

## Four Noble Truths - Four Foundations of Mindfulness

**Gil Fronsdal**

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So what I'd like to do this evening is to relate two very important practices or teachings of the Buddha. On one hand, we have the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, and then on the other hand, we have the teachings of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness refers to a particular teaching of the Buddha from a particular discourse the Buddha gave called the Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, which is the source for *vipassanā*, for most forms of posture that are taught both in Asia and in America. They trace their origins back to this particular discourse, and sometimes you can't necessarily see how they're connected. But the inspiration, the kind of basic idea of *vipassanā* practice, comes from this discourse.

People have chosen different parts, or chosen to interpret different ways, or developed in different ways. Now you have all the different schools of modern *vipassanā* derived from this discourse, and so on. I can't bring these two together. In fact, the two are brought together in the discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, in that the practice of understanding our life through the Four Noble Truths is offered at the very end of the discourse. I'd like to offer you my interpretation, at least one understanding, what perspective and why it appears at the end of the discourse. One of the remarkable things I believe about Buddhism—there are a number of remarkable things.

But one is that it's a religious or spiritual tradition which presents its teachings, its practices, without requiring people to adhere to any kind of supernatural, mythological, or moral beliefs. So you're not to believe in a god or a godhead, or there's all these kinds of, you know, the mass of some true, some idea about ultimate realities, or there's all these ideas that different religious traditions have that are kind of articles of faith. If you're not really brought

up in the particular tradition, it's often very hard to believe in the particular articles of faith that traditions have. If you grew up in a tradition, it just seems completely obvious that this is the way nature was or the world, but it's still an article of faith. The remarkable thing about the Buddhist tradition—and you're welcome to argue against me that I have a wrong view here—is that in the Buddhist tradition it offers a spiritual practice without offering any kind of real metaphysical or abstract articles of faith that you have to believe in for the rest of the system to work. That works very well then for introducing Buddhism to a wide array of people, because it's a Buddhism that doesn't conflict directly with other articles of faith, other beliefs people have.

In fact, from my Buddhist point of view, you're welcome to be a Christian, a Jew, or Muslim, whatever. Mostly, as a Buddhist, I don't feel that there's any conflict between believing in some article of faith and religion and practicing Buddhism. It's just that the two kind of involve different domains of our life. Instead of offering some kind of article of faith, some supernatural or theistic idea, what Buddhism offered—what the Buddha offered—was the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are not meant to be there to call truths, but I understand them to be perspectives, frameworks, for they're helpful for understanding our lives. Life is so complicated. There are so many things going on that it's very helpful if you can have a framework to organize your life, to make sense of it so you can live your life efficiently, clearly, and get to the point of it, which for the Buddha was ending your unnecessary suffering, bringing an end to suffering.

Liberation, in a simple definition of liberation in Buddhism, is coming to the end of suffering. The Buddha said, "Sometimes I teach one thing only, and that is suffering, and the end of suffering." Whether you suffer—if you're suffering, it's not really an article of faith that you suffer. You don't have to believe. You know, you know, read a book teaches you that you suffer, and then you may. That happens sometimes, right? You read someone like, "Nice. Oh, I didn't know it was so bad." Suffering is something that's pretty direct and immediate, and you kind of basically know it or you don't know it.

So the Buddha taught one thing and one thing only: suffering and the end of suffering. All the Buddhist teachings, then, are an elaboration of this teaching on suffering and the end of suffering. You very clearly see that in the formulation of the Four Noble Truths. There is suffering, there is a cause of suffering, there's an end of suffering, and there's a path to ending suffering. So that's a perspective, much as true as a perspective, to understand in your life as a framework, very much like human beings have found it very helpful to have systems of measurement. Here in America, we have what's called the English system. In Europe, they

have the metric system.

I don't know if you want to say that the American system of measurement of inches and feet is more true or less true than the metric system. One might be more efficient and more useful, but not more true or less true—just a way. Reality doesn't change so much. It's just a way of dividing up reality that's helpful. So the Four Noble Truths are frameworks like that that help us hold our experience so we can become efficient in measuring and seeing what is necessary for us to study. You don't believe them in terms like a religious truth, but rather you adopt them as a perspective, as a tool to help you make some sense of all the complexity of your life. You can get to the Buddhist point, which is to end suffering.

