

# 2012-01-15 The Four Noble Truths From Aboutness To The Beingness

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## SPEAKERS

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So to talk about the Four Noble Truths, part of the reason to talk about them is that they're at the heart of what the Buddha had to teach. And the Buddha said once that the Four Noble Truths are the unique or the special teachings of the Buddhist, Buddha taught many things which were not unique to him. But the Four Noble Truths, you know, really densified is what was special. And so to talk about it today, from a little different start from a different angle than maybe usual, talk about how we use our minds. And you know, it's not that common for people to get curious about how our minds function. And you know, but today we have a researcher who's very interested in that topic, but in most people when they go about their daily life, Sometimes their whole life, there is not a lot of reflection or inward looking at the functioning of their own mind. And which is unfortunate because the mind is a phenomenal instrument. And as we understand how the mind functions, we can influence that instrument, we can have some impact on it, and certainly has a big impact on us. And sometimes the impact that our mind has on us is one that's you know, deleterious will bring suffering and sorrow, pain, all kinds of problems. And without kind of turning around turning the attention around to look at the nature of this mind how the mind functions. We can't take responsibility. We can't be involved in changing this mind some way. So the alternative to turning around and looking at how the mind works and functions is I think for many people is to be is to have the mind focused outwards and attention focused outwards, to have a preoccupation focused outwards. And I like to think about this outward focus on is the mind is involved in aboutness. mountainous mind is about something. So if you're thinking about work, you're thinking about work, it's not work. And so you're thinking about something that's out there and a sense of work maybe tomorrow or the next day. If you're thinking about what happened at work yesterday, again, your mind is about something, it's focusing on something. If you're thinking about yourself, about your problems, then even though it's kind of focused inward in a sense, your mind is still thinking about something. There's a concern that our thoughts or imagination is involved in focusing on and a person can spend a lifetime having their attention focused on the world of aboutness thinking about things. And it can be there's a lot of important things to think about. And so, no, it's not that we're not supposed to think about things. But there's appropriate time to think about things and times to not think about things and but many people live in the world of aboutness. They live in the world of their mind thinking about things, being concerned about things, sometimes obsessively. And sometimes not so obsessively. I like to think of this aboutness the mind that's focused on something, something we're thinking about looking at hearing whenever as being half the picture of who we are, what's going on. And we then do too much time looking at focusing on things that are about something, thinking about things that were missing half of who we are. And the other half of who we are is the mind that's thinking the mind that's aware, the mind that's mindful, the act of attention that's required to focus on something. So say that I'm very, very concerned with cooking my meal. And so your mind is involved is about cooking the meal, you thinking

about the meal, you're focusing, you're looking at the food and what's going on. And so the focus is about something. And, but the nature of how that focus is being operating, how we look how we're paying attention, how we're organizing the mental landscape, so we can kind of focus on making this meal that's not studied, that's taken for granted. It's kind of invisible.

