The Four Truths

Patrick Kearney · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Patrick Kearney · 1:16:26

Last night we were looking at the middle way, opening the satchel of Dhammacakkha Pravartana Sutta—setting in motion the wheel of the Dharma. We explored the back story: how Siddhartha became the Buddha, and how he decided that he had to teach. He went looking for his five former companions, tracked them down, and first used the teaching of the middle way as a strategy to break open their resistance to hearing the Dharma—essentially breaking open their resistance to hearing something new. They assumed they already knew, but they were wrong, so he had to work his way through this resistance first, before he could then give them the basic teaching.

After accomplishing this, what he teaches them are the four truths. These are the *chattāro ariya-saccāni*, usually translated as the noble truths. Recent scholarship has cast doubt on that translation, so now you get different variations: "the four ennobling truths," or "the truths that have the function of making one an ārya." What I prefer is "the truths of the ārya."

An ārya is a mature student, someone who has had at least one glimpse of the unconstructed. You could say the bottom of the bucket has fallen out at least once. Such a person is ārya—cultivated, refined, noble. The word is actually cognate with aristocrat, aristocracy. So they form a kind of spiritual elite. In one sense you could say these are the Buddha's people, the ones who actually have some understanding of what he's about, regardless of nationality, gender, language, or ethnicity—all of that is irrelevant.

The four truths are what is true to such a person. What is true to most people is something quite different, but what is true to the mature practitioner is this basic framework. When the Buddha is speaking, of course, there's only one noble person, one ārya, and that's him. So these are his four truths.

Let me go through them.

*This is the noble one's truth of dukkha.** Birth is dukkha, aging is dukkha, sickness is dukkha, death is dukkha. Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are dukkha. Association with the unloved is dukkha. Separation from the loved is dukkha. Not getting what one wants is dukkha. In brief, the five bundles associated with clinging are dukkha.

*This is the noble one's truth of the arising of dukkha.** It is craving, which leads to further becoming, is bound up with obsession and delight, and finds its delight now here, now there—specifically craving for sense pleasures, craving for existence, and craving for non-existence.

*This is the noble one's truth of the cessation of dukkha.** It is the complete cessation of that very craving: abandoning it, renouncing it, releasing it, letting it go.

*This is the noble one's truth of the way leading to the cessation of dukkha**—the noble eightfold path of right view, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right energy, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

These are the four truths. They are the truths of the awakened ones, the noble ones. In other words, they show us the world from the perspective of someone who has awakened or is on the path to awakening. They provide the basic framework of the Buddha's teaching—more than a list, a kind of template, a structure being provided here.

The whole thing revolves around this concept of dukkha, so we have to examine it. This is a key technical term. Previously it was always translated as "suffering," but there's been some dissatisfaction with that translation, so people have tried other approaches.

Unsatisfactoriness. That's pretty wimpy. What about Thanissaro's "stress"? I don't think that works at all. The problem is that with many of these technical terms, there is no English equivalent. So every translation is wrong. I think it's better to simply say dukkha and get over it.

It's a compound word that comes from *ka*, which means space or empty space, and the prefix *du*, which conveys a sense of bad, unpleasant, painful, undesirable, imperfect—don't want it, get rid of it. So dukkha is a painful space. It refers to the painful emptiness that we feel at the center of our being, this sense that there's something missing. We feel we have to do something because there's something missing with the way things are—with who we am, with what our situation is. It's okay, but it could be better, and we need to make it better. This is the painful emptiness we feel at the center of our being.

Ka also refers to the space at the center of a wheel. The wheel, of course, is often the basic symbol of Buddhism, and there's always an empty space at the center—that's *ka*. The image here is of a wheeled vehicle where the axle goes through the empty space at the center of the wheel, but it doesn't fit properly. So the vehicle, if it moves at all, moves only slowly, grindingly, with incredible resistance. Grind, grind, grind. Has your practice ever felt like that? Has your life ever felt like that? This is dukkha.

Its meaning extends from the most gross forms of suffering and misery all the way through to the most subtle forms of discontent. Sometimes I try a little dukkha thought experiment. Think about your situation sitting here right now—is there anything about this situation that you would change if you could? If the answer is yes, then you have dukkha. You don't necessarily have suffering, but you certainly have dukkha. So dukkha can be quite subtle or extremely gross. It covers that entire range.

The Buddha begins with dukkha and analyzes it into three levels. But first, why does the Buddha begin with dukkha? Because he's talking to practitioners about their practice. Remember the context—he's got five companions who are extremely dedicated practitioners. The problem they have, from the Buddha's perspective, is that they've got the wrong practice, heading in the wrong direction, leading to the wrong result.

Why begin with dukkha? Because any kind of practice begins with dukkha. Why are we sitting in this hall? Because we have dukkha, we know we have dukkha, and we need to do something about it. That's why we're here. If we really didn't have dukkha, we would not be here. We would be at home or in the pub or at a party or doing something sensible—reading a book, maybe. But we're here because we've been moved to do something.