It's very interesting. Then he based this model of the Four Noble Truths on a medical model. That's the way doctors analyzed illness in ancient India. So rather than using a faith model or religious model, he used actual, very pragmatic methods of a doctor: the illness, a doctor's interest in the illness, the cause of the illness, the prognosis, the possibility of a cure, and then the cure, the medicine you have to take. So there's suffering, there's a cause of suffering, there's a prognosis, there's a possibility of ending that suffering, and then there's the medicine you take, which is the Eightfold Path. The Four Noble Truths, in their simplest versions, I think it's pretty easy to understand. Sometimes we suffer; that suffering has a cause, which the Buddha defined as thirst, *taṇhā*, which is usually translated into English as craving, this kind of feeling of compulsion, of being driven.

Sometimes we suffer and we don't even know why we're suffering. But you feel this momentum, this power, this force within us that kind of keeps us to the grindstone—a kind of suffering—and that force, the compulsion that keeps us there in whatever the suffering might be. If you want to let go of it, you want to somehow break out of it. You want, you know, somehow leave it behind, and it just kind of hangs on to you. That stays with you. You can't seem to leave it. It's kind of like this powerful force of sadness or grief or anger or pain or frustration, whatever it might be, and the force, that mental momentum, the drivenness that keeps it there.

The Buddha defined thirst as craving, which is very interesting, because craving is something usually you think of that people do—they crave. What it implies is that our suffering arises from something that we do. There's not some impersonal force or force outside of us that comes out, gets channeled through our being, and therefore we suffer because of all the terrible things in the world. The Buddha pointed to the fact that we suffer only because of something that we do, and that makes it very challenging because it's invisible to us, many times,

our contribution to our suffering, what we do. We feel so clear that people are doing things to me, and that life is unfair or whatever, and so it's very easy to look outside for the cause of our suffering. The Buddha turned—you know, you need to turn the attention inward.

If you want to study the place where you can make a real difference—who knows about the difference you can make in the external world and how people treat you? But you can make a real difference to your suffering by turning attention inward to see what you do. Particularly if you can notice that when you suffer, if you can kind of tease apart in that suffering, look deeply into it and see: where is that drivenness? Where is the craving? The grasping on that provides the momentum and the force for that suffering to be there. If you can do that well, then there's a possibility of letting go of that craving and experiencing the cessation of craving, cessation of suffering. If you do that really thoroughly, then in the Buddhist tradition, you become someone who's liberated. You have experience of liberation, of kind of ultimate freedom.

Then Buddha offers this path. So this is relatively easy: there's suffering, a cause of suffering, an end of suffering, and a path. It's very hard to understand this in the depths of our psyche. It's very hard to understand, you know, if I'm attached to—if I see someone out there who wears a beautiful T-shirt that has a metal cross or something like a T-shirt like that, you know, "Metta," it'll be great to walk around like that, you know. It's green and blue, and I can see my desire, and I can see maybe I'm suffering because, you know, "Oh, I don't have a white shirt." You know, it's probably no one likes white, and I should be wearing green.

Probably people don't want—people don't like me. How can I be such a poor choice of clothes? Pretty soon I get in this big morass. It's a mess of suffering. I might be pretty lucky. I can see, "Oh, you know, this is my mind thinking, and I have to pick this up. It's kind of a silly thought, and I can just let go of it." But it's much harder to let go, as we know, of certain things—they are really deeply enmeshed in our psyche, and we can't even see our contribution in it.

The drive for security, the drive for wanting to be liked, the drive to feel acknowledged for our work, the drive to acquire, to have the desire to want things, the tremendous impulse within us sometimes to be aversive, to kind of feel oppressed by life—sometimes some of us feel oppressed by life, just too much. It's very hard to see what we're doing in the midst of it. That is where our responsibility lies. In fact, if you don't have clarity enough to see it, you have no choice. You only have choice if you can see the place of choice. If you can't see the place of choice and what you're doing, you have no choice. Then you're being led around by

your desire and your grasping.

