

# Four Noble Truths – *Paṭipadā* (2 of 5)

## Entering The Stream

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Today, we will continue the talk on the fourth noble truth. The key word for the fourth noble truth is "*paṭipadā* ." It means something like "a method" or "a practice." I translate it as "practice," so it means "the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering."

There is a long tradition of translating the word "*paṭipadā*" as "way," because the English word "method" can also mean a way of doing something. But the English word "way" can also mean "road", a path that

one goes on. This has led to a very easily understood confusion where "*magga*," used to mean the Eightfold Path, is equated with "*paṭipadā*." Then the fourth noble truth – the truth of the *practice* that leads to the cessation of suffering – is seen as the same as the truth of the *path* leading to it. Since the word *paṭipadā* means "path," it must mean the Eightfold Path.

That teaching does exist in the *suttas*, but as I've said here, it is not the predominant teaching. But there is a strong connection between the Eightfold Path and the awakening that the Four Noble Truths point to. I've been teaching the four noble truths as a two-step process of deep insight, a deep encounter with inconstancy, with how things arise and pass away.

This is not so easy to understand in daily life. Rather, it is really something to discover in a very deep stillness and quiet of the mind, and in the flow of present-moment experience. As I said yesterday, we make space for that. We discover a kind of freedom in that space – in the non-involvement and non-entanglement with the flow, the stream, the river of life, as it flows through us, and as we are part of the flow.

There is a kind of freedom there. To understand and to see that this is the way – the practice for the cessation of suffering. The practice doesn't require us to

understand the cause of suffering, but it does address some of the things that cause suffering – the clinging, the holding, and the craving that are interfering with that flow.

First, the practice is to understand in a deep way that this is the way forward, at least in insight meditation. In order to reach the fulfillment of this, one comes to the full awakening of the Four Noble Truths: the full awakening to the truth of suffering, the full awakening to the arising of suffering, to the cessation of suffering, and to fully knowing this is the way, this is the practice of the cessation of suffering.

The idea of complete liberation, complete letting go, whether it's partial or full, does change a person. This change is sometimes called the Eight Fold Path. So there are two meanings of the Eight Fold Path. The one that is most associated with contemporary interpretations of the Four Noble Truths is that the fourth truth is the Eight Fold Path. It refers to the practices we have to do to build up the momentum to be on the path that leads eventually to liberation.

The stronger idea around the four noble truths in the early *suttas* is that the Eightfold Path is not a path that leads to freedom from suffering, but rather, it's an *expression* of our liberation.

Becoming a stream-enterer, entering the stream of the Dharma, is the first stage of awakening.

In the *sutta* it says, "Defines that the stream one enters is the Eightfold Path." Rather than the Eightfold Path being the way *to* some degree of awakening, with awakening one enters *into* the Eightfold Path – the Eightfold Path that the suttas say originates in oneself. There is no Eightfold Path outside of ourselves. It is found in us, with some degree of letting go, and some degree of liberation and freedom.

Living according to the Eightfold Path is not so much living by taking on all these lists describing the Eightfold Path, where you memorize the lists, and you have to do this here, and this here, and this here. Rather, it is a description. The Eightfold Path is a description of how someone begins to live when they have some degree of freedom and when they've touched something deep inside – their goodness, their wholeness, their lack of clinging and grasping.

The idea that with some degree of liberation, practice begins to unfold the more we allow it to happen, is a big part of the Buddha's teachings. When I was younger, I saw a lot of metaphors that described the spiritual path as climbing a mountain. Climbing a mountain is hard work. To paraphrase or reformulate what the Buddha said, going up the

mountain is only half the way. The ones who are on top of the mountain are going down the mountain.

The metaphor that Buddha uses for the practice that goes down the mountain is that of water flowing down a mountainside. When it rains on the mountainside, the water gathers together into little streams, creeks, and rivulets. The streams become creeks, the creeks become rivers, the rivers become big rivers, and the water keeps flowing all the way down. Eventually, it gets to the ocean. Water will flow downhill unless there's something blocking it. At some point when we get to the top, the practice is to just allow the momentum of the water to flow.

Another example the Buddha used was that of a log, which will flow in the current of the river unless it gets stuck on the shore, or someone on the shore grabs and holds onto the log. But if the log stays in the middle of the current, it'll go all the way out to where the river arrives at the ocean.

The word “stream-enter” (“*sota*” is the Pali word) literally means “current” more than “stream.”

“To enter the stream” might give the impression that you're just wading or floating in the stream. But the suggestion in this ancient text is that you enter the current of the river so it can take you somewhere.

Here we're talking about a phase of practice where allowing becomes the name of the game.

We have to stay present, but we allow our freedom to move through us and unfold into greater and greater freedom.

One way the Buddha talks about this is: “practicing based on seclusion, non-attachment, dispassion, cessation, and letting go.” Once a person has let go in a very deep way, they have a feeling, a sense, and a reference point inside for what this place of freedom is like. The language they use might not be the language people in the modern world would use, but the idea is to allow what is deep, deep inside, a sense of freedom, and to live there. Then our actions are closely related to that freedom, that openness, and that clarity.

If we have an open, clear heart, it's going to be very hard for us to want to be unethical or to intentionally harm other people, because doing that is violence against ourselves. If we are connected to that sense of inner freedom and non-clinging, the attitude or intention by which we live our life – right intention – will be one of kindness and compassion, as opposed to cruelty and ill will. This is the second factor of the Eightfold Path.

If we have a deep connection to our freedom and liberation, we will be careful with how we speak. If we have a deep connection to our liberation, then the awareness that comes from that will be right mindfulness. It is mindfulness that is opening and forward-leading. It allows things to keep flowing and moving. Settledness and concentration will come out of that as well.

Over and over again, the Buddha talks about basing one's practice on the liberation one has attained. This does not have to be a dramatic liberation, but as we practice, there are times we start feeling release and freedom. That freedom and release allow the practice to go deeper and deeper.

In the ancient texts, the insight into inconstancy, the arising and passing of things, is the core insight that the Buddha emphasized over and over and over again. Then, as things flow and move, we begin to release the grip of the hand, the grip of the mind, the clinging. At some point, we feel that release is meaningful enough that it becomes a reference point for us.

Then, as we continue to live in this inconstant, changing, impermanent world, we begin to orient ourselves to not cling again. Or if we do cling, to realize that the place of non-clinging is the place to be. The traces of non-clinging, the memories and feelings we

have of this place of freedom become the reference point for all that we do.

When non-clinging becomes the reference point, the life of someone who is free is described by the Buddha as the Eightfold Path: right view, right intention, right action, right speech, right way of life, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. This is the stream we enter into. This is what lives inside of us, originates in us, and leads to further and deeper liberation.

So there's a very intimate relationship between the four liberating insights into inconstancy and what Buddhism describes as the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path is not a beginner's practice. Rather, it is a description of the life of people who are really maturing in the path of release and freedom.

I will say more about this in the next few days, but hopefully, that's enough for today. Thank you for your involvement, for being here, and for giving me the opportunity to share this.