

2013-01-06 The Four Noble Truths

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SPEAKERS

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Morning, happy new year. And always grateful to come in, sit here and be with all of you. And certainly grateful for this last year that we were here and I could be here and practice with you and looking forward to this coming year. It's the custom here and the first Dharma talk of the year to give a talk on the Four Noble Truths. And that's what I'll do today. Four Noble Truths are considered by many to be at the very core of Buddhist teachings, Buddhist practice Buddhist insight. And some people say that all of Buddhism can be placed within the context of the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths can be understood intellectually, maybe relatively easily. But they are have the greatest value when they're seen with what's called the Dharma eye, or the eye of wisdom. And this is some kind of deeper capacity we have of knowing that is, we know, in reference to or through the perspective of our capacity for spiritual freedom for deep inner peace, for love. And so how do we tap into or how do we awaken the Dharma I? How do we have this kind of knowing that's deeper than thinking about something or even understanding and some kind of cognitive way? And one of the things is, I think it helps, is I think Dharma AI is kind of shy or it's easily eclipsed by in the busyness of the mind, or the attachments of the mind, if the occupations of the mind busyness of our life. And that for this kind of deeper knowing there has to be a certain amount of space, kind of maybe temporal space, space time, the kind of sense of time for things that maybe is almost timeless. So not the kind of, you know, if we're harried with time, there's very little capacity to know and some deeper way or there's some kind of stillness needs to be there. Not a stillness, necessarily. That's absence of movement and action in our life, but a sense perhaps, of inner stillness or outer stillness. That is, nurturing, nourishing or perhaps silence There's space or time in a sense of silence that is also soft and safe that we can have. So there's some space and some kind of deeper place inside of us to know, to be aware, to sense to feel. It's easy to live on the surface of our lives. And many of the ways in which we even think about ourselves, our personality, our world, how we interact with the world, is in a certain kind of way on the surface. And there's a beautiful kind of metaphor for this. It says it's kind of a true story. In the late 1800s or so 1800s there was a in the ruins of the ancient old capital of Thailand. I think it's pronounced utopia. was a nine foot plaster Buddha that I guess was quite nice it was had was plaster and had glass different places on it so it made it more beautiful and it was moved with tremendous effort to Bangkok where it was placed at a small temple with a roof over it and at some point it was moved to a bigger place bigger temple and at some point it was gonna be moved again. And they built a nice temple for it and it was going to be moved in 1954 and they had I think a crane come to lift this nine foot large sitting Buddha was quite heavy. And in the process of lifting it, one of the ropes broke and it it fell to the ground and some of the plaster cracked. And to everyone everyone's surprised through the cracks of the plaster, they saw gold

And so they carefully took off the plaster to discover there was a nine foot gold statue to real gold. And what they think happened is that the Burmese were invading Thailand in the 1700s 1700s. And we're about to, I guess, ransack the Capitol. And so they protected the gold by covering with cluster. And then

it was forgotten that it was covered with plaster. Maybe the people who did the work disappeared or were killed in the war or something. And according to Wikipedia, because you can read about it there. The value occurrence value of this statue is 200 and \$50 million that much gold in it some like five tons of gold.

So for 200 years the statue was the essence of the statue was the value of the treasure was hidden by plaster. So in this metaphor and taking that as a metaphor for you How often is your gold, your inner gold covered over with plaster? You plaster yourself How much time do you spend concerned with your appearance and how you appear to other people? How much of the time do you caught up with crazy You know, the plaster of me, myself and mine? How often are you putting on the decorations of that are that come from being greedy? Or being afraid? Maybe it's not plaster but rather armor that we put on. Or we put on the weapons again, maybe metaphor, armor of hate and anger and animosity or delusion and how much we caught up and involved in activities in our life that keep us superficial, keep us on the surface. And it's remarkable that people can do very profound things and get so busy doing it, that they stay on the surface of their lives. Maybe initially there was some depth of connection and value what they were doing But because of dizziness or fear or desire or greed or identity issues that come into play. Measuring ourselves comparing ourselves to others, we end up in fact living more in the surface having plaster and not really sensing and feeling what's deeper inside.

