

# 2018-03-11 Four Interpretations of The Second Noble Truth

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

suffering, desire, conditions, people, underlying conditions, second noble truth, meditation, insistent, uncomfortable, arising, mindfulness, passing, settled, called, mind, clinging, discomfort, life, four noble truths, craving

## SPEAKERS

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So I'd like to tell a story which I tell occasionally. I was told once that in the mid 1960s there were three high school girls who lived someplace down here like in Mountain View in Menlo Park. And Menlo Park. Those of you who've been around long enough, near the corner of Alameda and Sand Hill was one of the local centers for the burgeoning LSD culture. The Grateful Dead were stationed there. And Ken Kesey he was down there and electric Kool Aid acid bus started from there. It's very important. The history of the times. And so it was a period of, you know, a lot of LSD. And these girls learned that there was a Zen teacher in San Francisco who could teach them how to get high naturally. So they went up there to see Shunryu Suzuki, Suzuki Roshi, and then in the old Japanese temple, Soto Zen temple in Japan town. And he welcomed them in and they asked them the question, you know, how do you get high naturally? And he proceeded to give them a talk on the Four Noble Truths suffering the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, the Noble Eightfold Path to the say cessation of suffering. This is not what these girls were expecting, or wanting, except that the man who was teaching them these truths about suffering, he was so happy. And least for one of those young women, his happiness was so contagious or so meaningful, that she's been a Buddhist practitioner ever since. He became a Zen student and so this good juxtaposition of the focus on suffering and happiness and a sense they go together in the sense that the Four Noble Truths are meant to help us address suffering. In such a way we come up to the other side, into happiness into well being into peace. The so I was thinking about this this morning and little bit like the Buddhists to really understand the Four Noble Truths and their value become a little bit like firefighters, where they go towards the fire, everyone else might go away. So this willingness to look at suffering, to study it, to stop for it, to really take it in, and not to suffer better, but rather to really address it deeply. And not a few people have been quite moved by their encounter with Buddhism. Because some people say this explicitly that it's the first time in their lives, that they met some teaching that addressed the issue of suffering in human life, whereas everywhere else they had been their life. To that point, people seem to avoid it, distract themselves from it, run away from it. And, you know, it's a tender and important and profound issue of the human condition that we have suffering all kinds of different types. And from the most mild to some of the most biggest possible things we can experience. So it's a tender thing. It's a delicate thing to talk about because it touches something that's very primal to many of us. But this is what the purposes of the Four Noble Truths is to address it to understand it. And what I want to talk about today is not the whole four noble truths, but rather the second noble truth. The second noble truth is most popularly understood as being the cause of suffering. Whereas, in fact, the ancient text teaching of the Buddha he doesn't say that, but it's, but it's often interpreted that way.

But rather, there are four different interpretations for what the second noble truth This, most literally the wording of it says, it's the noble truth of the arising of suffering. So there's four interpretations of what this might mean. And to hear these four is a little bit of a journey. I like to think of it as a journey. And they're available, you know, just understand these different interpretations at different perspectives, different angles with which to understand our suffering and what underlies them or how to get deeper into it in a meaningful way. But they can also be a journey of getting more settled, where the mindfulness gets stronger the our being or mind, our hearts get more and more settled and peaceful. And as we get more concentrated in still, and the mindfulness gets stronger, we start seeing in new ways, we become more sensitive to bigger pieces of the picture of what's happening and until more information is available to us. And as more information about suffering becomes available, we can start having a different relationship to it. Or then information can have a different effect on us. And the effect that in Buddhism we're looking for is liberation, liberation from suffering, the cessation of suffering. So the first interpretation and the one that's, I think, probably most commonly taught, is the idea that our suffering is caused by a certain kind of insistent desire. insistent desire that is usually translated into English, by the word craving. So a certain kind of compulsion, a certain kind of energetic desire, even desire for useful and appropriate things can be a little bit too insistent. Little bit too much. I have a spider it's by have a spire throat You know, you got to do this can be a lot of expectation involved in them, a lot of need associated with them. And, you know, and so this sense of insistence that can come with desire can be a source of tremendous suffering, we're holding onto something, we want something so desperately. And in ordinary life, sometimes this can be seen relatively easily, in different circumstances, that we want want something, but we can't have it, the conditions have changed or such, we can't have it. And we realize that if I keep wanting this, I'm just going to keep being disappointed or keeping frustrated. So I'll drop it. And, you know, it could be that your internet doesn't work. You know, you that's, you know, for some people, that's a serious thing. And so you can feel the desire that all the desires that come along with being on your device and on your computer And at some point, the power outage doesn't get fixed for a while. And at some point, you know, you realize that this desire, I've had to let go of it for now, I better not hold on to it because if I kind of paste my house, keep trying the road, the amount modem over and over again, try to shake the computer upside down and see to make it work over and over again, you know that that frustration, that insistence that you know, desperation is not going to be for my betterment and so at some point is put down and realize, okay, I can't nothing I can do here. So that, you know, I want I certainly want the, the internet to come back on but I can't do anything I have to wait. So you know, I guess, you know, a few people would just sit quietly and meditate and go out and work in the garden or sit and you know, have a cup of tea or do something nice. Some people would rush out, of course, to Coffee Shop, the library anywhere where it might be. But you know, there's a, you probably have your own examples of seeing or have some insistent desire something you want something you can't have. And so you don't necessarily deny the you have the desire to drop you drop having it being active. Because if you keep having it up to active, the frustration is going to be there that expectation is going to be there. So to see the cause, and some things are relatively easy, and some things are quite difficult to see the underlying cause for them. And that's why something like meditation can settle the mind enough that sometimes we can see more deeply than the surface of chatter of the mind. And we can see some of the deeper causes for our suffering.

