

2003-12-08 Satipatthana Sutta (Week 13) The Four Noble Truths

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SPEAKERS

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It said that after the Buddha was awakened, he was reluctant to teach. It said in perhaps the legends that survive that. For the 49 days after his awakening, he basically hung out in the area where he was awakened and to enjoy the bliss of his awakening. And there's various things he did every seven days he changed. He did something different than those seven weeks. And one of those days when one of those weeks, I'd said that he basically stood, stood away from the tree under which he was enlightened the Bodhi tree and bowed to it expressed his gratitude to the tree under which that he had attained his liberation. And can you hear us in the hallways are working out there? It's not working out there. Why don't you all come in here, there's probably space in here. For you, if you want to bring the chairs in here, we'll make space. There's one chair up two chairs up there on the stage and two chairs over here, the chair in the back. So in the seven weeks after his enlightenment, the Buddha basically stayed there and is where he was enjoyed the bliss of his enlightenment. And it said that he was reluctant to teach, because he felt that no one would understand what he had to teach or what he had experienced, that they would maybe maybe he wasn't sure how you would teach it, his awakening his freedom. And you can maybe get very quickly a little sense of the difficulty of it. If you want to try to explain to someone what it's like to have a sense of presence. If you haven't really sense of being present? What does that feel like? I just said it right. So, but what does that feel like? Try to explain that. And, and maybe you can do it I don't know, I feel a little bit challenged to explain what a strong sense of presence is like, in some clear, definitive way. So the Buddha was reluctant to, to speak. And then it said that Brahma who's kind of the Zeus of the Indian Pantheon, the great Brahma intervened. And Brahma said something like, well, I asked, please, you know, please open the gates of the deathless, the deathless being a synonym for awakening the awakened state freedom, data freedom. Perhaps, in our modern culture, a word that is maybe a close synonym to deathless, we're going to points to the same thing might be timeless In a sense of being timeless, I mean, we say that sometimes about certain pieces of literature. You know, art objects is timeless. But the internal

experience of being a timeless moment kind of feeling that this moment here is timeless. And there are times in life where that stands out very stands out very, very strongly, where maybe sometimes it feels like everything standstill, or it feels like we disappear in the experience, there's no us he or she is timeless presence. And, and maybe with that word timeless, you get a little sense of what the ancient Buddhist might have meant by the deathless. That state where there's no death, no birth, no coming, no going, no movement, nothing happens. And so Brahma said, you know, please open the gates to death plus adores the deathless, so everyone can experience it or others can experience it or know it. point to it. And the Buddha then surveyed the world. And he decided that there were some people in the world who had that little dust across their eyes. And most people, most of us have a lot of dust. And so it's hard to see what's really there. But if you can clear out the dust from your eyes and see clearly, and the dust is not, you know, literally dust, but rather, the kind of things that get in the way of our ability to see clearly. And you probably each of you have have some experience of not having seen things clearly. Maybe after the fact there's, Oh, I didn't understand it was that way. Or perhaps you're so filled with desire, you didn't see what was really going on there, or so filled with hate or fear. So there's all kinds of dusts that covers the eyes. So the Buddha realized that there were some people had just a little bit of dust in their eyes, and so they might be able to understand what he had. To teach. And so then he went and found the five people who he thought might be most receptive to what he had to teach. And now the story is a little bit touching what happened there. These were his companions in the ascetic life. And he was practicing extreme asceticism, before his enlightenment. And he decided that ascetic path was not the path to awakening to freedom. So he gave it up. When he gave it up, his five ascetic companions left him because he was backsliding. He was taking you know, he was no longer an ascetic. And so he went and found those five ascetics and they saw the Buddha coming as he was walking across towards them, and they said, oh, here comes that slacker. I don't think they said that exactly. Those words, but Here comes you know, Harry comes, and let's not know exactly exactly details with how they say but let's not give them any real attention or let's not get up to greet him. And so they just that's just remain seated where they were. And the