

REC005

Today's lecture will be entitled,

Part One: The Cause and Cure of Mental Dissatisfaction*

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This is Part One of two successive talks: (REC005 Part I and REC005 Part II)

Concerning the Four Noble Truths

If what the Buddha says about
impermanence, suffering and
non-self/ in *The Three Signata*/
(otherwise known as the
three characteristics of existence)

is true, then, it follows/ that any idea/
a mind may have/ of itself/
as an independent/ and abiding 'self' is delusory/ -
and based on *avijja*/ - which is translated as "ignorance."

Common, man (due to *avijja*)
ignorantly assumes/
and believes that/

all the events
which he is seeing
and experiencing phenomenally

correspond to fixed concrete
realities in an external world,
which is actually
the wrong way/ of seeing things.

In other words,
Wrong View of the world.

To reiterate,
common man's view
of seeing things in the world/ is wrong

**because/ he falsely believes/ that the series/
of fleeting perceptions of phenomena
which he experiences/ have a fixed
and abiding substance and 'existence,'**

which is actually the **total opposite**

to the real nature of things
— in right view of the world —
in which all phenomena are impermanent
and cannot be grasped and clung to due
to the law of constant flux and change.

Simply stated, the world,
(as most
men conventionally view it),
in actuality,
has no continuing-reality,
no substance and no self.

For most normal mortals/ in this world/
this may be/ a bit too subtle/ to grasp/, at first.

*

The basic core/ of the Buddha's teaching
is found in the doctrine/ of the Four Noble Truths
which he proclaimed/ to his disciples
shortly after his enlightenment.

Referring to/ his own/
former ignorance/?
of the true nature of things,

the Buddha says:

“Bhikkhus, it is through not realizing,
through not penetrating the Four Noble Truths
that this long course of birth and death
has been passed through/ and undergone/
by me/ as well as by you/.

What are these four?

“They are

1. The Noble Truth of Dukkha.
2. The Noble Truth of the Origin of Dukkha
3. The Noble truth of the Cessation of Dukkha
4. The Noble Eight-fold Path.

“But, now/, Bhikkhus,
that these have been realized
and penetrated and cut off at
the point of craving for existence/
destroyed is that/
which leads to renewed-becoming
and there is no renewed becoming.”

Ironically/, it is/ indeed/ a fact, that,
for many Buddhists/ in today's world,
The Four Noble Truths have become
just a short list/ or formula of ritual truths/
only to be generally memorized/
but, which is/, unfortunately/, all too
often/ only very superficially-understood.

This is/ in no way surprising/, however,
For/ **within these teachings/,
lie hidden/ the most deep/ and penetrating truths,
(which are said/ to be accessible/ to only a few).**

The reason why/ we don't understand/ easily/ and clearly/
is explained in the *Avijja Sutta* (DN 16)
on the nature
of not seeing (or not being able to know),
which is broadly translated as 'ignorance' (*avijja*)

The Buddha said:

“Monks, ignorance is the leader
in the attainment of unskillful
qualities/ followed by/ lack of
conscience/ and lack of concern.” (S.N.45)

In an unknowledgeable/, ignorant person/,
ignorance in wrong view arises.

In one of wrong view,
wrong resolve (or intention) arises.

In one of wrong resolve,
wrong speech arises.

In one of wrong speech,
wrong action arises.

In one of wrong actions, wrong livelihood arises.

“Consequently/, **'knowing/' is the leader
in the attainment/ of skilful qualities,
followed by/ conscience/ and concern.**

In a knowledgeable person
immersed in clear-knowing,
right view arises.

In one of right view, right resolve arises.

In one of right resolve, right speech arises ...
In one of right speech, right action arises ...
In one of right action, right livelihood arises ...
In one of right livelihood, right mindfulness arises ...
In one of right mindfulness, right concentration arises ...”

In other words, if mind always precedes action,
wrong-mindedness leads to wrong and harmful action,
whereas right-mindfulness leads to right and beneficial action.

*

We often forget to mention/
that **even the Buddha himself /**
made many mistakes/ in his efforts/
before he/ ultimately/ achieved his final goal.

In the course of trying everything
which might lead him/ to the ultimate truth/
he even perpetrated/
physical harm on himself/
through practicing extreme austerities.

