

# It's Worse Than You Realize, Not As Bad As You Think

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When I recently discussed the ancient Teaching of the Four Noble Truths with Anzan Hoshin roshi, he said they could be summarized as “it is worse than you realize but not as bad as you think.” He explained that the usual person thinks the things that will bring happiness actually cause them to suffer. And since they usually cannot see this process, it is worse than they realize.

When the Buddha presented the Four Noble Truths, he was presenting a basic fact of experiencing that was true for his students then, is true for us today, and will be true for all those who come after us.

The First Noble Truth is the Truth of Suffering; The Second Noble Truth is that this Suffering is caused by grasping or craving; The Third Noble Truth is that this Suffering is unnecessary; and the Fourth Noble Truth lays out the path to ending Suffering.

This, his first Teaching was presented in the Dhamachakka Sutta and is known as the Cattāri ariyasaccāni or Four Noble Truths. The Roshi has pointed out that the term “ariya” or “noble” refers to their dignity as being straightforwardly true.

The Roshi translates the First Noble Truth as conditioned experience is suffering.

More about what the Buddha stated as the First Noble Truth can be found in looking at the word dukkha itself, which is composed of two parts, kha - meaning empty, open or spacious; and “du” which means “bad”. A classic metaphor is of the hole that the axle of a wheel passes through being broken or blocked. So, fundamentally, with dukkha there is a sense that things don't work, things are not working out for us.

The Sutta goes on to explain what suffering is: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; having what you don't want is suffering; being separated from what you want is suffering; not getting what you want is suffering.

The second noble truth, samudaya, means “that which arises with”. So it means dukkha arises together with or through or because of grasping.

The Roshi says that the second noble truth does not cut deep enough, as it does not address the cause of grasping. He explains that the cause of grasping is based on the the sense of separation, of being located away from our experience; from the sense of poverty that arises from it. Grasping arises from the need to overcome this sense of poverty.

So what do we need to do to truly understand these first two truths?

We need to attend to this moment of experiencing. Nothing else just this moment. Why? Because this is where our life is actually taking place.

So how good are you at doing this?

You can examine your own experience to see this.

How many breaths have you actually felt? How often are you feeling your hands? How often are you seeing the colours right in front of you? How often have you been completely present? How often have you felt your feet when they were not just hurting because of uncomfortable shoes? How often are you actually experiencing your life?

You can spend minutes, days and years like this, just rushing about, picking and choosing at those experiences that fit stories and feed feelings; or avoiding those that don't.

You reach a point where the only thing being experienced is the focusing on thoughts and feelings. Everything you notice is because of fabrication. Everything you notice has become conditioned.

The pursuit of those things that you believe makes you happy, has actually made you suffer.

So your situation then is, the Rōshi says, worse than you realize.

Only through attending to experience can you realize, for a start, how little you tend to notice; and even that which you notice is driven by random focusing on thoughts and feelings.

The Buddha saw this too. And though he had realized the inherent stainlessness and joyfulness of unobstructed experiencing he had to speak in terms of what his students were experiencing. So his first Teachings were based on the fact of suffering.

Before you start to practice at Dainen-ji as students of this Lineage, you see some of this; you can recognize that something is wrong, because things don't work, or you see some of the consequences of your actions. There can be a moment of recognition that this is not necessary; but because you are so misinformed about the who you are and what the world is, and because you have not been given the tools to investigate the nature of experiencing, you can quickly fall into yet another cosmology, which only leads to hope and despair.

The Rōshi, continues however and says, it's not as bad as you think.

So what do you need to do? You need to sit and apply specific instructions that work against the usual tendencies that make attending to this moment so difficult for you. You need to sit here. Here. In this room. Now.

Your tendencies are based on patching together your stories and thoughts again and again, and are fortunately not based on the inherent nature of reality. Thus you will begin to see the gaps between your fabrications. You begin to see all around our thoughts and stories is a whole world of experiences. You begin to see that the experiences arise and fall without anyone doing the experiencing, that experiences are without self.

So, you begin to see the next two noble truths. The fact that Suffering is not necessary, and the path to liberation is being mindful of your actual experience. You begin to see that all your experiences rise and fall and none of them can bind you. And that you can be free.

The Fourth Noble Truth is that this freedom can be realized through the Path and the Buddha used to describe the Path as an Eightfold Path.

The Eight Fold Path is:

Samma-dicci, Sama-samcappa, Sama-vacha, Sama-camanta, Sama-ajiva, Sama-vayama, Sama-sati & Sama-samadhi.

The Roshi translates the Eight Fold Path as:

1. Sammadicci, (Pali) "Complete View", or "Shoken" (Japanese).
2. Samasamcappa, "Complete Thought" or "Shoshi".
3. Samavacha, "Complete Speech", or "Shoku".
4. Samacamanta, "Complete Activity", "Shogu".
5. Sama-ajiva, "Complete Livelihood", or "Shomyo".
6. Samavayama, "Complete Effort" or "Shonin"
7. Samasati "Complete Mindfulness" or "Sho-shojin"
8. Samasamadhi, "Complete Practice" or "Shojo"

Of these, the most important is Complete Mindfulness. Only if you are mindful of your posture, of the breath and all the ways in which you are alive, can you learn to be mindful with the rest of your daily activities such as speaking, thinking and walking.

The Roshi goes on to say:

*Complete Mindfulness has nothing left over, pushes nothing forward. It simply works with what is most immediately present because what is most immediately present, what presents itself as this very moment, is all that you need to penetrate the Way, to penetrate into your own freedom.*

*This completeness shows you that body and mind arise right here in the same place and in the same time. Even though you might wander into memory, play out your lost loves, be chased here and there from dark room to dark room within your mind of thoughts and discursiveness, whether you are waiting for that damned bell to ring or hoping that this will never end, you are right here, right now. Practise this because it is the simplest thing in the world, because it is that which gives rise to the world, quite simply. Complete Mindfulness is the application of Complete View and the deepening of Complete View. Please apply the full Dharma to this whole moment. Take a clear look and see what's what.*

So its worse than you realize, but not as bad as you think; because you can do something about it.