The Four Noble Truths as Direct Experience and Insight

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 1:04:20

One of the most central teachings of the Buddha is the teaching on the Four Noble Truths. This can be understood as where we need to begin to start the path of practice. The Eightfold Path leads with Right View, and one of the key definitions of Right View is an understanding of the Four Noble Truths.

At the beginning, this is of course a more intellectual understanding. But that perspective—an intellectual understanding of suffering, what suffering is—is where we must start. We need to begin with some kind of understanding of what the Buddha means by suffering: this aspect of our experience that is created by basically wanting things to be other than they are.

The Four Noble Truths also offer a causal relationship. The Second Noble Truth is the truth of how dukkha arises—dukkha arises when craving arises. So we begin to get curious about how craving relates to this experience of struggle, of stress, of not liking the way things are. By definition, craving is not liking the way things are.

The Buddha discovered that what we call suffering, and his whole path, his whole journey, was about one question: Is it possible to have freedom from suffering? He understood through his own practice, his own investigation of his experience, that the very things we do thinking they will make us happy are actually the very things that create suffering. It's not the not having that makes us suffer—it's the wanting to have that makes us suffer.

At the beginning, we need to understand some of these teachings so that we can begin to explore in our own experience and see for ourselves that yes, actually, when wanting is arising, when craving is arising, there's already suffering happening. We start to see this, we start to recognize these experiences in our direct experience. All of the Buddha's teachings really point to looking at our experience, our direct experience.

The Four Noble Truths—the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause or origin of suffering, the truth of the ending of suffering, and the truth of the path leading to the ending of suffering—at first we need to understand what he meant by all of this. And then the encouragement, over and over again, is to look at your experience. See how the truth of suffering is experienced.

The Four Noble Truths convey what the Buddha understood: that craving, wanting things to be a certain way, is actually what we call suffering. When we are experiencing suffering, there is something we want

to be otherwise. This is not actually obvious. We think we need to have things be otherwise in order to be happy, and we don't realize that it's the wanting itself that is creating the suffering.

The Third Noble Truth points out that it is possible to have this kind of suffering come to an end. When the wanting comes to an end—the statement of the Third Noble Truth says it's the ending of this craving that is the ending of suffering.

The Fourth Noble Truth teaches that there is a way, a path. The Buddha's own journey and his brilliance allowed him to describe the path of practice: the Eightfold Path of wise view, wise intention, wise speech, wise action, wise livelihood, wise effort, wise mindfulness, and wise concentration. This is what will support us to see for ourselves the truth of suffering, the truth of how craving is intimately connected with suffering, and the truth that it's possible to be free of that craving and be free of suffering.

At first, teachings about the Four Noble Truths help us enter into the understanding the Buddha offered. But direct understanding of the Four Noble Truths is the way the Buddha described his own awakening. He said, "I directly knew as it actually is: this is dukkha, this is the arising of dukkha, this is the ending of dukkha, and this is the way leading to the ending of dukkha. Knowing and seeing thus, my mind was liberated."

He pointed to a direct experience of understanding around these Four Noble Truths. And then he unpacked it for us. He brought in the Eightfold Path—the tools that can support us to begin to see this for ourselves. He brought in teachings around each of the Four Noble Truths, an action associated with each: that we should understand suffering. By understanding, he meant not just the intellectual side, but understanding through experience. What is this experience of suffering? How does it come to be?

Seeing how it comes to be, we start to see the Second Noble Truth—how suffering arises. That seeing begins to support us through data gathering, just gathering data on understanding suffering. We begin to see how craving leads to suffering, how craving actually is suffering. And then the wisdom begins to let it go.

And this is the action associated with the second noble truth—that one lets go of the craving.

Now, that letting go is often, as you all are well aware, not something you can just say: "Be gone, craving." I mean, if we could do that, we would. I remember sitting in this hall saying, "I am suffering so much. If I knew how to let it go, I would." And sometimes when we're in that kind of space, what's being asked of us is to understand the suffering.

