

2010-01-04 Four Truths of The Noble Ones

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SPEAKERS

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So, good evening, and congratulations for reaching 2010. And it's the custom here at IMC that the first Monday evening talk of the year is a talk on the Four Noble Truths. And the reason for that is that the Four Noble Truths lie at the very core of Buddhism. It's both the foundation of Buddhism, and the culmination of Buddhist practices to really have a deep understanding of these four truths. And everything else that all the other teachings that we do here at IMC and the rest of the year, are really just appendages or footnotes to the Four Noble Truths in one way or the other. So it seems like a good way to start the year and I wanted to start This year introduced this topic of the Four Noble Truths from the perspective of ease. If you start with ease, because usually, when people talk about the Four Noble Truths, they begin by talking about the first one. And the first one just is basically a statement that says that there is dis ease, the lack of ease, there's suffering, or stress. And this year, I'd like to turn around and start with the opposite of dis ease or suffering, which for now, I'll call it ease. experience of ease. And ease can be a very wonderful teacher, for all of us experience of ease the reference points of these. One of the most succinct and I think very powerful insights reactions that I ever heard for meditation practice is the instruction. Set yourself at ease. And then notice what takes you away from that? Pretty good. So, Place yourself at ease and probably at first you don't get very useful. First time you do it because maybe you're not used to it. But then you start noticing both the experience of ease and what takes you away, the agitation, the fear, the desires, the restlessness, the doubt, the preoccupations, the planning, the remembering the fantasies, there's a lot of things that kind of come together. Sometimes they seem to all come together at once. But they can kind of keep them up keep us from having any kind of real sense of ease. So it takes us away from it, to notice that and as we get used to that and see that understand that we work with that, then we can question that. Whether It is it worth giving up that ease for those concerns those activity? Do we want to do this how we want to live? We want to just take it for granted that we have this dis ease? Or do we want to question it and perhaps let go of it or resolve it or dissolve it or do something with it. So we can drop back into that place of ease. With time, the experience of ease can get deeper and deeper and more pervasive or stronger, it has become stronger, it becomes a stronger reference point who what takes us away. If a person is really agitated, and they get upset at something, they might not notice the upset because, you know, it's kind of like business as usual in the mind. It just seems like that's how it is. But if you're really, really settled and calm and peaceful, and you get upset about something, it's gonna stand out in highlight. And so as the as the mind and the heart to get more and more settled more peaceful. It becomes a stronger A reference point for what takes us away from it. Now that could arise different arguments, that it's well worth giving up your ease for all these important things that you do. There's really important things. Right? That somehow there's an willing to kind of live that trade off between ease and, and dis ease. It's important to worry. I mean, obviously, it's important since it seems to be so popular in what you know, you can even come up with all kinds of defenses for the importance of worrying must have evolutionary value. And it's really important to do it well. And some people are experts.

But it worries something it tends to be to lose our ease in the process. So to look at the different arguments, we have about why it's important to get involved. Now, what's interesting about these arguments in this kind of debate they can go inside is that many things that we need to do, we have to engage in do not require stress to get them done. In fact, stress actually gets in the way of doing them well. And so to actually see actually be motivated and engaged and taken care of many things in life, including planning, various things can be done with ease or without ease. So it's not a trade off between doing certain things. And ease. It's a trade off between how we do different things. Do we do them with ease, or do we do them with disease, we do them with stress, or we deal with them with a more relaxed sense of way of being To ask this question notes, you know, to notice your ease knows what takes you away from it. If you do that really well. It'll take you deep down into your psyche into your core of your being that would make you operate, what makes you kind of motivates your life what your life is about. It's a very powerful investigation that goes on. And so but once you have ease as a reference point, or maybe a strong sense of ease as a reference point, it becomes a teacher that shows you more and more what it is it takes you away. And as it gets highlighted, what takes you away from your your ease, you understand what that is better and better. And my assumption is that most people, if they see that it hurts to give up their ease that they suffer in process would like to let go of that suffering. So there was one person recently who I said something really amazing to me, I thought was amazing. And I thought it was some risk involved in saying this, but I thought it was worth the risk. It came to me. I've known him for some time wasn't a stranger mean, student in mind for some time. So it's kind of a lot of a lot of, you know, understanding of him and a lot of trust. And he said that he was an anxious person with a lot of anxiety.

