

# 2019-12-02 The Four Truths of Happiness

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happiness, suffering, magnanimous, clinging, happy, cessation, practice, people, world, uprooting, craving, kinds, conditions, fishing boat, happen, truth, wonderful, life, four noble truths, buddhism

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdaal

So Good evening, everyone. Welcome to IMC. For those of you who were not here last Monday, I gave a talk on Nibbana, the Pali word for Nirvana, talking about how this important experience of Nibbana, how it works and fits into our Buddhist tradition. And there is a small little phrase that sometimes used as a kind of a, I guess a kind of saying that Nirvana is happiness and Nirvana is the highest happiness or the greatest happiness, that somehow the experience of freedom that comes with deep, deeply in going into this path of meditation leads to one of the highest kinds of happiness as a human being can experience. And that and I wanted to talk a little bit about this and talk about it. A little And unusual way. Many of you are familiar that It's often said that the core teachings of Buddhism is the Four Noble Truths. And the Four Noble Truths are truths about suffering. So the first noble truth is the noble truth of suffering. The second is a noble truth of the arising of suffering. The third is a noble truth of the cessation of suffering, and the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering. For some people, this is the great news, the good news of Buddhism, because it implies or indicates that whatever suffering we have, whatever stress whatever burden, whatever sense of personal oppression, whatever inner psychological suffering, angst, despair, discouragement that we're experiencing, that it's not permanent. It's there because of things coming together causes and conditions and those causes and goodness Shift, then that suffering can cease. And the second noble truth is sometimes defined as the total, complete without any leftover, complete destruction, cessation relinquishment, letting go of suffering. So that's kind of nice, though some people find it a little bit depressing that the central teaching of Buddhism is talks about suffering. Some people find it very inspiring some people come in here talks on the Four Noble Truths and say, finally someone's to telling saying it as it is, finally, as a man not avoiding the truth, what's happening there suffering in this world, someone's addressing it directly naming it and trying to find a way through it without trying to make the world you know, a pretty place or be kind of romantic about how wonderful everything is and basically That you're supposed to just put a smile on your face and kind of go through and go through life happily and something like that. And, but there's another, I would like to present this maybe the Four Noble Truths in a different way, kind of almost like the opposite way. And then maybe it needs a slightly different title. And so for now, I just call it the four magnanimous truths. Or the four wonderful truth truths are there for deriving truths, the truth, the truths of thriving and, and they have to do with happiness, happiness, sometimes presented as the opposite of suffering. So the first noble truth is a noble truth of happiness. The second is the noble truth of the cessation of happiness. Third is the noble truth of the arising of happiness. And the fourth is the way leading to the arising of happiness.

And partly, it's important to, to talk this way because it's very easy to miss the message from the Buddha, that this path of practice that we're on, is meant to be a happy path. And it's a path that leads to a great happiness. The Buddha, one of the titles of the Buddha was he was called the happy one. And was often pointed out in the ancient world, that the disciples of the Buddha, the monastic disciples,

were seemed always happy, always smiling to always happy. And these were the people who were insisting that their suffering in the world so rather than the subsistence to recognize suffering, the world being depressing, it did for the followers of the Buddha, it was actually something that liberated them and made them quite happy in a wonderful way and realistic and I would say in a realistic way. So, we have these four magnanimous truths about happy about happiness. And so then we can go and talk about each of them define each of them. And, and so, the noble, the magnanimous truth of happiness is that gladness is happiness. virtue is happiness. contentment is happiness. Joy is happiness. Happiness is happiness. Samadhi is happiness. Truth is happiness. generosity is happiness. renunciation is happiness. Release is happiness. This entanglement is happiness. In short, the path of practice is happiness. The path of practice to the end of suffering is happiness as nebi not initially because many people come to Buddhism because of their suffering and their challenges and that they have sometimes it's coming I don't want to belittle or make light of the fact that people come to practice with tremendous suffering sometimes horrible things happen to people and people have to deal with and, and that's often the case and then but at some point, sitting with that and addressing that, working with it practicing with it, it begins to crack open and then through that crack comes light the light of happiness through that crack comes in other thing comes to peace since a well being. And for me, I sat and meditated probably for I don't know how many years but I probably set meditated for about four years with not really feeling any happiness, but certainly sitting with a lot of my suffering. But having somehow having a lot of confidence that this was this was the right thing to do. And I was pulled into it more and more to really be engaged in this process of really being with what was going on for me and work. You know, I wouldn't say working through it, but I didn't have any concept of working through it. I just knew that this was really, this was true, this was important. I had to show up for this and just be with it. And then probably about four years are starting to be a crack in that and that crack slowly open into your bigger and bigger and, and for a long time I didn't, I had no idea that the path of practice could be a happy one. And that happiness and well being in a sense, can be an important part of this. I got no support for that. From my teachers, the people I practice with, there was no really understanding of that or in the Zen practice that I practiced in there was a kind of a kind of a stoicism or a kind of seriousness about the practice that it kind of like you have to if you were really a sincere student, he was you're serious. And, and so there was not a lot of bubbling up of joy and happiness around me. So I didn't have any models for anything.

