

Four Foundation: Four Noble Truths

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So far, the journey through this retreat, through the Dharma talks, has been kind of a central reference point for mindfulness practice in Buddhism, discourse on the four foundations of mindfulness, four ways of establishing awareness.

And there are 13 kind of descriptions of ways to establish this very strong... present moment awareness.

And we've kind of covered 12 of them, kind of, or we skipped one or two.

But we come to the last one.

And this is a famous teaching in Buddhism, sometimes considered core teaching in Buddhism, the four noble truths.

I like to call them the four liberating insights.

And one reason for that is as I said, the core teaching of Buddhism, and if you, you know, you can go to a class to learn about Buddhism, and they'll say this is that core teaching of Buddhism, and you have to memorize the four things, then you know the teachings.

But they're not meant to be teachings that way.

They're meant to be insights.

They're meant to be something that you see clearly for yourself.

And if you want to engage with them logically, that's a fine thing, or apply them in all kinds of logical, rational ways.

That's fine, since it can be inspiring.

But the idea is to come to a place where you see in a very, with tremendous clarity, and you see with a clarity where there's a context for that clarity, constant context for seeing it.

It doesn't like I go down to downtown Santa Cruz and maybe the boardwalk and say, hey, I have an important Buddhist teaching to tell you.

You know how great it is?

These formidable truths are great.

And just sit down.

It'll make a big difference for you.

Sit here in a coffee shop with me.

Excuse me, sir, but I have the roller coaster to go on.

But after a roller coaster of the retreat...

At some point, maybe your ability to see, your ability to have clarity, your ability to be stable and not caught up in your mind's rollercoasters has improved.

And there's a different context for seeing yourself, to holding yourself, to being with yourself, to loving yourself that prepares you to see in a new way.

And so, Francisco did a great job yesterday laying out the seven factors of awakening.

And there they immediate, they appear in the *sutta* just before the Four Noble Truths.

So they're kind of like what prepares the ground.

And that's very important as a context for the Four Noble Truths, because the seven factors of awakening as lived experiences are really great.

They're really a sense of being filled with wholesomeness, filled with goodness.

We just talked about becoming fulfilled in them.

In the *suttas*, they're often contrasted with the hindrances.

And in this text, the hindrances are to be abandoned, but the seven factors of awakening are to be brought to fulfillment.

This is not what I learned about Buddhism when I first came to Buddhism, especially in Zen.

We were not supposed to be happy in Zen.

There was no teachings about joy.

In fact, if you went to the teacher and said you felt a lot of joy, it was likely they would say, you know, to be nice to you, they would say something like, it's just one more thing to let go of.

And sometimes they would say something like, kind of the equivalent of that's delusion or worse.

Yes.

And because we're supposed to have a direct entrance into emptiness, and it's supposed to be like, I don't know what, but just by the affect of everyone, it was supposed to be stern.

Direct entrance to emptiness, to see directly into the truth, and none of this kind of sweet stuff around it, none of this loving kindness and joy and...

So, I don't want to make fun of it too much, because actually I still think that Zen is very profound and has its own logic for why it teaches this stuff that makes a lot of sense.

It's appropriate.

But still, what I learned was that I wasn't supposed to feel joy.

And one of the things that, and then maybe I misunderstood something too, but when I came to Theravāda and mindfulness, to my surprise, I discovered that joy was allowed, was encouraged, was actually possible in a whole different way than I knew in Zen.

And it wasn't just joy.

It was happiness.

It was peace.

It was profound states of tranquility.

It was deep states of unification, where we become whole, really feeling a sense of wholeness.

Even at the same time, we feel very, very, very simple.

The radical simplicity, not much is going on.

And this very beautiful state of equanimity.

It's hard from the English word to appreciate how fantastic equanimity is.

It's kind of like the crown jewel of Buddhism.

It's so special.

It feels so wonderful.

And so what I'm trying to convey is that these seven factors of awakening, they're something that can grow and develop.

Sometimes it takes years for them to really get strong.

But the idea is they slowly develop and grow.

It's one of what, what are you growing?

I'm growing the seven factors of awakening.

And they grow.

And there's a feeling of well-being, a feeling of belonging, feeling at home, feeling connected.

It just feels really good in here.

It's not easy to come to.

There's a lot of healing that might have to happen for that to happen.

And that's profound.

That's very meaningful.

And...