And part of what we do in meditation is to turn around 180 degrees and no longer concern ourselves so much with our concerns, but more about the nature of the mind or awareness or attention that is required needed to have concerns. And this is a difficult move because our concerns are so important and the nature of attention awareness, that awareness is needed in order to pay attention. That awareness you know, has no monetary value and you know, you can't point to it has no shape, it has no weight, it has no texture, it has no smell it has no it's not, you know, it's, you know, it's not a thing like we usually think of as being something which is important. So naturally want to focus on things that are important. And that often ended tendency as we focus about things were concerned. But half the picture is the nature of awareness itself. Attention itself being mindful itself. And to make that switch to start paying, being interested in awareness attention can shift the person's sense of perception as radically as if you go from black and white movies to color movies. Those of you who maybe watched Wizard of Oz, you know, this switch happens. Or perhaps it's, I think it was sometimes just going like from three dimensions of life to four dimensions of life. You know, the fourth dimension being the kind of certain kind of depth dimension of awareness, attention to the mind itself. So it's quite a, you know, it can not seem important, but it enriches and deepens our life dramatically, to have the attention, turn around and look at itself focus on itself. As we do that, then we can have a chance to notice a variety of things. Attention or awareness, how we use it, what's the nature of our of our, how we attend, how we focus, how we're involved in concerns, how we do our aboutness and, and some of it's pretty interesting, you can see that there's shifts and changes in the end how attention is used. We sometimes talk about attention is riveted. I remember some years ago I was driving around here Redwood City, peacefully you know, taking my kids taking him to school or something. And a police car came up behind me and I thought there was nothing wrong with me. So I just you know, my attention wasn't riveted yet. And I made an you know, I made illegal but but unusual turned down the usual Street and the police car followed. So I didn't think too much about it. But then because my route involved in other and you Turn to no different little street. When the police car fall in the again, then my attention was riveted. And so you know, it's kind of everything gets kind of narrowed and focused, you know what's going on, and what's the problem here and what's happening. So it's possible to get riveted with the attention. It's also possible for attention to be our awareness to be quite relaxed and spacious. I have a nice nap, you're leaning against the nice tree and a nice day, everything is fine or no issues and you have a nice view maybe. And the mind feels very expensive. And some people love the experience of expansive awareness as opposed to a contracted focused attention. So we have the ability to be focused, be expansive. We also have the ability of the mind be or the attention be stable and steady. You put your attention someplace and it stays there. We also have the capacity to have the mind the attention, the awareness, mindfulness, jump around, hardly be able to have anything rollover at all. It just jumps around and, you know, flips flips from one thing to the other quite quickly. So when these examples, you see that, when you look turn around 180 degrees to look at the attention how we use our attending, that it's a, it's a fluid, flexible or changing kind of phenomena. Because awareness is not a simple single thing. It's not a unitary thing, and has no shape. But it's a combination of different mental factors that come together to create a sense of awareness of approach of awareness, attention. And so you can, it's fluid, it's changeable.

If you also if you look at how we attend, how we are mindful how we focus on things, the nature of focusing itself, then it's also possible to see that there's often a lot of attitudes that are embedded in our attending and our attention in our awareness. And so for example, there common word for some people

is the there can be some of these. Some of these attitudes can be very subtle, but pervasive and very deep. There are sometimes involved lifetime habits, and sometimes somewhat invisible, because we haven't stopped to take around to look. So one relatively common one for some people is fear. And when they look out through their eyes, when they look in our attention, there's a certain degree of apprehension or worry that there's a danger and you're looking at where's the danger? What's going on, I have to take care of myself. And the other attitude, which is pretty common, is there's an attitude of desire. I want something to be looked at, when looking and paying attention to anything is how does it fit into my, what I want, or aversion, just kind of everybody you know, pushing things away, not wanting things. It can be an attitude that's embedded in there, that goes along. There's also can be attitudes of self You know, what's in it for me? How am I, my identity, My, how I represent myself to the world, how other people see me, can be can be very closely intimately tied to how we pay attention, we pay attention to those things, which are either going to build us up or criticize us. It's it's one of the sad things about human life is that we're energized by people who criticize us, and people who praise us. But people who do neither, we're bored by I don't know if that's true, but it's true. It's sad. And so I think one of the reasons some people find it's nice to be at home, is sometimes at home. There are so many people to deal with. And when there's a lot of people to deal with sometimes our social concerns about how we fit the end and where we could query belong and don't operate so strongly. And so this sense of belonging, a sense of who we are. And how we're seeing is sometimes very deeply embedded in how we pay attention. So just the very nature of paying attention. There's this focus as concerns that that you notice in the background. So there's kind of a background attitude that can be there embedded in how we are attending, paying attention is there. The other thing that you might start noticing if you do this record, quiet down and do this amazing thing, to no longer be focused on all the important things you have to do, and be thinking about, and focus on how the mind is operating how it's paying attention. You can also be aware of whether it's happy or not, or whether it's stressed or not, whether it's relaxed or not. And sometimes the attention can be tense, or the way we're attending and focusing on things can be quite tense and sometimes it can be quite relaxed as we turn inward or do 180 degrees. Turn, then what we start noticing is not issues which are necessarily particular to us as a individual human being have their own biographical history. If you're thinking about things, sometimes you know, then it's very interesting you think many times is tied into what's important for me and everything. But as we turn around this hundred 80 degrees, start seeing something which in Buddhism might be called more universal, that which we all human beings share. We share the nature of attending or using our mind to pay attention. We share in and various attitudes and qualities that come into play as we attend or pay attention. And so we start seeing something which is more we have all in common, rather than something particular to me. And Buddhism says that suffering is something that most people do not get. point the night the 99%. The 99 I think it's 99 plus percent. You know, suffer you know, this is suffering as you know, we all share. And in some ways, it's unfortunate in some ways, it's also quite profound, that we share this with each other because of our common humanity. It's something that is not the personal failing that we should suffer, but rather something about our shared life that we're trying to find our way together and trying to understand something and, and hopefully opens our heart to each other.