This takes us to the whole realm of affect, of feeling. There's some kind of pain, and we are moved to do something about it. This is the foundation of any meditation practice. The Buddha is addressing practitioners about their practice, so this is the beginning of it.

Notice also that in this framework of the Four Truths, there is no mention of *avijja*—ignorance or delusion.

Now if you're familiar with Mahayana Buddhism, this would quite possibly come as a surprise. My main exposure to Mahayana is through Zen, and in Zen they're always emphasizing ignorance or delusion. This is the fundamental problem—we don't see what's going on. So what we have to do is see properly what's happening. This is the fundamental issue, and enlightenment is the overcoming of delusion.

But here there's not a single mention of delusion. What the Buddha talks about is tanhā, classically translated as craving—literally it means thirst. Delusion is a cognitive term; it's about the head, about what we understand. Tanhā is an affective term; it's about the heart, about drivenness, about what we love and what we hate. Both are covered by tanhā, by craving.

And again, this practice is about action—about what one does. The source of action is the heart, driven to do something. So again, tanhā. You can see that the Four Noble Truths provide this universal framework, but it's specifically directed at these five people, at their particular context.

The Buddha then analyzes dukkha into three levels. He says birth is dukkha, aging is dukkha, sickness is dukkha, death is dukkha, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are dukkha. This is the normal everyday physical and emotional pain—the dukkha that arises through ordinary suffering. The tradition calls it dukkha-dukkha.

Then he says association with the unloved is dukkha, separation from the loved is dukkha, not getting what one wants is dukkha. So this is a deeper level. The tradition calls it vipariṇāma-dukkha—the dukkha inherent in change. This is the pain in a life that is fundamentally out of control, and it points to impermanence, which is a major theme for the Buddha. Things change.

Now that's not necessarily a problem. But the problem is that things change regardless of what we want them to be. I want things to change. For example, I want to get thinner rather than fatter. But it doesn't seem to be happening that way—I seem to be getting fatter rather than thinner. The situation seems to be out of my control. I suppose I could be relentless about it, but... that's another thing about change. I would like to be much more disciplined. I would like to change in that way. But I don't seem to be changing in that way. If anything, I'm getting lazier as I get older.

So it's not simply that things are changing. Things are changing in a way that I do not control. Change takes me to places that I don't want to go. It takes me to places where I'm separated from what I love and associated with what I don't love or in fact dislike. And there's not much I can do about it. And of course not getting what one wants is dukkha. Has anybody actually had that experience?

He's going deeper with this. One way of looking at the nature of dukkha is to say it's the gap between what is happening and what we want to be happening. And often when we look, there is that gap. It can get very subtle.

One of the things about dukkha that people don't necessarily get is that it can sound very gross, and it can sound very pessimistic. If you're an orthodox Theravadan, the way you show your orthodoxy is by saying, when anybody says anything about anything, you shake your head and say, "Oh, great holiday—ah, that's dukkha."

No, honestly it was fantastic. Dukkha.

So you're demonstrating this way that you have truly absorbed the Buddha's teaching. But dukkha is actually a refined taste that takes time to develop. The ability to perceive the dukkha in a situation requires a high degree of refinement in the senses and in the citta.

You know the old fairy tale about the princess and the pea? The princess visits some castle and the king is a bit suspicious about her identity. Is she really a princess? Is she just pretending to be a princess? So she's sent off to the guest bedroom. It's this magnificently comfortable bed, but the king has a single pea inserted under the mattress. And the next morning, he says to the princess, "So my dear, how did you sleep?" And she says, "It was terrible. That mattress was just awful. I couldn't get to sleep at all." You're a princess because of the delicacy and the refinement that she shows in her appreciation of dukkha. If she had said, "That was fantastic, that was the best bed I've ever slept in," out—you're obviously a fake.

Dukkha is like that. And this is part of the noble, the way that the arya sees things. What for the ordinary person is pleasurable, for the arya may well be painful. And you can see it in... I mean, it's a question of maturity. So it's possible that at the age of twenty your favorite music is rock and roll played to the nth level of volume. And it's possible that by the age of sixty you're listening to Mozart quietly. Now, one way of looking at that progression is there's a refinement going on, a refinement of taste, a refinement of appreciation of the dukkha entering the ear. As that develops, so one's tastes become more refined. And this is part of the whole progression of practice.

So dukkha is not necessarily gross. And to get a sense of it, we have to be really sharp and very sensitive to find it, apart from the obvious stuff, of course.

The deepest layer of dukkha is sankhara dukkha, constructed dukkha, or the dukkha of constructions, where the Buddha says in brief, the five bundles associated with clinging are dukkha. Now the five bundles or the five aggregates—we'll look at those tomorrow night—but this is one of the basic ways in

which the Buddha divides up the human being and their experience: body, feeling, perception, constructions and awareness. We'll talk about those tomorrow. But essentially it means human experience or the experiencing human being looked at from a certain angle. And the Buddha says in brief, the five bundles associated with clinging are dukkha.