And so, but at some point we have this.

So I want to lay it out because that's the context, one context for understanding the formidable truths.

Before I tell you what they are, I want to give you a story in the *suttas*.

There's a teaching that the Buddha gave that's heralded as being profound, proto-Mahāyāna, proto-Zen, and...

So some people will just teach this teaching, like again, direct pointing to the truth kind of thing.

And that's one *sutta* where the Buddha does that.

But there's another *sutta* where the Buddhist disciple Ānanda gives this teaching to another monk.

And when he gives a teaching to another monk, there's a context for this teaching.

And that's why I want to show you this.

The context is important.

And maybe it prepares the ground for someone to see and know, it had to do with a monk named Channa.

And Channa was, at least in the English, when the Buddha was speaking English, he was obstinate and so maybe stubborn or maybe a little bit rebellious or didn't quite do things the way you're supposed to do them.

He kind of did it his way, but it wasn't quite right.

We don't know exactly what his issue was, but he...

He knew the Buddha for a long time.

I think they were supposed to have been childhood friends.

And Channa is a charioteer.

It helped the Buddha escape the palace when Buddhists went off.

But eventually he became a monk himself.

But he was always on the little bit on the outs.

Out of the community, out of the teaching.

He would be reprimanded.

But we never get any clear sense why.

And I kind of think that maybe that's significant in the sense that many people get criticized, left out, condemned for nothing they do.

They're somehow not up to snuff in some people's eyes.

And maybe for him, maybe he did behave somewhat unusual, but we don't know what that is.

But we know now so many people are completely normal when they are neurodivergent or this way or that way.

And...

And so society has gradually come to appreciate people in a way that back then, we're talking about the Bronze Ages.

So, you know, they were a little bit behind in some ways.

So we don't know what was going on with this Chan now, but, you know, I feel for him.

Because when the Buddha died, he said to the *Saṅgha*, one of the last things he said before he died, that he...

Ruled the most strict, kind of the strictest kind of consequence for a monk short of being expelled from the order.

And that was, he could still be a monk, but none of the monks were allowed to talk to him.

He was no longer in community with the other monks.

So usually that's if someone does something really serious.

So it's kind of a big deal.

And so the Buddha died and...

And then Channa at some point had some kind of, I don't know if he had a change of heart, but he really wanted to see the truth.

And so he made his way back to the monastery, and he was walking around the monastery asking, may the elder monks instruct me, may the elder *bhikkhus* teach me, may the elder *bhikkhus* provide me with the *Dhamma* talk so I can see the *Dhamma*.

I mean, it's such, to me, it's such a sincere request.

Please, the elder monks, please teach me.

And so they weren't supposed to talk to him.

Maybe they were still annoyed with him.

After all, he was not up to snuff, whatever that means.

And so they gave him the most stereotypical, simplistic teaching of the truth that was kind of available back then.

They said, so these are the five bundles I talked about yesterday, the other day.

Appearances are inconstant, impermanent.

Sensations are inconstant.

Recognition and concepts are impermanent and inconstant.

These mental constructs are inconstant.

Cognition, consciousness is inconstant.

That's it.

The guy's asking, please.

And so they tell him directly, but it's kind of like...

I kind of imagine they're kind of like yelling at him and going like this.

At least in my imagination, it's not a good story, not a good event.

And...

And then they say the same thing over again.

Appearance is not self.

Feeling is not, or sensation is not self.

Concepts is not self.

Mental constructs are not self.

Cognition is not self.

So then he says, I know this.

I know all this.

I've heard the *Dhamma*.

Even so, my mind is not inspired, confident, settled, or resolved.

About quieting of all the mental stories, all the mental constructs, about giving up all the attachments, the ending of craving, cessation, *nibbāna*.

So he's asking to see the *Dhamma*, but it didn't inspire him.

It didn't point him.

It didn't show him anything.

It didn't, you know, he wanted more.

He really, he's kind of this point, his really, his Dharma desire is strong.

But then he says, instead...

Of being inspired by this teaching that they gave me.

Anxiety and clinging arises.

My mind is spinning.

For someone who sees the *Dhamma*, it does not occur to ask, who then is myself?

So that I can see the *Dhamma*, who can point out the *Dhamma*?

He's really asking.

He's really ready.

He doesn't get anything from the elder monks.

So then he remembers...