And it might be that what we really want the real cause is a clinging or a desire to be seen to be respect it to have certain status within reason that could be appropriate. But that can be overdone. But to see how that underlying drive for identity underlying drive for, you know, to be seen, how it operates might be hard, because it manifests itself in a desire for, you know, something else the desire for it could be the desire for wearing a nice set of clothes, you know, I better wear the right clothes and all my clothes

are dirty or I don't have nice clothes and I better find nice clothes, and you sit and be quiet and you notice that the desire the drive for clothes is really an expression of a deeper desire. And so we start seeing some as we sit quietly, sometimes start seeing these deeper, what's called causes the desires that are behind it. Sometimes it's quite hard to find the cause And even if we do find the underlying cause some of these things that drive us and motivate us are hard just to drop and put down there. Sometimes, you know, there's such almost primal urges that arise within us that even if somebody points it out, or we see it clearly, how do we drop it? How do we stop being this way, and so it's difficult. So if we practice something like meditation, and are able to get quieter and Still, one of the things that happens is the mindfulness, the awareness can open up to to see a greater peace of the mental ecology of the things that are going on. And we start seeing not just the immediate cause, or what we would call the cause, we see the range of conditions that have to come into play for the suffering to be there. And this is a second interpretation of the Four Noble Truths are the second noble truth and that is that the second that the it's the truth of the conditions that bring about the suffering. Now the value about the conditions is that it's a, it's a bigger range of things to study and be aware of. And some of those conditions you might have more control over in the cause itself. So I mean, I'll give you a little bit of an analogy. We have in the here, this conference rooms, a little room on the side here. We have a little space heater, we plug into electrical outlets when you want to use it. And every once in a while someone will when it's cold, someone will plug it in and have it run. And they'll forget to unplug it, or to turn it off. And we'll come back then you come in the next day and the room is like a sauna. So that's not very good. So you know what to do. We can be upset with all the people who use it. We could send out emails and say, you know, remember everything He uses it, please remember to unplug it. And then we do that and then it happens some months later it happens again. And so then we can get frustrated. And we really want this to be unplugged, you know, unplugged and not be running overnight. And so we put up big signs, you know, all kinds of things, but still people are, you know. So, the cause, in a sense of that the heater being on is those people who don't unplug it after using it. So we can be upset about the people. The other option is which we finally figured out is now we have a little device that plugs into the outlet that has a timer on it. And now we plug the electrical cord from the space heater into that outlet. In order to have the electricity go to the space theater. You have to choose one hour, two hour, three hour And now someone forgets, it'll go off automatically. So the electricity and the outlet is just a condition for having the heater work. It's not the cause for it being left on. But it's part of the conditions that are needed. So we address the underlying condition, rather than, than what we would call the cause. So the same thing with our suffering, sometimes if we if you understand that the more of the pieces of what's involved, we can start identifying the conditions of our suffering, that might not be called a cause.