Now this is constructed dukkha. This is all the ways in which we construct our dukkha. So, for example, if you go out for a good time and late next morning wake up in the gutter with vomit stains around your mouth, you are experiencing constructive dukkha. It is gross, but the point is it's constructive.

Or, let's say you're meditating and you've developed a goodly amount of concentration, mindfulness, etc. And you decide, okay, pretty much halfway through the retreat, I've got to go for it. And you sit there for an unusually long period of time and by the time you finish, there's a quality of strain, of tension in the body, strain in the mind. You're not quite satisfied with the result that you've got. You've got dukkha and it's being constructed. So that's more subtle.

More deeply is the recognition that all our efforts to escape from dukkha are in fact dukkha. I recognize that there's a problem, I'm doing something about it, and this very doing is painful because I'm manipulating my experience to make it suit me, and it never works. Whatever I do to make things better, it just becomes part of the problem.

And there is nothing I can do to make it better. This is one of the understandings of dukkha that develops in the course of meditation practice—this recognition that everything I do to avoid, escape, or overcome my problem is just part of the problem.

The Buddha expresses this as: clinging to the khandhas is dukkha. This is the third level. In brief, the five bundles associated with clinging are dukkha. In Pali, this is the *upadana-khandhas*—a compound where you have *upadana* and you have *khandhas*: *panch-upadana-khandhas*.

You might wonder: would you say that's clinging to the self? Clinging to these aggregates as the self? Clinging to constructions? Well, clinging to anything. These are the *upadana-khandhas*, the clinging bundles. You can translate that in various ways. "The bundles that cling" would be a valid translation, or "the bundles that are clung to," or "the bundles that are associated with clinging"—because it's a compound, you can have any relationship between the two parts, which is why you get different translations.

When we speak of *sankhara* in the context of the five khandhas, it specifically refers to the construction of volition—all the choices that we make. So there it has a narrow application. *Sankhara* more broadly means anything constructed, anything put together, and anything that in turn puts something together, that constructs something. That means everything except Nibbana. But in the context of the five aggregates, specifically it means the choices we make—what we do in order to construct our lives.

I remember when listening to Thai teachers, we'd often talk about *sankhara* as if it was thinking. Sayadaw

U Pandita's explanation was quite brief. When asked what *sankhara* means, he simply clenched his fist and said, "When the mind does this." That's pretty much it.

Here we encounter the deepest level of dukkha. Notice that the Buddha does not say the five aggregates are dukkha, or the five bundles are dukkha. If he said that, there would be no way out. But he says the five bundles associated with clinging are dukkha—which means he's indicating that dukkha is an optional added extra.

So the deeper we go into our practice, the more refined we discover dukkha. There are times when its universality becomes apparent, and yet it's an optional added extra. We actually don't need it. Otherwise there would be no solution to the problem.

Then we encounter the arising of dukkha and the cessation of dukkha. This is the Noble Truth of the arising of dukkha: it is craving which leads to further becoming, is bound up with obsession and delight, and finds its delight now here, now there—specifically craving for sense pleasures, existence, and non-existence.

It's all about craving—*tanha*, literally "thirst." We've discussed how dukkha is this sense of an empty space, a painful emptiness at our core, and we're constantly trying to fill it in. There's this drive that emerges, this incredible energy that comes bursting out of this empty space, grasping for something to bring in and fill it up.

And this is tanha, this is thirst. This is the drivenness we find within us, the sense of urgent necessity: "I've got to do this." It ranges from the gross to the subtle.

The most obsessive addiction is craving. Have you ever had the experience of meditating and things are going okay except the mind won't completely shut up? It's like you've just got to chase this thought. "Okay, no I won't." But you've got to chase this one. "No, no, no." But you've got to chase this one. That sense of urgent necessity is tanha, is craving. It can be very subtle or incredibly gross and everything in between. But it's that sense of drivenness that we feel, that pushes us forward.

So it's a form of desire. Often people get this mixed up with desire. They think that the Buddha doesn't like desire, that you mustn't desire things, it's very naughty. If you want something, you'll be punished. But tanha is a particular kind of desire that the Buddha very carefully defines. Don't get it mixed up with all forms of desire. Without desire, we wouldn't be here. Without desire, we would not be doing this meditation practice. Desire is fundamentally necessary.

But tanha is a kind of drivenness—driven desire and aversion. The shadow of wanting is not wanting. This drivenness works both ways. It's like if I want the sunny side of the street, I don't want the shady side. If I want the shady side, I don't want the sunny side. If there's movement toward, there's movement away. If there's desire, there's aversion.

We saw it in the Satipatthana Sutta: "longing and sorrow for the world." If there's longing, there's sorrow. If there's sorrow, there's longing. Each is the shadow of the other.

So it's not simply desire. It's the whole sense of drivenness, either towards or away from. But a drivenness that has these particular characteristics: it leads to further becoming. We become someone. We want to become someone. We want to become real to ourselves and to others.