*

When the Buddha begins
by mentioning his own mistakes,
he thereby implies that **others**

(and this means you and me too)

may have also/ been making mistakes/ in their
approach/ to achievement/ on the path of purity.

When we think about this/, we realize
That/, although we might/, certainly/, admit
we have made/ our own/ inherent mistakes,
this is not unusual/ and nothing to be ashamed of.

Making such mistakes is/, in fact normal/,
in the process/ of the search for truth,
and there is no reason/
for feeling guilt or anxiety.

What we learn from this/
is to avoid making
the same mistakes
over and over again.

*

After failing/ in attempt-after-attempt/
each time/, **through insight**/,
we simply say,

“Oh! That is not the right way.”
and we abandon it/, and
continue to strive on/ with
diligence and perseverance/
in search of/ the ultimate truth.

Francis Story, in his oft-reprinted book
on *The Four Noble Truths*,
(BPS Wheel Series 34-35),
goes into close analytical and
significant detail in describing
The Four Noble Truths,

relating how the Buddha,
says in his own words:

“At last, after those arduous,
agonizing and fruitless austerities
[the Buddha]... was able to say:

‘I discovered the profound truth/
so difficult to perceive/
difficult to comprehend/
tranquilizing and sublime/
which is not to be grasped/
by mere reasoning/and/
is visible only to the wise.’”

And further,

“**So long**/, O Bhikkhus/,
as the absolutely/ true knowledge,
as regards / those Four Noble Truths/,
was not quite clear in me,

so long/, I was not sure/ whether/
I had attained/ that supreme Enlightenment/
which is unsurpassed/ in all the world,

but as soon as/ the absolutely true knowledge/
and insight/ as regards/ these Four Noble Truths
had become/ perfectly clear to me/,
there arose in me/ the assurance that/
I had attained/ that supreme/, unsurpassed/ enlightenment.”

**So the path/ to enlightenment/ starts/ with the Four Noble Truths
which we will proceed to explain following a book of that name**
written by Francis Story and published by the BPS in Sri Lanka

Francis Story, as some may know,
was an intellectual and Buddhist scholar,
born in London, England, in 1910,
who became a declared Buddhist
at the age of only 16/, after studying/
a course in comparative religion.

He later qualified/ in medicine/
and served
in the Army Medical Corps/ in 2WW/,
after which/ he lived in India/ as a volunteer-
worker for the Maha Bodhi Society,
of which he was a life-member.

He lived in Asia/, as an Anagarika/,
—or homeless one, for 25 years—
following the initial stay in India/
—and later, in Rangoon/ in Burma,
And/, finally/, then, after 1957/, in Sri Lanka.

He was a well known lecturer and author
who was close to Venerable Nyanaponika
and the Buddhist Publication Society,
in Kandy, in its nascent stage,
from 1958
onwards, in later years.

Since his book/, on the *Four Noble Truths*/,
is considered to be/ by many/,
long-time, adherents
as the definitive text
in English,
we shall/ now/ follow his
tight guidelines
in the way he has
broken-down and structured the explanation for us:

And what are these Four Noble truths?

Concerning the First Noble Truth

Francis Story stresses/ the fact of suffering/
by quoting/ the following words/,
which run like a recurring theme/
throughout the Buddhist scriptures:

“What, Bhikkhus/, is the noble truth of suffering?
Decay is suffering. Death is suffering.
Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering,

To be separated from the pleasant is suffering.
To be in contact with the unpleasant is suffering.
In short, the Five Aggregates* of Existence
connected with attachment is suffering.”

[* The five aggregates are
material form,
feelings,
perceptions,
mental formations and attachment
and the wanderings of human consciousness in the mind.]

If we break the Buddha’s statement down/ into its parts/,
following/ condensing/ and summarizing/ the author’s main points,

“Suffering’ seems to be such a simple, all-inclusive
word. Everybody suffers, but what does that mean?

The Buddha explained there were three kinds of suffering:

- (i) first, physical bodily pain;
- (ii) second, mental pain related to uncontrolled consciousness, and
- (iii) third, existential pain related to the impermanence, the transience, of
all compounded things, including self and the universe.

The first and third types of pain
mentioned will be familiar/
to most of us who/
have experienced suffering/
in its various manifestations.