And I think I have a feeling the gold in our gold is inside. And so the Dharma is the Four Noble Truths are pointing to the gold to go to the treasure that we have that's waiting inside, that if you're lucky enough, your rope will break and you'll crack a little bit. Don't be afraid of cracking there's a there's I think I said Rachel rip great It was her name Rehman Nomi rumen, who wrote a story about when the heart cracks, the light shines through. I got a note once on retreat, someone I'd be working with as a teacher, and at some interest, she had a lot of pain. And so, but then she sent me this beautiful note that says something like, now I understand. When the heart breaks into many pieces, it has more surface area to feel nicer. So don't be afraid of cracking a broken heart. So the Four Noble Truths are, can be presented simply an ad because they're so simple, they're often misunderstood. One of the simple ways That the Buddha mentioned about the Four Noble Truths was a particular phrase out phrase ology a particular way of saying it. That's. He said, this is suffering. As the first noble truth, this is the cause of suffering. This is the cessation of suffering. And there's a way to that cessation. And then this is, I think, very significant, because it's meant to be particular. It's meant to be a way of seeing what's happening in the moment as we live our lives, as opposed to a general philosophy that you know, you read a philosophy book about Buddhism Mills, you know, it just, you know, and sometimes when people take it very generally, they misunderstand it and say that Buddha taught that life suffering. But instead of taking a generally here the Buddha is making it particular. And the ability to stop. And notice what's going on in our lives in particular, is a doorway to understanding the value of these four noble truths. So it means being willing to look not to argue with the Four Noble Truths as being you know, it's a philosophy, but rather to notice, here, now, if there is suffering, to notice this, this suffering is here. And then, and then stopping for the particular to become aware of the cause of suffering the conditions for it, which the Buddha in a simple way, talked about as clinging or thirsting or craving. I like to call it driven is a compulsion Because if you're have compulsion or driven is you can't stop so easily. And I think that's part of the nature of suffering. If we feel suffering, we feel some kind of despair or discouragement or upset or hurt or something. And you know, you can see it, you don't want to have it, but you can't just kind of put it down so easily. Because there's that we're driven, there's compulsion, there's kind of an obsessive quality to the desire or the clinging or whatever it was we're holding on to. And then it's possible to bring that to an end to release it. These three first noble truths, suffering the cause and the cessation eye. It might be useful to think of them from the point of view of the head, the

body and the heart. The head in a sense that they are intellect or cognition, can see and be aware that we're suffering

You can certainly know your feel your suffering and hurts, right. But to know it is very important as part of the value of mindfulness to have that zoom certain kind of freedom, or space that can happen when there's a clear recognition, this is suffering. Because otherwise the knowing we have gets entangled with it gets caught up in it. And there are not a few people who identify with their suffering. at their most recent retreat, I thought there were a number of people who came with wide eyes metaphorically at least, and said, I had no idea how much I was depending on my suffering. In order to feel safe in the world, or to feel like I know who I am, and without it, I wouldn't know who I am. I need to have it. So get entangled with it. But the knowing is the first step. To know that we're suffering, and that's kind of the mind in a sense, cognition. The second noble truth, I think of is very helpful to think that the at the door to understanding it is through the body. Certainly that's been my case. That suffering that when we cling, when there's compulsion, when there's craving, many, many times, it is manifested somehow in the body. The bigger the craving, the more likely something is gripped in your body, your, your belly, your hands, your face, your eyes. It's quite something, how people sometimes grip reality with their eyes. This also I noticed in this last retreat in particular, actually, I actually bought one of the retreatants came for what's called the interview meeting with me to talk about the practice. And as I was, we were talking and I was trying to say something helpful. I could see that her eyes were just locked in. Because he was trying so hard to get something understand what I had to say and try to. And the very kind of locked into this of her eyes, trying to understand the great wisdom that I had this guide to good she listens, right. But that very locked deadness represented the issue she had to address. So it was kind of like this. It's almost like she couldn't really understand what I had to say. Because she was understanding it through what she was trying to understand it. The way she was locked in was invisible to her. How you look was invisible how she was looking was invisible because of what she was trying to look at. That makes sense. So thought at that point in the interview rather than continuing with my wisdom maybe was to stop and said and gently ask her and say what's what's happening with your eyes right now. And, and when she paid attention to that she could feel I can sense it herself.