So that instruction, that encouragement from the Buddha—understand the experience—that recognition... I didn't in that moment actually recognize this. But at later times I did. It's like, "All right, this is suffering." Understanding that this experience happening right now is suffering, and this is what the Buddha suggested I understand—that's an insight.

That shift of relationship to suffering... the Buddha spoke of these actions in association with each of the noble truths in three parts. The first is simply knowing the truth, recognizing: this is suffering. And then recognizing that suffering should be understood—that itself is an understanding. The difference between believing I need to do something to get rid of it, to fix it, to change it... that's not the perspective of "suffering should be understood." That's a perspective of craving around suffering. And then the third understanding or insight that comes along with that action of understanding suffering is: suffering has been understood. We begin to recognize how craving leads to suffering.

So with each of these truths there is an action, a practice essentially. With suffering, it's understand it. With craving, it's let it go—but mostly it's allow the wisdom to let it go. Create the conditions of understanding the suffering, and wisdom begins to weaken and ultimately will release it. There are times when we can consciously set something aside, turn away, say "not now," put our attention on something else. That's a kind of form of letting go, but it's not the letting go that frees the mind.

The third noble truth is meant to be realized—this truth of release, the truth of the release from dukkha. That is meant to be realized. And the fourth noble truth, the path, is meant to be cultivated.

So there are these practices that come along with each of the four noble truths. And in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, there's also an instruction around the four noble truths that much more sounds like the understanding the Buddha had on the night of his awakening. The Buddha said, on that night, "I directly knew, as it actually is: this is dukkha, this is the arising of dukkha, this is the ending of dukkha, this is the way leading to the ending of dukkha."

The instruction or mindfulness practice in the fourth foundation of mindfulness has very similar language. It's pointing to seeing the Four Noble Truths through experience—the direct experience of recognizing this is suffering, this is how suffering arises, this is how suffering ends, this is the way, the path leading to the ending of suffering. A direct experience of that.

So this is how I want to explore the Four Noble Truths: through this teaching in the fourth foundation of mindfulness. Let me offer a little overview.

We've talked about each of the foundations—not so directly as much, but we've explored the experience of each of the first three foundations: body, feeling tone, and mind states, the quality of the mind. We've talked a lot about noticing how the mind is in relationship to experience. This is a way of understanding the third foundation of mindfulness.

The fourth foundation of mindfulness is basically asking us to look at our experience, and the word for this foundation is dhammānupassanā. Dhamma in this context means something like phenomena. The word has multiple translations or senses depending on the context in which it's used. Dhamma with a small "d" means basically phenomena. I talk about dhammas arising—everything that arises is a dhamma, an experience.

So the fourth foundation encourages us to notice our experience from perspectives of the Buddha's teachings. We could say it's looking at the dhamma, the small "d" dhamma, through the lens of the Dhamma, the capital "D" Dhamma. There are five explorations in this where we notice... In this fourth foundation we are essentially opening to all phenomena. It is the movement towards receptive awareness, choiceless awareness. We're opening to every experience.

And then there's an encouragement at times perhaps to notice how experience can be understood from the perspective of various Buddhist teachings.

With each of the practices—there's a practice about the hindrances, the aggregates, the six sense bases, the seven factors of awakening, and the Four Noble Truths—we explore experience. We simply recognize experience, and then bring a little curiosity about how it might be connected to this particular lens of the Dharma. With each practice, we notice the experience in terms of the teaching.

Each practice begins with the phrase: "And how does one abide observing Dhammas as Dhammas? Here one abides contemplating Dhammas as Dhammas in terms of the five hindrances." Or: "One abides contemplating Dhammas as Dhammas in terms of the seven factors of awakening." Or: "One abides contemplating Dhammas as Dhammas in terms of the Four Noble Truths."

So we receive experience as experience in a simple way, and then notice in terms of the particular frame.