So as we turn around and just 180 degree and look at this other half of our life, the nature of attending attention, awareness. That's when the Four Noble Truths come into play. Because the Four Noble Truths have a lot to do with how we attend how we pay attention to religion. kinship we form with what's going on the relationship we have, as we attend and pay attention to anything at all. What's that relationship that's embedded that's so sometimes that relationship that's embedded attitude is quite tenacious. So there are some attitudes that create more stress more suffering than others perhaps.

And so the Four Noble Truths are pointing to the core, or the root. activity in the mind that contributes to within Buddhism is called suffering or stress. And so we start there, then Buddhism points to what's something that's called tanha. Tanha, is a colloquial time of the Buddha colloquial word that meant thirst And so it wasn't, you know, some big psychologically technical word, just thirst but not thirst for, you know for a drink. But more like the thirst like an English we use the word the thirst for power that thirst for money or something, there is kind of a driven ness or compulsivity kind of a craving, that the mind is capable of. And when I like to think of as drivenness or compulsion, when the mind contracts around the desire, when the mind gets obsessed about a desire, when the mind has a desire that you can't put down, can't let go of easily, when the mind is kind of riveted by a desire, caught in the throes of a desire. Then it's called tanha or craving or thirst. And when the mind is riveted or caught in the throes of desire, so it's contracted and tight, then sometimes delighted in that desire, delighted in that kind of sometimes desire. You know, kind of being caught by desire can have a certain kind of energetic delight in it. But still, that itself is stressful that itself involves a certain degree of suffering. And when it's very strong, they can have a lot of suffering. And when it's built has a lot of expectation and hope and fear, a lot of sense of self involved in self representation, when our security and safety and you know, some so many things get tied in to this, to this, the force of being of givenness of being compulsion from stronger and stronger and their gifts. And it's a setup for suffering. And so this movement from the mind, being in the throes of desire caught in desire, as the root for our suffering, is the first to the Four Noble Truths. So the first noble truth begins With the truth that there is suffering in the common human experience, that is the 99.99 or so, that there is, you know, the experience of suffering. And the kind of suffering that Buddhism is interested in looking at and addressing is that suffering, that that is defined or by the second noble truth, that suffering that comes out of ton now, or this, this, this being caught by desire. And this has an impact on the nature of attention because our mind is operating mind is not free when we're caught to these things. The fourth noble truth says that it's possible to seize, bring to an end, the suffering that's caused by being caught by desire, it's possible to get uncaught by desire, it's possible become free And it's quite possible, you know, to have desire without being caught by it. There's just good desires to have and go along. There's some really beautiful, wonderful desires that people can have that because so wonderful and so noble people sometimes overlook that the how they hold the desire is causing a lot of suffering. And there's desires that are terrible desires to have, but they're held so lightly and loosely. And that people are free from it, they're not going to act on it because, you know, it's the it's not the nature of desire per se, which Buddhism focuses on the kind of desire but rather how we hold it, how it affected has in our mind. So again, this is another way which we keep turning 180 degrees around to look at something that functioning how this functions within us. Rather than focusing on what we're wanting, which is the object which is aboutness. We can get blind if we only focus on what We want to what we don't want the world of aboutness we're blinded from the other half of what goes out of what our human nature is about. So that it's very hard training and a big part of Buddhist trainings is training to be willing to turn the attention away from all the things that we're about all the things that are so important for us, we have to do and fixed and manage and get. So we can pay attention as a whole other side, the nature of awareness or attention or attending how the mind functions.