There's so many ways in which ways we react, we cling we close down, we contract, we resist manifest in our body, that I found that by. By doing that wonderful turn, hundred 80 degree turn away from what we're concerned with, to really feel what's happening in our body is one of the really significant ways of understanding the nature of clinging. And also to begin understanding one of the play one of the ways it might be possible to relax To let go. And the relaxation which is socially important part of Buddhist practice is not so just kind of, you know, you can be a relaxed person, which is nice but, but rather so that you don't have to hold on and be in the grip in the vise. So the things that we're caught up in and it's surprising for people who do Buddhist practice, how much they're in the grip, of variety of attachments and clinging. If you don't want to know how attached you are, don't do Buddhist practice. Because it'll be revealed to you and in deeper and deeper layers. And one of the things that people are in the grip of often is their sense of self, the construction of self the creation of self, nothing wrong with creating self and having self identity, but in the grip of it caught in it is, you know, is more suffering. So in the body, how is your body in relationship to your Suffering what's happening here. And I find that dropping into the body is also very helpful because if you stay only in the head and the cognition of it, it's all too easy to remain involved in the story making mind, the mind that tells stories that interprets that it assigns meaning to what's going on. And often suffering is fueled by the story making mind that we are the mind tells itself stories about what is and then we grip more we justified clinging or reacting to clinging. One of the greatest forms of suffering is suffering more because you're suffering because we're uncomfortable in some way. There's all kinds of judgments and ideas about what that means to be suffering or what it means to be a person who's suffering. And so then we react and cling and

despair and resist and get angry and run away and all these wonderful things. So to come into the body, and one of the things that it's possible to feel through the body, I believe often is some of the manifestations or actions that come out of clinging or resistance, which takes the wonderful as the wonderful names in English, fight, flee, or freeze, fight, flee or freeze. And so you can feel that you can feel your strong tendency to fight to attack to harm to lash out, in any direction that the world outside or the world inside to us. It's possible to feel the tendency to flee, to close down to resist. And it's possible to feel the freeze that could happen and so we breathe instead of do flight. Fight for Flee and freeze, we breathe. And again, the breathing is part of the body, come into the body and let the body breathe, let breathing, the rhythm of breathing, the attention to the breath, be a protection from all of that because when the breathing is fluid, the breathing kind of begins to move it kind of lubricates, it kind of loosens, it kind of keeps us from getting too caught. as you go about your daily life, I find it very helpful to tune into what's happening with breathing in the body. And to watch be very curious and interested at the how breathing shifts and changes when it becomes tight and contracted or shallow or when the stomach is held or different parts are held. Because oftentimes, if you really notice that the tendency is to want to stop doing it, and not that we can always stop doing it, but sometimes you can sometimes It's almost natural just to relax, oh, I'm holding and let go. And once you let go and the breathing is more natural, it's a little bit harder to be caught in the grip of fight or flight or flee or freeze.