At times, we might notice—for instance, around the hindrances—the presence or absence of sense desire. In a moment of experience, sense desire will either be present or absent. So we open to what's happening and bring a curiosity: Is sense desire present or absent? Is ill will present or absent? Is restlessness present or absent? There are other instructions about the hindrances that encourage us to notice and get familiar with how they arise. But it's basically really simple.

The instruction for the Four Noble Truths asks: How does one understand Dhammas as Dhammas, or phenomena as phenomena, in terms of the Four Noble Truths? And the instruction says: One understands as it actually is, "This is dukkha." One understands as it actually is, "This is the arising of dukkha." One understands as it actually is, "This is the ending of dukkha." One understands as it actually is, "This is the way leading to the ending of dukkha."

In a moment of experience, one of these four things is possible to see. Either suffering will be present or it will be absent—the first and third noble truths. We may actually see how suffering is put together—the second noble truth. We may see that directly in experience, in a moment, how suffering is coming together. Or in a moment of experience, we may see how the path is being cultivated.

If you're curious about how the path is being cultivated: well, first of all, if mindfulness is happening, that is cultivating the path. If we're applying effort, that is cultivating the path. If there's stability of mind, that is cultivating the path. These qualities, these wholesome qualities that we've been cultivating, these are expressions of "This is the path."

The language in the Fourth Foundation really emphasizes present moment experience, not simply a conceptual understanding of the Four Noble Truths—which is necessary to recognize that this is dukkha in our present moment experience—but it is emphasizing the recognition: In this moment, this is the experience of dukkha.

And this is an insight. We can understand the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha said that on his Night of Awakening, these are the insights that woke him up: "This is suffering. This is the arising of suffering. This is the ending of suffering. This is the way leading to the ending of suffering." These are insights. They're understandings. They're not just concepts to think about. They can be seen in the moment clearly, and free the mind.

Over and over again in the suttas, this kind of seeing is emphasized. This kind of seeing: "This is something. This is X." In the talk on dependent origination last week, I mentioned that with each of the links of dependent origination, there is a teaching that points to understanding any of the links from this perspective. One understands, "This is clinging." One understands, "This is how clinging arises." One understands, "This is how clinging ends." And one understands, "This is the way leading to the ending of clinging." The same thing repeated for feeling.

Same thing repeated for mental formation. Same thing repeated for becoming. This pattern of the Four Noble Truths is understood to be an insight that can illuminate wherever we are in experience. It can be an insight for wherever we are in experience—to see this is what's arising, this is the experience that's arising, this is how craving is happening in this moment, this is the ending of craving, the non-arising of craving in this moment.

To make sense of these insights, for me it's helpful to reflect on the fact that there are a couple of different ways that dukkha is understood in the suttas. The first way is that dukkha is understood as the suffering that arises when greed, aversion, and delusion are present. Craving is present, suffering is arising when greed, aversion, and delusion are arising. And the ending of suffering is talked about as the ending of greed, aversion, and delusion—visible in this life, this possibility of greed, aversion, and delusion ending in this life, the ending of suffering in this life.

So in this case, this is the dukkha of craving, clinging, becoming—the constriction around greed, the constriction around aversion, the constriction around delusion. The experience is around understanding the presence and absence of greed, aversion, and delusion. This is the understanding of the First Noble Truth: seeing the presence of greed, aversion, and delusion. When we see that greed, aversion, and delusion are present, we feel into the truth of this is suffering. When we have moments—perhaps brief moments—of greed, aversion, and delusion falling away, we experience the absence of greed, aversion, and delusion. The Third Noble Truth.

So seeing aversion, for instance, and knowing it as dukkha—that is an insight. And I think we begin to understand the insight nature of it by seeing how experience shifts when we do understand aversion as

"this is dukkha."