In plain words, (i) we don’t want/
physical pain to continue/,
and (ii) we don’t want/
transient existence to stop.

The second/, mental-pain/, is
perhaps the hardest to understand
and the most hidden/ and subtle.

*

The author explains
that
in the suffering of the aggregates
“lies a state of dis-ease/, unrest/
and instability/

of which we are/
normally unaware/
but which/
is present all the time/.”

He says it is mental pain
related to
uncontrolled consciousness/
that calls for/ special understanding.

In this analytical section/ of this paper/,
we are sticking strictly to the explications
of Francis Story on the Four Noble Truths,
first, because they are close-knit, yet expansive
and; second, because they have stood the test of time.

The so-called aggregates
are the groups (*khandhas*)
which consist of the components

which constitute/ a living sentient being/,
including/ physical body form/,

[and] sensations
“derived from
the six sensory organs
of the eye, ear, nose, tongue,
tactile organs and mind perceptions
arising from these organs in contact
with their object;
[plus]
mental properties,
including
intellection/, imagination/, memory/ and volition/
[which means what we want/wish for or will or desire]...”

and finally,
the sum-content/ of consciousness/ at any given moment.

This content of consciousness/ is dangerous mental territory..

*

All of these aggregates
are
in a condition of
arising and passing away
and
there is nothing constant in them.

The suffering inherent/ in the aggregates/
is that they are no more/
than a/ continual flux/ of conditionality/.

There is subtle suffering
and fear of realization
that all existence has
no self-existing core
of individual personality;

thus what we call
'existence' is nothing more than/
a momentary confluence/...

[End of Part I, first half. To listen to the end click
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of cause and effect
states of consciousness/,
flowing in a continuum/,
converging in space and time/
in an instant/ of conscious awareness.

There is also fear and instability
inherent
in the insight that,
in the process of mutability,

(or changing)

whatever is coming-to-be/
will be
continuously ceasing
without ever reaching
a state of abiding being.

[And]

All this goes
completely against the will
and cravings and notions of common,
everyday, ignorant man's way of thinking,

and/, to the extent that he is aware
of the flux of existence/,
he will constantly feel himself
to be
in a conscious or unconscious/
state of uncertainty/, instability and irritability.

Even the subtlest impression or mood
in the mildest-mannered man

is subject
to uncertainty, instability/

and is/
the cause of a barely perceptible
but resultant sense of subtle irritation.

Furthermore,
in case it is not already obvious,
from what has been explained,
it must be stated clearly/
that/
there is absolutely/ no human personality/
beyond the consisting/ momentary/
confluence/ of the five aggregates.

What we consider as self
is a conditioned phenomenon
fleeting
in a series of mental events
which is always temporary
—always arising and ceasing.

*

When, through ignorance,
consciousness of the idea of self
wants to cling to life or the objects
which it thinks it wants in this life,

there will be a gaping discrepancy/
between what is expected-to-continue
in existence
(being)/
and that/
which is constantly disappearing.

The urge for perpetual life/ is called
grasping-after continued existence,
and the body grasping
is constantly casting out multiple networks
of innumerable grappling-hooks
to catch new things to nourish it.

*

Concerning the term ‘mental irritation,’
Francis Story also makes the point that

“like all other organisms, man is conditioned
to respond to irritation,

for the principle of irritation
plays a leading role in organic evolution.”

There is always some form
of irritation present,
conscious or unconscious.

Our wishing for a life free from pain
is often based on fear and anxiety
that the pain we have known
will come back again/ and/
perhaps, in a much-worse- form.

The pleasure-pain principle/
Indeed/ may be part of nature/
that teaches us to keep things
in balance
and follow the Middle Way,
as an expedient way/of
surviving/in the process of evolution./

Furthermore,
“even pleasure in itself is a source of pain”

—as long as it lasts/ there is the anxiety/that/
it will cease/and become a source of longing/

—a longing for the returning/of an already past/
and no longer existent state/
which can never be repeated/the way it was.

While it takes a while to figure this out/
there is also the accompanying lesson/
in the fact/ that/, while
self-indulgence/
eventually leads to pain/,
self-restraint
leads to and results in the opposite.

In any case,
suffering and pain are here to stay,
even if *we* are not,
so we may either accept the reality of it/
or continue to suffer from delusions.