And that you've been practicing some time he'd done a lot of therapy. He'd learned about being present with anxiety, feeling in your body, not being reactive is kind of going into it. deeper all these things and I told them that that wasn't the right thing to do. I told them was just stop being anxious I told them it's a colossal waste of your time to be anxious. Just cut it out and he said he left my interview with me for the next few hours irritated with me so that's reasonable. You know, because you know, you know, anxiety is supposed to stop him. It's like he was you know, your blackness your whole life, it's core to your being and who you are. Just kind of pull it out and say enough of that. Is that easy, you know, it can't be that easy. And, and my anxiety is so sophisticated.

And but he after a while, after the, I guess the irritation wore down or something. Then he started noticing that, together with his irritation or kind of proceeding or part of it is anxiety wears, these little stories would come up. He started like having stories about going on an airplane soon he had to go flying. And it made him anxious to go on an airplane. Do you see this airplane stories in his mind? And those story making thing of the mind. He could just say no to that. I'm telling you that I will tell myself that story. I won't go into the story. And then the anxiety that's come out of that story making didn't happen. And he found there were so many times where he could just say nothing got back. I told that story. He couldn't necessarily stop the anxiety but he could stop the stories that produce things so that was quite something. So, if in his situation he started seeing that there was something he could do, that would get in the way that would interrupt that cycle that got him anxious. And he understood that it was for his own benefit. Not to go down that route. To kind of, you know, let the stories get the upper hand and control his life and then spin out all these feelings that he struggles with. So from some kind of ease or commerce state, you can watch and say, Oh, I'm not going to do that. No, thank you. You can you could be very calm and settled, perhaps. And then see some wonderful consumer product that is being advertised to you and You could see how the desire for that takes away agitates the mind it takes away some of these. And so you might think, Oh, you know, it's not so much fun to get my spinning out about wanting all these things wanting this particular thing. I was actually very happy before I saw that

advertisement, thank you. And now I'm not. But if I just let go, and come back to that ease, it's for my betterment, it's for my benefit to do that. So, you know, I could come up with many examples, where you would see that from the vantage point of some ease, it's not worthwhile, you don't want to go there to that place. That interesting, to grab on to, to cling to get attached, to resist to be afraid. There's a lot of movements of the mind that are summarized under the kind of category of stress that we can start seeing that there's some choices involved, whether we take that route with picking something up, we're getting involved in some way. Or there's a choice about whether we stay involved. Or we could just come back to the ease or relax in some way. And that movement of seeing that we have a choice and seeing that one activity one, one kind of inclination of the mind, is not so helpful for us. And another way of being is helpful is useful, is one of the key distinctions that Buddhism makes the capacity to see that distinction between what is beneficial and what is not what is helpful and what is not. between what is peaceful or easeful, or brings a sense of well being, and that which is a loss of our well being. that distinction is really key. So the Buddha was a person who was interested in this whole area of suffering, this ease and ease, he studied it and got involved in it. He was he had studied a lot of the different spiritual traditions religious traditions of his time in India, practice them studied them. And seemingly he was a very intelligent and well learned person, and well practice person. And the religious traditions of the Buddhist time are pretty sophisticated as far as religious traditions go. And in doing all this study and then doing his own all his inner practice, he came out of his experience of awakening. And the key thing he had to teach was what's in English is usually called the Four Noble Truths.

However, there's the English translation that we already said the Four Noble Truths is an accurate enough translation of the original Indian language. Noble Truths is *Aria* such in Pali. However, that the grammar that expression is such a is multi Vaillant can be actually be different things. And that ain't the Indian truth the Buddhist traditions preferred way of understanding the term is not the Four Noble Truths noble truths, but rather the truths of the noble one. The truth of the noble one, and the Buddha was considered a noble one, not because he was born nobility, but rather because of his spiritual insight attainment that he had and that the people who have experienced a similar level of realization of peace and well being as the Buddha are also called noble ones in our tradition, we don't do it here, we don't go around saying you know, but they didn't back then. So the truth of the noble ones, and this is significant, because what is the, what is the perspective for understanding what we call the Four Noble Truths is the perspective the perspective of a suffering person, or as a perspective of a person who has ease. The Buddha saw the Four Noble Truths understood it, when he had a very profound experience of peace. So there was a profound experience of well being of happiness when it was called the happy one, sometimes, of happiness of well being a peace. And so if you remember that maybe from his perspective of his well being He understood these four truths and to say, say it from that perspective, what he saw was that if you reach out to claim to grasp, that you will suffer. If you have ease and you reach out to grasp or resist or tighten up or contract, in all the many forms, we can do those things that you will suffer partly because the very movement of clinging or grasping and clinging is a form of suffering in and of itself. But also because it tends to then generate further suffering down the line. So, from the point of perspective of E, if you grasp, you will suffer if you let go of that clinging That suffering will cease. So the suffering that arises because of that you're grasping, that suffering will go away when the grasping ceases. And then you come back to what? to that place of peace or peace. So, the way that the Four Noble Truths are usually taught, the first noble truth is a truth of suffering. Meaning that there is suffering, if people experience suffering, just a very simple statement. The second truth is a truth that suffering arises based on grasping or thirsting or clinging. And the third truth is that when that grasping seizes the suffering ceases Do you see that So, you can start from suffering you go suffering, cause of suffering and the cessation of the suffering. If you start from the ease, you see, you then you see, you'll see, maybe the grasping and the grasping leads to the suffering. So which direction you look, the Buddha saw the Four Noble Truths from the perspective of peace first. Many people when