And one of the conditions some, I mean, all kinds of things can be a condition, but one example would be that if a person has is really challenged by something by strong desire, maybe addictive desire and, and see let's say say taco Home and seeing you know, they, there's a bottle of alcohol on the table, that bottles are the cause of going to get a drink. The person's going for the drink would be considered the causes in themselves, but the bottle there is a condition and seeing it as a condition for drinking. If the bottle is not in the table or the bottles not even at home, then the chance the chances of the addiction, ie desire are raring up so strongly is not going to be there. So sometimes we can take care we can do something about the condition and not the cause. A strong desire for you know, for some people I know, have an addict addiction there but they have a weakness for doughnuts and then they feel bad about themselves. Afterwards, because they've come to the donut thing. So don't go to that coffee shop, where they sell donuts, go to the coffee shop that doesn't sell any sweets. So because that's a condition, right? So you could say, well, you should, you know, grow up maybe and deal with your strong desire and just kind of overcome the cause of it, your desire and get on with it. But that's kind of unrealistic. Sometimes. It really, you know, in human lives. So what's the underlying conditions? One of

the underlying conditions that Buddhism emphasizes is something called ignorance. And this is a kind of misunderstanding about things. So for example, there can be a misunderstanding of what brings happiness. We might think that pleasure brings Happiness. And so we pursue pleasure. And certainly there's good feelings that come with pleasure. But it's not really a heartfelt happiness there. And so and so the confusion, the ignorance about what what brings happiness can lead people to pursue the wrong kind of the wrong pursuit, a pursuit that sometimes lends itself to further suffering. So to be ignorant to have this ignorance about what happiness different than happiness and pleasure, it can be one of the conditions. And if that condition changes, then we're not going to pursue pleasure in inappropriate ways. Perhaps. It might be that the underlying condition might be a belief that, you know, there might be that the desire is to be in a certain kind of intimate relationship with someone. And there's a strong insistent desire and needs To be in the relationship or to hold on to that relationship. If we start looking deeper for the conditions for that insistence, there are some people for whom it's a strong desire for security, to feel safe in this world, being in that relationship creates a certain kind of safety. But then the question is, is that the best place best way to be safe? If that's really the need? Is there another way to be safe that doesn't depend on another person providing it? And so there's this may be a kind of ignorance of of what's where safety resides. There can be ignorance about the permanence of things. People can believe that certain things are going to be here all the time. And then when they go away, there's a lot of suffering. But when we have a sense, you know that everything changes, everything comes goes. And it sad that certain things go and people die for sure. But it's not an insult. It's not that betray reality hasn't betrayed us because we have a flat tire. Reality hasn't hasn't betrayed us because we get sick and maybe die. It's kind of built into the human condition to some degree to have things come and go appear disappear, be born and die. And how we live in the world of birth and death is a tender and delicate thing.

But, you know, it's not, you know, shouldn't be unexpected, you know, it shouldn't be holding on has to be this way forever. And so that's a condition that goes into all this. And so as we sit and get deeper into ourselves and get settled enough, we can start seeing some of the different thoughts and ideas and feelings and impulses that are holding This whole kind of desire thing in place, and we start seeing some of the underlying conditions that go on. And some of those conditions then can be shifted and changed better than some sometimes the drive for the desire, but then the desire changes to once the conditions underlying conditions have changed. So we go further, as we get more settled and more still and more aware, there's a greater sensitivity, kind of a physical, visceral sensitivity to what's happening here. And one of the one of the interpretive third interpretations of the second noble truth, the truth of the arising of suffering is that suffering, a strong desire insistent desire, craving is suffering is not that it can be the cause of suffering. can be a condition for suffering, but in and of itself to have this craving this clawing, neediness, this clinging, this obsession with a desire that in itself can feel tense income with contraction, it can come with a kind of fever sometimes kind of pushing and demanding a kind of feeling that we're not under control control of our own life, it can come with a Can you can feel that the tension, the irritation, the how in and of itself, craving is uncomfortable. So rather than needing to kind of convince ourselves that what we want is not the right thing, or that we want or, you know, having a desire is not useful. We have a visceral feeling, that having the desire in this kind away, is not healthy. And some people will only give up certain desires when they feel that that's strong and system desiring feels so uncomfortable to have. Why would I do this to myself? This still there in quiet or the mind is in meditation, the more ease and peace we have in meditation, the less willingness or tolerance, we have three tolerance, the wrong word, but a willingness less interest, to allow ourselves to continue to feel the discomfort of having insistent desire. If you're basically uncomfortable already, and you're running around being busy in your life, what is a little bit more discomfort you know, you don't even notice it. You know, the discomfort or desire is kind of subtle, some of it and you have much better you know, you have bigger things to be uncomfortable about and so you don't need it. You hardly know That's one of

