

# *Satipaṭṭhāna* (66) Knowing the Four Noble Truths

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## **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

suffering, noble truths, knowing, conscious, freedom, understand, effortless, mindfulness, cessation, *dukkha*, welfare, aware, *Samyutta Nikāya*

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I want to share a wonderful passage from the teachings of the Buddha. To paraphrase, the Buddha says, “It is enough. It is enough to do this. This is a good enough, wonderful life. It is enough if you just do this with your life.” Rather than thinking of this as a high standard, this practice is enough. This is a wonderful way. If you just did this, it would be enough.

“Practicing for your own welfare is enough. Practicing for the welfare of others is enough. Practicing for the welfare of both the self and others is enough.” This is a bit of a paraphrase of the text, but hopefully, we are practicing for our welfare and the welfare of others.

This week we looked at the Four Noble Truths. The wording of the Four Noble Truths is, to me, very simple, but very evocative. One way it is evocative is that there are no pronouns in it. It says:

*One understands the noble truth of suffering. One understands the noble truth of the arising of suffering. One understands the noble truth of the cessation of suffering. And one understands the noble truth of the practice leading to the cessation of suffering.*

There are no pronouns there. It is not emphasizing one's own suffering or the suffering of others. I interpret this to mean that as we practice, we are available to recognize suffering wherever it occurs – in ourselves and in the world around us. There can be equal care for our suffering and the suffering of others.

Each of them is enough, it says in the sutta. This is found in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, book 12, sutta 22. Paying attention to the suffering of others, if that is what is salient or prominent, is enough. That is good. Paying attention to our own suffering is good as well.

I think doing both is really the best. If we only pay attention to the suffering of others but not our own, we can easily speak and act in ways that cause more harm to ourselves and others. If we only pay attention to our own suffering, it is too easy for that to reinforce self-

involvement, self-preoccupation, and selfishness. It is too easy then to not pay enough attention to the suffering of others and cause harm because we do not understand people. We do not understand the impact we are having or what is supportive for people.

To be able to care for ourselves and others is a phenomenal thing. Keeping the Four Noble Truths at the center of Buddhist practice is a form of self-protection and protection for others. We start to notice when we are becoming uncomfortable, tense, stressed, or distressed. We stop and pay attention to that knowing. This is worth understanding. This is worth looking at. This is a very different approach than just barreling ahead with the suffering and being preoccupied in a way that reinforces it.

In mindfulness, there is a special awareness we develop: the ability to step back (metaphorically) and know it, be conscious of it. The knowing and consciousness of suffering are, in some ways, more important than the content of what is happening. The knowing of it is where freedom is found. The knowing gives us information about how to do a course correction. If you notice the shoulders are tense, it may be simple to relax the shoulders. But if we notice we are attached to some outcome, letting go may not be so easy. It is not so easy to let go if we are holding on to some pain or attached to suffering.

Slowly we learn to have a different relationship to suffering where it is not driving the show. It is not confusing or preoccupying us in some deep way. We are learning the ability to step back and be conscious. In that consciousness, there is some ease, some freedom. There is the information we need to make possible course corrections. That is how it is protective.

At some point in our meditation practice, we become aware that we are straining. We are trying too hard, or we have an expectation our meditation should be different. We have this idea that “I’m not doing it well.” We can feel some discomfort around those kinds of thoughts. We can feel some *dukkha*, some strain, or stress. If we notice this, then we are on the road to becoming free of it, especially if we have developed this very clear capacity to be consciously aware. Then we can make a course correction and maybe change what we are doing.

We are not so focused on the content of what we know or on the process of what is happening. We are prioritizing being conscious of it. Some people might feel that this is not enough or that it is dangerous. Or we are not taking proper care of ourselves. But as we are relaxed, open, and conscious in this effortless way, then we have access to deeper places of wisdom – deeper knowing. We have time for some deeper process to

unfold and to reference what we say and do against this freedom, spaciousness, and ease of clear knowing.

Instead of trying to understand what The Four Noble Truths mean (which is appropriate and I hope you understood more this week), remember the importance of the word to understand, to know. To know each one. And the knowing grows – the capacity to know present moment awareness, present moment conscious awareness, can grow. It becomes a place of abiding, resting – a place of freedom. We discover in a deep way that the freedom and peace we are looking for in our practice are not found in what we are trying to understand. It is found in our capacity to understand. It is not found in what we are trying to know. It is found in the knowing itself. That is a paradigm shift.

May you appreciate your knowing, your ability to be conscious, to be attentive, and to be aware. May you go through the day periodically tapping into or exploring the value of understanding, knowing, and being conscious in this effortless way. See what you learn. See if you learn when it is difficult, when it is easy, and what benefits come from it. It is even good if you just have little hints of it from here and there.

Monday we will start the last week on the four foundations of mindfulness. Now that we have gone

through all the exercises, there is a foundation for bringing it to a close. Thank you very much.