's something very important about not judging people by, you know, better and worse, kind of a higher, stronger, and weaker kind of motivation. I have a lot of respect and appreciation for that part of a human heart or the mind that's intentional, the intentions, the motivations that move us forward in our life. I trust it. I know if there's deep mindfulness, deep awareness, I really trust people's motivations and intentions, even though sometimes it takes funny turns superficially.

So I do not know any kind of motivation, you know, the practice, I think, to be celebrated and appreciated and enjoyed. I'm as appreciative of someone who has, you know, a fairly lightweight—so-called lightweight—approach to the practice motivation as I am of someone

who's, you know, very strong. So I hope you've had a chance now to reflect a little bit in the brief discussion about your motivation about letting go in relation to all this. Then there's your motivation about engaging in a path, of beginning to put conditions together in your life that lays the foundation so it becomes easy to let go. It isn't easy to let go. It's not easy to let go into an abiding sense of peace and freedom and compassion and love. So there is a kind of day-to-day work of making that path, creating that path, by engaging ourselves in the various elements the Buddha described for doing that.

Now, for some of you, maybe, Julie, you meditate a little bit every day, or are mindful of your life. That's how you're laying some of them. Maybe it's you now, maybe not. Some of them are a little trail in the woods for you, and some of you are kind of blazing ahead, making big freeways. Both trails and freeways get to the same place. What I want to do is to give you a little more time to reflect about your motivation for all this, and I would like to do a little ritual with that.

We've pretty much finished our year-long class. Some of you've been here for the whole year. Some of you came just for today. It's all new to you. We do have one more class of the discussion group next Wednesday morning at nine. There's the fine oldest little discussion group from the year. Anyway, if you've ever been here today, you're welcome to come to a discussion group, nine to eleven, that kind of follows up on today. But I would like to do a little ritual around motivation.

What I'd like you to reflect on is some simple one sentence, simply one sentence that encapsulates some quality or sense or felt sense of your motivation to engage in a spiritual path, engage in the path of liberation, or the *Eightfold Path*, or another one. You may have your own language, or your own sense of what that is. But in relation to what we talk about today—about you engaging in suffering and the release from suffering, the possibility of the freedom or the peace, awakening that's possible, and a sense of a path that you can engage in—so you send your motivation. Some one sentence that encapsulates your motivation to engage in a path, and that sentence may also describe a little bit, you know, the strength of your motivation, how important it is for you. Does that make some sense to you? Does it make sense?

So there's some way that you can express in a sentence or so how important it is for you, or what it means for you to engage in a practice that makes more sense. There's a wide leeway, but you're not held to one very narrow definition. Take what I say, my question, and translate it into something that makes sense for you. If the way I say it doesn't quite make sense, does anybody—does this not make enough sense, what I'm saying? Yes, please, Betsy, does it

make sense? The question is, can you describe in one sentence or so your motivation, your sense of your motivation, what your motive is to do, and how strong the motivation is to engage in the practice, to engage in a path?

So, okay, for this ritual, you all have to leave the hall, and let's make a big circle in the outer hall there. Any way we think about this, that's the right way to do it. Well, you and me stay here. You are going to stay where you are. We can do it a little bit differently. I'm going to go out there, and what I'd like you to do is, one at a time, come and walk through that door there. You can walk through the door, and one at a time, come through there, and you want your nose. You can walk around, you know, this direction, out into the outer hall one at a time. When you come to the outer hall, I want us to form a big circle out there. It'll take a while. People who are first will have to stand out there and wait. Those of you who wait in here will sit here quietly thinking about the question until it's your turn. There's no need to have a long line of people here waiting to be next, but very calmly and slowly. As each person comes into that room in there, I'll be there waiting for you, and then you can tell me your question, your statement, your sentence.

So, well, yes, more or less. One can't ask. If you have a lot more you need to tell me, we can do it some other time, but we want to—because we don't have, we have like ten minutes left. So, you know, I don't want to—there's about thirty-five of you, so I don't want to keep people waiting for you too long. It's only to kind of make it go smoothly and relatively quickly, and don't leave me waiting for someone. Kind of keep it going.