

2008-01-06 Four Noble Truths

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SPEAKERS

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This is my first talk at IMC for the year. And as is my custom, I'd like the first talk of the year to be a talk on the Four Noble Truths. And in thinking about the Four Noble Truths, I'm reminded that right after the Buddha was awakened, he was asked to teach, and he was somewhat reluctant to teach. But then with the repeated requests, he decided he would teach, and in saying he would teach, he declared or said that the doors of the deathless stand open, or the doors of freedom stand open. And this idea of the doors to freedom stand open is an interesting expression. that it isn't that they were open back then and they've shut since. Or it isn't that they're there. Open in India, and if we just get the India will find his big door and we just could walk through that door you know will be free. And it isn't that the doors are somewhere in the future. It is the doors are open now they're here and now for those who know how to find them to look at them. And what I'd like to suggest is that the doors to freedom can be found in every single event that we encounter that we live in, that we find ourselves in. So in every event that occurs, there's the doors of freedom for those who have the eyes to see those have the ability to get through. And it isn't just a one door. There's actually many doors available. There's many Dharma doors available at any given event, any given situation we find ourselves in. So I use the expression event carefully because I could say, in any given thing, anything we see experience, anything we encounter. But that suggests that it's a thing out there. It's us here. And then there's a world of experiences out there. But he's talking about an event, you could see that kind of dualistic idea that there's a vent out there and me, I have nothing to do with that event. Or we can see ourselves as included and included in the event. And that's what I meant with using the word event. They were part of any event that were part of that. So right now there's the event of a Dharma talk. And I'm the one having to giving it but you're having to free people listening to it. But we all share the event in one way or the other because the event of the Dharma talk, just you know, there's the if you leave here and it starts to rain Then there's the rain, you can say, what's the Dharma door of the rain? As if in the rain, you'll find if you kind of get a microscope, you'll find it. Or you can say, what's the Dharma door of the event of the rain, the event is you included you're in the domain of an umbrella, you don't have an umbrella you have to drive through the wet conditions. So the Dharma door or the Find the Dharma door, you have to include yourself in the event. You're part of it, not to some dualistic way, not that you're separate from it, but you're actually inclusive. And so it's very holistic or very inclusive. Buddhist practice because no matter what, where you're in, what you're at any situation you find yourself in is a way of turning towards that to find the Dharma. And why that's very important is that is that we don't find the Dharma normally by turning away, denying, pushing things away. Sometimes we let go of things or strategic ways that the freedom is spelled By letting go, but never turn our back towards anything, never dismiss anything. This last week, I felt a little bit concerned about how easily some of us use the word just, oh, it's just a thought, Oh, it's just, you know, something? Oh, it's just a feeling, oh, it's just so and so with your skill. And, and, and there might be some wisdom in there. We're just, we don't take things out of proportion that they can be more important than they should be. But it's too easy with the word just to actually be

dismissive. That that's not important. And I think that in Dharma practice, we'd like to think of everything is important. And everything is in some ways, kind of equal importance as a door to the dorm as a door to freedom. Some situation some events are much more difficult to find the door Then others.

But still, it's there. And so the task and Dharma practice practice is to find the door to find where's the door? I can step through? Where's my freedom here, as opposed to running away from the situation? denying the situation. So where is it? So and as I said, I think there are many doors, many Dharma doors. So it's up to you to find that doors for you to kind of tune yourself or perceive or study, investigate situation, any situation you're in to see, where's the, where's the possibility for freedom here? Where's the possibility for Dharma here? Where's the possibility for compassion, for love for peace, for release? Where's the possibility for deeper understanding of the situation? Where is it? So it's require staying present and looking. And so mindfulness practice is a key to this practice to this because one of the things Mindfulness, is it to help help us be present in a way that's helpful, not present in some kind of agitated way, but really present in a calm way. So we can actually study what's happening, we can see what's happening here, what's happening in me what's happening in the world around me, what could what's happening here, so I can find a key, who to be a little bit freer or a lot freer in a situation. This means that in Buddhism, you have a responsibility. And there are, I think, some spiritual traditions, including some Buddhist traditions, where there's a kind of a forfeiture of personal responsibility. It's very comforting to have a religious teaching that says, Oh, just put your hands in the hand of Buddha and, and Buddha will take care of you or something like that. They thought you could trust something else. But in the teachings that the Buddha himself there's a way in which we have to learn, take response. ability. So I like to think of Buddhism as being for adults.

