

Path, Pt 1

Graduated Discourse 9, Dedicated Practitioners' Group

January 17, 2023

Kim Allen

AI Disclaimer: This transcript was produced with the help of artificial intelligence. As such, it might contain inaccuracies, absurdities, or even inappropriate language.

We have been going through the Four Noble Truths over the last several sessions as part of this larger expansion on the Buddha's graduated discourse. This is the part at the end that's the teaching special to the Buddha's teachings concerning the Four Noble Truths. We've mentioned that some teachers like to emphasize the tasks that are associated with each truth so that they become practices or actions that we're doing. And other teachers, I kind of like this talk more in terms of insights that you have. It's not that you, these are like truths with a capital T, but that they're things that we come to understand about how Dukka or suffering or unsatisfactoriness works for us. And I think we understand them more and more deeply. You know, it's not like we're learning a truth like we learned the two plus two is fours. That's true. And then we know it. It's that we discover more and more deeply what each of these truths or insights refers to. The fourth one is about the path to the cessation of suffering. There's a process to letting go of clinging. You know, we start out with the truth of Dukka. Yes, there is the, we have problems as humans and many of them are caused by the clinging in our own minds or the way we're seeing things. And then we get the good news that this doesn't have to be the case, but there's still the question of how we might bring that about. How we might make that transformation. So there are many paths, actually. It's not that you can exactly define step one, step two, step three, we might want that at some level, or maybe we don't. Maybe we don't. But anyway, there are many paths described in the sutta. And, but all of them do share some basic similarities, which kind of a process that you go through. So, we probably know that the most commonly, most common framing for the path is the eightfold path. But that's that itself is divided into the trainings of Sela, Samadhi and Panya, much of which are the structure actually of this graduated discourse, right. So we start with ethical conduct and generosity at the beginning, you know, purifying the heart and mind and then we move through various things that we develop. And then on to the understanding the Four Noble Truths as a form of Panya wisdom. In a sense, we've done that one through, through the whole graduated discourse that we've been talking about. So I don't want to take it from that angle. So I'll do another one tonight. Another angle on articulating the path. And that is

that we can talk about the path of development and the path of letting go. And we'll talk about the first one today. And then I get to stretch it out to one more next time. So who thought we were ending tonight. Nope. So, from Tanjaf's essay, Life Isn't Just Suffering. We can't simply tell the mind not to cling. It's like a disobedient child. If you force it to let go while you're looking, it'll search for a blind spot where you can't see it and we'll start clinging there. In fact, the mind's major blind spot ignorance is the prime cause that gives rise to clinging's proximate cause, which is craving. So as the fourth noble truth, the Buddha recommends a path of practice to eliminate the blind spot. The path has eight factors. We may know them, right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. But in a more abbreviated form, the Buddha's term for the practice is abandoning and developing. Abandoning activities that hinder awareness and developing qualities that expand its clarity and range. So awareness is the antidote to blind spot, right to ignorance. We have a vija ignorance and vija knowledge or we're going to call it awareness this time. So, abandoning activities that hinder awareness and developing qualities that expand the clarity and range of awareness. So we'll talk about that second one tonight. You know what are these qualities and how do we connect with them. And then we'll talk about these qualities that expand the clarity and range of awareness. So I want to start actually with a helpful image. So when we think about the term developing or cultivating, which is by the way the task associated with the four noble truths with the fourth truth, right. So I'm going to be kind of somehow subtly of acquisition, like, I'm gaining something or I'm going to be the same entity but more developed something like that. It's about me getting something or acquiring something. I read an article today about the atmospheric river storms that are happening in California right now. It said it was talking about how these kinds of storms are demanding that we develop more sophisticated meteorological models to understand how weather arises and moves and changes. And one of the people in the article, a meteorologist I think was quoted as saying a few decades ago, this isn't a literal quote I'm terrified phrasing, but a few decades ago. If you were to ask these models, what an acorn would look like later, they would essentially say a bigger acorn. And then he said but now we have models that are better they're closer to predicting that we will get an oak tree from an acorn. You know, you can imagine the development of weather systems, you need sophisticated models to understand what they're going to develop into. And the helpful image for the Dharma also is this idea of a seed growing. So, you know, an acorn doesn't much look like an oak tree does it they're very different entities and yet there is a continuous path from one to the other. So, you know, often we start our spiritual path or at least our dedicated spiritual path as adults. And we may not may not be so obvious for us to think in terms of a seed growing into something quite different because in terms of our body, you know you get to adulthood and you're kind of done with the development phase of getting getting getting to adulthood which is a dramatic set of changes over a couple of