So then it doesn't feel very impersonal, and feels like other causes and conditions are causing your suffering. Am I making sense so far? So it's very hard to apply the Four Noble Truths in the depths of our psyche, and they can actually feel very almost insulting. We can add injury upon injury for someone to come along and say, "You're responsible for your suffering," because people feel so raw and so filled with pain to begin with, and then now they have this burden. They feel guilty because "I'm the one who's causing it," and so just make them feel even worse, and they feel more discouraged. It's not meant that kind of way.

The beauty of the Four Noble Truths is just to apply it any way you can. If you hear, "Oh, you're responsible for suffering," and then you contract because of that, then you apply the Four Noble Truths to that particular contraction. Maybe you can see that, and let go of that. "Oh, I don't have to take that on as a burden, thank you." So it's hard to get in, you know? In Buddhism, they talk about the deep subconscious roots of craving within us. So it's not necessarily available to the conscious, normal mind, the street-minded one that walks around. The deep roots of attachment to self, for example.

So the Buddha offered a path, the Eightfold Path. He offered practices to help us use the Four Noble Truths to their full potential. Like you have a knife, and maybe the knife is really dull. In order to use that knife to its full potential, you have to sharpen it on a sharpening stone, and then you can really use it well. You can't really cut deep down into whatever you're cutting—into the eggplant—unless it's sharp. In the same way, you take and sharpen the mind enough so you can use this tool of the Four Noble Truths to apply deeply into your inner psyche. That's one of the functions of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

One way of understanding the Four Foundations of Mindfulness is they're laying a foundation for you for applying the Four Noble Truths to our lives. I think of it as a pyramid. A pyramid has a stable base because it's so wide. If you turn a pyramid upside down on its head, it'd be very difficult to keep stable or it would tip over. So you won't have a very stable base. If the Four Noble Truths are like the top of the pyramid, you won't have a very stable, firm base for holding at the top of the pyramid if you have it upside down. Therefore, the discourse in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness offers that foundation.

I like to think of the four as being the first one being the base of the pyramid, the second being the next layer up, the third being the next layer up, and the fourth being the next layer up. The first foundation is, in some sense, the most important because it's the foundational one. The first foundation of mindfulness is mindfulness of the body—being mindful of our

embodied experience, what it's like to live in a body, to experience our life through our body. Many people are not connected to their body. It's very easy to lose touch with our body. The body provides a tremendous friend, provides tremendous information about what's going on.

It can help us a lot in processing our life. Often, one of the best ways of processing our experience is by entering into the body's way of holding that experience. Many times we're trying to fix things with our head, with our thoughts and ideas. Sometimes it can be like an endless kind of treadmill running around and around in our thoughts. It can be a lot faster to drop down into the body and hold our experience right there. It's like a shortcut to spiritual life is through the body.

In this discourse of Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Buddha first says—the very interesting thing, the first instructions he gives is before he can even describe the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, he says, “Put away covetousness and grief for the world.” Covetousness and grief, desire and grief, or sorrow about the world. The operating word here is “about the world.” For me, it's pointing to the fact that if you're going to do the spiritual work that the Buddha is pointing towards, you have to, in some way, at some point, learn to turn your attention away from the external focus that we often have to the objects of the world—not because they're bad, not to reject them, but so that we can turn inward to see where the point of choice and responsibility lies. So it's a turnaround of the attention.

We kind of lose our concern with all the things in the world: our bank account, our job, our relationship, our recreational opportunities, all the kinds of things that we can get lost in, so that we can get access to this deep inner world. There has to be some conviction, some understanding of the wisdom of at least temporarily learning the art of taking that backward step, the inward step, and not constantly being caught in the things of the world. It's a lot easier said than done. Some people come to do mindfulness practice trying to help them not be so caught up in the world. The first instruction given is, “Just don't be caught up in the world.” Thanks a lot.

At least theoretically you should understand this: that theoretically the practice is to turn inward and let go, the best you can, of the external drive to always be thinking about future, past, things in the world. Then it says, “Go to the foot of a tree or an empty room,” and this room here qualifies as being pretty empty. Now sit down cross-legged, sit up straight, and set your attention in front of you. Sit, set your attention straight or in the present moment. The first instructions after this are: start paying attention to your breath. Notice your breath.

Notice qualities of your breath.

Notice a long breath as a long breath, a short breath as a short breath. Tune in to the qualities of your breath, the experience of your breath, what your breath is like. Become intimate with breath. Get concentrated on the experience of the breathing. The bottom layer of that pyramid is cultivating the ability to concentrate on the breath. That's one aspect of mindfulness of the body. The breath is a preeminent tool for calming and concentrating the mind.