And, and so we're trying to find the inner adult, sometimes not so easily. So there's many things I can talk about is the pointing to as being doors. One of the significant doors that Buddhism talks about is the door of impermanence or the constant change of events or experience what's going on in situations. And certainly there can be a kind of kind of a lightening up sometimes when we realize that things are changing. There. I've been told that there's a Sufi re suka Sufi story of a man who went to a Sufi teacher and said, I have this wonderful ring Can you inscribe something on the ring saying That will help me in my spiritual life. And so there's the Sufi wrote on the ring, this too, will pass. And so certainly when you find yourself in difficult situations to remember or this too will pass can be helpful. But what about when you find yourself in wonderful situation blissful situations, you don't want to be told that this too will pass. I mean, that's kind of like a party pooper. But in fact, bliss will also pass and you're actually better off knowing it, then not knowing it because then you're not going to cling to it in a way that's going to hurt you later. So that's one door. Another door that Buddhism points to is the door of what can be called not self or the impersonal door. We don't take things so personally. So in a conventional colloquial way, not taking things too personally, it's often talked about and it seems that it's can be free. unhelpfully lightened up. You don't take things too personally. And but Buddhism takes it to a kind of a kind of more inclusive degree where we learn not to see anything as being coming to define me. Nothing, nothing is used to define who I am. So who are you then if you can't be defined? Well, that's kind of a challenge. And the trick is that if you don't define yourself, and if the trick is we're not defining yourself, there's a greater opportunity to be free. And so it isn't, it isn't a matter of finding who you are this the quest of Buddhism, but rather to free you from clinging and holding on to all the definitions all the ways we identify, this is who I am. And then what we are can just take care of itself in some way rather than us needing to hold on to something clinging to something. So in any situation we find ourselves in what do we take how we how are we defining ourselves in this situation? How are we identifying in the situation? Are we building up our sense of self? How are we measuring your sense of self? How are we comparing yourself to others in that situation in the situation? How is selfing occurring in the situation we find ourselves in. And it can be very, very subtle. It can be as subtle as it starts to

rain, you know, during the Dharma talk, and then you realize you didn't bring your rain jacket or your umbrella. You know, it's easy enough to do. But then the thought occurs, maybe I should sneak out of the air, so no one sees how stupid I was. You know, because, you know, there's been a lot of rain and we shouldn't have rain jackets. So they're very little little moving might not be a powerful source of thinking, but little thought, Oh, you know how other people see me is important here. And so I don't wanna be seen as someone who forgets to age jackets. So That's a kind of a maybe a trite example. But it's pointing to something that's considered a Dharma door to freedom in Buddhism. In other Dharma door to freedom is a dark what's called the Dharma door of suffering, suffering itself. And there's some there's a way of paying attention to any situation, any event you're in, and asking yourself, where is the suffering in this event? Where's the tension? Where's the where's the stress in this situation, this event? Generally, you find it in yourself. Sometimes you can feel it interpersonally or you feel in some other people, and that's significant as well. But where is the suffering in situation? And maybe it's counterintuitive to think that suffering should be a Dharma door. That suffering should be a important door somehow if you step into or towards suffering, that somehow that's a significant spiritual movement to make Many of us think that suffering you know, we recoil from it, you'd rather not be part of it or we're not really look at it in a responsible, careful way.