And, but this kind of cracked open more and more and slowly over time, I began to feel this is actually important. This is something to pay attention to and appreciate. And one of the reasons they pay attention to the happiness that comes along is that happiness can be a teacher, suffering as a teacher, we can learn a lot about ourselves by sitting with our suffering and looking at it honestly, we can see the causes of it the underlying conditions for it. We can find a way to let go of those conditions and causes and find a better way to live. But the same way happiness can be a teacher. Happiness also sometimes can show us the underlying conditions and causes of our, of our suffering. Happiness sometimes provide a different vantage point to see the same thing, sometimes with more clarity, but happiness also can show us the causes and conditions for happiness. Where this welfare come well being comes in benefit beneficial, wholesome, healthy states of mind, healthy states of heart can come from and that is certainly part of what Buddhism is about. The Buddha talked about developing, increasing, growing and thriving in wholesome states of mind and healthy states of mind. And I think you know, this word thriving, to thrive, not just kind of like you know, suffer better and have To simply, you know, be over your suffering and then live a kind of dull, dull life. But a life that's really thriving, really kind of the best qualities of heart the best and what we have inside, can kind of bubble up and fill us in this wonderful, alive, nourishing way. And that for me that as his crack of my armor crack of my suffering my crack of my fear and my guilt that I lived with, when I started to crack, crack open. And, and I really kind of started getting into the practice more and more. It felt deeply nourishing for me. It was like nourishment.

I felt nourished. It was amazing. Sometimes the feeling that it would have of like somehow the flow of nourishment, almost like medicine, kind of flowing through my veins, moving through my marrow of my bones, just the thoroughness and the fullness the embodying have this sense of well being that came was quite remarkable. And I had never experienced anything like this in my ordinary life. No one had ever told me that it could be such a fully embodied somatic experience of well being kind of coursing through everywhere just kind of filling me and delighting me and just feeling so like health was happening, deep health. And it was even more surprising for me to have that because I wasn't looking for it I didn't even know was possible, like, Wow, what's what's going on here? So the first, this magnanimous truth is to recognize that there is happiness in the world, and that the Buddhist path involves many kinds of happinesses. It's remarkable to read carefully through the Buddhist teachings, and to really see it laid out all the different ways that happiness, joy, gladness, delight, contentment, are emphasized as part of the path. liberation. It was almost the expectation that these kinds of wonderful states would be part of our path to work through suffering to contend with suffering to deal with suffering, that the path to the end of suffering is actually a happy path. Believe it or not, they may be not the first four years are first while we get started.