So then the third noble truth has this kind of odd formulation of cessation, the truth of cessation or this is cessation I suppose my guess is that most of you hardly ever used the word cessation in your active vocabulary. What is Buddhists mean by cessation? It's the seizing of something, bring to an end to something. And this is kind of the good news in Buddhism. often think it's very unfortunate that the good news in Buddhism the Buddhist English is announced through the word cessation. It's not very inspiring. But it's, you know, the fact that we can release the grip, release the holding or the compulsion. And that the suffering that follows in the wake of that compulsion or grip can be released as well. That we can let go of this strong tendencies to fight or flight or freeze is a very meaningful thing for everyone. But not again as an intellectual thing, and maybe not even as a bodily thing as the body relax, but this is an issue of the heart. The goodness of the heart is waiting for us. Our heart is a mixed bag. Our heart is capable of causing trouble but our hearts also has a tremendous capacity. For goodness our hearts our treasures our hearts our gold. But that this cessation is to relax and let go into or to open up or awaken with the Dharma hi the hearts capacity to be at home in itself our hearts capacity to be at peace. Our hearts capacity to be open and if we use the opposite language of fight, flee or freeze and we have the wonderful expressions of approach, soothe and open. So we have both capacities. But the Dharma hi opens to this inner heart this inner gold where the tendency is To meet our world, with compassion, with care, with willingness to openness, to be undefended and resistant. Not because we're being naive, but because there's a way in which being undefended and resistant, is what makes us safest in the world. What allows us to touch in to the depth of you know the depth of inner goodness. And so to awaken the Dharma eye is to awaken a sensitivity and intuition or seeing or an understanding, from the perspective of this goodness of the heart, this capacity of the heart to be open, to be at peace, the heart to be available, and not covered over plastered over and to begin appreciating how valuable it is to drop into or to be present for this inner capacity, this inner knowing this inner sensitivity that we have.

I find it meaningful that in the formulation of the Four Noble Truths that the Buddha gave, there's no personal, no personal pronouns. So I don't know what exactly why that is. But I like to interpret it this way. That as we open, as we practice, as we say, present for this world of ours, we don't really differentiate between the inner and outer world. In fact, that inner and outer world is kind of it's not there's not a real separation between them. And so if we encounter suffering in the world around us and our neighbors and friends and community and the wider world, approach, soothe and open. Let this

place is the Dharma AI the Dharma heart. How does it respond? How does it resonate? What does it want to do? It'll probably probably respond very differently than if it's the plaster, the brittle, brittle plaster. That can break so easily. But so, you know, so there's this carrying in both directions. And one of the surprises is that when we drop into the heart and feel the world through the heart You know, we might say the heart his inner, the inner life. We go in to discover the heart. But when we rest in the heart, there is no inner and outer. It's as if the heart can encompass the whole world includes everything in it. So the sense of being some, you know, some precious inner, just the very idea of inner precious inner is a little bit of a clinging kind of a little bit of a holding a little bit of creating something that's not needed.

So to offer our Dharma heart or golden heart to the world around us, I think it becomes kind of a natural thing to do. When the plaster falls off when the clinging releases. And the goodness of our heart is the place where we come from and respond. To the people who we know and the world around us.

So I don't so don't be afraid of having your plaster broken. You're heartbroken. Don't think it you have to maintain the facade because probably behind your plaster is something that's worth more than 200 and \$50 million probably it's priceless once there so my hope is that in this coming year that not only will you discover how priceless Your heart is, but that you nourish it, support it, open it, grow it. But perhaps even more wonderful is through your own sense of your heart, Dharma heart, inner heart, is to see it, value it in others, to recognize it. Others have a heart as well as others have this place. They might not know it. But they also have this beauty that's there. And so we also then become someone we could community that appreciates each other, for the depth of our hearts, not just what we see on the surface.

As opposed to be complete around the Four Noble Truths, I should mention that the fourth truth is the Eightfold Path. And the Eightfold Path are those helpful practices that we can do that are the stepping stones and support for the deep inner work of the first note three noble truths are pointing to because it's not always easy to do this work, it's not always easy to open up the plaster and go through into the deep depths of who we are. And so there's, it's important to have a lot of support, put together the conditions that support that, that make it safer to do. So. That gives us a strength and courage to do so. And so the Eightfold Path, or the supports, the strength, the protections that we build and create so that we can do this deeper work.