It's one of the attractions of thinking. I think myself into existence. I am who I think I am. I am who I think about. So I think about a world, and if that world is real, it means I'm real because it's my world. And we want to become someone—someone real to others. I want to be recognized as someone, a specific someone. I don't want to be recognized, for example, as a complete idiot. I'd much rather be recognized as a man of wisdom and distinction. You do that, don't you?

This leads to further becoming. We're always seeking to be someone.

Bound up with passion or obsession and delight. *Raga* translates here as obsession. Usually it translates as passion—that's the standard translation, but I think that's wrong. *Raga* literally means colour, and it's the colouring of the heart when it's caught up in some kind of obsession. In English we have the expression, if someone's really angry, we say "he saw red." In other words, the *citta*, the heart, was coloured red and there was nothing else there.

So it has to do with drivenness, obsession, the inability to see beyond something and therefore to let it go. "I've got to get this. Or I've got to avoid this. I don't care what happens next. I just must have this." This is obsession.

And delight, *nandi*, is the gratification that comes from satisfying a desire. It's the payoff. So I want something, I get it, and there's a payoff. If there wasn't a payoff, I wouldn't bother. So *nandi* is the gratification that we get. But it has a quality of agitation to it, and it sets up another round of desire.

"That was good. I've got to do it again. That's good. One more time. That's good." And again, again, again, and again, and again, and again. So we find ourselves pursuing the same patterns of obsession, of desire, or aversion, as the case may be. It works equally well. And there's a repetitive quality to it. And so it becomes tedious, but still we've got to keep going with it because this is where my satisfaction comes from.

We can see this broadly in consumerism and the whole economic neoliberal project. On the broad scale of things, the fact that as a society we never have enough. So the little thought experiment that I like to provide is: imagine Prime Minister, Treasurer, Governor of the Reserve Bank, they have a press conference, they announce to the nation, "We've been studying the national accounts, productivity, national wealth—they've all increased greatly over the past fifty years. We've reached the point now that we've got enough. We can all stop now. Just chill. Let's take a break. We've got enough."

I mean, it's inconceivable, isn't it? Because it's impossible to have enough. It's just incoherent. Enough?

What? It just makes no sense. If you spoke like that in serious company—not like dharma hippies, but serious people—they'd think you're a complete lunatic. "How can we have enough? We've got to grow the economy. We've just got to. True, we're destroying the environment, but we've got to grow the economy. The climate's getting a bit... but we've got to grow the economy." We've just got to, because it's impossible to have enough, and this is *tanha*.

And you can see it more subtly when we're in the grip of some thought, and we can't let it go. I'm thinking something, it causes me pain, I can see that it causes me pain, I can feel it causing me pain, but I've got to finish it off. I've got to keep thinking it. So I'm sure you've had the experience of meditating—a thought arises, you notice that the thought has arisen, you know that you should drop it and head back to the meditation object, but you decide, "I'll just finish this one off, and then I'll go back." And "this, I'll just finish this one off." This is obsession and delight driving this.

And the Buddha says, "finding delight now here, now there." This is the restlessness implied in the endless search for satisfaction that never quite arrives—looking for a completion that never quite arrives.

He says specifically: craving for sense pleasures, existence, and non-existence. Notice that the latter two, two out of the three, are all about identity. The Buddha is very interested in how we construct an identity and what we do to sustain it.

Anyway, that's briefly the arising of dukkha.

Then we have the cessation of dukkha. This is the Noble One's truth of the cessation of dukkha: the complete cessation of that very craving—abandoning it, renouncing it, releasing it, letting it go.

In another discourse, the Buddha compares the cessation of dukkha to the ending of hunger. We've all experienced hunger, and when we're hungry, we have this growing drivenness: "I've got to eat." So we eat, and there's a great satisfaction when we eat, especially if it's a lunch like today's. There's a pleasure, a gratification that comes out of that. Several hours later, we're wondering, "What's for dinner?" So we go through the whole cycle again, and then again and again and again.

We never get to the end of it. But what would it be like if hunger itself ceased? Then there'd be no pleasure that comes from eating, but there'd be no distress that comes from not eating. The Buddha would say that—assuming this was physiologically possible, which of course it isn't; it's just an image—the pleasure that would come out of the cessation of hunger would actually be greater than any satisfaction we can find from eating.

You could look at it this way: let's say I'm a habitual smoker, and I have a desire for another cigarette. So I reach out and smoke it. There's a gratification, a satisfaction that comes with that—because otherwise I wouldn't bother. But that sets me up for the desire for the next one, and the next one, and the next one.

In contrast, let's say my desire is to give up smoking. If I satisfy that desire, then the satisfaction is very

different. It's not driven, it's not restless. It's quite peaceful and still. It's more subtle but more profound, and ultimately more satisfying than the first one.

In a mundane sense, what we're talking about is what we've discussed before: contentment. Being so absorbed in the present experience that we're not ruthlessly reaching out for something else to add to it or to justify it. This has to do with a relationship to experience which is not driven and therefore is pleasurable.