And so the Four Noble Truths that are part of this exploration part of the study of how you know this, this universal is common characteristics of our mind or attention, how it functions, how it works. And so we need some help in order to do that. Well, we need some help in order to study this to turn this around well, and so the help in order to do this is the fourth noble truth, which is the Eightfold Path. And it helps for example, you know, if you spend your day robbing and stealing and raping and killing, things like that, you know, you're more than your world is about certainly is about aboutness about doing those things and probably, you know, you don't go home and just kind of like, you know, relax you know, and the rest of the nature of awareness you know, probably your mind continues to be obsessed or tight or

contracted. And so and it's, you know, so concerned about those police you know, I mean, let me know, please follow me a few streets and I was riveted. just dragging my car. And, but you know, so. So certain kinds of living certain kinds of ways, doesn't is not conducive for the mind to be stable or steady or calm enough to do this turning around to look. And so part of the Eightfold Path, it's really important if you want to get help and doing this kind of big and beautiful thing, it really helps if you live an ethical life, because an unethical life keeps you agitated keeps keeps you focused or caught up in the world of aboutness. If you want to free yourself from aboutness, it helps if your ethical life is clean, clear, good. So focusing on your speech and how you speech is important part of that ethics focusing on great behavior so you don't kill and steal involving sexual misconduct. And then also about your livelihood, focusing on how you make a livelihood for yourself that is supportive of this process of turning around to look at the heart. Did you know The mind functions, it's 180 degree turn. So those are the middle section of the Eightfold Path. It also helps if you have a good understanding about the Four Noble Truths, you know what's going on here. So the first step they infopath is right for you. And one of the one of the common ways of defining right view is that you're looking at your experience through the perspective of the first three noble truths. So, you know if, if what you want to do is to free the mind free that the other half of ourselves from the attitudes of being contracted or tight or caught or driven is, instead of free, which is a beautiful thing to have the heart or the mind set free and relaxed and not caught, to be at ease and to be at peace with itself is one of the most beautiful things to have happen. But if you want that, it's hard to do that. If you think that your spiritual life will find its culmination satisfaction, meaning by if you can find just find the right crystal and you go around the Crystal shops and crystals are nice. And maybe they're even powerful, but you need to find the right crystal then you can Everything will be okay. If you do that you're looking in the wrong direction. Because the direction you need to look at is not that the crystal, which is again is a world of about focusing outside yourself. But you have to be willing to turn around and look at where the problem is. You know where your attachment is, where your clinging is, don't expect the crystal to help when you're the one who's clinging. So there's many ways in which people focus on things which don't aren't really direct and to the point. And the Four Noble Truths I find quite beautiful because they're to the point. They're very simple. They're just to the point you look directly at where the problem is. And so the first of the Four Noble Truths involves I think I understand it to be a willingness to do this turn 180 degree turn. To begin looking here at With your contribution is to the suffering. And this also is very hard. Many people suffer for terrible reasons which they don't feel they're responsible for. And so then it's easy if we stay the victim, to blame them, blame it, blame my illness, blame whatever, and focus again outward to the world of aboutness. In order to turn 180 degree 880 degrees around to get the other half of our life.

