

2016-01-04 Experiencing The Four Noble Truths

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SPEAKERS

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So Good evening, then my loud enough for you all can hear okay? Okay. So welcome to 2016 I don't know if you've been welcomed properly. And you still have 360 days left in which is kind of a blank canvas for you to paint craft your life on. And one of the aspects of the Buddha Dharma teachings of Buddhism is that this life that we live is a life that we can craft. The Buddha repeatedly used the language of crafting, and artistry and kind of kind of hand making. He said like, just like a farmer creates irrigation channels, just like Aerosmith makes arrow arrows and just like pot Potter makes pots. So a wise person shapes their minds. So we were in Buddhism were craftsperson were artists of our own life, and who we are, how we are, how we manifest how we appear, how we grow, how we change is malleable to the influences we put on ourselves. And what you do today, what you say today, what your intentions are, how what you do repeatedly, will shape your future, how you grow and how you change. Buddhism puts a tremendous emphasis on the teachings of impermanence, that things are always changing. But not all things change randomly, and that all things change out of control, that we have a role to play. And if you want to live a life of peace, of wisdom, of compassion, of clear seeing, then you can live you can behave, you can put together the conditions. So you get shaped as a person who becomes a peaceful person, you can be shaped, crafted into a person who becomes wise. And this takes, you know, practice. And so in Buddhism, the emphasis is much more on practice, on behavior on conduct, than it is on beliefs on ideas and concepts. And that's not always so obvious. If you read books on Buddhism, where sometimes it seems like some books in Buddhism seem pretty heady. And, and, but if you come back to the early teachings, you find that sometimes they're kind of heady, but only the Buddha was only replying to heady people that came to him. For the most part, and, and over and over again, the emphasis is on, on shaping yourself crafting yourself, cultivating yourself developing yourself. And one of the key teachings that's come down through the centuries, that kind of encapsulates this movement of crafting ourselves, is teaching called the Four Noble Truths. And the Four Noble Truths are can be seen as kind of propositions and sometimes people see them as beliefs and tenants, though that's not how they're meant. They're meant is for practices that we engage in is crafting. There's, there's tasks, there's activities associated with each of these four noble truths. And it's possible to see that all of what Buddhism has to offer is somehow encapsulated or summarized or rises out of these four statements. These four practices are that important in Buddhism, and it's my custom here at IMC at the first talk of the year, first Monday of the year, to always give a talk on the Four Noble Truths with the idea that this kind of sets the stage for the teachings for the rest of the year, but also sets the stage for if you're interested for your practice in your life, how you want to craft it and make it the first of these four noble truths is a very simple statement, the truth of suffering.

And before you start thinking that the Buddhists are always focusing on the negative, the whole emphasis in the Four Noble Truths is to bring us to happiness to peace to some great happiness, great sense of well being in our life. And we start by a very honest willingness to address how we suffer address our stress to really Look carefully at our distress or unease. I like the word unease for this. So the truth of unease. And chances are that you're all familiar with being feeling uneasy in some way. Because I think it's part and parcel of most people's lives, sometimes big sense of unease, maybe the word suffering with a capital S, fits pretty well. And sometimes it's pretty mild, lowercase you for any sort of mild thing. The and the second noble truth is the truth, that of the arising of suffering, sometimes it's seen as the cause of suffering. But it's the really the conditions that which our suffering comes with. And I explain that in a moment. The third is the truth of the cessation of suffering and cessation of the conditions that bring it about, and are the conditions that it comes along with. And this is the good news, it just sounds pretty, you know, uninteresting just the cessation of something, the end of something. But the end of suffering, the corollary of that is profound level of peace or well being. The third noble truth is the practice, or the series of practices, or activities or behaviors that we can engage in, in this crafting of ourselves is kind of building ourselves developing ourselves. So that we can do that the work of liberating ourselves freeing ourselves from an ease in the most profound ways available to human being. So it's not simple stress reduction, but rather a radical transformation of the heart. So the heart, I like to liberate at heart I like to think of as a heart that's at home in itself. When you were at home with the idea, at least in theory is that a home is a place where you can just be yourself, just relax and feel at home, feel peaceful, and you can walk around your underwear, your pajamas and you're comfortable. Whatever, you know, you just be yourself. And so, to be at home, in your heart is to be really feel at peace and at home and with yourself. And a really deep acceptance of yourself so that you really feel like who you are, is a refuge who you are, is a source of well being. You freed yourself from the forces of conflict in the heart, distress, anxiety. So these are the four noble truths. They're called Noble. The word noble is an interesting term. They're not called sacred truths. So occasionally, people will use that word. Sometimes they translate as holy truths. But that's really not a good translation of the original Indian word. The and I think I'd like to contrast it with sacred because sacred is kind of a loaded term. And sacred sometimes refers to a sacred reality, sacred idea is something other outside of oneself. And there are things which maybe deserve to be called sacred, I'm not saying there isn't. But the idea of noble refers to into a kind of person, a person who has no ability, a person who has, that's an English translation. A person who has dignity person who has value, person who, who's upright. And so rather than focusing at something that's sacred, a sacred reality, the focus is on again the crafting and cultivating of ourselves becoming someone who becomes dignified, becomes upright becomes a certain kind of nobility, perhaps the and true noble truths are the are sometimes called the truth. So the noble ones, the word truths, again, can sound like a, you know, a tenant you have to believe. But here the word has a couple of other connotations in the Indian language, the word such sought cannot also mean reality of four realities, four things which we can really real in the sense that we can experience them.