So one of the ways that the suffering is, in a sense honored in Buddhism, as a Dharma door is that it is sometimes called noble, noble suffering. And the first of the Four Noble Truths is a noble truth of suffering. And now this isn't to celebrate suffering, in all its different forms just because it's suffering, thing loss, just touch squat and suffer some more than. And what it is, is, there's a way of looking at suffering. That is noble. There's a way of looking at suffering, where we can find freedom or find the Dharma, find, practice, find the path. So we don't shouldn't just sophistic suffering, the whole point of Buddhism. And I should underscore this, the whole point of Buddhism is to really free ourselves from suffering. To have a radical transformation of heart, so that our heart becomes free from all the forces within us that contribute to stress, distress, fear, and suffering. And there's a radical release. So that's really the point. So the suggestion is, there's a way of paying attention to suffering, that can be freeing. Probably most of you here are all too familiar with ways of paying attention to suffering, which produce more suffering. That Fair enough, that you know, not to do, but maybe you don't know so well how to pay attention suffering, to become free of suffering. So the Dharma door suffering. So the Buddha has these four noble truths And he says the first The first of those four noble truths is the truth of suffering. The Noble Truth of suffering, he did not say that life is suffering. It's not as not it's fairly common to find in popular literature. The idea that the Buddha thought that life is suffering. He did not say that. He just stated that there is suffering. And you kind of hard to deny that. Even if you say, I don't suffer, you still have to say there's no suffering, you need to look around a little bit. And it's there. So there isn't there is suffering. And there's some noble possibility. There's a possibility and that suffering, but we have to stop long enough to pay attention to that suffering to study it, to get to know it. And that is one of the great challenges of Buddhism is a challenge to really tune in to the places where When there's stress, tension suffering, what is this? What's going on? Look at it. Then the part of his Dharma Dorf suffering, as we study it, is to begin appreciating to seeing our contribution to that suffering. So not just simply seeing suffering in and of itself, but to see what am I doing to contribute to it specifically to specific especially to your own suffering. So if you find yourself suffering, what is your contribution? The idea being that the path of practice in Buddhism is found when you begin searching, understanding your contribution to it. Again, this is not very popular. You know, it's rather it's much better to blame someone else and assign the responsibility elsewhere. But again, remember I'm talking about this as an adult path. requires some degree of looking at your own contribution is in no way meant to deny that other people are conditions for our suffering, that other people do awful things to each other. And that somehow we have to also contend and deal with those other people that are doing terrible things. At times, you have to respond to them. We can't just Buddhists are not just supposed to sit on their

cushion and deal with their own thing without responding. But the path of Buddhism is found by looking at our own contribution.

And there, perhaps a radical or maybe radical it was radical, but maybe very challenging. teaching of the Buddha is check teaching that our own suffering has its origins in our clinging. So in terms of where our country our contribution is, our responsibility is it lies in our are clean. And so some people get insulted by this idea or really troubled by this idea what I'm suffering and you're telling me that unclean You know, my boss just fired me. Or I just got this terrible health diagnosis, and I'm suffering terribly. And now you're telling me I'm suffering because I'm cleaning. Horrible things happen to people and they suffer. And now you're telling me that it's not the horrible thing. It's, I'm cleaning. It's bad enough that I have this horrible health diagnosis. You know, it looks like I have, you know, a week left to live. And that's bad enough and now you're rubbing salt in the wound by telling me that I'm suffering but it's like clean. Well, we have to be very careful who we tell this to because it could be like, it could be Couldn't be like softening when it could actually be very difficult at certain times to hear this. Someone just lost their spouse has died. And they're suffering terribly tremendous grief. You go up to them, oh, you're just cleaning. There might be a lot of cleaning involved there might be in that kind of situations, but you don't make it worse for people that way. But even so, you have to there's the path and Buddhism involves looking at sooner or later having the ability to look in some deep way, at the way in which our clinging the consequences of our clinging to see of clinging always produces suffering. If you let go of the clinging, the suffering that clinging produced is let go of as well. So this isn't my rewording of the Four Noble Truths is a little more palpable, palpable for people. Gil's first noble truth is if you claim you'll suffer as you go has two noble truths. If you claim you'll suffer, if you let go of that clinging, that suffering will go away. So it's really another way of saying the Four Noble Truths. So the Buddha said this way, he said there is suffering, that suffering arises from our clinging. And third noble truth is if you let go, if you if you're like hidden say, if the if that clinging seizes that sink, clean comes to an end, then the suffering comes to an end as well. So the Dharma door so what where's the suffering, having the ability to stop and be present for it and I would suggest that it's Some situations, it's a it's a long term goal, to have the personal ability to stop and really be present in an economists way for suffering. I'm not saying it's easy, and a lot of the practices of mindfulness of loving kindness, of compassion, of developing concentration and inner strength that Buddhism focuses on, is so that partly so we have the ability to stop and notice our suffering, without reacting to it, without being for or against it, just being present in a full way, you know, with our with our consciousness, our presence, here it is, because we tend to react so quickly to it. We can muddy the water agitate our vision of it, by by our judgments or reactions or our fears and everything. So it's a big endeavor just to do the first noble truth. And then once we have that ability to be still enough, be economists enough with the suffering Then we can be probing and looking, where's the clinging here. And like clinging to comfort, my clinging to security. There's nothing wrong with comfort and security, but clinging to it will surely produce suffering.