In fact, in this discourse on Four Foundations, the Buddha says, "As you get tuned in to your breathing, let your breathing help you calm your body and mind." Allow the breath to calm the body and mind. Calm yourself. As you stay with your breath, calm your body, calm your mind, calm the agitation that might be there. One of the reasons for this is it's very hard to see clearly into the psyche if you're agitated. In order to apply the Four Noble Truths deeply, you have to somehow settle the agitated waves on the surface of the ocean of your mind. Otherwise, if you are all agitated, you can't see through the agitation.

So to cultivate, begin cultivating calm and concentration not just in meditation, but see if you can develop a lifestyle that's conducive for that, because it's not easy to develop a calm mind or a calm body. Sometimes you need to look at the rest of your life and see, "What can I do to change my life and live in such a way that I am not always so agitated?" If you want to do the work as deeply as it can be done, then the next instruction after meditation on the breath is to learn to start paying attention to your daily activities. Include your daily activities as part of your meditation practice. When you're standing, be mindful that you're standing. When you're sitting, be mindful that you're sitting. When you're lying down, be mindful you're lying down.

When you're walking, be mindful you're walking. When you reach out to pick something up, be mindful of the fact that that's what you're doing. When you're going to the bathroom, be mindful of that process of going to the bathroom. When you're putting on your clothes, be mindful of that process of putting on the clothes. The discourse says you start paying attention to your life. Be present for it. Notice what goes on, perhaps some modicum of presence in the activities of your life, partly so you can bring calm to that part of your life, partly so you can notice what's really going on.

Very many years ago I was at the library at UC Berkeley, and I really was doing my dissertation research, and I really needed a book that only they had in the library and was not on the shelves. So I went to the librarian to ask for help, and the librarians were quite unhelpful, and they were unwilling to go and look and see if somebody had checked it out, if it was missing,

or where else it might be if someone had returned it. I'd come all the way up from Stanford to go to Berkeley to get this book. I explained to them the tremendous importance of getting this book, and it was certainly very important for me, and I was really into the discussion and trying to get their attention, and they were across this big table as I was. Finally, another librarian walked by and said, "Oh, you know, I'll help you." She helped me and was able to help me.

But when she offered to help me, then I relaxed, and only then did I turn my attention to what was going on with me, my body. I found out I was leaning halfway across the table. My feet were almost off the ground. I was really, you know—ideally, I would maybe notice that while I was doing it, so I could maybe be more composed and perhaps more effective in my communication. When I was caught up in that book and getting my way, there was not much opportunity there to use the Four Noble Truths as a reflection, to understand my experience in the present moment. If I had been more composed and paid more attention to what was going on, my activities, the fact I was leaning over the table, standing on the table, whatever I was doing, then I would have noticed, "Oh, where is the clinging here? What's the craving here? Do I really want to be craving this way?" That's one of the reflections in the Four Noble Truths.

Do I really want to live this way? Is it part of my priorities and values to lose my peace, my harmony, my sense of well-being desperately trying to get this book? Is whatever I'm grasping, is it really worth it? Sometimes it can be a wrestling match. It's a fascinating kind of exploration of the mind to be asking this question: Is this grasping really worth it? Why am I doing it in my heart's heart? Is this really what I want my life to be about? So pay attention to your breath. Learn to use your breath as a way of calming yourself.

The next instruction is to pay attention to your activities. The next instruction is to start paying attention to your body directly: your body itself, the different sensations of your body, the different aspects of your body. Get really familiar with your body. Part of this foundation of the mindfulness of the body is also an instruction to pay attention to what's called the impurities of the body, the impure aspects of the body. Your snot, and things like that, your piss, and your bile, and all these liquids which, you know, you don't really want someone to—that person's—those liquids of that person then kind of come all over you. We all can have the sense, right? Sometimes you do that. We don't really want that person's vomit to—please.

I was surprised that it was okay for me to hold my son's vomit in my hand when he was two

years old. That was really surprising. I had no idea that human beings went around sniffing other human beings. But I don't—any dogs did that, holding each other's vomit. It's a parent's thing. It's really educational, but you know, anyway. So the impurity—there's a reflection, and there's instructions to meditate like that on the impurities of the body.