The other meaning is what is practically useful. So, it's true that if I cut my finger, putting it cleaning the cut and putting a bandage on it, helps it heal faster. That's to say it's true means that it's accurate, doesn't mean that it's helpful doesn't mean that it's a philosophical proposition. You have to believe that bandages are true, you know the truth. Just that that's good idea. So it truth is in that sense that it's a good practical, if you want To heal the cuts of your heart, then you want to have certain kind of medicine, that is healing if you don't have true medicine, they're accurate to helpful medicine. And so the Four Noble Truths are meant to be that. The other thing is a background for these teachings of the Four Noble Truths that is that when the Buddha taught what he Buddha taught, he called the Dharma. And when he described the Dharma, what the Dharma is, the teachings, the realities, the truths that he taught, he emphasized that it's meant to be something that's directly visible and evident, usually were to evident or visible, and immediate to something to be experienced here. And now, it's not something to

be you can read about, it's for sure, reading is good. But to, it's meant to be experience, it's meant as something that we have direct physical contact with, that one of the really recurring emphasis that Buddha gave was practicing with your body, being in your body being embodied, that to realize the Four Noble Truths somatically, not to realize it just as good ideas in your mind, your mind. And so over and over again, the Buddha emphasized what's called Mindfulness of the body, embodied awareness. And it's through this field of what we can feel and touch and sense with our senses, that the Four Noble Truths start becoming alive. So for example, if I make a fist, really hard fist and keep it really tight, for a long time, as tight as I can, eventually my fingers and hand is going to hurt. So there's pain. Why is the pain there? What are the conditions for the rising for the occurrence of this pain, it's because I'm holding my fist really tight. If I stop holding my fist really tight, then the hand will relax. I release the hand from the tightness, then with time the pain goes away, probably pretty quickly. In those in that very simple example, is something you can feel physically, you can feel the tightness in your hand, you can get a sense that Oh, yeah, there's a holding there. And you can kind of intuit that, yeah, if I released that holding, the pain will go away. And you can do it. Then there's in some way those encapsulates the first three of the four noble truths. There's pain, there's suffering, and your realization that suffering arises because of this tight way of holding my hand. And then it's possible to seize that suffering, seize that holding the word, that's the classic word to seize. But to end it to let go to release it. By just the simple act of releasing the hand. That's a completely ordinary thing that people can experience in other ways in daily life in all kinds of ways. Very simple, that you have a certain kind of is probably probably you utilize this all the time. If you're a little bit uncomfortable. Sometimes you look at what your discomfort is. And you might notice it sometimes it has to do with how you're holding yourself what you're doing. And you have to change something if you want to relieve yourself of the discomfort. So if I remember once, I was pretty motivated to get a library book from the library, Windows students that went all the way to UC Berkeley from Stanford, to get a very rare book. And the catalog said it had not been checked out. And the person at the desk was completely non interested in helping me. And so I was very interested in getting the person's help. And so, finally, the person agreed to go look in the backroom if someone had had to return the books that had been shelved out or something. And only when the person left, that I noticed that my back hurt.