And sometimes security's a good goal to have. But sometimes it's overdone. Sometimes comfort is a nice thing to have. The desire for is overdone. Sometimes it's overdone. When, for example, with comfort and sensual pleasure. When people define the success of their life, by the degree of pleasure they have, there's some people who believe that something is fundamentally wrong with their themselves, if their life is not filled with pleasure and delight or success. The for better or worse. The model of a spiritual practitioner in Buddhism is amazing. As someone who has renounced many of the creature comforts many of the sources of security, many of the sources of identity that many of us think is so essential for our lives. What is essential? What do we really need to have? And the big challenge of Buddhism is, do we need to claim to any of it. And so this is where the challenge begins. This is where the arguments begin. And I think it's healthy for practice Buddhist practitioners to be arguing with the Dharma, arguing with these teachings. And just wait a minute. Wait a minute here. What is

cleaning? I understand this cleaning stuff a little bit. But now I'm being told that I'm not supposed to cling to security or to a sense of self, or to, you know, I'm going on and on and on. What's that about? I don't believe that. This is really important. This is this I want to exist unless I have this claim to this. And so I think it's healthy to be in the debate, as long as you're a respectable respecting debate partner, as well as well as you're willing to kind of hear the other side and engage in question mostly in your own mind. So, what is it we cling to? So, sensual pleasure, comfort, security, one of them very powerful when in Buddhism Buddhist teachings is the idea that we cling to a sense of self. So that has to do with ways we define ourselves, identities we have for ourselves, as we protect ourselves, even something as subtle as this wonderful for some people spiritual kind of sense of I am. I am you don't feel to say I am. You know, whatever. Just I am this wonderful sense of I am. I am that I am to the burning bush. The aim in Buddhism is Buddha said, even that sense of I am that contains a little bit of cleaning in it. That's odd. What's that about? So what is it? What does it mean to let go of clinging to self? And how thoroughly are people willing to do it is a challenge. Some people cling not so much to self, but they claim to existence. They want to exist, in the sense of I am this, in some people claim to the opposite. Some people have a very deep clinging, it's kind of invasive, clinging, clinging to, not existing, not wanting to be and that can take, you know, kind of silly forms. For example, a little bit maybe, for example, no one should model themselves on me too much, but so, so, without warning, I'll tell you something about myself. Since I was really young I do not want to wear clothes that has any kind of emblem or sign or paintings or anything on it. Because I don't I don't want to be identified by anything. And so I kind of kind of in the past kind of clung to that kind of spirit kind of clinging, identity kind of non identity clinging. I don't want to exist that way. And so, you know, it wasn't some wise thing. It's like, you know, keep away from me, you know, don't I don't want to be defined by anybody that way. And I've lightened up on that quite a bit. But you don't see me too often. Something like that. So that's an example of you know, you know, clean even if subtle form of non existence and extreme form, suicide would be a cleaning to non existence in Buddhism, and everything, a lot of things in between. So there's a lot of things we cling to and, and the very promising teachings Have the Four Noble Truths is a third noble truth, which says that it's possible to seize to bring to an end the cleaning.