decades right, and then you're an adult for a long time and then there's you know all the changes that come with that but it's a you know in our minds we kind of have this subtle sense of okay I'm done I got there. But this is not the case at all spiritually is that you know that especially if we didn't really start a dedicated path until adulthood, we really are like the acorn, in terms of our heart sometimes. And there can be this potential for oak tree something really different, even as we're living our adult life in the world. So I want to talk about a bunch of different ways that we could say what it is that gets developed. And what I'm hoping is that it won't just sound like a whole bunch of different lists because that's not the point. It's more like we're building a picture, because there isn't just one path as I said and there isn't just you know, here's the three things that you need. And if you look at a bunch of these different lists of you know kind of what are the things that we need to have come about. There start to be similarities we see that it's not arbitrary there are 100 things that you need to do, but neither is there just one. So we're going to kind of fill out an ecology, let's say, of kind of mental development. You'll see, as we go along. So just technically we could say there are what are called the 37 AIDs to awakening. So maybe there are 37 things but I'm not even going to name all of those tonight for some of them are pretty similar. So the first one is not even a canonical set. But I like it. I heard it from Ken McLeod, who was a Western teacher in the Tibetan tradition I have and I found it really useful. And that is willingness capacity and know how about that for a list. So willingness is very similar to this quality that I like to call faith or confidence, sata in the poly. But you know it comes, it's a very basic form of those. Are you willing. We can't change very much if we're not willing. But it's also useful to see that there are many different layers of our heart and our being as we start looking into this willingness will discover things like there are some things that we resist at a conscious level, but in our heart, we really want that. We really do want that. But there are also things that we claim to be ready and willing for, we can say it with words, but our heart is not so willing. We have these different layers in our consciousness in our heart. And it's good to be aware of those. In the end, it's the deeper heart wish that matters. So even the stuff that you that you're resisting on the surface if your heart wants that transformation. It's going to keep knocking on the door. And then there's the ones where we say we're ready and willing we show up. Yes. Okay, but we're not ready yet in the heart. Those ones aren't going to happen. So, and then there's capacity capacity has to do with how strong your awareness is. So we're talking generally about, you know, what is it that fosters awareness. And then there's the timing. So the question is for awareness, can it persist in the face of strong experiences. Initially, though, that would be strong experiences that are often negative, you know, can we handle pain without freaking out, can we handle anxiety. Can we handle someone being angry at us without losing it, losing our cool. And that's a lot of what we develop at first that steadiness that yes I can be present for this difficult experience. And it also includes, do we have the capacity to be with strong pleasure, strong joy. And then there's the amazing, beautiful