Buddha came up into their myths. And spontaneously, somehow, they were so moved by his presence that they stood up, offered respect and offered him a seat. And even though they said they weren't going to do those things, but there was something about his presence. What is it, you know, here we have back to this sense of presence. timeless presence are some people who walk with a sense of the timeless or the deathless or the being free or being at ease. I certainly have met people who I really felt in that person. There was very little dust, there was very little ego, there was very little movement to being defensive or trying to build themselves up, or trying to being worried about anything at all, or being anything seemed to have any desires about, particularly, that seemed to be kind of, you know, a filter that through which they were experiencing the world through which I could experience them. There wasn't, I didn't see their desire there. And it's quite remarkable to meet someone who was clear that way. And so here was the Buddha. And there was just presence there. And that presence must always be remembered, I think, because that was there prior to the beginning of his teaching. So then he tried to teach and now remember again, you know, he was reluctant to teach you didn't know how he could point to what he had experienced. And so he made it, what I suppose is his best attempt to do that, and which was kind of his formulation of his path, his experience what what wasn't so much what he

experienced that he was trying to explain to people, because maybe it may be I don't know why he didn't. But there's very little in the discourse of the Buddha, where he tries to explain or describe what it is that he experienced with his awakening with his freedom. He does use the word deathless at times, but deathless is kind of like the description of absence without death. And so but in terms of a positive description, you know, it was bright light, it was looked great bliss. It was, you know, you know, mystical union with the universe or, you know, the merging of the yin and the yang or, you know what, you know, he didn't he didn't, the Buddha gives very little positive description of what The Awakened his, his awakened experience was like. What he does in this first discourse, is he describes what he thought people needed to know. So they could do the work themselves to come to the same place. So it was kind of a pragmatic approach. Rather than pointing to something, maybe he didn't think they could experience it by describing it. This is what you have to do. This is what you got to understand and what you have to do in order to have this for yourself also. And this was kind of the motivation of the Buddha was not to kind of be a teacher that knew something different than others to stay that way, but rather a teacher that brought people into what he knew and what he experienced. But he realized that other people had to do the work themselves. He wasn't going to zap them. Though his presence was still there, right? Very powerful presence. You can imagine, you know, these, these people who are reluctant to receive his message, you know, actually, he offered to teach them. And he they said, No, you know, who are you to teach us something I don't remember exactly the details, but and then he said, You know, I'm a Buddha now I'm awakened. And kind of very confident kind of statement, maybe, you know, in some circles, presumptuous or arrogant, in a very elaborate, he said, I'm now awakened, fully awakened. And, and, and you can imagine these these friends, here's kind of this pull, push, they feel this incredible presence. But they feel like he's kind of left the path that they understand. And they're reluctant to hear what he has to teach. And then he tells them, you've known me for a long time. If you ever know something, I'm prepared. As you remember the details, have you ever known me to lie? And or say what is not? So they know you've always been completely impeccable. And they don't think you should listen to me now. And so he does they do. And so then he describes to people, what he feels they need to know, so they could experience attain this liberation that he'd attained. And what he describes is, what many of you hopefully know very well, is the Four Noble Truths. And it could seem a long way from the first noble truth, to awakening to freedom. And some people say it's so far away, what in the world is have to do with it? The first noble truth is the truth of suffering. And here we are in the mire of suffering in the mode of suffering, you know, so common in this world, and why would we focus on that in the world To attain something which is the timeless moment or this timeless presence or this freedom from ego from attachment to self freedom from all clinging at all entirely, why would focusing on suffering be the first thing he points to? And the second noble truth, he talks about the cause of suffering, how suffering comes about, and why again, why would you have to study or understand about the cause of suffering? I think because it if you're gonna if you're if going to one of the doorways to liberation, is to understand what is locked to that door, what keeps the door locked. And if you understand what the what the lock is, then you can unlock it. But if you don't understand the lock, everything will stay closed. And so the lock for the Buddha well What is craving? What keeps the lock closed is our clinging or holding tight to our experience and clinging or craving is kind of a synonym for a wide range of ways that the mind holds