And then I noticed that I was leaning three quarters way over the desk to make my point. And then if I released myself from leaning so far over, that that discomfort, my back went away. So I was contributing to my pain. In this situation. I had a role and I saw my pain. I saw my contribution, and I released it. That in essence is the first noble truths. But as semantically to feel it here. So for example, if you're nervous about something you're going to do, some people, when they get afraid their shoulders go up, or their stomach gets tight. And if you can feel that, if you don't feel it, then you don't even know it, you don't know you're not done, know what you're with what you're doing to your body. But if you really feel that tightness in your shoulders, and you feel Oh, I'm really holding myself, I'm holding those shoulders really tight. If it's, you know, if it's not chronic, you might be able to release and relax, you realize I'm holding myself out of my fear and my anxiety. And I can just release, release, release it physically. There's movement of seeing the discomfort, seeing our contribution to it, and then releasing it. But there's also a kind of psychological discomfort. So I might, something might be very important for me, maybe I have a conflict with someone. And the outcome is very important for me. And I feel very right about it all. And so I can feel my anger. And the anger comes up with a lot of tightness. And I can feel quite quite tight between my temples and my forehead, or my jaw. And there's a semantic relationship to this. And then I see Well, what's what's behind that? What am I doing? What am I contributing for that tightening up? You don't have any tightening without you contributing something? And so what is that here? And you see, oh, it's because I'm angry. But it's not just because I'm angry. I really want a certain outcome. And I'm really driven for that outcome. And that the mind that's churning away, how can I figure it out? How can I? How can I manipulate situation to get my

outcome, prove that I'm right or something that driven us? And that need to be right, for example, I can identify in myself, and then I can relax, I can maybe say, okay, that's okay. Now, this is not the right time. I know, I know. And sometimes the where I felt that I needed really to prove that I was right. To someone, not necessarily the person who caused the grievance. So you know, I'd go find my friends burden them with proving that was right. My poor friends, you know, gala, relax. So the is mood. So this, our bodies, our physical senses give us a lot of information. And part of the function of mindfulness is to heighten that physical sensitivity. So that we know just not only aware of the gross movements of tension or tightness that go on gross movements of discomfort that go on, but we started becoming aware of the subtle ones as well. And subtle does not mean to inconsequential, or kind of mild. Some of them were subtle stuff sometimes represents the chronic, deeper movements of the mind. They're the ones that are most difficult to address and most useful to address. So as we become as we do mindfulness meditation and mindfulness practice, the idea is to develop a heightened sensitivity to our body, to what's going on here. What's going on in our belly and our chest, in our hands, in our jaws in our face, what's the signals that are coming there, there's a lot of signals a lot of information that comes through the body. And as this body awareness gets more and more heightened, then we will naturally become much more sensitive to the ways in which the body expresses unease, discomfort, suffering, all suffering that we have, my guess, somehow has a physical corollary physical manifestation, somehow you can feel it, you can sense it. That's probably why it's so oppressive. And so we can, we're more sensitive to it not so we can suffer better, please. But we don't want to be like, one of my favorite Charlie Brown cartoons. and apologize. Those of you heard it many times. alfonzo will make a movie to be used when he's around that Be careful. He made a movie of one of my things that I most commonly say. So,