they read about Buddhism, you know who, or maybe not very little spiritual practice will usually start starts looking at the Four Noble Truths and effects of suffering. And sometimes they get kind of pressed about Buddhism at least, was this you know, great religion that begins with suffering. Give me a break. You know, it's kind of like party pooping religion.

But, which perspective you know, where do we start from there sort of suffering and we start from ease which direction you go to understand these these core teachings. I think we start where we're at. But it can be very useful I think to remember how important ease are pieces ease of mind, ease of action is being able to be at ease going through the world to be able to hold things easily to be to ease up love the expression to ease up ease up a little bit here. It's a good thing. And And what if you if you understand the Four Noble Truths as truth to the normal ones? Then you might understand that the Four Noble Truths are speaking to your best welfare. There's the speaking to your welfare to some great couple capacity that you have for being at ease, being at peace. And that this is these are the kind of the area of things that we study we look at, to help develop that peace, to understand it, to let go the disease to become healthy, but but the hearts become healthy. And so the Buddha studied all these different religious traditions of his time. And amazingly, I think it's quite amazing that that this is when it came to the core teaching, suffering, cause of suffering, the end of suffering and then the fourth noble truth I've been told you yet. Because it's somehow you hear the word there's the truth of suffering, the truth of craving is the cause of suffering and the possibility of cessation of it all. You know, Doesn't sound that lofty. It sounds kind of like, you know, therapy. You know, and I pay my therapist a lot. You know, it'd be Buddhism is just therapy, clothed in mysticism in mystery, something i don't think so i think it's, it is a form of therapy. But not because it's mixed, that makes it demeans it or makes less of it. I think it really is pointing to the core in the heart of, or the very center of our heart, the center of what drives and motivates a human being and the possibility at the very core and center of our being. There can be profound sense of peace, at the very core of our being That is often hidden from view. When there's fear when there's less than desire and ambition, when there's a version ill will and resentment and those things begin to dissolve, fall away. We dropped down to some core sensitivity, a core place, this very sensitive, maybe tender core place a beauty, a sense of beauty and place that there are only I think, I think in English. And you know, this is your scale talking now, I may that in our, in our wonderful English language, I sometimes see more and more I sometimes just succumb to the succumb to the suit, referring to it as spiritual. That kind of spiritual depth of who we are. That sensitivity that place of openness, that place of beauty. It doesn't require believing and really anything. It doesn't require believing in religious doctrine doesn't require believing in divinity of something. God goddesses doesn't require believing in the true nature of human being who we really are to the self really is, doesn't require believing something about the nature of the cosmos of nature doesn't require any belief at all. It mostly requires dissolving all those boundaries, all those barriers for that sensitivity, that beauty to just be there for us. And it's such as to allow it to be.

So I know at least my experience, my sense is, it's quite profound. The Buddhist pointing to and it's very significant that he was able to point to something so profound without couching it. In a lot of esoteric religious beliefs Creed's know, the kind of things that often complicate metaphysics, Supernatural, all this stuff.