on or contracts gets heavy is burdened by experience in ways in which the mind kind of brings about its own suffering. So to see that craving and then this is where the work is, is to release it, to let go of it. Some things are relatively easy to let go. And probably all of you had experience of letting go of certain things. I'm sorry maybe for this example that pops to my mind. This is the danger of listening to me as I think of examples on the spot. But you know, you're driving down the road and maybe you're in a hurry to get somewhere and you coming towards a traffic light traffic light turns yellow. And you have to decide, do you? Do you have enough time to go through just you know, you're close enough to that intersection that makes sense to go through even though it turns yellow? Or do you have to stop? And sometimes maybe it's not so clear. And you have your desire to get somewhere. And you have your sense of what's reasonable to do. And so, maybe you have to let go of something. You let go of your speed you let go of trying to get through there. Or you let go of concerns about tickets. There is a wise letting go and not so wise, letting go is letting go. Sometimes some things are relatively easy to let go of the point I'm trying to make. And some things are quite difficult to let go of and some things it's inconceivable to many of us why someone would want to let go of certain things. Or it's inconceivable that it's possible, or it's inconceivable that, that it's you still Be a human being, you still live a normal life as far as you know it, if you somehow empty yourself or rid yourself of certain kinds of clinging. But here Here you can kind of remember to go back in your mind if you can. The presence of this man standing there, outside of Sarnoff in ancient India, who had walked for many days to find his five ascetic practice friends, and there was just powerful presence, where in his presence, they stood up, because there's something about that presence. Why did he let go of what had happened to him? They'd known him for many years what had happened there, how thoroughly what he could have claimed was he had let go of everything. And in someone, here's someone who let go of everything, and meeting someone let go of everything. He wasn't like a dull flat person. You know, the first thing I thought was, Oh, this is boring guy. Or you know, or this was something about him. That irradiance is something that they stood up to meet him. Once I heard a Dharma talk by a monk that was so inspired, that when the monk ended the Dharma talk he got up to leave, just leave. And there was no plan in the room at all for this, everybody stood up as he walked, you know, kind of like when you stand up for loyalty or something, you know, you know, or you know, this, you know, it was like, it just felt like everybody felt so, moved like this is what you had to do. There was no thought it was just this is what you do, because it was such a powerful talk that was given. And so, let go of everything. And part of the challenge of Buddhism or the or maybe the offering, the challenge is that, how thoroughly Do you want to you want to let go So, an example that I use this weekend, teaching is Maybe imagine yourself or imagine, maybe you know such a situation. But imagine someone on their deathbed. And this person or you, hopefully is completely at peace about dying. It's happened that way. Occasionally people do that. I remember it was one woman a year ago on retreat, who was dying, probably cancer didn't think she had more. She was told she'd have much more in six months to live and she was anguished about her upcoming death, because she had a 10 year old daughter. And so, you know, it's a pretty tragic situation in many ways. But one of the counselors that was given to her that made a real impact on her. Is that how she died, would have a huge impact on her daughter, if she's going to die anyway. She died worried and afraid. That would be a very powerful teaching to her daughter. But if she could die peacefully at peace, that'd be a very different kind of