mystical experiences without falling into those grasping that making them into our ego. That starts coming on the path is that we have strong, beautiful experiences. Can we also just be with those, not like, you know, oh dismissive is just an experience not important. No, no, no, you can take it in it's nourishing it's more subtle than that. And then there's the capacity to be with that understand it, not identify with it. That matters a lot. And a lot of practices cultivating that strength. So even when you when you sit on the cushion for 45 minutes and you think all I did was just pull my mind back from being distracted every two minutes. It still mattered because you were developing capacity to be with that. It builds over time like drops in a bucket. So know how is the skill to meditate or practice well. We do need to get instructions. Most of us. Right. Sometimes more sometimes less in different areas, but we do probably need a teacher on the path. And then we also need to practice the skills that they teach us. That's also part of the know how so some of the know how is experiential. You know, we learn how our mind body system works we figured out for ourselves after we've gotten the instructions. And some, some of it comes from experts or guides and people who have walked this part of the path before we can gain some things from them. Maybe the guide is a book or a scripture, something that we've read. But often there needs to be a live person also. So willingness, capacity and know how. I think are really interesting set to any way might check, you know, which is the stronger, which are the stronger ones for me which are the weaker ones. What feels most important in a given case that we're working on. Do I need more of this one or that one. Anyway, all right, so now on to the more canonical things, the things that are named more in the Buddhist teachings. We will need to have some willingness capacity and know how we will need to cultivate mindfulness, concentration and discernment. Those are kind of the three that are often named in this strand of Buddhism this strand I teach mostly from the early Buddhist perspective, sometimes venturing into the terrifata. So mindfulness, concentration and discernment, these are kind of the ones that stand out overall as necessities on the path. And it's worth noting that just among those they cover for the eight steps of the path, right, we have mindfulness and concentration are themselves steps of the path and the wisdom steps are wise view and wise intention at the beginning so right there. So half the path is covered by mindfulness, concentration and discernment. So we will need to learn this skill of directing our attention in a wise way, gathering your mind concentration. We will just need one pointed focus it's just a general ability to gather the mind. Bring it to a point, bring it to a theme, not to be distracted continually. And then discernment, all of these skills are not that helpful if we can't apply them in wise way, or, you know, point them in some direction down the path, we need that view that intention that wisdom to make the path effective. And then another list that's often pointed to is the five spiritual faculties. So these are her faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom look at that I just named three of them mindfulness, concentration and discernment or wisdom. And then we just added on a couple more to complete another list and they're set. You know

why, why this set, why did the Buddha pick these out. Well, you know I don't know all the reasons but in the texts, the way these five are used is that they're named as the factors that differentiate how people who are at different stages of the path, essentially. So, and each of them develops it's not like we just have, you know, we got a certain amount of each one and that's it that determines how far we can go it's not like that they develop right that's what we're talking about. But still, there are a lot of suit as particularly in the injury of Samuta, the chapter in the Samuta Nikaia about the faculties, where he says, you know, what is it that differentiates beings who are stream enters versus fully awakened people or people who are good at concentration versus people who are good at wisdom or faith fall more faith types. And he often says the differences in their faculties. Their minds have different capacities, faculties being what we bring to bear, how we, how we approach problems, how we're learning things. So often what the faculties are about. Yeah. So developing these five will need to really have strength in all five of them in order to propel the mind all the way to full awaken. So these are another set that we look at and we can see which ones are stronger which ones might need to be cultivated. And by the way have been named so far I know I said the last three I had just named but also faith remember I said was the same as willingness similar to willingness. So everything's been named except energy in this set, but energy we might place as part of capacity. Maybe how much energy we can bring so I feel like we're on the right track with everything that's been named so far it's starting to build a picture right kind of a more unified set. So these canonical lists, pick up themes in nice ways. Okay, so then, I think the last set that I want to name kind of officially is the seven factors of awakening. Those are the ones that are brought to bear as the path starts getting close to fruition. And then there's any fruition, you know, like any of the stages of the path and also these faculty's seven factors of awakening gets strong when we're getting close to letting go of anything, even, even if it's not going to be like an insight that's a stage of awakening, letting go of certain unwholesome mind habits that are strong, like you know if we have a big release of something, the seven factors of awakening will be there before that also we may not see them all, but they will be there. And then you'll recognize some of the things on the list because they're overlapping mindfulness, investigation, energy, joy, tranquility, concentration and equanimity. Are we seeing a pattern and these are similar to what's been named before with a very important addition, one of which is joy. We do need to have some kind of wholesome happiness in our life in order to awaken. You know it's not all about discernment and emptiness and concentration and sitting a lot and being really mindful. It's the joy and all that there has to be joy and happiness, you know, in a wholesome way, you know we're not talking about Netflix kinds of things, not that Netflix isn't joyful, but the Buddha was pointing toward well being, you know really deep inner, inner well being that came about comes about from practice and we can feel we have well being like that. Sometimes it comes on the cushion, sometimes off of it, but often will feel at first on the