So the fourth noble truth, the fourth truth of the noble ones, is that a path of practice. Now sometimes It's said to be the path of practice that allows us to do the second noble truth. The third noble truth is because it's not easy to let go of clinging. We get help by following a path of practice a way of life that makes it easier for us to let go. So for example, if you really want to be understand yourself deeply enough to find the places you know the deep places of holding the Attachment inside of us. It helps. For example, if you practice mindfulness, it helps the mind is quiet. It helps if you live in ethical life, you're

not agitated. It helps right things help us eightfold path provide those things, the path to help us do that. But another way of understanding the Eightfold Path, is it not? It's not prescriptive. This is what you should do, but rather descriptive. It describes the path of, of how the noble ones walk, describes the life of someone who is attained, who is touched or experienced or uses that deep sense of ease or well being with that inner beauty as a reference point for how they live their life. Someone who had knows really their own inner beauty that everybody has, each of you have it. And even the ones of you who think not, he's not talking about me. You have it, everyone has it. And someone has in touch with that would not kill, would not steal, would not lie, would speak in a way that doesn't cause harm, intentionally. would would approach their mind their life mindfully with awareness with sensitivity would approach their life allowing the mind the heart to settle into a concentrated state to calm state peaceful state. They would understand, they would see if I cling to that thing right there, I will suffer. They'll see that be stirred up in the highlight for them to see all these things, and that's just how they live their life. So is it the Eightfold Path? Is Buddhism prescriptive? This is what you should do, or is it descriptive of how you'll be? If you have this experience? It can be both. It's up to you. But if you take your ease, whatever it is you've had in your life as a reference point, then the Four Noble Truths can serve as descriptions. They can serve not to tell you what to do, but to show you what you know, just show you what's going on. Oh, disease if I cling to this, or suffer. People do that. From this ease, the way I want to live my life is ethically it's a description of what wants to come out if you use your suffering As the reference point, then perhaps the Four Noble Truths niffle that are prescriptive. This is how would you should do me and my suffering. I don't like to suffer, what should I do? Follow the full path. Me and my ease. What should I do? Don't follow the Eightfold Path, but manifest eightfold path or, or allow the Eightfold Path allow ethics allow these things to flower bloom within you doesn't mean you have to do something you have to kind of just put a bubble pop up in you.

So the truth of the noble ones is something that can be your truth. If you use ease as a reference point and I would recommend it You try it. And for those of you who have very little ease in your life, don't say it'll cause even more disease if you get upset about that, but everybody will have some sense of ease because ease, I'd like to suggest at ease, it's a relative term. So if you're always hyped up and anxious, and perhaps one morning you wake up from a nice long sleep. And instead of being anxious, you know, a scale of one to 10 you're anxious at nine. You got a you have to be anxious at eight. So you're more at ease and you were when you were nine. So then that, that eight becomes a reference point for how do you get to nine and then someday you get to seven, that becomes reference points for eight nine so what I'm trying to say is whatever modicum of ease compared to how you maybe often are in your life, that becomes your teacher and your reference point. And if you take that seriously and understand how you lose your ease, and question that and look at more deeply, perhaps you'll be like the person I suggested to just stop being anxious. Perhaps you'll have overcome your irritation with me giving this talk and you will say, you know, I don't have to go there. I don't have to do that. I don't have to follow that train of thought that activity. I don't have to get caught up in those feelings. I can relax with this. I can get engaged in whatever endeavor I need to engage in take care of whatever you need to take care of. And I could do it with more relaxation with more ease. So what do you think of that challenge? Easy. So we have about 10 minutes. So if anybody would like to ask any questions or make some comments, or, or appropriate protests, this is a good time.

I have a question of kind of how to question. One of the things I've been working on, it's very much along the lines of what you're talking about. But

when, for example,

when I become aware of my lack of ease, I say to myself, this is practicing mindfulness.

When I

become I tell myself this is suffering. And I tell myself, this is practicing wise understanding.

When I tell myself

I remind myself of wise thought of cultivating wholesome states of mind. I remind myself that I'm practicing wise thought, and I wonder if you could comment on using those types of thoughts and how useful it is. As opposed to just being thinking less, using fewer words. And just being aware of a state of feeling state of mind. Okay,

that's a good question. But before the maybe, maybe I could answer a little bit, but perhaps is much more significant for you to answer that yourself. And, and so you've done both ways in which do you find helpful for you?

It seems to depend on how stuck I am. And

there's a comfort in knowing that I'm practicing the path, and that there is greater understanding. And there's an ease that seems to come with that.

Great, but it's when you're not stuck.

And you do that doesn't happen very often.

So I think you answered your own question, you find it useful to do it. And, and so, but if you're if you continue to practice mindfulness and notice all this, at some point, you'll find that it's no longer useful to have those thoughts. no longer use them to remind yourself of this is mindfulness is the right mindfulness isn't the right effort and all that, that just gets in the way But until then, point comes, is longer supportive and helps you? That sounds great. But just be sensitive The day will come when it's no longer appropriate. That makes sense to you. Yes.