So that's the first note first magnanimous truth, the second magnetic nominalist. magnanimous truth is the cessation of happiness. And there's a lot of parallels between that four noble truths and the four magnanimous truths. But one of the places where they differ is that the Four Noble Truths The second one is this is the arising of suffering. But the first to the second of the magnanimous truth is a cessation of happiness. Happiness is not permanent usually. And one of the things that happens in life when we suffer if we were happy to be Begin with, we lose it. Happiness can disappear easily. And it can disappear for many reasons. It can disappear because the conditions change. If we're happy because we know one day we won the lottery. And that's where we think happiness is from. And then the next day we don't, and the next day we don't. And the next day we don't and it can be a lot of misery. And the lottery is not just the real lottery, but some metaphor for you know, somehow causing conditions luck fortune, something comes our way and we get something wonderful happens. And then we don't the I don't know why this is what comes to my mind as I'm speaking. When I was about eight. I think I really wanted battery power toy that existed back in ancient times. I really wanted it. And I got it for Christmas. And I played with it once I was happy and I never played with it again. I don't think my parents, my parents didn't really want to give me this present, but I really wanted it. And so I got it one day of happiness. I wasn't unhappy, but they just that somehow the, you know, the happiness of having that dissipated so quickly that promise the Euler, the wonderfulness of what all of an advertisement or whatever just didn't hold up after a day was gone. And other year. Around that time I also got a battery powered. I know it was a remote control the airplane I think it was back then. It was an airplane on a very long string. But you can control it on that string. So it wasn't radio operated, I think. And so I was pretty happy to get that. Pretty good. But it was a little complicated, I guess to, for it to work or something and print it, operate it. So my father went with me to the local high school athletic field. And he was going to, you know, show me how it works and make it work. I think I did one half circle around the field that crashed and broke, and it never got fixed. So happiness is coming. They go. Some reasons, they just, we get what we want, and they don't really make us happy. Sometimes we get what we want and conditions change and falls apart and gets destroyed. And there's so many different ways in which happiness the things we hold on to a want for happiness, don't sustain themselves. The world doesn't cooperate, doesn't keep things just the way it's supposed to be. So I'm going We love gets sick and maybe dies and where our happiness is kind of dependent on a man maybe, or what kinds of things can happen. People lose their jobs and suddenly the world world is turned upside down. So, all kinds of things can happen. In this four magnanimous truths, there are the cessation of happiness described in the same way as the arising of suffering, the cessation of happiness is craving for sense pleasure and comfort, craving for identity and craving for non identity. The definition of the cause the

conditions for the rising of suffering is craving for sense pleasure and comfort, craving for identity and creating craving for non identity. This idea of this craving this thirsting This one thing of things is both a source of holding on a source that makes us suffer. And also can destroy the happiness we have.

We can create we can hold on to happiness. And somehow it's so brittle and temporary, so many other things, we can't depend on it. And so for holding on for dear life and we depend so much on it, you know, it's things things can go awry. This idea of identity holding out to some kind of person we have to be, we have to be a smart person, that pretty person, capable person, a successful person. There, you know, something, you know, powerful person, high status person, or non identity trying not to be something so many people hide who they think they are. They try to pretend they're not something and they put on clothes that somehow hides their who they are. They do something with their hair. Some people, some people, I know people who do things with their skin color because they think some skin color is better than other skin color. Some people hide their place of birth and nationality where they come from, because it's embarrassing. Some people don't want to let others know that they grew up poor, or, you know, because I don't know and the kind of things people we hide from other people, because we think somehow we're not going to be liked, we're going to be rejected. We recruit people in like a look up to us. And this idea of identity, what we want to become and be, you know, hold on to is a source of a lot of suffering for human beings. And so it's destroys happiness just as much as it brings about suffering. So, there's a lot of lists in Buddhism, of other things that are the cause for suffering. They can just equally be called the cause for the cessation of suffering for the destroying the side. frame, Chronicle go together. If you're happy and you get involved in these kinds of clings and attachments, the suffering tends to be to vanish. If you're not happy, but you cling to those things, you probably suffer also. And then the third, magnanimous truth is a truth of the arising of happiness. And this also is worded like the third noble truth. But then here, it's not the cessation of something but the arising. It's and it's a, it's fine to almost the same way that the cessation of suffering is described. The remainder lists fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non reliance on it. So here, the that this very thing that involves a cessation of craving. That is the cause of suffering is also the cause is that the ending of that craving is the source of happiness and well being. There's many things that bring happiness, the path of practice, and Buddhism is one of the very important ones. But that the happiness of doing practice is also a temporary happiness. It's conditional. It's conditioned upon doing these practices. If your happiness is from being generous, generosity is a great source of happiness. And you stop being generous, you know, you still have to remember what you did and it's nice, but you don't get fed again the same way. The happiness of concentration, happiness of meditation, you can keep doing the meditation to benefit from that kind of happiness. So the path of practices is to kind of Happiness that you need to do things in order to keep it going. It's possible to stop practice and have a lot of the benefits a lot of momentum of happiness and well being a practice kind of to fade away. And I've known people who've left the practice their happiness is FA well being their pieces faded away. And after a while, they said, This is not my life is not working anymore. And they go back to practice, but sometimes it takes many years to realize that the the, so, the happiness, there's vital happiness which are temporary. But Buddhism focuses on a kind of happiness is not meant to be temporary. Something that's portable we carry with us is not dependent on the conditions around us. And that happiness is the happiness of once and for all, ending stopping, uprooting the underlying some of the underlying causes for suffering and the craving is considered to be the cause of suffering. There's many kinds of craving. But these cravings, these attachments can come to an end.