We talked the other night about kaya-gata-sati, mindfulness immersed in body, being all about finding pleasure in the physical—the kinds of pleasure that we're talking about and the kind of pleasure that Siddhartha was referring to when he gave up his ascetic practices. This is the kind of pleasure being referred to here.

Now, just to backtrack: we've got a list of four truths. The first one is dukkha. The second and third are the arising and ceasing of dukkha. Notice with the second and third, there's a dynamism. Things arise and cease. And they don't arise and cease at random.

The arising of dukkha—if there's dukkha, there must be something feeding it. So what's feeding it? What's feeding it is craving. If you get craving, you get dukkha. If I want to get rid of the dukkha, what to do? I could hit the dukkha on the head with a hammer, or I could work out what's feeding it and let go of that.

When there's craving, there's dukkha. When craving is dropped, dukkha is dropped. Notice with these two truths, it expands out from one thing—dukkha—into two, and we've got a dynamic relationship. This relationship is all about cause and effect. In other words, it's about dependent arising. This is the basic framework of the Buddha's teaching, but it's applying dependent arising to a specific problem: dukkha.

So the Buddha is presenting these five companions with a very specific cause-and-effect relationship. He's telling them, "Look for the drivenness." Remember we talked yesterday about why people take up an intense ascetic practice—these men are completely full-on macho ascetics. There's a drivenness in this. That's why they're doing it. And so the Buddha is saying, "Look for the drivenness. Check that out. And is it really satisfactory? And if it's not, why don't you just let it go?"

He's presenting them with a universal principle, which is dependent arising, and he talks about dependent arising endlessly throughout his career in all sorts of different ways. But he's presenting it to them in a very specific example of it, in a particular relationship that is of relevance to them as they're sitting in front of him. So he's making something universal applicable to this situation right now. And that's very much his genius as a teacher—that he had the capacity to do that. And it's quite something.

When I started teaching retreats here, actually, I was doing a PhD in Buddhist studies at University of Queensland, and eventually I dropped out in order to become the resident teacher here. But what I was doing was studying dependent arising and esoteric Buddhist philosophy, and I'd be doing that for months at a time. Then I'd come down here and teach a retreat, and I had to say something that was actually

relevant to the meditators sitting in front of me. And it wasn't easy.

Some people think my Dharma talks are abstract, dry and academic. Can you believe that? And if you think they're abstract, dry and academic now—you should have been here fifteen years ago. They were intensely academic. But, you know, that's the way I thought; that's what I was studying. And I knew this is something I need to communicate because this is what the Buddha was all about—so it actually is relevant to someone's experience when they're right in front of you.

If you ever become Dharma teachers, you'll discover it's not easy. So my heart goes out to poor old Buddha when he's faced with these ascetics and he's got to give them the whole lot in one hit. It's not so easy. But he was a genius at that. And this is one example of when he succeeded in doing it.

So you've got one thing, which opens up into dynamic relationship. When we are practicing meditation, what is it we're playing around with? We're playing with dynamic relationship. What is it when we're working with something—a distraction, say? What is it we're saying again and again and again? "What's feeding this? Something must be happening to make this happen. What is it?"

So we talked about structuring attention. I can focus in on one thing, but don't wear blinkers so you can't see what's around it. You can't see it in its context. Open up, and then you can say, "Well, when this moved, that moved as well. That's interesting. Is there a connection?" So it's this open investigation into the shifting patterns of experience, and the basic principle is: What's feeding this? And what does this feed?

And the Buddha is presenting this as a kind of template in the Four Truths. And the fourth truth is the path. And remember this is the second time he's mentioned the path. The path is also the middle way. And it's also the fourth truth. This is the Noble One's truth of the way leading to the cessation of dukkha: the Noble Eightfold Path of right view, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right energy, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

We talked about the complexity of the path yesterday—the fact that it's a dynamic system. Again you get this dependent arising, these dynamic interrelationships. Here, let's have a look at some other aspects of path. For a start, the fact that a path always has a direction. A path is going somewhere. I'm going somewhere.

So I want the path that goes there in order to get to where I want. In other words, I have a goal. And I need the path that takes me to my goal. So I want to be enlightened, or I don't want to be grossly suffering—I want to be subtly suffering. I want a bit of this subtle spiritual suffering that you're banging on about. So I have some kind of goal, and I want the path that goes to that.

We've talked a lot about the nature of right effort. One of the problems with effort is that if I'm pushing what is my present experience aside in order to get to some imagined goal in the future, I'm not fully engaged with the present experience. And it's a barrier. It gets in my way. I overlook things that I

shouldn't overlook. I strain, which just slows me up.