So I was on your retreat last week, and you talked a lot about breathing with. So I'm also an anxious person. And so I'm thinking about practicing breathing with anxiety. So when is it appropriate to say

I'm breathing with and when is it appropriate to say stop it?

Good question. Again, I think that's for you to find out. So I can tell you some things to pay attention to. One is that if you don't know your anxiety very well. You might be better off just hanging out with it for a while. Getting to know it. And one of the important things is you hang out with some anxiety is you want to also notice what your relationship to it is. You have an aversion to it, you hate it, do you love it, to use it to build up your sense of self, your self identity is really dependent on it. Some people anxiety is so core, so central to how they organize their personality, their life, their character, whatever, that they'd be lost. Without it, they wouldn't have to orient themselves and find themselves. So that's interesting to see all that. So it's very useful to study it to learn to hang out with it into find a relationship, that's more economists about being anxious. Some people are anxious about being anxious. So just kind of be simple with it. Another thing to keep in mind is that if you if you are successful and saying no to it, and let it go, and there's probably small anxieties you can do that with, and I would encourage you start

practicing with you know, to balance weights and then eventually, you can get, you know, to the one pound weights and the 10 pound weights of anxiety, but it's good to start where you can. And so the two ounce weights, that's pretty good. If you can do it there, you know, just let it go and let go of it. But if you find yourself letting go of anxiety, if you're able to do that, you know, say no to it and let go of it. When it comes back really quickly, or the same anxiety reappears over and over and over again. And you're always saying no, and cutting it off, then you want to stop doing that, because then you're just kind of you just kind of sense cutting off the tips of the plant and the plant keeps growing. And you haven't really understood what's really happening. And so then you want to stop and actually engage and look more deeply at the anxiety and learn how to sit still with anxiety, sit in the middle of it and hold it and be with it, breathe with it. So you can start seeing some of the deeper dynamics of what's going on, with where the attachment really is. And so it's You know, if you're successful at saying no to it, then you find that it's slowly begins to the tendency that habit starts to fall away. I mean, this person I was, I was talking to you about, in part, he had his habit, you know, so it was when I saw there was releases of a habit, I thought you don't have it, sometimes they're broken by just not participating in it. But some anxieties are much deeper than that. And just know you can you can say no to a lot. And, and without addressing the deeper issues. And, and, and you can even kind of say no to it and override it and pretend it's not there, but could still be deep down festering. So those are some thoughts that may be useful. What do you mean by the expression breathing with anxiety? What does that mean? I wasn't at your retreat. So when we teach mindfulness Practice on retreats we often do it. giving instructions sequentially like I do here Wednesday evenings I do intro class. So we first start the first day we talk about mindfulness of breathing, just focusing on the breath, considering the breath. And then we'll talk about mindfulness of the body, focus on what's going on in the body, and then emotions and thoughts. And then eventually understand the full kind of range of what we can experience as humans, and to include it all to hold mandala. But between, but sometimes the breath is very useful. Sometimes what you can do is rather than letting go of the breath to notice something else, like anxiety, and just forget about your breath, there's no anxiety or notice what's going on in your body. You can continue being aware of your breathing and, and, and then as you breathe, you can breathe with the experience of anxiety, like discover different ways of doing it. The one is, you would feel your anxiety maybe feel in the body someplace. And then Imagine that the breath goes through it in and out of it. Or imagine that or you feel like anxieties in your belly. Then you feel the belly move as you breathe, and you feel that movement kind of moving through the anxiety. So you're both with your breathing which is stabilizing to do.

And you're staying with the anxiety. If you go into anxiety completely, some people spin out. And so you have an anchor or you have something offers some stability by staying with the breath. And the third option that some people find useful is they don't they, they, their attention is kind of like little bit on dual tracks. A part of the part of the awareness stays connected to the breathing. And part of the awareness stays with whatever you're breathing with, like the anxiety and somehow having that kind of dual kind of attention. The breath still provides the anchoring stability to lubricate and so we don't get pulled in. And if you ignore your strong experience Like your anxiety, then that's that's a struggle. But if you give completely over to, that might also be a struggle. But sometimes staying with the breath and breathing with can be used for some people just right balance of how to deal with it. Like multitasking. Everything is everything, everything, everything in its own season. Multitasking Buddhists I was really happy when I was after I left the monastery, I was a fast order cook. That was multitasking. My Buddhist practice helped me a lot to do that. Multitasking has its place. Okay, so maybe you have an easeful 2010. Thank you.