teaching for her daughter. And what would be better teaching given that she had to die anyway, that was what's going to happen. And that really got her attention. And I don't know what happened. I didn't I wasn't there was any follow up for me so. So there are people who die at peace. And but you can imagine maybe yourself on your deathbed. And you know, you, you know that you have maybe an hour left or a few minutes left or a day left or something. And, and someone comes in and asked you, you know, do you want to know how it's going in the stock market today. And that's something maybe in other times was an interest of yours or maybe you know, this All kinds of things that, that, you know, you know, the status of the interest in your bank account, or someone really interested in and your opinions about home improvement projects in your house. Things that maybe cause certain a lot of stress in your life, you know, earlier in your life, but, you know, a neighbor friend perhaps in backing out of her driveway bumps into your car and dents and knocks on your door, you know, and, and I know, I know you only have a couple hours left, but you know, I want to tell you, you know, I feel really bad about bumping your car. And would you mind filling out these forms and you know, it probably kind of pales in importance. You probably have a lot of equanimity you're probably not going to be caught. by those things, you know, if you're caught at all, it's like a Please leave me alone. But it's all kinds of things that are maybe you wouldn't normally you would normally hold on to and maybe be quite distressed about that it's quite easy to let go of in that context. And how thoroughly does impending death call on us or allow us or encourage us or require of us to let go very, very deep things you probably don't care so much about how your hair looks, you know, the last minutes or whether you know, your, your clothes, your, your pajamas a little bit dirty, you know, it's not that relevant to what's going to happen. So the mind is at ease about a whole bunch of things that normally maybe wouldn't have been on. So I've had a lot of trouble kind of conveying, I think, but I think you have to fill in the blank. You have to kind of imagine yourself in this situation, and imagine them you know, how thoroughly the teaching of death What would allow your calling you to let go of things that now living now, you wouldn't want to let go of, or you wouldn't think of letting go of wouldn't occur to you. So I hope that work that exercise somehow. So here's the Buddha coming to see us five ascetics and saying, craving is the second noble truth. And it's possible in the third noble truth, to release that craving to let go of it. And he wasn't talking about craving to stock market necessarily, he was talking about a you know, particular kinds of craving. He was talking about every possible craving in your mind, every possible thing where the mind grabs on holds on resists all the different kind of synonyms for all the variations of clinging or craving That, that the very roots of absolutely everything somehow has been released and uprooted and that's what so that's a third noble truth. And here you imagine this person is so radiant and luminous, giving this teaching and claiming I have done this and I imagine that it's somewhat compelling is teaching is ascetics were looking for that liberation to begin with. And also the Celtics have been many years of spiritual practice. So that in some sense, we take them as being very mature people spiritually mature, they let go of a lot already. Instead, extend to let go right. But here he was saying you have to go further. If let go of everything, and for those for those of them who didn't get it. Then the next day he gave a second discourse. And there he talked about letting go of the attachment to self heal, it talks about letting go of seeing self in the body, seeing the self, in our feelings, seeing self in our perceptions, seeing self, in our thoughts, seeing self in our intentions, seeing self, in our dispositions, in our attitudes, seeing self in consciousness, don't see for

sale don't look for self and all those things. And these ascetics for people, these people who let go so much already, just in telling that telling don't look for self in any of these places. They let go. And they experienced the same thing as the Buddha. What holds people back from being willing to be interested in letting go Oh, if I don't if I let go, I will Have these relationships? If I let go, you know, I won't be able to do this. And that's all kinds of reasons but you maybe hold back. Are they good reasons? Are they good reasons now because of course you have 20 3040 years to live, right? So you might as well hold on, you know, for now, right? Or do the reasons start disappearing, the closer you get to death. And I think they do for many of us. That's part of the wisdom of old age is the proximity to death. That a whole bunch of things just simply don't have the kind of pool that they did earlier in life. Not a lot of 18 year olds are concerned about their acne or their pimples. Maybe they don't have a lot but you know, when your fourth even your fourth It's a big deal, right? But by time you will be at can you've kind of let go of that one, right? The proximity, you know, so but there's a lot of things that get low it gets like a go as we get older. Buddhism is a four is is a form of premature aging. Why wait? Why wait? When Why wait, you know, until you know? And do you have 20 years? Do you have 40 years? How long do you have until the reasons that you know, the reasons for holding on still seem pale or lose their significance? So the Buddha was passionate, I would say we're very motivated. To try to point to the possibility of a very radical transformation where