So how do goals fit into this way of looking at things? The Buddha doesn't talk—he does talk about goals, setting up goals—but he's more interested in directions. It's all about setting a direction. If I know that my goal is in this direction, if I've got the direction right, I can forget about the destination. I can forget about the goal because I know I'm going to get there. And instead, all I have to do is be fully committed to this step right now. This is part of the image of the path: being firmly grounded on just this step. This is the only step that counts. And if I'm satisfied about the direction, I don't need to worry about the goal. That will just happen. It may take a while, it may take longer than I want, but it will happen. I've just got to be completely engaged with this step right now.

Another aspect of path is that it implies that someone else has been here before. We've talked about this. In this path that we're on, people have been on this path for over 2,000 years. And we're just the latest bunch of travelers. There'll be other people after us. So we're part of something much bigger than what we might normally think of.

The Buddha also points out that the path is a lot more than just meditation. We spoke about how the path has three groups: there's view, which is wisdom; sīla, ethics; and then you have meditation. In one discourse, a non-Buddhist asked the Buddha what he taught, and the Buddha said, "I teach two things. I teach ethics and wisdom." Which is very interesting because he made no mention of meditation. And it's very odd from a Western perspective because what draws us into Buddhism is it's all about the meditation. Then we discover the other things later. But when the Buddha was presenting his teaching to non-Buddhists, he didn't even mention meditation. He said, "I teach two things: ethics and wisdom."

And he compared them to two hands washing each other. I can't wash just one hand. I need two hands. Then I can clean the hands. Ethics is like one hand and wisdom is the other, and they wash each other—they support each other. I think what he was getting at was that if we're looking for meditation, it's here. It's in this action. It's the interface between ethics and wisdom. In particular, whatever we cultivate in meditation has to be expressed in action. In other words, the test for our practice is the way that we live, which is the whole realm of ethics.

Anyway, that's a quick tour of the Four Truths. And the Buddha goes on a bit further, talking about each of the activities or the duties associated with each of the truths. So the first truth, dukkha, is to be fully understood. And it's interesting that he doesn't say it is to be gotten rid of. He says it's to be understood. In other words, we study our dukkha.

The second truth, the arising of dukkha, is to be abandoned—the letting go of craving. The third truth, the cessation of dukkha, is to be realized. This is awakening itself. And the fourth truth, the path, is to be cultivated, developed.

Then we come to the end of the discourse. "This is what the Blessed One said, and the group of five

bhikkhus rejoiced in his words. And as this teaching was being given, the perfect and stainless vision of Dharma arose in Venerable Kondanya: 'Whatever is of the nature to arise, all that is of the nature to cease.'"

This little verse is the standard verse which indicates the perfect and stainless vision of Dharma—in other words, attaining the first stage of awakening, the first glimpse of the unconstructed, the first falling into the black hole and never being seen again. And this happens to Kondanya, and the way he expresses it is: "Whatever is of the nature to arise, all that is of the nature to cease." Again, this is a model of dependent arising. He saw into dependent arising.

So whatever is of the nature to arise—what would that be? Basically everything, except nibbana, except the unconstructed. Whatever begins, ends. Everything that arises ceases. And the emphasis is on the everything. What we do is we kind of set aside something out of that which doesn't cease. Let's call it, for example, the self. This is the sense of the self—it's all happening to me, I'm the audience of this drama, without me there's no drama. But the Buddha says all this is of the nature to cease. Or as John Hale once was heard to remark, "Nibbana is the ultimate paint stripper—it strips away everything."

So Kondanya was the first to get it.

Now, do we have time for his story? Yes. Kondanya was a brahmin who was very brilliant as a boy and was particularly specialized in the art of reading features, reading the body—physiognomy. He made a living along with others as a kind of soothsayer, examining newborn children to tell their doting parents, on the basis of his examination, what would happen to them. Astrology and the reading of features—these kinds of arts were highly developed in India, greatly respected. People who did this were highly respected and well-paid professionals.

When Siddhartha was born, his father brought in the local experts. Because his father was a wealthy and powerful man, he could afford five of these experts. So he brings them in to examine the boy and to explain what the boy's fate would be. Kondanya was the youngest of the five, therefore the most junior in the hierarchy.

They examine the boy, look at his horoscope, do their calculations, get together in a huddle. And the four senior ones said, "There's no question, this kid is going to be a universal monarch, an extremely successful political leader." They were happy with that because they'd doubtless get a big tip from his old man for telling them that.

But they couldn't come to consensus because Kondanya said, "No, no, no. He may do that. Or, if he leaves home, he will become a sammasambuddha, a supremely self-awakened one."

The other four said, "You don't want to tell the old man that. Believe me, he doesn't want to hear that."

Kondanya sticks to his guns. Then they explain, "Look, we've seen you do this. We've been doing this

longer. All of us agree it's not going to happen. So just keep your mouth shut."

And Kondanya says, "I shall submit a minority report."

So he did. And the other four were correct—the old man didn't like it at all. So they walked away with less cash than they would have, except that Kondanya didn't walk away. He wanted to stick around this kid because he knew this kid was very special, and if he does something really special, "I want to be there when it happens."