I felt it. I felt it at one point in Burma. I was practicing with Sayadaw U Tejaniya, and the first couple of weeks were really hard. The shift of practice style was challenging because I was used to really focusing, and that kind of approach let me just go right into not having a lot of dukkha—just focusing on the breath. But the style I was learning there was open from the beginning, and there was a lot of dukkha, a lot of reactivity.

After about ten days, I thought, "You know, if I was doing another practice, I'd be way more settled by now. There is so much dukkha, there's so much suffering right now." And I actually heard myself say that: "There's so much suffering." And I was like, "Right, suffering. This is what the Buddha said we're supposed to understand."

There was a shift in that moment. The shift of seeing, "Oh, this is dukkha" as an understanding, not as a "poor me, this is dukkha." This is dukkha. This should be understood. It was kind of that flavor of the insight around the action—right, this is dukkha, this should be understood. And that shifted my relationship so that there was more interest in observing the experience of dukkha. That's an insight. To recognize it as dukkha is an insight.

Sometimes we might see the conditions putting suffering together. We start to see how it's arising. We see how the mind is latching on to something.

Early in my practice I was exploring a pattern of loneliness. I felt it pretty much every night as I went to bed. And I was not terribly confused about why I was experiencing loneliness—my partner of ten years had just broken up with me. So I wasn't particularly confused about it, but I was interested in seeing and understanding. It was kind of interesting to me that it happened regularly, so I thought, "Okay, I'm just going to get to know this pattern." I watched it regularly every night.

And one night I noticed that while I was setting my alarm clock to go to bed, the loneliness started. It's like, what? That did not make any sense to me. Going to bed by myself—that's the kind of idea I thought the loneliness was about. But setting the alarm clock? I noticed the loneliness just arose.

It was very clear seeing the arising. So I just kept watching, and then over the next few nights I began to see that when I was setting the alarm clock, there was a memory that arose of being with my ex-partner. We were in a place where we were having a lovely time in Disneyland, and we were looking up at a marquee that had a clock on it. It was a memory that had a clock in it, and I could see the connection between the digital clock I was looking at and the digital clock in the memory.

I could also see that the loneliness was a response to the memory. So that was the trigger, the cause in that moment. The mind had jumped onto that thought, and it was like, "Poor me, I'll never be happy again. I'll never be able to go to Disneyland and be happy ever again." That kind of mindset. This was the craving, the clinging. And it was a memory. So that was seeing how the loneliness had been put together—seeing

how the mind latched onto the memory and created a story around it and suffered around that story.

The next night was actually even more interesting in a way. I mean, that was fascinating to me, that I could see all of that. But the next night was even more interesting because as I set the alarm clock, of course the memory was there. Of course I thought about that experience. And the loneliness did not happen. It was as if having seen how it was put together, it no longer had the power to put itself together.

This is the power of seeing, of the data collection essentially. The seeing how the craving had arisen created the conditions for the letting go. It wasn't exactly that I experienced the release in that moment, but I noticed the absence. The suffering did not arise in that experience.

Sometimes we see the suffering when it ends. In that story I didn't see the suffering when it ended—I mean, I saw it didn't arise the second night. That first night when I saw it, I saw the loneliness and I saw how the loneliness had been put together. I don't particularly remember seeing how the loneliness ended there. And the next night I didn't see the loneliness end. The loneliness never arose, which is actually even better.

But sometimes we actually get to see the ending. We get to see how the suffering falls apart.

So here's a story of doing walking meditation—there are lots of stories in this talk. I was doing walking meditation and there was a lot of craving around looking at people. I think I mentioned this earlier—wanting to look at their faces. It would come up a lot during walking meditation. I was doing walking meditation just out in the front here, and when anybody would walk by, I would see this intensity of wanting.

At first I was doing, "I'm not going to look." It was kind of a guarding the sense doors in a way, but there was a little bit of aversion in that guarding. "I'm not going to look. I'm not going to look." I did get to see to some extent that there was wanting there, but it was being repressed by this "I'm not going to look."