cushion in a strong way, and we can feel in that experience of joy or PT that there's, there's it has nothing to do with sensual joy. And then we realize, oh, you know, I like my down comforter in the winter and I like, you know, whatever's in my fridge and those things and the beautiful view, but this that I'm experiencing now this isn't like a different, it's of a different order than that. Still conditioned of course it's not. But nonetheless we feel that it's just coming from a different place. So, you can remember you might remember the story of the Buddha where he was striving and striving and striving for a long time and he was applying a lot of wrong effort and doing the ascetic practices and bearing down and all these things and starving himself. There was some, you know, unwholesome effort there. But nonetheless what what changed his mind was, first of all, they realized this is not getting anywhere. But then he remembered this experience, right as a child of having a kind of a deep joy experience, while resting under a tree, watching his father do a ceremony. And he felt that well being and he suddenly remembered that experience of well being came up in his mind his heart. And he thought, huh, maybe that's important. Maybe that's part of the path. Is that the path. Yes, that's it. And so then he realized that he should call to be the deep concentration states of John. And you know we may or may not be at that point on our path but we can always turn toward this wholesome joy and remember that it's nourishing. And it's meant to be that way it's meant to soften and integrate and warm up our system so that we can free it. The seven factors of awakening emerge together as a set. I mean we can cultivate each one individually and we can balance them somewhere about energizing somewhere about calling etc but eventually they emerge as a set and we have a mind that is both energized and calm, and very aware, all at the same time. So this is a very well balanced mind essentially. So I want to read. I want to read about these but it also links in with some of these others lists. This is from the same to in Kaia. Satyapata on a same to whatever our haunts perfectly enlightened ones arose in the past, all those blessed ones had first abandoned the five hindrances, corruptions of the mind and weakeners of wisdom. And then, with their minds well established in the four foundations of mindfulness, they had developed correctly, the seven factors of enlightenment, and thereby they had awakened to unsurpassed perfectly enlightenment. So that's a lot of convoluted language and similarly for our haunts in the future, and in the past in the future, any our haunts and any Buddha has awakened by abandoning the five hindrances, cultivating the four foundations of mindfulness and purifying and establishing the seven factors of awakening. So that's kind of a set of my set of three things that we would do. So what is this awakening to unsurpassed perfect enlightenment. It's happening in this quote. It's actually a letting go. It's actually a letting go so we do all of this development and cultivation to poise the mind in a position where it has a chance to let go deeply. And then the actual letting go is not up to us that is a that comes about naturally, let's say. So next time we will talk about more about this path of letting go. There's a broad range of what we let go of and how we let go. Some of them obvious and some of them more