the advantages of something like meditation. So that we can start feeling the discomforts in our lives that we usually don't notice usually ignore. So we don't make this the big advertisement for meditation come and be uncomfortable. You know what this is where you can really do with discomfort well, so don't let the secret out. But that's but to some degree, that's one of the functions of meditation and mindfulness is to get concentrated and still enough to really see the impact of on ourselves of how the mind operates. And how I see the field the impact of these desires. And it's better to be to know you're uncomfortable and to not know it, because if you know it, then you can do something about it. And if the and if it's this, you know, and, and you might not even know what the desire is for, you don't have to know what it's for. You have to know it's uncomfortable. And I let go of it. I'll settle down. And I've had that invitation outside. I'm quite apparently quite capable of having this urge, like a poor to want to desire something. I don't know what yet, but I'll figure that out later.

So, so this idea of just just feeling what that urge is, like, you know, to realize that, to crave to have insistent desire itself as uncomfortable is a kind of suffering. That's a third level of this. The second noble truth, the fourth level, and this is most closely associated with meditation and doesn't have to be any of these, but this is the most and that is to be. Learn how to find a way in meditation. Become mindfulness, it becomes quite strong. The whole system has gotten quite still and peaceful. And in this in a situation where we're concentrated and still and mindful, there's a way in which there's kind of this, this reversal, the more still we can become. The more we tune in to how things are constantly changing. The more we're agitated and spinning in our thoughts, the more we have this illusion that things are much more still and permanent and solid than they actually are. So as we get stiller and stiller and stiller, then we start seeing that, that in the room more more in the present moment more in the flow of experiences happening now. We're not thinking about the past and thinking about the future. We're not rehearsing the same thing over and over and over again, which gives a semblance of permanence because we keep repeating the same idea. As the thinking mind has gotten quiet, and then we start whatever is going on in the present moment, is feels more like a flow more like an unfolding. It's more the arising and passing the appearance of disappearing or things. So we have a thought and we're where the thought arises. And the appearance of a thought is more significant than what we're thinking. Often we're concerned by what we're thinking. But the fact Oh, there's a thought I better things to do than think I was sitting here peacefully minding my own business. Why would I now get involved in this thought? And so then it passes away, we passes or we let go of it. We start seeing that the body sensations we have are actually kind of a dance, a kaleidoscope dance of sensations appearing and disappearing, which seemed like a solid sensation turns out to be, you know, pixels of sensations that come Bingo, the emotions that we thought that were so solid, you know, we were just in this mood, the mood hasn't gone away exactly. But the mood itself is comes and goes in and out of in and out of perception. We're aware of it, we're not aware of it were something else. And there's this constant shifting, changing panorama of what we're aware of what's happening in the moment. As some things arise and pass, sometimes the perception shifts and takes in something else for a moment. There's this kind of wonderful kind of kind of flow that people have. And, and what people start seeing more and more acutely is what's called the arising and ceasing of things. So as I said, the traditional wording, literal wording of the second noble truth, the way it's described, it's the noble truth, of the arising of suffering. The third noble truth is a noble truth of this ceasing the cessation of suffering. So, at times we start seeing things arise and pass and rise and pass. And this is a very, this also is a very different way of relating to suffering, our suffering is still there. But we see that it's not constant. There's gaps in it. It's kind of part of this dance and flow of things. And so the minds at mine has a way of attributing permanence to our suffering. We kind of hold it in a package or this, this is fixed, stuck, it's heavy, it's it's solid. I'm here with my suffering, this is what it is.