So he sticks around, he lives in the neighborhood and he waits. And Siddhartha grows up and he's having a good time and being educated and doing all the things that young men do, and Kondanya's life is dribbling away, waiting. He must have got anxious every now and again, but he recalls his faith and he stays.

One morning he's in the market buying his chai or whatever he buys in the market, and the market is abuzz with gossip. He hears the word "Siddhartha" mentioned, so he goes up and says, "What's going on? What happened?"

And they say, "Didn't you hear?"

"No, I didn't hear. What happened?"

"Wow, you must be the only person who hasn't heard."

"Stop driving me crazy and just tell me what happened."

"He's gone."

Who's gone?

Siddhartha's gone.

What do you mean he's gone?

He's just gone. He just disappeared last night. Nobody can find him.

And so Kandanya is just absolutely horrified. He's been waiting for decades. It's like watching cricket—as soon as something happens, you've missed it because you've fallen asleep ten minutes ago.

So he goes racing off in pursuit, but nobody knows exactly where Siddhartha went because he slipped out at night. But Kandanya is no fool and he heads southeast along the same main road that Siddhartha is traveling. Eventually he catches up with him, though nobody really knows when, or how many years it took before he found him.

But he ends up as one of the five companions. So he's one of these ascetics. And this time he's absolutely

determined he's not going to let this guy out of his sight because he knows his propensity for disappearing. So he's practicing asceticism, which is really, really not a good thing to do. It's very painful. So he's having a very difficult time. He's not a young man anymore. But he's got to wait. He's got to wait until something happens.

And finally, something happened. Siddhartha has lunch.

Well, he drops the whole thing. He decides, "Okay, it's not working. I'm out of here. I'm heading to the village down the road because I hear they serve really nice chapati."

And all of the five are just completely devastated by this betrayal of everything he stands for, Kandanya among them, and they walk off, they leave him.

Now if you put yourself in Kandanya's shoes, how would you have felt? You have invested virtually your entire life on hope and faith in one person, and eventually, after decades, he completely disappoints you. He disillusions you so much that not only are you not looking for him, you're making sure you're walking away in the opposite direction. So Kandanya must have gone through hell.

Anyway, sometime later—we don't know how long—Siddhartha returns, except he's not Siddhartha, he's the Buddha. He gives the first teaching, and Kandanya gets it. That's what he's talking about. And he's the first to attain a glimpse of awakening.

So if you ever feel discouraged in your practice, if you ever think it's taking too long and progress is too slow, just think of Kandanya. He's the patron saint of slow students.

"When the wheel of Dharma had been set in motion by the Blessed One, the earth-dwelling devas cried out: 'This unsurpassed wheel of Dharma has been set in motion by the Blessed One. It cannot be stopped by any samana or brahmana or deva or Mara or Brahma or by anyone in the world.'

"Hearing the cry of the earth-dwelling devas, the devas of the realm of the Four Great Kings cried out. The Tavatimsa devas, the Yama devas, the Tusita devas, the Nimmanarati devas, the Paranimmitavasavatti devas, the devas of Brahma's assembly cried out: 'At Baranasi, in the deer park at Isipatana, this unsurpassed wheel of Dharma has been set in motion by the Blessed One. It cannot be stopped by any samana or brahmana or deva or Mara or Brahma or by anyone in the world.'

"And so at that moment, at that instant, the cry spread as far as the Brahma world, and this ten-thousand-fold world system shook, quaked and trembled, and an immeasurable glorious radiance appeared in the world, surpassing the divine majesty of the devas."

I think this is code for "something very significant just happened."

And what happened was the wheel of Dharma was set in motion. When did that happen? When somebody understood. Yeah, when Kandanya got it.

And I find it really intriguing. When the Buddha was awakened, the wheel of Dharma was not set in motion. Only when Kandanya got it, then it started to move. In other words, the wheel of Dharma moves when the understanding spreads. Then things are starting to happen.

this realization, this awakening will not die with the Buddha. It will continue. And of course the wheel of Dharma has been turning ever since and continues to turn.

Then the Blessed One cried out in inspiration: "Kondañña understands! Kondañña understands!" This is how Venerable Kondañña acquired the name Añña Kondañña—Kondañña who understands.

You don't get it in English, but what the Buddha said was "Aññāsi Kondañño! Aññāsi Kondañño!" "He understands! He understands!" And I find this very intriguing.

I cannot think of any other time when the Buddha responds this way. Here he's given everything he's got, and as a result, one out of five has received the first glimpse of Nibbāna, of the unconstructed. Later in his career, he gets on stage, gives a Dharma talk, and five hundred people attain full awakening. He just got better. This is his practice run.

But this is the only time where he dances a jig for joy because someone got it. He's up there dancing: "Kondañña understands! Kondañña understands!" Abandoning all enlightened dignity. But he never does it again.

The traditional schools interpret this differently. Some say he was sitting there with a little smile on his face. Others say he cried out in inspiration—this is udāna, spontaneous poetry composed on the spot and presumably sung out in great joy, not mindfully mumbled but sung with delight.