I think part of the reason for that is so you don't get—even though there's a tremendous emphasis in Buddhism on the importance of the body, being in your body, sensing, enjoying being in your body—you also don't want to be attached to your body. Many people are attached to their bodies in various ways, and so people are excessively attached to their body. Contemplating the impure aspects of your body is meant to be a strategy so you don't get so attached to it. You know it's a really good body, it's really great, it's a really wonderful friend we have. The Buddhist tradition says specifically, “Your body is your best friend.” But if you get attached to it, then think about those things.

Another instruction on mindfulness of the body is contemplating death, particularly contemplating a corpse, and either as a visualization or—back in ancient India, they would go to charnel grounds where they just dumped the dead bodies on top of the ground to rot. People would go out there and sit and watch the process of decay, and this maybe is partly also to help with the attachment to the body. It's a very powerful practice to sit with a corpse and watch the process of decay. I like to think of it partly that the contemplation of death, which is strongly recommended in Buddhism, is not meant as a morbid practice, but a way of getting our priorities straightened out, to really understand, “Yes, I'm going to die. What's most important for me? If I come to my deathbed, how do I remember my life? What was really important in my life?”

These different exercises all belong to the foundation of mindfulness of the body, and lay the foundation of both being calm enough, being present enough for experience, for a body, knowing what goes on in our body, because suffering usually has a physical, embodied quality to it. I have known people, for example—it's quite common that people say, “I started paying attention to myself when I was angry. When I was angry, I noticed what a tremendous cost it had on my body.” When you get caught up in the object of your anger, we're often blind to the cost in our own physical body. I've had people come and say, “Oh, and I noticed the cost of being angry. I didn't feel it was worth it. I didn't want to do it.”

The Buddha said, “If you want to do your enemy a favor, be angry, because you're causing yourself harm in a way your enemy couldn't even do it themselves.” So the first foundation of mindfulness helps to do all these things with our priorities a little bit, with getting grounded

in our body. Understanding the impact our suffering and our choices have on our embodied life, our lived life, is seeing clearly into the body. The second foundation of mindfulness is called *vedanā* in Pāli, and I like to translate this into English as the feeling tone of our experience. This can be a very humbling realization or study.

The feeling tone of our experience is the idea that every experience you have, whatever it might be—whatever sense doors you have in the rawness, at the sense level of the experience, not your experience of democracy, that's too big, but in your sense experience, in the moment experience of life as it's lived: hearing a sound, tasting, touching, thinking a thought—that experience is either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Why this is humbling: if you pay careful attention to your mind, you'll discover how often you're actually an amoeba. You're an amoeba, and yet it's amoeba-like reaction to pleasantness and unpleasantness, this liking and disliking, holding on, going towards, not liking, pulling away, pushing away, just based on what things are pleasant and unpleasant.

We're like slaves to pleasure and discomfort, and we react so constantly to this—running away from the unpleasant, holding on to the pleasant, wanting it, desiring it, being caught and caught in it. Sometimes it's not really about the big picture of, you know, we sometimes build political philosophies and their origins arise not out of great philosophical consideration, but they arise simply because they find some experience unpleasant, and so they're reacting to that unpleasantness. Or the unpleasant is propelling them to have aversion, to try to stop something. It isn't that it's not okay to have preferences or dislikes, but we want to be master of our own mind. To see how clearly the mind can be amoeba-like, a reaction machine—it's impersonal, not like even you doing it—is very helpful and instructive to start watching how the mind works and how the mind picks up craving, how the drivenness arises out of this, very originally from these very basic, simple things.

I'm sitting here meditating. My knee hurts. It's an unpleasant experience. I don't just let the unpleasant experience be there neutrally, but there's all these reactions to it. First of all, it's this whole philosophy that in order to be a successful human being, I should be constantly dwelling in bliss. I'm a spiritual person after all, and physical pain is a proof that I'm not very spiritual. Here in America, you're not supposed to have pain because there's all these aspirins and stuff you can take, and it's a personal failing to have pain, and all this reactivity to it.