subtle. But either way, I thought it deserved its own, its own session to really talk about the aspect of letting go, but the aspect of cultivation and letting go there just the two sides of the hand. So I wanted to, yeah, I wanted to start with the development part to talk about what we're bringing in in order to enable the mind to do these deeper letting letting go and letting go happens all along the path of course it's not going to wait for the end for the big bang. It'll happen naturally along the way. Yeah, so. So, great. Do you have any questions about this or thoughts or things that came up in your meditation or anything else. Yes, Steve Ross your hand is up. Yeah. It's the deeper heart wish that matters you said. Very, it's my it's my cutting edge right now in my practice to figure out how to develop how to bring more heart into the practice because it's been. I'm just looking for the apart from the actual Brahma Vihara's themselves. How do we just moisten everything with the heart. And that's something. What is our own was saying to me a term of treasure that I was asking where is this I want that I don't know how to get it. And I don't see it in the, I don't, people don't talk about it. And yet you talk people talk about heart mind, like it's one thing. And you talked about it like it's not quite one thing. There's something different about the heart. I don't know more about this. I need to know more about this. What a beautiful question so you have your hand on your on your heart as you're asking that. What do you feel there. Well I know I do understand. I know I fall into that very very easily and but but he saw Sarah said, he said, he feel each breath with care is a carers what's behind the whole practice feel each breath with with care. And my girlfriend who's a Sufi is real big on the heart. And it's like, okay, how do I do this, because I know it's important. So yeah, I can feel that I can feel that. But how do I bring that into breast meditation I've been trying. I've been trying to breeze with heart. I've been trying to breeze with love to that's beautiful. I'm trying to do that but to eat but I don't see this. Jeannie taught me that the Buddha didn't say that where do I find this stuff. Yeah, so the cheetah is the heart. Have you heard that word the cheetah sometimes translated as heart mind, but it's, you know, the implication there's so many several words for mind or heart of course in Buddhism. And the one the cheetah is the one that is most directly related to our emotional or feeling or faith based heart. And you might be happy to know that it's also apparently the part that gets liberated in our, in our system. And the aspect that's more like mine, you know we like, like I said they're not totally separate but is the monest, the thinking mind, the linguistic mind. And what is the cheetah where the love and awakening will happen also also where the suffering happens. And one way to connect with that is, I loved that that you mentioned the word care that this monk said in that, you know, we think about the formal Brahma v. Haras as, you know, for those who don't know the word the four heart qualities. And those are practices we can do phrases we can say mindsets we can have. But what stands behind all of them is something that the Buddha never said we had to particularly cultivate, which is this quality of care. And it can manifest as any of the Ramavihara's or as our love of practice or faith, anything like that. And it's a quality that we can touch into by breathing through the heart

area and literally connecting into the heart. And sometimes imagining the, imagine the breath coming in and out of the front of the chest, or you know you can just imagine the passing through the heart area, but literally placing your attention there will start to wake up the qualities that are there. Of course it's not your physical heart but the mind and the heart are generally understood to be in the chest, and even the mind actually. So I would encourage just placing your attention there more often and allowing the breath energy to be there with the simple understanding that the care that's felt there is the closest thing you can get to innate in early Buddhism is that the Buddha didn't seem to think that we needed to generate a sense of connection care. We always feel it, but we seem to understand that we have this capacity for that comes with having a cheetah. And so, it might be good to do like five to 10 minutes at the beginning of a sip, don't do mindfulness right away. Focus instead on breathing into the heart and feeling that sense of like goodness in yourself, the care that you feel for this being for your practice and anything that's inspiring, then start your practice and breathe with care. Yeah. In the early teachings this is somewhat, I would say just kind of woven through the teachings it's not so much something that's named and listed. The Buddha would was just tapping into that with his own being as he spoke with people. Is this helping. You were muted but I think you said yes. Yeah, okay. But you know Steve I perceive you as someone who has a lot of heart and who approaches from a fairly heart based direction so it might be just that there's a new layer of this opening up for you. I don't think it's after that. I feel it off the cushion all the time. On the cushions where I have the problem. I see. Okay, well then just bring in try bringing in that that part at the beginning of meditation. Yeah, thank you so much. Yeah. Yeah. Other thoughts Heidi yeah. I really was struck by the triad of willingness capacity and know how, especially know how, because that's a term that doesn't mean theoretical knowledge. It's, it's how to do something. That's right. So, it's skill knowledge. Yeah, exactly. And it's, yeah, it's about actions to take, not just to be theoretical. So I, I somehow especially related to that. Yeah. Yeah, it's pragmatic it's. Yeah. And, you know, we I think we're intended to feel that not only in our daily life where we are sort of doing things. But on the cushion having a sense of that with our mind and heart and body energies, you know, it's like wow, you sit down and it's been a busy day and the mind is going it's like okay what do I do with this, you know how do I. Do I do this in some way or depressed or we surprised or I don't know, incredibly happy something but just like wow what do I do with this system kind of like the way an artist would be able to work with the conditions of a certain medium, you know, arrive and it's a moist day and paint canvases curling in the, in the humidity. No problem I know how to paint on that and still make it look good, you know, things like that. Body and mind or medium for art. Yeah. I find myself totally confused. The, you know, the new terminology and the, the use of prime numbers to list to make lists. I find. It seems like the context in which this was developed is a different context and my mind developed. Can you say more about that. How is it for your mind. I