And it can be so dense and so impenetrable, that it's hard to have a different relationship to it. We're kind of like, stuck in it. But if we can, if we're quiet enough and still enough with the mindfulness and start seeing that, whatever it is, thing is that we're calling suffering is made up of phenomena that's arising and passing and coming and going. It's not solid. It's actually not so stuck. And it's just a fun it just like everything else is phenomena that comes and goes, then the grip, the holding the clinging, the insistence we have on those desires begin to lighten up. Our identification with the desire begins to lighten up are kind of being glued to it becomes unglued, we become a little bit step back, we're not willing that we may have more of a sense of the panoramic view of it maybe then being kind of stuck in the middle of it. And there's a way in which seeing the arising and passing a phenomena is considered one of the in and of itself begins to help the mind. Release the fist of clinging, the way in which we hold on to things or push on things and it doesn't require understanding the cause it doesn't have to require understanding the condition. It doesn't have doesn't require seeing that's craving is itself suffering. It's just that just seeing how things arise and pass shows us a whole different paradigm for what's happening in the moment. And how it doesn't make any sense to claim. It doesn't actually work to claim in this experience, that it's not worth clinging to things that are coming and going all the time. In in this moment, mom experience now if you pull yourself out of this quiet place, and start debating with yourself, Well, some things are really worth clinging to. You can have a wonderful debate with yourself and come up with great things to cling to. However, you've left that quiet world where things are Coming and going and rising and passing things are peaceful. And so you don't have access to the kind of peace and letting go, that that arising and passing, can, can give. And so then of course, then this experience of inconstancy can't help us because we're not in touch with it. If we go back up into the conceptual world of talk, thinking about how what's what's true and what's coming and all that. So four interpretations of the second noble truth in different circumstances of our life, different ones are the most relevant and useful in different circumstances, different ones of them are accessible to us. Sometimes it's the cause. It's helpful to see the cause and exploring and considering the cause it's really good. However, some people are so that's the only Approach they have, and sometimes only kind of reviewing and thinking and analyzing, looking for the cause can be a dead end. It's not some people it's not doesn't open up for people what's going on? So it's useful, but sometimes it's not. Sometimes what's accessible and useful is to look at the conditions, what are all the conditions in place for this, for me to want this, sometimes those conditions have to do with things that happen in childhood, or big influences on us that once we understand those early childhood conditions, then we understand the why we have certain drives why we had the cause of certain desires we have today. So conditions is an interesting world. And sometimes it's quite simple. You know, it's, we see we have a certain belief that once once we see the underlying belief, we see that belief doesn't work, but the belief is the condition For the desire. The third is sometimes it's just so obvious how uncomfortable I am having this desire. I don't care about the cause. I don't care about, you know, the conditions for it. Just, you know, let's drop it. It's not worth it. I'm feeling so uncomfortable. And then the fourth interpretation of fourth approach to this is, has to do with seeing how things come and go the impermanent and cost in nature. Oh, here comes a desire, here comes to suffering. I'll guess I'll just ride the wave. I know that, you know, some waves are short, some waves are big.

And if I just ride the wave with discomfort, you know, I'm not going to make it worse. But if you don't just simply Oh, here it is. I'm going to ride the discomfort to ride the wave. But rather I'm going to fight it. I'm going to hold on to it. I'm going to engage in it. I'm going to add Analyzing I'm gonna look for the cause, sometimes looking for the cause is the cause. or looking for the cause to kind of perpetuate something, the identification or something. But sometimes it's wise to see Oh, here it comes, I'll just ride the wave. And if you're lucky, it's a shortwave. The End If it's, and if you're if you get invested in it or get identified with it, then it's usually a longer wave. So four different approaches to this four noble truths, each of them in their own time and place. And I think it just shows you the hopefully the richness that this kind

of teaching that the Buddha has, has for us as we apply it. And also one of the things one of the points I wanted to get across is that we do have different states of mind that we live in are different kind of, and so the approach the understanding of our life varies at different states of mind. If we only have one state of mind that will always live in, we only have access to certain approaches then. And part of the function of meditation is to help us go into, you know, different states of mind. But you know, not necessarily altered states in some dramatic way. So you don't have to get frightened about that. But states of mind where your your peaceful or quiet are still so that you can be more sensitive and see in a different way. So and then, when some high school students come to you, and ask you how to be happy without naturally you'll just light up someday and sit, give them a talk to them about the Four Noble Truths and maybe you'll inspire them. So I think we have that he has that right. We're having a tea today. Hello