We begin, we have to be interested in taking, you know, what is our contribution? What are we adding? That's, that's, that's where the Eightfold Path. That's where the, that's where the Four Noble Truths are about our contribution. So there has to be a willingness to suspend and the appropriate time blaming other people's responsibility For what's going on, in order to find out what am I doing? And if you never do that, then you miss half your life. So turn around and look, what am I what's my contribution and, and then there's the practices of beginning to use your mind differently. It's not just a matter of looking, but which is mindfulness, this seven step of the Eightfold Path. Start looking more carefully what's here. And then concentration, the eighth step, a full path stabilizing steady in your mind. So the mindfulness can be more pure, more focused or more can look more deeply. And as you see how the mind functions, how it operates, what you're doing, then we can start making choices. We can make choices to let go of those things which cause the mind or the heart to suffer. And we can, we can do those things in the mind, which helps it be more, you know, at peace or at ease or happy. And we can watch what the choices we have in the mind in our hearts and what we do in there, the mental landscape. And this is a hugely important thing in Buddhism Buddhist practices to begin taking not only responsibility for mind, but begin discovering where we have some agency to make a difference. So it could be as



simple as how to use a simple example. You know, I could be driving someplace. And notice that I'm able to tense if I turn around 180 degrees around, stop focusing on where I'm trying to get to and what I'm thinking about and turn around and look at my tension. I see the tension has to do with how I'm driving it look more carefully to see the tension is there because I'm feeling so much on the fear that have come late. That person is going to be angry with me, but come late to my appointment. So maybe that's a reasonable movement of the mind. But if I turn around and say, Do I need, can I take responsibility for that? Can I change that inner landscape? Can I let go of my fear? Or can let go of my impatience? Or can I at least let go of the ways in which I'm driving such a forceful, fast way. And as I do that, as I change that, then things calmed down a little bit. I don't do that, things probably will speed up. So the Eightfold Path, part of it involves beginning to take responsibility for the inner landscape, and learning how to navigate it, and to make choices that are different than how we're just kind of barreling along in our own. As the Eightfold Path becomes stronger for for us To become bit bigger part of our life, the function of that is to help us with this work of turning inward and seeing deeper and deeper, but not just seeing deeper and deeper. But I like to think of it as simplifying the inner landscape of attention, of awareness of how we attend. So that our attending, the way we are paying attention, the way we are aware becomes a simpler and simpler act. So it's just paying attention with just a present and paying attention without a lot of desires. embedded in our attention without a lot of fear or aversion. Without a lot of concern for self is self representation or when people think we have an increased capacity for simple attention simple presence. The process of simplifying attention or awareness, all the strenuous kind of extras that get somehow entangled with it is a really beautiful thing. And to discover through a simpler and simpler capacity to be simpler capacity, just to be aware to be here is one of the great gifts. Things are not always best when we stop being so entangled and how things are. The Four Noble Truths as I understand them, are support and help us to be, at least in the simplicity of our attention or awareness, to realize this other half of who we are. The subjective landscape of attention of awareness has a capacity of luminous clarity, openness, relaxation, peace, that, for me is very closely associated with being Simple. So little isn't necessary. And so the part of the process of using the Four Noble Truths is the process of beginning to let go of all the extra stuff that we kind of pile on top of our capacity to simply be present simply to be. And as we simply be, as half of us the subjective side of attention attended becomes simpler and clearer and less entangled and less driven. Then we can still be involved in the world of about this, you still take care of things, be involved, but we tend to get involved in the world and be with our concerns in a much more relaxed and easy way. And we don't invest so much important, desperate importance in that half of our life. You can be more balanced. So my proposal to you I don't know if it's true or not, is that my proposal is that there's a good chance that most of you have lived an imbalanced life. And you're focused on that half it has to do with aboutness. And I would love that this talk now urges you to correct that balance. And so you become equally balanced on the two sides, sides of aboutness and the sides of beingness. And may Your beingness be simple and peaceful, and a gift to the world. So thank you