have this, you know, I appreciate your talk and everything but it seems like it just bounces off the way my mind is organized. Okay. And can you say any more about how your mind is organized. Can you put some words on that. Well, or not organized or however and you know whatever impression there is I'm curious how you would describe it. Well, it. Well, that is a difficult thing but for instance, when the other Steve was talking about his feelings in his heart and caring and all this stuff. It, it just seems like an abstract concept to me. Okay. So I guess I'm a very concrete person. Well, I think we talked about this a little bit last time but I'm going to I want to follow up again and ask, what is your inspiration in practice. Why what draws you to meditate. In experience. I think it's a very large. What started it. And somehow it felt natural to you or. Well, I had worked for you in some way. Well, it was pretty magnificent actually I just finished reading a chapter and the comparative anatomy of kidney development. And then when I put the book down and I had this. I don't know how long it lasted but this incredible feeling that it was all connected. This very blissful, expansive oceanic. However you want to put it. And there was the thought that everything is as it should be. And I was flabbergasted and it took me a few years to sort of, you know, come upon, say, Satori or whatever you want to call it sort of that sort of thing. Yeah. Which I don't know if it was or not, but it's a great feeling and, you know, I've sort of been pursuing it. So you had, you know, kind of a very genuine powerful spiritual experience early in your practice even before you really had a practice. This is not so uncommon actually many people touch into this because it's a capacity of the human heart to find a dimension like this. And then of course that ignites an interest like who else knows about this where is this talked about where can I find this. Can I learn more about it. The heart has feelings like that it's just natural. So I'm curious in your, you know, in your long exploration of all of this. This is resonated for you. You named Satori which comes from the Zen tradition. Have you tried that kind of practice. Sort of where I gravitated. Yeah. Yeah, because the sudden awakenings awakening experience is more in the front, let's say, and more forward in the Zen tradition. And we have this more developmental model. Yeah. So, there's a year. Anything I can learn that might help. I'm looking for. Well, let me ask, are you looking to repeat that experience. Yeah, I realize it's that's self defeating, but yeah. You do be living that space. Yeah, much longer. Yeah, so what you need to somehow is to find, find your gates. And then there are things that help you access some of those same qualities. You know, I don't know that you'll get all of them together at once. That's an active grace. It's not up to us. But you, I think, and I'm not going to make you name them, but you can, you know that there were certain you input words on it a sense of rightness, everything's in its place or everything is okay. And that's something like contentment of Kness. There are feelings of connection of no boundaries of oneness, these kinds of things. So, finding resonances with those feelings in you in the external world often in the natural world, we can find that. And then also maybe in people, you know, are there people to that you can find to be around to evoke some of those

feelings. Those are places to start, because you're talking about a level, you know, bounces off as you said because you're talking about a level of your being that isn't really linguistic, it doesn't have language or lists or prime numbers in it. And yet, this experience isn't integrated through all of your being yet. And that will need to, that that's what it's trying to do is integrate. That makes some sense. Intuitively. Well, it's a pretty slow integration, I guess. Yeah, it's, you know, there's a there's a path named in the Koreans and tradition that's called sudden awakening gradual cultivation. And that's the order of it. But really awakening isn't complete unless it's more integrated. I'm using that term, but you know, we wouldn't say that it's complete unless there is some ongoing connection to it in some way, or some some kind of understanding it's a process, you know, I'm not going to try to define all of that but Yeah. Yeah. Something in you is moving. There's a result. It has its own language. I don't know if it's the language of nature, the language of feeling the language of color, the language of dance, you know, Steve's partner does Sufi dancing, maybe there are many ways to get at this level of your being and start to bring it into something that your body and your mind can integrate. And I think it's important to keep at that. Doesn't matter how fast or slow it's been. You don't have a lot of time to keep working on it so go for it. I'm aware of it. Okay. Thank you. Yeah. Okay, it looks like we're at the top of the hour so we will wind up here. I'm going to go ahead and get off the bus.