This is not something which is temporary, it's possible to uproot it. And the example that sometimes given is in fact taking a plant and pulling it up by its roots. And for some plants, if you do that they'll never grow again. Or another example they gave in the ancient texts, is taking up a palm tree. If you cut

a palm tree at the base, it doesn't like a redwood tree was brought from the sides from the roots, but a palm tree, if you cut it to the base, nothing will grow again it dies. So cutting our attachments at the base, uprooting them. So idea that you really don't have to kind of diminish them, you don't just come to terms with them, Be wise by them, you can actually do a radical transformation of the mind, turning of the mind up up rooting of the mind, so that some of these underlying tendencies that cause us to be attached cause us to be clinging Two things cause us to be caught up in fear caught up in identity just vanishes. That's a remarkable thing to watch these go. They tend to, I don't know of anybody who they all go all at once. But they do some they do go bit by bit piece by piece. Remember one minute once many years ago, this woman came to a retreat practice, came back to the year later the next retreat, and she said what happened at the last retreat? Was that after that retreat, and this last year since then, I've no longer been cynical. This in my cynicism is done. I thought that was pretty cool. Well, done. uprooted, finished being cynical. I thought that was pretty good. So there's a uprooting of stuff. They finished sometimes it's a gradual uprooting the so I was neurotically concerned with everyone liking me when I was younger. And I started seeing how painful that was to live that way. And I knew that I that this was something that didn't make sense wasn't possible. That something I wanted to not, I didn't wasn't looking anymore to be successful get everyone to like me. I just wanted to be free of this strong urge for that. And from I found myself that was very hard to kind of face and admit to myself, this was the case. And I could just this is what I have to let go of, but actually felt afraid of letting go of it because it was a kind of a protection or kind of a hope that it wouldn't have to face the world somehow in sort of starkly naked way or defenseless way or something. And so what happened was that slowly over time, he started to fade and fade and fade. And now it's I think it's pretty much gone. And so maybe it's still there. Live. But, you know, it's not really a problem for me and I don't feel it troubles me at all. So you know, to look for a magic moment or a pill that's in practice, it's going to do it. It's not always realistic. But it is sometimes more realistic to think that some of these things through practice slowly, slowly diminish to a point where they come to an end, the ending of these cravings, the ending of something that doesn't come back, that's not temporary, that's permanent. And so as these cravings, these clings, attachments cease completely cease, and they're not going to come back, then we have a portable happiness since a well being than the well being the happiness of not having those challenges. Something we carry with us and the happiness is close by, maybe not felt every moment, but it's available and there and to be connected to

the third of these magnanimous truths. is the way leading to the arising of happiness. And this is exactly the same as the explanation for the fourth of the noble truths of suffering, the way leading to the cessation of suffering. And that is the Noble Eightfold Path, that there are eight practices, healthy practices that move us towards the end of suffering and conversely, help us to grow and develop and happiness. These are eight conditions for happiness. That right view, right attitude, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. It's kind of a mouthful to hear all of them are fearful to hear all of them all at once. But, but the important things that are these practices that are nourishing, nurturing that are supportive. If that help us to thrive, that helps something really beautiful, begin coursing through us in developing. These are not road to duty. They just do these things as a kind of a duty. They're actually meant to be something that is enlivening inside that gives birth to something inside that wants to come out and express itself. That health. Our system wants to be healthy. Our heart their psychological heart wants to flow freely and be unburdened unrestricted and oppressed. It wants to sing it wants to just be open and available and not held down. there's a there's a natural movement towards psychological health. If we get out of the way, the Eightfold Path or practices that are kind of getting out of the way for these beautiful qualities inside of us to thrive. The Buddha said That when someone has become spiritually mature, they don't, quote, I'm paraphrasing him a little bit. When they become spiritually mature, it isn't that they practice the full path. They become these eight practices. It's just not actually how they live their lives. So in terms of the middle three that have to