the every possible clinging or craving in the mind was released. And his teachings were his, his his profound teachings were meant for people are interested in that. Now we come to the texts that we've been studying these last almost three months now three months, the Satipatthana Sutta. This is one of the most important texts giving the Buddhist practice instructions. I mean actually details for meditation practice for cultivating awareness and it goes through some 16 exercises a developing mindfulness, developing presence He says in developing this mindfulness, this will lead you to liberation. So the first nine exercises had to do with developing mindfulness of the body. So imagine someone who has learned to develop a very strong mindfulness to the body that the presence in their body, they're here in this body. Where are you? Where are you going to be, then you're not going to be lost in your thoughts of the future or the past. Usually, people have a very strong presence in their body, or present in this world they're living in. They kind of know the posture they're in when they're sitting or standing. They know what they're doing with their body. They were very aware of their sensations of the body, what's happening in their body as they feel things. So, the beginning is developing is very strong presence in the body, physical presence, cultivating, developing that Then, next exercise developing a very strong sensitivity to how we how experience is either pleasant or unpleasant, coming hypersensitive, maybe is the wrong word but sensitive, recognizing, tuning into how experienced they are pleasant or unpleasant or neither that kind of neutral, sensitive to become the kind of being strong presence and using that presence, to be sensitive to the quality of that experience we're having in the present moment. And then developing a sensitivity to the states of mind that we have. So there's a strong sense of presence in the mind to so aware when the mind it goes through its various kaleidoscopes of different emotional and mental states. When the mind is filled with anger, or, or ill will when the mind is filled with desire when the mind is Filled with beautiful states of the mind is concentrated when the mind is distracted, when the mind is feels expansive with the mind feels contracted, kind of aware of what goes on the mind sends very sensitive maybe my neutrally sensitive to the quality of the mind, strong presence of what's going

on there. And then as and then as these exercises develop, the person also then develops a very keen sense of sensitivity to the forces that causes us to shut down the light of awareness kind of covers over our awareness in our presence. We notice how when desire arises, and we follow the deliverer of desire, that is kind of nice, perhaps, but at the same time, it's kind of a darkening of awareness kind of darkening of presence, we kind of lose ourselves in the focus of desire, some kind of loss, loss in touch with ourselves might be very sometimes with a desire, you're very alert very early Alert. But like once when I was 14 there was this girl didn't say anything more right? I was very alert about certain things. But you know or ill will hate can also be very alert but it's kind of shutting down and contraction or losing touch with that sensitivity that presence. So where are these forces that kind of tend to cover up a strong sense of presence and a person continuous practice and also becomes very sensitive to the ways in which we identify to the experience as this is who I am, myself, the way that the selfing happens the way that attachment to self happens, clinging to self happens Building up self, all these things wanting people to see us in certain ways. So presenting ourselves, oh, I need this great Chinese restaurant. And we usually tell that to people is not because it's good information, but it is it reflects Good on you that you chose to good restaurant eating. That's probably a bad example but so then, but very sensitive to this kind of how selfing happens and how selfing causes suffering. And then very sensitive to how this the sense experience we have in the world as we see things as we see objects in the world, hear things taste things, very sensitive to how the mind will grasp or resist or get entangled with that experience. With thoughts and story makings with emotional entanglements with motivational entanglements wanting or not wanting. So developing this sensitivity, all these sensitivities we talked about, imagine all that. And then from that strong sense of presence, Strong Sense awareness of all these forces, the person also then he starts having evoking are these strong, wonderful spiritual feelings or emotions or states, of, of mindfulness, very aware of mindfulness, the presence of mindfulness, where it's like very aware of, kind of the alertness, of investigation of interest and experience. They're really here and interested, very aware of their effort, their energy, their vitality, their application, their engagement with with life, they feel engaged. Even if they don't have a lot of energy, they feel engaged and very, very attentive to joy, feeling of