It all you depends/ on the individual entity/
looking into the mind/ and/
having insights into what is true.

That suffering and pain are here to stay/
are also/ inextricably/ bound-up with
the *Three Signata*:
impermanence, suffering and non-self.

Indeed, everything there is/ in the universe/
is/
inextricably/ bound to arise and pass away...

In its cosmological aspect,
suffering even has an existence
independent of man's awareness.

If even our own galaxy/ can break up into/
elements and particles/ in space, one day/
who are we to say/ that we are here to stay?

Energy and nourishment are
what make things change.

Energy draws and compacts
particles together -
[and]
energy blows them apart...

This is the law of the cosmos/, throughout all galaxies/.

So when we consider/ that man is nothing/
more than/ such a small/, composite bundle/
of energies and particles/, acting in the way/
all compounds arise/ and cease/, in this world/
and in all galaxies,

—it is hard to see how such a puny
compound of elements,
such as the tiny speck of a man,

having grown into a larger organism
only relative/ to his immediate-environment

—it is hard to conceive of how/ such an/
insignificant compound of aggregates
could believe/ that it had/
an 'individual' personality.

Bhante G., the Venerable H. Gunaratna,
has inferred that this compound of elements
which we call 'self' is a simplified
psychophysical frame of referents
which we need and require as a tool
to be able to continue to cope and exist
within our environment and survive
rather than to lose orientation and die.

But even if this were so,
such a frame of referents and skills
as tools just to survive would be
a mere mortal-oversimplification

of how the cunning/, human mind/
had evolved over time/, so that man/
would know how strive-to-survive,
for at least as long as/

dependant arising conditions allow.

If this were so, such an implied
survival-of-the-fittest view
would merely be a narrow,
and only partially true view,

providing man with only
the requisite knowledge
needed for the primal task
of survival.

But as Bhante G.
would be the first to agree/, such
a system of environmental orientation/
would
provide no knowledge of goodness or of
morality or any wider cosmological view.

*

Man's proximate sphere
of psychophysical orientation
is limited to what is needed
just for continuing survival...

It will seldom happen/ that a
man/ struggling for his life/
in hostile surroundings/
will have time to pause/

and contemplate the wider/

cosmological aspect of transience/
and impermanence/ as it affects
his existence or non-existence...

Nor in the process of just trying to
Survive/ will he have time to stop
and philosophize about the transient
flux/ in the changing nature of matter...

Nevertheless, according the Buddha:

Matter is made up of
four primary elements
in different combinations
arising under different conditions
dependent on different factors.

*

Francis Story writes,
“Matter is made up of the
four great primaries
[or elements].

“For convenience, they are defined as the elements
of solidity, cohesion, temperature and motion.

(And space is sometimes added as a fifth)

“For philosophic purposes,
this is an adequate definition,
denoting, as it does,
the varied transformations
as well as the atomic functions
of the atomic units (*kalaapa*) of matter.

“These atoms and their components
are in a —continuous state—
of movement and change,
are in a
— a process— in which
energy can assume
the physical aspect
of solid, physical substance.

“That this is only an appearance is
fully-confirmed by modern physics,

“For as Bertrand Russell has pointed out:

‘In pursuit of something/ that could not be treated/ as substantial/,
physicists analyzed/ ordinary matter/ into molecules/,
molecules into atoms/, atoms into electrons/ and protons/,
but now/ electrons and protons/ themselves are dissolved/
into systems of radiations/ by Heisenberg/
and systems of waves/ by Schroedinger.

‘The two systems/ amount mathematically/ to the same thing/.
And these are not wild/ metaphysical speculations/,
they are sober mathematical calculations/ accepted by the majority of experts.’

Francis Story comments further,

“Since matter/ has resolved itself into energy/,
whether it be/ as radiations or waves/,
all phenomena are seen/
as a succession of *events*/
in the space-time continuum/,
not as static entities...

“To be properly understood/,
they must be observed as processes/
bearing the unitary characteristic/
of all forms of energy/, that is to say
perpetual movement/ and transmutation...

“Here again/, the problem of individuality/
obtrudes itself/,
for like the protozoon/
the atom has no real identity/
from one moment to another/
in the phases/ of its hectic existence.