do with ethics, it isn't that they have to work hard at Right Speech, right action following the precepts, the ethics, they are ethical. They become ethical. It's kind of like the who they are as opposed to what they try to do. It's not a rule to follow. It's an expression from the inside to allow. I like to think of it as an artist maybe, you know, expresses herself on the canvas. a dancer expresses himself in the dance. A spiritually mature Buddhist expresses themselves in this same kind of expressive way something inside wants to come out through the Eightfold Path. So for the four magnanimous truths, or the four truths of thriving, the magnanimous truth of suffering, the magnanimous truth of the same man I got him, I tell him His truth of happiness, the magnanimous truth of the cessation of happiness, the losing of happiness, the magnanimous truth of the arising of happiness, and the magnanimous truth of the way leading to the rising of happiness. So, take your pick the Four Noble Truths, so the four magnanimous truths, there may be two sides of the same coin. So those are my thoughts. So what are your thoughts? What do you think of that and have any questions or then inspirations hearing this or ideas do you want to share?

So you said that you start off and happiness fades over time, which I'm sure we all late happiness will will, will cease the second magnet. Yes, right. Which I'm sure we've all experienced, but then theoretically at some point that kind of stops happening if you if you've successfully gone down the path

if your happiness depended on unreliable things, that you can't keep your happiness.

Okay, but if you if you

find something reliable, and the most the most reliable is the kind of happiness that's there. When you when you no longer crave there's no longer clinging and wanting needing something to be a certain way. We're always needing need things to be a certain way to have certain things. To receive praise to get things in the world trying to organize the world. So for us to be happy, sooner or later, it's probably going to change, you'll lose it. But what is it What's a reliable happiness is kind of the, the focus of this kind of whole approach what's reliable. And it turns out, it's a little bit hard to appreciate, who turns out, if we can really let go of our attachments. Then when our happiness then knows long, no longer dependent on what we're attached to, because you know those things. So it's not fragile as the world check comes and goes and changes in all kinds of ways. But we're not depending on it to being any certain way. So our happiness is not dependent on it. And we don't suffer if things change in ordinary and psychological ways. But it turns out That a heart which doesn't cling and doesn't grasp doesn't. It's just kind of like, it's just naturally happy. It's the nature of the heart to be buoyant and open and happy. Except when it's weighed down by things or closed down or constricted. And I why that is? I'm not sure.

Okay. Thank you. So I thought at first it sounded like you're contradicting yourself. But it sounds to me now that like, you think there's different kinds of happiness or they come from different causes.

Yeah. So there's a hat. So there's happiness that comes from clinging and attachments, which is, as things in the world change, which they inevitably do, or you change you die and too much for your happiness. But the way things change that, you know, the world's unreliable in many ways to hold on to independence always going to be that way. And there it's I'm sure there's things that are happening in our society, but even now, that Many people were depending on it being a certain way. And it's not it's not the way it is not the way we depended on it. The Great stuff I thought was really amazing when I was in Burma. So I was living in Burma and retreat, meditating, and just made it home students meditating, you know, all my waking hours. But every once in a while, we got the news that we had to know from the locals, they told us you should know this is happening. And one day they said, Oh, you should know this. That all currency, paper currency below something like \$10 is no longer valid. Now

most people had their money under the mattresses, and most of them had it in bills less than \$10 because it's Burma, you know. And so and so they wanted to kind of somehow eradicate the government had this problem with all this black market money and all this people Who are not putting money in their bank not paying taxes? I know what they did. So the solution was just to that invalidate paper currency. said, wow. And our paper in United States it says in God, we trust that, you know, you can do that with money. I thought money was money. I thought it was like inviolable. I thought you had to be a certain way. I was flabbergasted. I thought you could rely on that. So we woke up tomorrow morning, and who knows what's going to happen? Something will change. So let me see, I was gonna say so. But the other kind of happiness there is healthy happiness is to have their happiness is that don't come from clinging. But they can also be temporary. And that's what I was trying to say about. The happiness is a practice. There's a lot of happiness that come with practice, but it depends on the practice. If you cling to that, and it goes away, then it's sufferings even worse, but you don't have to claim you don't feel suffering if you don't have that happiness. But you could lose the happy But the happiness that comes from destroying craving or clinging, that can't be taken away from you. Because it's gone. Is that make more sense?