It occurs to him, staying in Kosambī, at the monastery there, is Venerable Ānanda, praised by our teacher and esteemed by his wise companions in the holy life.

Venerable Ānanda can point out the *Dhamma* so I can see the *Dhamma*.

I have a lot of love for Venerable Ānanda.

Why don't I visit him?

This is a little unusual in the *suttas*, for love to be evoked in this way.

So he remembered who he had love for, who he cared for.

He would say, maybe he can help me.

Then arriving there to Ānanda, he said hello, and he explained the story, what had happened to him with the other monks.

And he said, Venerable Ānanda, instruct me.

May Venerable Ānanda teach me, may Venerable Ānanda provide me with a *Dhamma* talk so I can see the *Dhamma*.

And Ānanda said, on this matter, I am certainly delighted with Venerable Channa that you have opened up and cut through your obstinacy.

Listen, Venerable, give ear, Channa.

You can understand the *Dhamma*, the *Dhamma*.

You can understand the *Dhamma*.

Then, Channa thinking, it seems I am capable, it seems I am capable of understanding the *Dhamma*.

A great rapture and delight sprung up for Venerable Channa.

Maybe no one had ever believed in him.

There are people who grew up with who no one ever believes in them.

And he found someone who believed in him.

There was someone that he loved, because Ānanda was always friendly to people and kind.

And someone believes in me.

I can do it.

What a difference that makes to hear that.

And then Ānanda gave him these profound, liberating teachings.

So maybe in that context, it's a context, right?

The context is set.

That's very different than just sitting down and hearing something profound and like, okay, there you go.

But now this context of love has been established.

Care, inspiration.

Someone believes in me.

Now I can listen in a different kind of way.

So what Ānanda does is he quotes this teaching from the Buddha.

Mostly, this world relies on on the distinction, or the dyad, of existence and non-existence.

Things either exist or they don't exist.

But when one sees with right wisdom the arising of the world as it comes to be, the thought that the world doesn't exist won't occur.

Because you see it occurring.

When one sees with right wisdom the cessation of the world as it comes to be, the thought...

The world exists, won't occur.

The word for world has a double meaning in Pāli, just maybe like it has in English.

It can be the world out there that we experience, that we live in.

It can also be the personal world that we live in, that we feel and know for ourselves.

It can be our own personal inner world.

And the Buddha explicitly defined the word world as being this psychophysical world that we inhabit.

So if you see all your experiences here, or any part of it, appear, you can't say it doesn't exist.

But if you see that it goes, you can't say that it...

If you see it arise, you can't say it doesn't exist.

If you see it go, you can't say that it exists.

And in the between, when things are coming and going, appearing and disappearing, they kind of both exist and not exist.

They don't exist.

There's something different going on.

It's a process.

Everything's in process.

It's in movement.

It's in activity.

The word exist as an existing thing that really just is fully there and unchanging doesn't occur.

And so to see the process, to see it coming and going, to see anger arise, you can't say, you know, there's no anger, but to see it can go, you can't say that there's anger now.

The idea that anger is an existing thing, or no, it doesn't really exist.

Both are not quite right.

There's another way...

And so, one of the things we do in this practice, we start appreciating more and more not what is here, but how what is here is a process.

It's an activity, it's a movement.

There's a coming and going of not existing things, but there's a coming and going of the experience of things.

That's all we have is the experience of things.

And there's something about resting in that coming and going of things.

And this is where the context of the Seven Factors of Awakening is good.

When you have all this well-being of being mindful and present with the Seven Factors of Awakening, when you've already let go of the hindrances, some of your attachments, you can watch and see that something arises, and you can feel that grabbing onto it, resisting it, diminishes your well-being, obscures the well-being.

You lose some of that goodness.

So why would you do that?

Why not just let go?

Letting go, not only is it good, letting go makes it even better.

It just moves and it keeps growing.

It keeps getting better and better the more you let go in this stage of practice.

There's so much peace, so much equanimity, tranquility, joy.

And you can feel something diminishes when you cling and something wonderful happens as you let go.

And so when we start entering into this process level of practice, everything's in constant, everything is changing.

It just feels right not to hold on.

It feels really good to have it be there to see it arise and see it go.

And to know that all the psychological things that were often very troubled by, simply phenomena that comes and goes, is not an easy thing to see.

But with the foundation of the Seven Factors of Awakening, where one of the factors is *samādhi*, is a great clarity of attention.