Then you have this pain, and, "Well, you know, this is not right. I probably got the wrong instruction in meditation, and probably there's a better meditation teacher out there, and I think I'm going to find the better meditation teacher. But this is the only place I can find where

I don't have to pay if I don't want to, and everywhere else I have to pay. Why do all the other people charge so much and they're so terrible?" This whole universe arises in reaction to having somehow been hooked by the unpleasantness of the knee pain. Your life will be a lot easier if you say, "Oh, it's unpleasant," and you leave it at that. But we cannot get hooked.

So studying the pleasant and unpleasant neutrality of experience teaches us something about the hookedness, how we get hooked. That's very helpful if you understand. If you don't understand the Four Noble Truths, the next foundation of mindfulness is called the foundation of mindfulness of the mind. That's—who knows what he means, the Buddha, except when he says it's the foundation of the mind. Except he gives a list of things that he says you should pay attention to, and that's very clear. When the mind is filled with lust, you should notice that—it's really helpful to notice when there is craving and lust in the mind. You should also notice when that lust is gone, when there's absence of lust.

Notice the difference between what it feels like to have a heart or mind filled with craving and when it's without it. Notice when there's hate, and notice what it's like to have a mind that's free of hate. These are very useful things to pay attention to. Notice in our experience. Notice when there's delusion—it's much harder to notice when you're deluded, but you can sometimes notice your delusion and then notice the absence of it. Notice when your mind is distracted, what it feels like. Get to know that really well.

Rather than being judgmental and upset at the fact your mind is distracted, you're instructed to really know that, study that, get to know what that's like, be mindful of that experience, and be mindful of experience when the mind is not distracted—know what it's like. Then when the mind is agitated, know that, and when it's not agitated, know that, and then that's all. The kind of unwholesome states of mind. You should also know a wholesome state of mind. When the mind is—the suttas use great words like "exalted." When you have the supreme mind, the ultimate mind, when you have a liberated mind, you should know: these wonderful minds are filled with joy, feeling of peace, feeling of being at ease, at home in itself, feeling liberated from craving and grasping.

You should know those kinds of qualities of the mind to be able to distinguish between these things. It says, knowing these things, being really expert at these qualities of the mind, is very helpful, because if you see these things well, then you can—it's a shortcut to understanding, to using the Four Noble Truths to get down into the depths of our psyche. So the first foundation is the body. The second is the feeling tone. The third is the mind. The fourth foundation is the foundation of *dhmma*—*dharmas*. No one knows by what the Buddha meant here,

again, with the title. The category *dhammas* here—the ancient Buddhist dictionary gives like fifty-six different definitions of *dhamma*. So it's very hard to know what it actually means here.

But again, what happens is that the explanation is given in the explanation of that category, the fourth foundation. There are five exercises or five things to pay attention to in the fourth foundation of mindfulness. To make it simple, what you're asked to pay—there's a shift here from the first three and the fourth. The first three are a little more just descriptive in the sense that you just notice what's there. Don't be judgmental about it. Just notice what's present. When anger is there, notice that. When pleasantness is there, notice that. When the body is tight, notice the body is tight. When the body is loose, notice that.

Just notice how things are. Develop a non-reactive awareness, simple direct seeing things as they are, which is a very basic instruction for *vipassanā*. In the fourth foundation of mindfulness, you're encouraged to start studying the processes and the ways in which the mind works. It is to study not just such things in and of themselves, but how they're part of a continuum, a process of change. There's a chain of cause and effect that brings things together. In particular, you want to notice—to give a shorthand version here—you want to notice when the mind, in some way or other, gets entangled with experiences of life, entangled with your thoughts, entangled with your feelings, entangled with the objects outside, and in some way gets entangled. Notice that, and notice how that happened.

Notice how you get entangled, and notice how you can maybe prevent that entanglement from arising in the future. Notice the effect that entanglement has on your psyche. Notice what you can do to let go of that entanglement. To notice so is not a matter of, again, judging your success and failure in this, but involves some study here: What is this experience? One of the examples is clinging to sensual desire, sensual pleasure. What's to notice? What the effect is on your psyche to be clinging to sensual pleasure?