The Buddha is absolutely delighted. He knows he can communicate this. Now he is a teacher—not just claiming to be one, but actually embodying what it means to teach. Now there is something happening. Now there can be a Buddhism. Now it's possible that things can start moving.

And this is where we'll leave it tonight. Tomorrow we'll start on the second discourse.

"If the wheel is set in motion and nothing can stop it, why is Mahākassapa waiting in a mountain until after it stops for it to start again?"

It just runs out of steam. No one can stop it, but somewhere in the future it will naturally cease. That's the nature of things—whatever has a beginning has an end. But then it can start again, given the right conditions.

"Did the Buddha say anything about Paccekabuddhas, explaining how many there might have been?"

No. In the early material there's very little mention of them.

Previous Buddhas at all, or I can't recall mention of Paccekabuddhas specifically, though they might be

referenced somewhere. If it appears in the Tipitaka, my guess is it would be in the Khuddaka Nikaya—in the later material.

These are Buddhas who realized enlightenment but weren't able to teach. Is it a real phenomenon or not necessarily? I can't recall having read about it in the early texts. I've seen it mainly in the Jatakas—the story collections that come much later. I'm not certain whether it's part of the early tradition, although it's built into the logic of it, isn't it?

Had the Buddha not succeeded with those first five ascetics, presumably he would have thought, "I'll give up," gone back to his Bodhi tree, and remained a Paccekabuddha. I'd never realized what a close shave it was. I mean, I'd thought about how fortunate it was that Brahma Sahampati persuaded him to teach, but I'd never considered the next close call.

It sounds like a whole series of pretty close shaves. But the conditions came together and suddenly—there it is. That's the way things work. When conditions converge, something suddenly clicks.

"How soon after do they all become fully enlightened?"

That's for tomorrow night. Stay tuned for the next exciting episode.

"Is a glimpse—like you're describing—stream entry?"

"Can people still experience nibbana hearing a dharma talk? For the first time?"

Technically it's possible. I suspect all those who had the past-life karma and practice that would predispose them to such realization may have already encountered the Dhamma and awakened. Or perhaps they simply don't tell us about it, and it happens regularly without anyone hearing about it.

They speak of transmission in various traditions—not so much in Theravada teachings, but in Mahayana and Vajrayana they discuss transmission extensively. When the Buddha gives a talk and many people become enlightened, it's quite reminiscent of those later transmission-oriented contemplative traditions. It doesn't remind you of Theravada so much as the Tibetan and Zen approaches—it has more of that flavor.

"Patrick, you mentioned dukkha as this sort of painful emptiness. Do you think that's our intuitive understanding that the self isn't real?"

Yes, I think so. I believe fundamentally we all know that we're not real—that this sense of self is constructed. But we cover that up with all our desperate projects to be recognized and to recognize ourselves as substantial. Much of human endeavor is based on this deep but deeply suppressed intuition.

"Unknown thousands in therapy trying to find out, trying to be convinced that they are real."

The way of therapy is often the way of self—getting a healthy self, presumably.

I know that Stephen Batchelor discusses the Four Truths as being sequential, and I've found that whole discussion quite illuminating. It gives meaning to having dukkha in the first place.

It's almost like sequential in that you need to realize dukkha first, and that leads to the realization of the cause of dukkha, which leads to the realization of the cessation of dukkha, which leads to the realization of how to live that life of cessation. It's quite useful, I think.

I mean, this is a list. And like other lists, it can be read in different ways. It can be read in a linear form, and it can be read in a non-linear form. I think it's deliberately... I think it's meant to be like that. There are different ways of reading it. These lists are really sophisticated. I don't think there would be just simply one correct way to read it. If you point out a different way of reading it, it gives you a fresh viewpoint, which is very useful.

*Question:** Isn't there a certain amount of drivenness needed, more than just mere desire to actually stay on the path? It's not like it's super easy, after all, and you know, we can talk very well about desire for awakening and desire for the end of dukkha, but without a certain amount of clinging, thirst, drivenness, to keep on keeping on, you know. Otherwise, lots of people come to meditation once or twice, but don't stay on the path.

*Response:** Yeah. I was reminded of a conversation I had decades ago when I was in Hawaii. I was talking to a fellow Zen student about another Zen student who had been practicing for a number of years—I forget how many, but not inconsiderable. He suddenly dropped out. And everybody was wondering why. And my friend said, "Well, he obviously got what he came for." And I thought, yeah, that makes sense.

It's the people who don't drop out who are the people, in a sense, whose desire always outmatches, always goes beyond what they've attained. And the Buddha talks about this. He says, don't be satisfied with what you've attained. There's always something more. So the drivenness is part of nature.

So I think, yes, you're right, it's part of the whole path. But it's a question, I think, of using it skillfully. The quality of it. Because the quality of it is refined when you practice. But there is a quality of... a sense of, "I have to do this. I don't have a choice." In one sense I do, but in a deeper sense... I don't.

Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you for listening.

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