And it's a little bit odd that one of the world's great religions should have one of its highest most lofty goals. The season of clean. That seems like a, you know, doesn't seem like much. I mean, my neighbors down the street, I mean, they have communion with God. They have oneness with the universe. They have, you know, all these wonderful, powerful experiences, infinite bliss. And they asked me what do you have your religion you know, I like clinging It's okay. They say, you know, it's okay. We live in a pluralistic society. It's okay. And, but if you have a sense of how pervasive And profound and deep cleaning is in the heart. It has an intuition of what it's mean to unshackle to release the heart totally, completely. At least my Buddhist point of view, it's really the ultimate thing, ultimate experience, ultimate kind of thing to happen to human being. And Buddhism tends not to talk a lot about what it's like to have that kind of level of release internal experience and having that level of release. But it's probably almost fair enough to call that experience of grace, profound deep grace as a result, but that would be a very Buddhist thing to say so I will say because, but, you know, it's a wonderful thing. So then, the fourth noble truth. So there's four noble truths. The fourth noble truth is the truth of the Eightfold Path of the path. And here are the ideas That it's pretty easy to point to suffering, it's pretty easy to say that suffering comes from clinging. And it's pretty easy to say, well, just like oh, you'll be fine. It's hard to do it. It's the if we're dealing with the deep structures of our psychology, structures of our thought, deep structures of our emotional life, these deep structures of who we think we are. And some of these deep structures are deeply formed by our conditioning as children. So we're dealing with very, very deep conditioning. And from Buddhist point of view, some of these deep structures come with being born. They're just they're kind of structures of the psyche. And so in order to have some chance to really get down and look at these things, and really begin doing the deep work of letting go, there

needs to be a path it needs to be a process to do that. So, the Buddha then has the fourth noble truth is the process by which that's done. And, and so very briefly, the process begins with the first step called the right view, right orientation. And that is to have the orientation that what we're trying to do here is the first three noble truths. So we understand that we're orienting ourselves around using suffering as a door. To us clinging as a door non clinging, and to use the release that we're looking for that in your experience. So say that you find yourself here. You know, it rains, so it's raining, you realize you didn't bring your raincoat? And the thought arises, oh, no. I'm supposed to be mindful. And now all these mindful people are going to see that wasn't so mindful this morning, I left my house, and so shows that I'm a poor mindfulness practitioner. So this feel kind of depressed now where people can think about me and, and I'm kind of, you know, I've been doing this for a long time, and I just failed and I'm kind of bad person. I think maybe I need to do some therapy. But I don't have enough money to go to therapy and I never didn't have enough money and I seem to squander it on video games, and I keep making these bad choices in my life and these bad choices, you know, have to do with how my parents raised me and I really need therapy to deal with this and, and, you know, and so go on and on and on. That's one way to go on. And that's why to go on, just add suffering, the type of suffering the type of suffering. Another way to go on is to look at yourself think, oh, here I am. Notice it's raining. I'm thinking about how I don't have a raincoat and I'm suffering and thinking about what am i suffering about? Oh, suffering is about some clinging to how other people are going to see me. I think most people think clearly was very clear cognizance of the fact that they're concerned how other people see them, interpret them, judge them over a raincoat will probably begin lighting up when I clean. I hope it's not a big deal. It's Oh, there it is, again, that old, an old habit of mine, to measure myself, compare myself to others and be concerned with other people think about me. There it is. This is a relatively minor issue, raincoat issue, I think I can let go. And you maybe you're able to let go and letting go, you feel the relief. You're no longer concerned when people think about and you walk out into the rain, your shirt.

So that's one possibility. So that's, that's a relatively hopefully a minor issue. It gets, you know, much more difficult when it's bigger issues in our life. issues having to do with our relationships or work or, or what the purpose of our life is about. And so it takes a lot of care to investigate present two question to be to be settled enough to do this kind of work. But what it requires is it takes an interest to look at our experience from this vantage point. Where's the suffering? Where's the clinging? Where's the release? It there are other things you can do with the situation. You can you know the with a raincoat situation, you can rather than saying, rather than thinking with a spiritual task is to look for suffering, you might think a spiritual task is to is to realize that I am one with the universe right now. My spiritual task is to fall back into some kind of is to kind of pump up my concentration and get blissed out, and then I won't notice that people are judging me. It won't be an issue. So let's get to it. Let's get the Samadhi going. Let's get the joy going. So those are other tasks people might could take But those those orientations that don't lead to the end of suffering. So the suggestion is that if you were interested in this path, you find a path or beginning to be sensitive to where is the stress, where's the suffering? And where's the clinging, where's the release of it? It's beginning taking responsibility for this. And then the next seven steps, so they prepare has to do with what you do in relationship to having seen suffering. The second, the second of the Eightfold Path, right intention has to do with once you see the suffering, see the cleaning, then you're really kind to yourself about it. You have you evoke, you try to evoke as much kindness and compassion as you can. So your attitude about what you see and how you are in this process is important. Rather than berating yourself or being hard on yourself for because you're clinging and because you're suffering Ask is to kind of engage in this path with as much kindness and compassion as you can evoke, maybe initially, you can't evoke very much, but you try to find that, find it, find for yourself. And that's why we you know, we're going to focus some of this year on loving kindness here at IMC, you might want to come to Charlotte's class. And then with that, that's kind of the backdrop of how you know your attitudes, least attempted attitude, then you try to work on your