You have this great foundation of the first three mindfulness practices first, so you're familiar with how to pay attention to your body, how to be calm, and so you can notice when sensual desire has gripped your mind. The effect is it contracts the awareness. The awareness doesn't feel free. You don't feel free. You feel kind of imprisoned or tight or constricted, contracted. Then you notice, "Why am I—what does it take to be free of this? Why is it there? What's the process of liberating myself from this?" There's a study of this. What can I do about this? Another example that's given here is any kind of attachment, clinging to a sense of self.

Notice that you've already cultivated the ability to be non-reactive in your experience. Use a non-reactive awareness. It doesn't judge, doesn't criticize, and feel guilty for the attachment to self. Then notice the effect that attachment to self has on yourself. Notice the cost it has. Again, you probably feel a contraction, a limitation. You'll find it heavy. It'll feel difficult and painful. Even the most sublime and wonderful ideas of self and who you are—if you are attached to it, it is a hindrance, and here you are asked to notice how that is hindering you. Notice the effect it has on you.

Then, on the opposite end, you are instructed to notice those qualities of mind that arise that are helpful for the process of liberation. They are conducive for becoming liberated, becoming freer: mindfulness, non-reactive mindfulness awareness is helpful to liberate the mind. Investigating your experience is helpful to liberate the mind. Joy is helpful. Tranquillity is helpful. Making effort can be helpful. Tranquillity is helpful. Equanimity is helpful. Seven Factors of Awakening—these states of mind arise. Notice the effect these states have, how the mind feels more expansive, more at ease, feels lighter.

It's very important to notice the effect these things have, the process they are part of. What can you do to support the slow arising of these things? What can you do to maintain them as they arise? We're getting closer to the top of the pyramid, almost to the top. The last thing you're instructed to do after doing all these different things, being familiar with all these things, having got these under your belt, is then the Four Noble Truths: to look at your experience very carefully. Where is the subtlest form of tension, of stress, of suffering in your life? Not to ignore even the gross ones, but subtle. You'll be very subtle if you want to get down to the very deepest roots of your suffering.

Attachment to self is so powerful. It's so good at camouflaging itself. You know it's there, and it's so good at putting up a tremendous resistance to being studied and being addressed. There can be this biblical battle sometimes with people, and they get close to that deepest sense and attachment to the idea of self, and yet it can be very subtle to pick it up, very subtle and very familiar with all the tricks of the mind, and learn how to stay grounded in your body in order to really get down and see the depths of all this. So where is that subtle suffering? Where is that subtle attachment that gives rise to cause, that gives rise to that suffering? Can you find the release from that grasping, the freedom from it?

So it can sound like a big project, all this stuff. It's not meant to be that way. But I think it's helpful to think of a spiritual life as something that you're not expecting to work overnight. It's a slow, progressive thing. You're building the foundation over time. The last thing I'll say

is, the Buddha said the *Dhamma* is good in the beginning, it's good in the middle, and good in the end. If you use the Four Noble Truths at the beginning, middle, and end, you don't have to wait until you do all this foundation stuff before you do the Four Noble Truths.

If you start studying and applying the Four Noble Truths at the very beginning of your *Dhamma* practice, then probably you won't suffer because of your *Dhamma* practice. You'll enjoy it a lot. Whenever you notice—whenever you can notice—the suffering and the craving and clinging that's there, let go of it, or have a wiser relationship to it. So if you sit here, and you're a brand new meditator, and you sit down to meditate, and your mind feels really restless, and then you notice that your mind says, "You can never do anything right, and I'm supposed to be concentrated and blissed out here like everybody else is here in this room, and you're the only one sitting here and being miserable, and boy, you're really, you know, a lousy, no good person, probably a failure as a human being. Hope no one notices." But then you remember, "Oh, but these Buddhists teach the Four Noble Truths. Let's apply this to this. Oh, there's all these ideas that I'm attached to doing it right. Let me let go of that attachment to doing it right. Oh, I'm just sitting here being distracted, and it's not so pleasant to be distracted. But now I'm not going to add a burden of all the suffering on top of it." So apply the Four Noble Truths any time you can.

So I hope that makes sense. If some of you are new, it might not have made much sense because there's a lot of teachings that are summarized very briefly. But for those of you who heard a lot of these teachings before, it might have been helpful for you to get a sense of how the Four Foundations of Mindfulness lay a kind of a path that helps us understand the depths of the Four Noble Truths. So thank you very much, and I wish you a wonderful week.