At some point—because I was here on a three-month course and had plenty of opportunity to see this happen—I got curious and thought, "Well, okay, this is happening. This is happening every day. I might as well look at the wanting as opposed to repressing the wanting," which is what I was doing with the "I'm not going to look."

So I started getting curious about the wanting. And what I noticed is that wanting sprang into being as soon as somebody entered into my field of vision. That was the arising of the wanting—as soon as somebody sprang into my field of vision. I got curious about this. "Wow, okay, there it is."

I felt the wanting, and it felt like such a strong urge to look. So I was feeling that urge and not looking. I was using mindfulness to just be curious about the wanting, which is a form of guarding the sense doors, by the way. Mindfulness can be a guard of the sense doors.

So I saw that there was seeing, I saw that there was wanting, and through the curiosity of watching the

wanting, I didn't look at the person. I just watched the wanting. And as the person got further up in front of me, and then walked right in front of me—it would have been so easy to flick my eyes up—the wanting got so intense. It grew as the person moved more into the field of how easy it would be to look at them. The wanting got stronger. So I noticed the strengthening of the wanting.

Then, standing and doing the walking meditation out here—I was standing at this point—just watching the wanting. And the person went up the stairs and into the door, into the building. The wanting vanished in that moment. It felt like being released from a vice grip, seeing that wanting end. It was a very cool experience. I thought, "Wow, that is so cool."

So I kind of got into watching people and watching the wanting, and then when they would disappear, watching it go away. I really got into that. That was fun. I spent—I don't know how long—a couple of weeks really looking forward to having the wanting arise so I could watch it go away.

And at some point, in the middle of watching this whole thing unfold, I realized that I was clinging to the wanting in order to see it go away. In that moment, it released—even though the person was standing right in front of me. That was a deeper kind of understanding around the letting go. The stimulus, the thing that I had wanted, was right in front of me, and I no longer wanted it. That wanting was just gone.

So these examples are pointing to ways that we can see these truths, ways that we can see these Four Noble Truths in experience. And it comes about through curiosity about suffering, curiosity about how suffering arises, and getting to witness it falling apart. Sometimes actually seeing it fall apart—and in the seeing of the wanting fall apart, there was another kind of learning there about just how much the wanting was suffering. Because of the feeling of the wanting going away, there was so much... it's like the mind had been so tight.

We don't usually recognize just how tight the mind is around craving. Until we see it go away and we feel the freedom of that, the release and the ease of that, we don't really understand. And then suffering starts to be felt more clearly as we experience the kind of purification I was pointing to the other day. We start to experience the freedom, and when it comes back, when the suffering comes back, we feel it much more clearly. It's not a mistake.

Sometimes there's a question about the sequence of these four truths: why is the third noble truth, the ending of suffering, talked about before the fourth noble truth, how we get there? There's a couple of different ways of understanding this, why this might be.

There's a kind of familiar framing of the Four Noble Truths as the Buddha being a physician, and this is how you go about looking at an illness. The first thing is there's the illness: suffering. There's the reason for the illness: craving. There's the prognosis: is it possible to cure it? Yes, possible to cure it. And how? The prescription: the Eightfold Path.

So that order is kind of how you would go about seeing a doctor. You'd go to the doctor and you'd go

through the experience of your illness in that order. That's one way to understand why the fourth noble truth is at the end—the path is at the end, the way leading to the ending of suffering is at the end of the four noble truths.

Another way to understand it is through the cause and effect relationship between the first two noble truths and the second two noble truths. The first noble truth is a statement of what happens, and the second noble truth is a deepening into how it happens. Likewise with the third and the fourth noble truths. The third noble truth is a statement of what's possible, and the fourth noble truth is how it happens. So there's a causal connection, a kind of conditionality, between the first and second noble truths—craving is what leads to suffering. And in the third and fourth there's a parallel framing. The fourth noble truth describes the conditions that lead to the ending of suffering. That's another way to understand why the fourth noble truth is the last one.