so don't listen of the so Charlie, so Charlie stripe is with Linus and Charlie says, Oh, so you don't think my father knows how to fix a car? Well, just the other day, we were driving along, and there was a loud knocking coming out of the engine. And Linus says, Well, don't tell me he stopped and fixed it. And Charlie said no, he turned up the radio so that's one strategy to deal with our unease, our suffering, is just turn up the radio and distract ourselves from it. But that's the opposite direction that this four noble truths is about the task of four noble truths is to have a heightened sensitivity to really see and understand our unease. And practice does that, you know. And that's the good news, because then we can address it. And then we can start understanding the second noble truth, often said, in English to be the cause of suffering. And that works very well, for many people, they could have cause and effect kind of analysis, many people find very helpful. And sometimes, you know, it's pretty obvious while I really caused my suffering here, I just really made a big mistake. And now I feel a lot of distress. And it's pretty obvious kind of the cause and effect relationship. Some of the Buddha's analysis was a little more subtle, where it gets more more subtle, these four noble truths, how we analyze how we understand them, and how we sense them as we go into ourselves. But another way of seeing it is that there's not causal so much, but a wider category that includes cause, which is the conditions, what are the conditions that we contribute, that support us, or create the suffering for us? And that's the analysis we want over and over again, that kind of exploration. As we get more sensitive, we ask ourselves, what is my contribution here to my knees? I think this is a very mature thing to do for human beings to ask that question, what is my contribution? To start there to be there, it doesn't mean that we don't ask what other people's contribution are, is. People could also create conditions for us to suffer. But the one that we can have the most control over the most effect on the most take most responsibility for the most is how we contribute to it. And our contribution might be the one that's the most significant for the most deepest and profound ways in which we hold on resist, tighten up, cling to things. And so to ask that question, what is my contribution here, and even if 90% of the contribution comes from someone else, if you can look at your 10%, you're at least taking responsibility for your part. And at least you're taking responsibility for that part, that you maybe can make a difference. And as there's a new book called

10%, better, that's become very popular, but it's about mindfulness practice. So even if you get 10% better, it's a lot better than it was. So to ask this question, what is my contribution is the question of the Four Noble Truths. And the word that the Buddha used for the second noble truth to describe or define your contribution to our suffering is also a physical word, a somatic word, which is emphasis on the body over and over again. And the literal meaning of the word is thirst, thirsty thirst usually translate into English as craving. And, but I like this kind of I like this physical word of thirst, you know, so. And we use it sometimes in English for other things besides being thirsty for water, you know, the thirst for power, that thirst for glory, that thirst for all kinds of things, right. And I think I think of this kind of this word, as a certain kind of compulsion, and drivenness. And that's one of the reasons why suffering is sometimes hard to let go of, because it isn't just like, we're mildly holding on to something mildly want something? Oh, you know? No. I don't know what to ask you what, you know, what do we cling to, but the moment but, but rather, it's, you know, we're serious about our clinging.

You know, we're serious, but we hold on to, we're serious about what we want and what we don't want. They're very important for us. And so sometimes there's almost by a logical urge for certain things, which comes across as a kind of compulsion, or driven or a thirst. I remember, you know, some of the thirst I had as a teenage boy, you know, that wasn't, you know, I was almost out of control, some of it, sexual urges, in particular, you know, you know, but wow, you know, it was a wild ride at times. I don't know how it was for any of you. Maybe we were mild mannered and easygoing, coming goes, you know, he calm music. Oh, who cares? But you know, this compulsion for things. So this compulsion for all kinds of things people have in their life. compulsion for seemingly good things security, well being status, identity, praise, comfort, money, relationships, sex, power, all kinds of things we want, or their thirst to be, you know, not to be uncomfortable or do all kinds of things. And it's part of this thirst that Buddhism holds up is one of the deepest things that people have to hold on to is issues around self identity. It's okay to have an identity. But when there's thirst or compulsion and givenness around, I have to be, then there's inevitably there's going to be suffering, because to hold on to some idea, I have to be this kind of person this way, inevitably is going to run into reality, making it difficult to be that way, the challenge to it. So it's because you're so in that challenge, and that challenge is going to be challenging. And so to see our contribution, to see the thirst to the driven is to see what we're doing, that kind of causes brings about comes along with that suffering is part of the task. And then the activity of letting go of relaxing, softening. And in beginning, sometimes, some things are easy to let go of. And some things take practice takes time. Some things are gradual, softening and relaxing to find that we can really let go of some things. The third noble truth is the important also because the experience of the release experience of things that were uneasy for us coming to and coming into a place of ease of well being, and the relief of release, the satisfaction, the goodness, the well being the joy, I'm no longer caught in the grip, of my addictions, my craving, of my clinging, of my intense resistance, my 10 saying no relaxing, and to feel the difference between a mind that's caught up in its preoccupations. And the mind that's finally free, is something that meditators become increasingly sensitive to, because probably, my guess is most of you, if not all of you, as meditators have had the experience, personal, direct felt experience of what it's like, they have your mind more in control of you than you are. You sit down to meditate, and you say, I'm gonna sit here peacefully in my mount business and stay on my breath. That's all I'm going to do. But your mind has other plans. And you're thinking about dinner, and what happened yesterday and this conversation, that conversation and you know, plans and fantasies and all kinds of things going on in that mind. And, you know, some of them are mild, but some of them if you really pay attention to your mind, represent a certain driven ness or compulsion, some of our suffering really can feel the tightness and the concern around some preoccupations. And so we're trying to be trying to just kind of let go of it and be here and be present. And then lo and behold, at some point, you are so good, no longer cotton those concerns. I don't know how that happened. But I'm glad and now I'm finally here and settled.