“The basic structure/ of the universe itself is energy/,
something that can only be described/
as an unceasing/ restlessness and agitation.

“Thus, for us/, what we consider as body/,
solidity or corporeality/ is, in the final analysis/,
not what it appears to be/,
but belongs to the same category/
of phenomena,
wherever they happen to be/,
internally or externally/ and “subject to
the same laws/ of dissolution/ wherever
[they may be] found...

“The same is true of the factors/
of cohesion, temperature and motion/,
and the same is true of what/

appears to the senses be/

form, feeling, perception, arising mental formations
[the aggregates] and the
resultant restlessness/ and motions/
of consciousness/ as energy events.

“To put it in Buddhist language/
one should try to understand/
according to reality/
and true knowledge/
that the body is just a component/
of changing forms of energy/
whether/, organically or mentally/,
dependent changing factors and conditions.

“Even the simplification/ of phenomena
into the simile of basic elements/
is not what it seems to be/
because in “in physics/
there is nothing/ that can be called/
absolutely solid, gaseous or liquid/,
but each partakes in some
degree of the nature of the others.

“Phenomena/
wherever they may arise and appear/
may be said to be of one kind/
in its fundamental structure/,
and Buddhist cosmic analysis/
defines it/ by the characteristics
of (*lahutta*) - lightness or buoyancy;
(*mudita*) - softness or plasticity;
and (*kamma/nnatta*) - motion or activity...

“Since in physics/
there is nothing/ that can be called/
solid, gaseous or liquid/,
but each partakes/ in some degree/
of the nature of the others/,
this gives contemporary evidence
of what the Buddha said
about the nature of matter/
to disabuse the mind of any belief/

that the human body/ as an organism/
distinct from other material objects/
and to counteract/ the tendency to/
regard the body as the Self/
—or integral to the Self.”

The main point/ Francis Story is making/
is that suffering (*dukkha*),
in its broadest sense/
designates a kind of/
mental and physical uneasiness/

continually coming together/
and breaking up/, evolving and dissolving/
appearing and disappearing/
in processes of inevitable change/

in everything in life/
from the most subtle impressions/
to mild discomforts and dissatisfactions/
to wild explosions/ of agony or madness/

in a dynamic process/
which an ordinary man/
with wrong view cannot control/
and yet considers/ to be 'his life.'

The mental problem for man/
and this means you (and *me*),
is that man cannot accept/
the ever-changing process of nature/

which is the central problem/
that suffering (*dukkha*)/
is inseparable from the process/
of coming-to-be/...

which will ever be/
in a state of becoming and never
reach any ultimate state of being.

Common man may become angry
when he realizes that he cannot be
as he desires to be, but this is *avijja* or
ignorance of
seeing things as they really are.

Similarly, in the mental aggregates
of what seem and appear to be

form, feeling, perception,
arising mental formations
and restless motions of consciousness,
subtle irritation and restlessness
take on diverse forms

such as
fretfulness, excitability, frustration,
anger, worry, conflicting desires
intense psychophysical emotions
and all sorts of other wild and
distressful and destructive states.

Mind-body agitation
becomes heat-energy
and consumes and
burns up energy (and
this is just as true
for you as it is for me).

*

Furthermore, we realize:

“Seen in this light,
even what we know of
happiness is not free
from the *dukkha* of agitation.

“Happiness exists only
in contrast to its opposite mode
of restlessness which we call sorrow.

“Since pleasure and pain
are merely relative states,

and neither of which can be
experienced without its opposite,

**Buddhism denies
the possibility of a perfect,
unchanging and unalloyed
(pure) happiness
where the conditions of
conscious life prevail.”**
(Wheel Series 34-35) ...

Even the vaguest
impression of agitation
still consumes energy as heat,
so, again, we come up against
the ever-recurring hindrance

**that, as long as there is still
any trace of worldly human**

consciousness-irritation
in the body-mind aggregate,
liberation on the path to
deliverance from human
suffering is still bound to fail.

**The cause of the truth of *dukkha*
is that the origin of craving
inevitably leads to suffering,**

which becomes even clearer
once we come to understand
The Second Noble Truth.
The Cause of Suffering

[which is the topic we shall go on to discuss in
the next section of our continuing exposition.]

[Thus ends this lecture on the First Noble truth.]