Stephen Batchelor had a perspective on this that I found really interesting for a while. He was pointing to the first three noble truths, noting that as mindfulness strengthens, we tend to see those first three in order. The first thing we usually see is the suffering. Before we see the ending of suffering, we see the suffering. Then as we deepen into recognizing the suffering, we start to see how it's put together. As mindfulness strengthens, we start to see that. And then we begin to see how it falls apart. So those first three noble truths do happen in a kind of order.

Then he described the cultivation of the path by unpacking the analogy of the path itself. A path is—there are all these paths in the woods here, and you know they didn't just appear yesterday. They stay paths because people walk on them. Likewise with the Eightfold Path, Stephen Batchelor said those first three noble truths are how we walk on the path. We are cultivating the path by walking on it, keeping the path clear for those coming behind us. That's essentially how paths work. We are all participating in keeping these paths in the woods clear, and we are all participating in keeping the path of practice alive by what we're doing here. This is a way to think about cultivating the path.

There's another way that in my own experience, reflecting back on some of my insights, some understandings that have arisen, there's a way that sometimes we can see these Four Noble Truths actually arising in that order in experience. To me, those three ways of thinking about the path as being the last of the Four Noble Truths were more conceptual. They're all more conceptual ways to explain why the path might be at the end. But I had a particular experience that really pointed this out to me in retrospect. I did not see this at the time, but this was one of those understandings or insights that was so powerful that it keeps arising in my experience. New understandings continue to happen around it. Some of our insights can be that way.

When these Four Noble Truths actually happen as insights, as deep insights, I think they actually happen in this order. The way the Buddha framed it in his understanding: "I understood as it actually is—this is suffering, this is the arising of suffering, this is the ending of suffering, and this is the way leading to the

ending of suffering." The understanding may have arisen in that order for him. I had an experience where they arose in this order for me.

I'm going to go through this. It's quite a detailed story, but I'm going to unpack how this happened. This was early in my practice, in the first few months. I was working with anger, working with a lot of anger. I spent a couple of months just getting familiar with anger and beginning to understand that anger is dukkha. The very first time I noticed it—I had read this book that said, I was very interested in understanding my anger because I was being whipped around by it. There were times when I was completely non-functional around the anger. I would find myself frozen at the computer, just non-functional.

The invitation was simply to get to know your anger, get to know it. And the very first time I actually recognized "I'm angry, this is the experience of anger," it was shocking to me how much it hurt. Because frozen in that space of mind, in the story of the anger—this is the same partner who broke up with me, about the same person—the story of the anger was "that person is going to be so miserable when I'm angry at them."

that I was miserable. And so that was a shock, but it also was an insight. This hurts. This is suffering. And I spent a couple of months kind of getting familiar with anger, getting really familiar with the fact that it was suffering. And just that—just that part of the practice—was really useful.

I learned a lot of different things. I learned that piece around, "I thought this was going to hurt that person, but it's hurting me first." I also saw that this practice was making it easier to see the anger, that I wasn't in such a rage. Even that was huge for me—just to be able to see that the anger was happening and not be caught in that mind that was just in the rage. I would find myself frozen at the computer, and that stopped happening.

So I spent a couple of months getting familiar with anger. Then one day I was in my kitchen, and I was cutting an apple. As I was cutting the apple, there was a lot of mindfulness present—I wasn't trying to be mindful, you know, but there was a lot of just mindfulness there. And I think my attunement to mindfulness connecting with the anger had created the conditions for the mindfulness to arise in this moment.

So I was cutting the apple, and what I'm going to describe happened in a split second. It's going to take me a couple of minutes to describe, but it happened really fast.

I was cutting the apple, and there was a memory of being with my ex-partner at a fruit stand. I could see the connection, kind of like I described with the alarm clock—I could see the connection between what I was doing and the memory. In this case, the mindfulness was right there as the memory arose. And I saw this kind of impulse, this gathering. We talked about intention. This was an intention. I felt the gathering of impulse to jump on that thought and think more thoughts in order to get angry. I was not angry in that

moment. I could see that I was not angry in that moment, but I felt the urge, the pull to get angry.