The task is to really allow yourself to experience what that's like. This is a very often overlooked part of Buddhist practice. Because people so many people are looking for something, to let go of something and we're looking for the relief. But once you have the relief, be nourished by what it feels like to no longer be driven, no longer be craving or clinging or resisting or having ill will or hate. What is that like ah, and like take time to feel that absence of the compulsions be nourished by it. Some people it doesn't occur to them to do it because their mind is on to the next preoccupation. There's a lot of good things to be preoccupied by right. So let's go on to go on to the next one next worry or something. But take time, have tea, go for a little walk around your block. Just sit and look out the window a little bit. If you and feel even if it's just a little attenuation, little reduction of your distress or your sadness or your grief. Appreciate that feel how and feel it somatically what is shifted inside of you. Is your forehead less crunched up. Is your jaw released? Is your stomach softer Are your eyes softer? Sometimes when there's a lot of preoccupation with things where your eyes get really fixated and hard, and you have to sit and sit and meditate, you feel that kind of hardness for the heart or the eyes. And then they soften and relax, feel the semantic benefits of letting go. support that letting go support the relaxation of the body, study, learn, learn how to use that to support this process of deepening, deepening the Four Noble Truths. And then the last of the Four Noble Truths is called the Eightfold Path. It's though it's the path that supports us that sets motion that conditions that makes it bet easier and easier to do the first three noble truths. Because we need a heightened sensitivity, we need to have this more high higher the sensitivity is the more we can tune into all this things. The more we understand how to pay attention, what we pay it, but the value of thing attention to unease and suffering, the more we can have a clear conscience, the easier it is to really get in there and see what's going on to see all this stuff. So the Eightfold Path are eight different practices that Buddhists will practice to create the conditions that support the, for the deep, deep work, of letting go of compulsive compulsion, craving, hate, greed, fear and such things. So the there's eight core steps, and they're divided into three categories. The first one is this listed this way, the first category is ethics. Which means how we behave in the world. If you really want to experience profound peace, if you want to develop a heightened sensitivity to what goes on in your heart in the deepest corners of your heart. Please, please, don't kill people. Don't kill animals. Please don't steal. Please don't engage in sexual misconduct. Please don't lie. Those are the four that are listed there. If you're not, if you don't care about doing this deep inner healing and the inner peace, then from the point of view of your heart, at least kill and steal. You know, it's okay. It's not okay for everybody else. But, but if you have what you want, take care of your ethics. And for most of you, I think that it's probably you're fairly ethical people. But a lot of people, a lot of Buddhists find the area that you find the most value to pay attention to is their speech. Their sound went off, just as I was telling important things about speaking. Let's see can maybe is anything you can do? It's back now. Okay. I guess it wasn't, it wasn't meant for you out there. So it's back. These are gone again. It's gone. It comes and goes. It's interesting, but it's in? It's happening in here? No, I think so here it took a turn. Turn it up a little bit, see what happens. It's fine in here. It says that any better out there only because no. I wonder where to go.