You have this reference point to really see in the moment that things are coming and going.

And so something begins to let go, release because of that.

But then he goes on, then Ānanda goes on to quote the Buddha, mostly this world of ours, the external world of people, is attached, clinging, fixated, in bondage.

But towards those mental attachments that they have, that you have, if towards those, one does not attach or cling.

So one has clinging, but one doesn't cling to the clinging.

That's what he says.

So that's an interesting step.

But this is the way he says it.

Towards the attachments...

One does not make the new attachment, this is myself.

We don't make an identity out of it.

We don't use it to define ourselves.

It's an attachment, but maybe it almost like has nothing to do with you.

Isn't that kind of odd?

After all, it's yours.

So you've got to take responsibility, and you've got to hold on to it, and you have to flail yourself with it.

No.

So mostly this world is attached.

Right?

And so it doesn't say, don't have those attachments, it says something different.

Towards those attachments, if you don't get attached that this is who I am, then one will have no doubt that this very *dukkha*, this very suffering, when it arises, is clearly arising, is simply arising.

And that suffering, when ceasing, is simply ceasing.

There's something about not holding on to it.

This is mine, this is me, not building a self around our attachments that helps us to see that those very attachments, when they appear, are just their appearance.

That's all.

We don't have to build stories and ideas and react and hold on to.

Look at that.

There's an attachment.

I know it comes.

I know it will go.

Attachments usually don't...

The reason they don't go...

It's because we're holding on to them.

We're constructing them, making them, engaging them, fixing them, wanting to do something about them.

So in ways we just keep it going.

But here the instruction is, with this very settled mind, when there's a...

It isn't...

When you can watch an attachment appear, because it was gone for a couple of seconds, they came back and not do anything with it.

Just see the arising.

When one, with this, perceiving like this, with this one's knowledge becomes independent of others.

This is how there is right view.

This is how there's right view.

There's something about being able to be independent of others in the *Dhamma*.

It means you know for yourself what the *Dhamma* is about.

And it does not require a PhD in Buddhist studies.

Here it's saying what it requires is become quiet enough, still enough, clear enough in the mind that you can see things coming and going.

That's it.

There's something profound about seeing coming and going when you leave it alone, radically leaving it alone.

And so the Four Noble Truths now is another way of saying that.

The Four Noble Truths is to have an insight where you can...

The way that it's taught, it's not a thought as a teaching.

The way the classic formula, the Four Noble Truths, is presented.

It's presented in the first person as an insight that you would have.

So it's almost like you have this thought.

This is suffering.

It doesn't say to know what the suffering is.

Just know that this is ouch.

This hurts.

And this is the arising of it.

This is its appearance, it's appearing.

And this is its passing.

This is its cessation.

And to start in this context of the seven factors of awakening with so much well-being, and there's no inclination now to cling, resist, where we're capable of, it feels really good to just allow things just to move through, come and go, move through, shift and change.

And at some point we see so clearly that things appear and disappear, come and they go.

And there becomes an increased appreciation for the ceasing, the letting go, the not picking up, leaving things alone.

And one sees that in that ceasing, the more strong that becomes, the more we let things just disappear, fade away, the less clinging there is, and it just feels better and better.

At some point this teaching is about things, letting things go, or things let go of themselves in this practice.

Things come to an end.

In the context of all this well-being, deep equanimity, deep sense of the seven factors of awakening there, supporting us, it becomes clear that this is getting better and better.

Just to let go, just to let that letting go, go disappears.

And there can be experience of freedom, profound freedom.

And then to come back from that, letting go and be left with how beautiful everyone is.

To come back and feel, know your own beauty, preciousness.

There's been a foretaste of that.

With the Seven Factors of Awakening.

The Seven Factors of Awakenings are some of the most beautiful things you can experience inside of yourself.

To start having this inner beauty that starts to melt some of the sufferings we have, the wounds we have, the attachments we have, the fears we have, is quite a phenomenal thing.

And to really appreciate that it's possible here.

And so when Ānanda said to Channa, that you can do this.

I think he had a sense of what was there in Channa, the potential of his own beauty coming forth, his own freedom coming forth.

That this liberation experience in Buddhism is not really meant to leave us with nothing.

It's meant to leave us without any attachments.

But the absence of attachments, it leaves us with beauty.

It leaves us with something precious.

It leaves us with love and compassion.