behavior. Try to have behavior in your behavior in such a way that helps you be subtle enough to look deeply into the structures of your cleaning structures of your mind. So it helps if you want to be if you want your behavior to help you be settled. You want to look at how you speak. speech is a major for me people major source of agitation one way or the other. And so the Buddha said if you can look a little bit in mind of how you speak, and try to speak in such a way that you speak honestly, and kindly and truthfully, so that you have better chance of being settled, being relaxed, not not saying things and causing things that happen through through speech that agitate you and other people. The next one is you wanted to behave in such a way that your ethics doesn't also agitate you. The idea being if you go around killing, stealing, and lying, and doing sexual misconduct, it's going to be hard to be settled. Because it's really hard to kind of, kind of clean the windows of the mind so you can see what's going on there. If the mind is agitated, you can't see. So what are the reasons for ethics and Buddhism is not some world ism, but rather One of the reasons for ethics is that it's through being being ethical, that you have a fair chance to be calm enough, settled enough, still enough to see deeply into your psyche. And then you want to live have a livelihood that is conducive for this practices at all who I believe it doesn't also also agitate you, livelihood that supports this process of deep looking deep settling deep release. So the first of the Eightfold Path is right orientation right view. The second to the Eightfold Path is right intention. The next is right speech, right ethics, and then right livelihood.

The last three have to do with looking and developing your own mind. So rather than behavior now you're going to look into our mind and it's hard to look into our mind you have to be relatively calm and still to really begin looking deeply. And that's one of the reasons for meditation is to have that calmness and The six the full path has to do with beginning to take some responsibility for what our mind does, rather than letting our mind do whatever it wants. It has to do with beginning to, in an easy ways at first, letting go of activities of our mind, which cause us unhealthy, like or unhealthy for us and start engaging in those activities of mind which are healthy for us. So if you spend a lot of time in your mind, being critically judgmental of others or critical judgmental of yourself, it's not so hard to see that's unhealthy. If you spend a lot of time in your mind tuning into how beautiful people are and being kind and generous to people, that produces a different effect in the minds more healthy. So in shorthand, this sixth step is beginning take some responsibility for what goes on in your mind. Change The direction of your mind little bit to the degree that you can. This seventh and eighth have to do mostly with meditation practice. It's developing mindfulness practice, developing your mindfulness. And then the last one is develop your concentration, developing of the stillness. And then with enough presence, calm mindfulness and concentration, we begin kind of finding the places of release, finding the Dharma doors of freedom, we can let go. any degree of letting go healthy, letting go, feels good. If it doesn't feel good, you probably haven't let go properly. And I had that problem where I thought it was letting go some point. And I found that whenever I'd be kind of grumpy, or kind of just kind of neutral. And then later it came back to bite me. And I realized that I hadn't let go properly One of the principles I have is that if there isn't some sense of joy, or well being and letting go, I probably haven't let go the right thing. I haven't let go portfolio completely enough. So each step along the way, hopefully is satisfying. Each each, each step on the path, each engagement in mindfulness practice in practice of Buddhism, I hope that people find it satisfying. Because I know some people hear about the great path. And the deep structures of the mind we eventually get to address and think it's far off in the distance and get discouraged. And there is a path that is deepening and deepening. But there's something very significant that can be encountered in each moment. Each moment, there's a door to freedom and the door of lightning up each moment. There's a Door to let go of a little bit of cleaning. It doesn't have to be dramatic, to be beneficial. So, here as we begin our new year, I tell you that there you will encounter in the course of this year, an infinite number of Dharma doors. There is a surplus and abundance. There is Dharma doors. They will come your way every day. I hope you find some of them and step through them. Thank you