joy arises and attended been aware of the arising of, of tranquility and very sensitive, aware of the arising of concentration and very aware of the rising and presence of a state of equanimity. Were very aware of these, these high quality issues of the mind or the heart quality characteristics So, you have very refined qualities that develop. So, it's probably should be enough one lifetime right. And then comes last exercise. The very last exercise of this whole discourse. And this is the exercise to start orienting yourself as you go about your experience as you go about your life. orient yourself through the or, or use the perspective understanding your experience through the framework of the formula Truth. So to notice, when there is suffering or stress or tension to the whole range of kind of, you know, closely connected experiences and that family of suffering, but to notice those, and it might be that it's very, very, very subtle. Because sometimes in deep meditative states are in great blissful experiences, spiritual experience, or whatever, there might still be the remnants of very, very subtle stress or agitation or clinging, that might almost be invisible, because we're kind of blinded by the beautiful state. But the Buddha says, even the states look for where the suffering is, the agitation or the stress, but in all circumstances and look at where the cause with the cause, look for the cause of that. suffering, look for where they they're

holding on is and then let go. And that's the last of the exercises. Let go, Raj, there's one more is the Eightfold Path. If you can't let go, then practice the Eightfold Path. But let go and how completely and thoroughly Would you like to let go? That's your choice. If you like, as Ajahn Chah said, If you let go a little, you'll have a little peace. If you let go a lot, you'll have a lot of peace. It's your choice. So now I'll read and again, monks, a monk abides contemplating mind object His mind objects in terms of the Four Noble Truths and how does a monk abide contemplating mind objects as mind objects in terms of the Four Noble Truths? Here, a big Bhiku understands as it actually is, this is suffering. She understands as it actually is, this is the origin of suffering, he understands is it actually is this is the cessation of suffering. And she understands is that actually is, this is the way leading to the cessation of suffering. In this way, he or she abides contemplating mind objects, his mind objects, internally, externally, and both internally and externally. Or else he or she abides contemplating in mind objects, their nature of arising or their nature, vanishing. Or their nature of both arising and vanishing, or else mindfulness that there are mind objects is simply established, to the extent necessary for bear knowledge and mindfulness. And he or she abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how a monk abides contemplating the mind object, his mind objects in terms of the Four Noble Truths. Listen to this, monks, if anyone which means you if anyone should develop these four foundations of mindfulness in such a way for seven years, one of two fruits could be expected for him or her. Either final knowledge here and now final awakening, here and now. Where's hearing now? Or if there is a trailer Have clinging left, non return ownership, one step short of being fully awakened, let alone seven years. If anyone should develop these four foundations of mindfulness in such a way, for six years for five years for four years for three years for two years for one year, one of two fruits could be expected the same ones as before, let alone one year. If anyone should develop these four foundations of mindfulness in such a way for seven months, for six months, so we're getting shorter, right? Imagine your death is getting closer. Maybe that's what it's good. For months for three months for two months for one month for half a month. One of two fruits could be expected. Either final knowledge here and now or if there's any trace of clinging left, non returning. Let alone One month, if anyone should develop these four foundations of mindfulness in such a way for seven days, one of two fruits can be expected. So, it was said with reference to this, that it was said, this is the path. This is the direct path for the purification of beings, for their surmounting of sorrow and limitation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way for the realization of the Barna, namely, the four foundations of mindfulness. That is what the Blessed One said. The Baker's the monks were satisfied and delighted in the Buddha's words So, the Buddha said That, indeed, that he said, the doors of the deathless are already open. The God Brahma said, open the doors of the deathless, as if they're all as if they're closed. And the Buddha's replied to Brahma before he decided to go teach, he said, the doors of the deathless are already open. Which means they're open for you, for all of us, for me. And if they're open, where is that door? It cannot be anywhere else. But right here with you here right now. And if you let go, here and now you'll step through that door. Maybe so.