It's a mystery. You can bring your chairs closer, and I'm going to finish up in about four or five minutes. On this eightfold path. If you want to scoot forward, maybe you can hear better for come in here from the cozy for five minutes. Oh, this may be better. Okay, so you can hear me now. Okay, I'll tap Next time to just go make your way or something. So, ethics, and so speech behavior, and then the other is livelihood, that certain livelihoods are also not conducive for a settled peaceful heart and do this deep inner investigation we want to do and so the Buddha listed that selling weapons was not conducive trading and people slaves and prostitutes is not a good idea. And being a butcher, they said it's not a good idea but you're meaning you kill animals. It's not a good idea. So number things like and trading and poisons. It's also not a good idea. He listed those four. So I don't know if those are still relevant in

the modern world because they were back then. In the same way but but you know is your livelihood that you have. If you want to develop this deep abiding sense of peace is a livelihood you have supportive of that is the interesting question. And then the next category of these eightfold path has to do with cultivating and shaping our minds and hearts. So doing those things that bring greater sense of ease and happiness to us, avoiding those things that cause us to stress. And sometimes we can actually choose in big ways, small ways. We don't have to kind of wait for magic to happen that we feel better, we can decide to do certain things or avoid certain things. And then cultivate mindfulness, develop a heightened awareness, as I've emphasized already, and then also develop a heightened concentration, the ability to have a stable still quiet mind, which is what concentration does, is a tremendous support for having this heightened sensitivity to see what's really what's operating in the depths of our, of our being. And then the last category they hold that is called wisdom, that we want to cultivate wisdom or wise understanding. And one of the understandings is to really use the Four Noble Truths as a framework, as a frame of reference, for understanding our life. So there's many ways of understanding our lives, some of them are useful, some are not. But for example, when I was young, I had a chronic condition of guilt. I was guilty for everything. Gil was short for guilt. And I, you know, I didn't have to even do anything when I was already guilty. He's gonna just give us you know, and, and so the framework in which I organized that my life looked at my life was what have I done wrong now? Or I'm, you know, you know, how am I guilty? Now, I was just like, that was the way the world was organized for me for a while. And you have your own, some people get organized around comfort and pleasure, where can I get more pleasure? Now? That's kind of everything's oriented that way? Or? Or what's where, you know, some that are on greed? How can I get more out of this situation? That's the way or who, you know, we have, we have a framework that we are a frame of reference, which we kind of see the world and understand the world that we operate. The Buddha recommended the Four Noble Truths as a frame of reference that you hold. In addition to others, it might be useful, with a frame of reference to keep coming back in this situation now. Where are these four truths playing themselves out for me? Is there unease? What's my contribution? Can we sense or feel or experience, the release of it, the ending of it? Is there some way that these eight steps the Eightfold Path can support me so that I can release things I can't release, maybe I can kind of develop myself in such a way that one day I will be able to do it. So to keep using it over and over, come back to that, come back to that. And if you do this, it's going to help you see where you're uneasy or your suffer.

And help you see where you can not suffer where you can let go. And it becomes a way of crafting yourself this skill we develop just like a craft person develops a skill, we develop over time, a skill, to be able to tune into ourselves and see where what we're doing that creates on ease. And what we can do to let go of it to change to free yourselves of it, we can see how we can maintain our sense of ease or sense of well being. We've got more more skillful, because we've used this framework, this orientation, to study ourselves to understand ourselves, and to craft ourselves as we go along. and developing that skill, then lets person over time, be able to stay more and more in a place of tremendous sense of ease of peace, where it isn't just our heart that feels at home. But we feel profoundly comfortably at home in this world that we live. It's a remarkable thing to craft your life. With the support of the Four Noble Truths. It's really kind of meant to be the good news of Buddhism was to be very encouraging and inspiring. And something that you can carry with you throughout your life. It's a toolbox you carry with you it's always useful, always helpful. In Sunday, you come to to a situation where you're not suffering whatsoever and you don't need the Four Noble Truths anymore. And then what? Let's find out. So you have 360 days left. Enjoy them. And I hope that this framework or the Four Noble Truths, helps you with your joy in this life. Great. Thank you.