Yes. Thank you.

Can you

I appreciate that you flipped the figure ground relationship with this magnanimous set of truths. I guess just what was coming up for me is I've often heard for example, auto and trauma suffering is rote burn, don't cling on to suffer. And this really points to the Joy of letting go.

But the joy of letting go. And that's it's kind of an art form, almost to learn how wonderful it is to not cling to let go. They're certainly the well being the goodness of feeling the release of that tight hope holding on the cramping that can happen in the mind and the heart just always holding on to tightness in the constriction and just feel so good just to have released. But there's also the wonderfulness of just that openness, that freedom that is that can come and the more we let go, the more ease and peace that can be inside. And that just happy to go through the world and that ease that peace, the peace of not clinging. It's a fantastic thing. That's like one of the greatest treasures. If you want to be wealthy find this inner peace. I think of this I don't know if I can say this properly but the story of you know this man is spending his days sitting by the river fishing and another businessman comes along and say you should really get a fishing boat and really go out and you can get catch a lot more fish. Why should I do that since the fish at the man is fishing? Well, if you have a fishing boat and then catch a lot of fish, you can buy two or three fishing boats and hire people and having big fishing company. But why should I do that? Because you can keep growing the business and have lots of you know, hold the two big things and start having fishing boats in headquarters in a different countries and it'll be a great empire and you'll be the greatest, you know, fishing merchant in the whole country. Why should I do that? Because then when you retire, you'll have lots of money and you can Just go to the river and fish so why not just fish now? So I don't know that to the story kind of you know you know so you know let's get a lot of good cars a big house big fat job let's get you know the best this the best that and get it all these conditions everything all the comfort things all the things in place and right you know it's been years building it up and then we could finally relax and let go and really let go because we can just let go into our luxury into how wonderful it is in our mansion and palace and our cars. And we sit down we finally arrived retired so ah so good. And someone says you know this has this house has 82 rooms And I figured that it takes about you know, one day you know, we should clean one room a day because takes about 80 days for the rooms to get dirty again. So we'll go around you know and clean all the rooms are going to take care of all our palaces, you know all our things and or something. What about

just I didn't go we did not have so many things. So there's a story of Merlin as our Dean's wonderful wise man of Persia. And he every day he eats Beans, beans and rice beans and rice beans and rice. And he has a neighbor who's a minister who is a minister for the king and who lives in a palace and is wealthy and his neighbor says moolah. You know you're gonna have to eat beans and rice. If you just kind of kiss up to the king, then and flatter him and stuff like that, then you can, you know, he'll shower you with wealth and you can have all kinds of food and have a wonderful life. And Melissa says to his neighbor, if you were just happy with rice and beans, you wouldn't have to kiss up to the king. So you know, you're happy now. So this idea of letting go and finding happiness. There's so much happiness that's available in this world. That's really there for easy picking. That's invisible if we're constantly wanting more, wanting more having this having that trying to build and build and build safety in a nest and this and all kinds of things. So one of the forms of happiness in this list of happiness and the first magnanimous truth is that renunciation is happiness.

renunciation, letting go. Inner well being is the greatest happiness, the greatest treasure, the greatest well, to really learn to identify this Inner Wealth, treasures, treasure that we have a peace of ease, love of warmth, of the happiness that can live inside. And really see that that's can be our home. That we're not dependent on getting more things and getting and doing and all this stuff and learn wisely and smartway how to live a life of simplicity, so that there's lots of time and ability for this inner treasure, to be there to inform us to be with us and to guide us. It is possible this world it's possible to live a very happy life. It's very sad to see you walk around society and see how many people seem to not know this. They don't really understand it. They're chasing empty dreams. So, there is a path. There are these four magnanimous truths they can be your truths. May you be happy. Thank you