So that's probably enough. We have a little over five minutes before the scheduled ending of this time. Would anybody like to ask a question about that or clarification or anything? Sometimes nice to hear from people. Yes.

I'm reading a book called this social animal and it's the stories About it's a fictional story, but it's the premises about what, what makes people happy and successful and fulfilled. And the basic premise is that character and morality really comes from the subconscious versus the cognitive conscious. And I'm always trying to in a more maybe more technical way, find out what what the word heart means. And I think what he's, to me what he's trying to describe is it's it's the heart It's the unconscious or not conscious that is where, where people's connection to themselves in the world and just wonder what you thought of that unconscious versus heart.

I don't think that Buddhist teachings put so much emphasis The unconscious. But it certainly recognizes there can be a tremendous amount of subconscious. Meaning that it's not conscious now, but it can become conscious. And so part of what Buddhist practice does is to begin to open up and to reveal the more subconscious and unknown aspects of what operates and what works. Things that are covered over hidden are the layers that we go through. And so what is the heart mean? I wondered about that

myself coming down here today. What's the heart and why am I going to talk about the heart? It's a kind of a, it's kind of a I don't think the Buddha talked about the heart the same way that I did today. But every culture has their own words to try to point to something. Some people in Buddhism like the word Buddha nature, there's something the some people beautiful, use the word spiritual material. Some people, you know different words that point to something there's a distinction that's valid. And, and some people talk about. The Buddha himself talked about something which is almost as bizarre. I think for many people here in the West it was translated literally, he talked about feelings of the flesh and feelings not of the flesh. But if you kind of understand what he meant means by this, some translators are translated as worldly and not worldly or spiritual and worldly. That the not the flesh. It has to do with those inner feelings that can happen that have are not there and we're not we're feeling not because independent of how our external senses are being stimulated. So for example, you know, you can feel love and peace, something is people can feel but it's But we're not they're not happening because of our, you know, our taste buds or touch nerves or different things. It's something deeper knowing that knows love or nosepiece or knows generosity. And so it's this, the inner kind of knowing or capacity or feelings that give birth to the kind those kinds of valuable human capacities of love and peace, generosity, wisdom, that in a very, very rough way I'm calling a heart. And it's not a surprise. I think that every book that Jack Kornfield has written has the word heart in its title. Because I think in our culture, it's trying to point to something that speaks to our culture in some way. I don't know if that that you know addressed your topic or not.

Gil, thank you so much for this beautiful beginning of the new year. I've been focusing on one other aspect of your talk today secession. My wife died a week ago. And I've been with the help of many people in the Sangha and other friends and allies. I've been really sitting with this notion of secession, over and over again and, and also discovering some of the riches that come out of embracing cessation. Being with it, being with others, sharing the experience of loss with others and having them all also share their experiences of loss has been very healing for me. And so I just wanted to share that with all the members of the Sangha. And to thank you in many, many ways over the past year, and in the future that our lives will touch in various ways.

The I'm sorry for your loss and the so I think what you're coming here week after and speaking this way, is a testament to how loss and probably certain degree of of grief is kind of the broken heart which shows the gold allows something beautiful to be there. And grief offer often comes together with gratitude and if it's kind of relaxed into it. And what some of you don't know is that Rob for many years has been supporting the support groups we have here on Wednesday for people with life threatening illnesses and so He's offered tremendous support for people who are going through this kind of process of dying themselves. Some of the people in the group have died over the years. And one of the remarkable things about the support group that Robin and make Bennett's facilitate, is I think it's probably the place at IMC where there's the most love. So, you know, they kind of tragic, right? This may be kind of tragic, but it's also a place of a lot of love. And so it's good work. The heart is good. Did you trust it? Thank you. So I wish you all a heartfelt year. Thank you.