It leaves us with a tremendous appreciation of this live life that we live, because there's nothing else to be with, but this to be with it, with freeing.

So this *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* then ends with the four noble truths, which are four liberating insights.

That make much more sense as insights when you understand the foundation, the context in which now the mind is ready to see it.

So you don't have to memorize these Four Noble Truths.

This is not necessarily a teaching you're supposed to hold on to, and it's meant to be something that reveals itself to you when the mind is still enough, clear enough, well enough, healthy enough, that it's just obvious that things are coming and going, arising and passing.

And to see the arising of suffering, and at one point you'll see it completely fall away, and to feel the freedom of that, to feel the goodness of that, and to know that that's possible in

this heart, to know that it's possible to have that level of freedom of mind, is a phenomenal gift.

And so Ānanda was offering that to Channa through this teaching.

So in Zen and Japanese Buddhism, there are various expressions, more poetically maybe, of this kind of beauty, of this insight, how we see the world and how we see others when there's no clinging to anything in the eyes.

We live in a kind of different world then, in that freedom.

We live with a different kind of love, maybe.

So I'll read you this poem.

It's kind of a poem.

I guess it's a poem.

We don't know who wrote it.

The world is a flower.

Wise beings are flowers.

Loving beings are flowers.

All that lives are flowers.

Flowers.

All phenomena are flowers.

Red flowers, green flowers, white flowers, yellow flowers, black flowers, rainbow flowers, flowers of every color.

All the different kinds of loves shining forth.

Life unfolds from love and returns to love.

Such an immense universe is, so many beings, each a flower.

Flowers of gratitude, flowers of sorrow, flowers of suffering, flowers of joy, laughter's flowers, anger's flowers, each connected to the others, each blooming and each fading away, and each making the others grow.

When our real mind's eye opens this world of flowers where all beings shine.

Music echoes through mountains and oceans.

One's world becomes the world of millions.
The individual becomes the human race.
All lives become the individual.
Billions of mirrors all reflecting each other.
There is life and there is death.
There is no life and no death.
There's ever-changing life.
There's unchanging life.
Flowers grow and fade.
Flowers remain and never fade.
Moment by moment.
Friends, such a vivid world, such a bright you, you were conceived out of these flowers.
You gave rise to so many flowers.
You have no beginning, and no ending.
You are bottomless and limitless, even as you are infinitesimal dust.
You are flowers.
You are love.
You are loved.
All beings shine out of their uniqueness, all melt into the oneness of colors.
You are one.
You are many.
Only one moment.
Only one unique place.
You are unique.
Besides you, there is nothing.
You dissolve, appearing in all.

You came from peace, and you returned to peace.

You stay nowhere.

You are everywhere.

You occupy everything.

You occupy nothing.

You are the becoming of indescribable change.

You are love, you are flowers.

So you can do it.

I believe in you.

You can find the profound rest, contentment, ease in your own heart and mind from which you gaze upon this world where everything is a flower.

Everything is something to love.

Maybe everything loves you back.

Everything is changing.

Everything is freedom.

Nothing to cling to.

Everything is allowed to dissolve, disappear, return, shift, change.

Each moment, it's unique.

Each moment is special.

Each moment is just as love should be habit.

So in a certain way, this practice is guiding us to see the world in a new way.

It's opening up the possibility for us to see in a different clarity.

With an open heart, the caring heart, and with a little bit of luck, you can be Ānanda for other people.

You can believe in them.

You can be their friend and love them and see their beauty.

Maybe see the beauty in everyone you meet.

What a world it would be if we looked at each other's beauty, saw each other as a wonder of nature, as flowers.

So the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is a bit scholastic, a bit dry, but where the poetry is and the delight and inspiration is in relationship to it is in you, and you're practicing it.

Where this profound sensitivity can arise, profound opening of the mind, that great appreciation, maybe even love for letting go, of wherever we're clinging, to release the fist, and to allow the wholesome in you to grow.

You have all these wholesome seeds.

They can grow and become big.

And when those wholesome seeds are well grown, maybe you too will see the world like flowers.

And maybe as the world dissolves, maybe you'll dissolve.

And it'll be one of the best things ever.

And when you evolve back, reappear.

You'll know even more about how beautiful the heart, the mind, and all beings can be.

They are.

You'll see the world with new eyes, and the world will forever be new.

Thank you.