In that moment, that's seeing the second noble truth, essentially—the craving. There was the craving. I wasn't actually angry in that moment, but there was the urge, the movement towards the anger. So I saw that impulse. Seeing that impulse, the thought that came up in the mind was, "You don't have to get on that train." And it didn't happen. The impulse went away. And the anger never arose.

So that was the third noble truth—seeing how that impulse, even the impulse, had a little bit of a sense of suffering to it. It was not the full-blown anger. It was not anger at all. But that craving fell away. That's seeing the third noble truth. I saw that. That happened.

And in the next moment, I was standing there and kind of waiting to get angry, because I had not had this person arise in my mind without anger arising in a very long time. So I was standing there waiting to get angry for a moment, and it didn't happen. And in that moment there was the recognition—actually, I sank to my knees. It's like, "This works." This that I've been doing, this path—this is a path, this is a way. I saw in a moment that it was possible to not get angry. This is a path.

That kind of recognition, sinking to my knees—I found a path. I knew that anger was going to arise again. I was not deluded about that. But I saw that what I had been doing was a way that anger could be released, could be overcome, could ultimately be let go. So that recognition—"Oh, this works"—that's how it expressed itself in my mind.

This works. And it was like, this is amazing, this works.

I understood how it worked even. I understood something about how it worked because I could see that it had been those couple of months of getting familiar with anger and feeling the suffering of it that was what had the wisdom there that said, "You don't have to go there." That way lies suffering. You get on that train, suffering will follow. The mind understood how the practice worked in that moment. So it not only understood that it was a path, it understood something about the nature of how the path works.

In that moment, I knew I'm going to be doing this for the rest of my life. This is a path. That is the insight of the Fourth Noble Truth—that recognition. And it can come in a lot of different ways. These kinds of insights can come in a lot of different ways.

Sometimes, just to finish about the four insights, I don't think you can have an insight into "this is the path" without going through those first three. How could you? That insight followed the freedom, the freedom of the letting go of suffering. The realization "this is the path" followed. So I think that's the way that they arise—in a moment of deep understanding, a moment of deep seeing, clear seeing.

Sometimes I think this particular seeing, especially around the Second Noble Truth, the seeing of how the suffering was put together, the recognition of the thought, the conditionality of the thought, the craving to jump on that thought, to think more thoughts—that was seeing quite a bit of detail in a very short time. So

that understanding around the Second Noble Truth had quite a bit of detail. The understandings that I had developed over the earlier months around dukkha, like the recognition of "oh, this hurts"—that was a pretty simple insight.

So sometimes the insights, and more and more in my own practice now, it feels like the insights are getting simpler and simpler. There's a release from dukkha and there's not even a knowing what was released, but there's the understanding it is released. Just a recognition that something has let go. That's enough. That's enough.

These insights sometimes can have a lot of detail and sometimes can be really simple. The detail is revealed. That's not something that we do. I could not have done the seeing of that. It was the momentum of the mindfulness that saw that.

This instruction can be instruction around noticing the Four Noble Truths in experience. Just a simple way to understand our experience. Dukkha. This is dukkha. Sometimes even just bringing that in as a reflection, a wisdom reflection, can help our minds. This is dukkha.

Sometimes if we're finding ourselves walking back and forth and wondering what's being cultivated right now, and there's not particularly anything flashy happening—maybe it's patience, and maybe that's cultivating the path. So when it doesn't feel like there's much happening but there's not clear dukkha either, maybe there's wholesome qualities. Maybe this is the path. And it can be just a reflection to support the mind to stay with experience.

And then sometimes when mindfulness is very stable, it opens into very clear seeing. And this is one way that this can happen.

Thank you for your practice. It's an amazing thing, an amazing journey that you're on. And thank you for being on it, for being on this path.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.