

CHRIS DEALS WITH IT

episode notes




EP 72 - On Noble Truths & Paths

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A review of these core tenets of Buddhism: The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. How can we apply their wisdom to daily life, even if we don't devote ourselves to deep study and meditation on them?

The Four Noble Truths

1. Our current existence is temporary, and the nature of it is suffering.
2. This temporary world and its pain come with an attachment to this existence.
3. This attachment can be severed or contained by confining, or letting go of this craving.
4. The **Noble Eightfold Path** is the path to sever this attachment, and our release from suffering.

The Noble Eightfold Path

A summary of Buddhist practices leading to liberation (nirvana)

1. Right view
2. Right resolve
3. Right speech
4. Right conduct
5. Right livelihood
6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness
8. Right meditative awareness

1. **Right View:** Remain mindful of the Four Noble Truths, understanding that death is not an end. Our karma (or actions & beliefs), have consequences after death. In Buddhism it's believed there is a successful path out of this world, with karma leading to rebirth.

I also consider this to mean there's a successful path through this world. That we can orient ourselves better towards the reality of our existence.

2. **Right Resolve:** To have the right thoughts, aspirations & motivations towards non-violence. Avoiding hateful conduct and elements of the worldly life that divert us from the Buddhist path.

For me, this also means maintaining strong moral & ethical underpinnings that drive our desires and our conduct. I resolve to approach differences and situations non-violently.

3. **Right Speech:** Avoiding idle chatter, lying, rude speech. Do not cause discord or harm in the relationships of others.

A straightforward reminder that our words have the power to affect others. We should use them responsibly: To help, to heal, and to inspire as much as possible. When we do lack the words: Avoid filling the void with our uncertainties.

4. **Right Conduct:** Don't kill, injure, or steal. Avoid sexual misconduct and material desires.

All these things lead to disharmony for ourselves and those impacted. In hurting others or being selfish in our desires, we cause great imbalances in our own lives. This path identifies that we should remain vigilant for cravings and desires that arise, which can lead to improper conduct.

5. **Right Livelihood:** Don't make a living by trading in weapons, living beings, meat, liquor, or poisons.

More broadly, I take this to mean avoid doing business in trades that result in active harm to other beings. While the Buddhist definition is more detailed (meat and booze), I feel the general point is applicable to all: Is the work that we do in this world resulting in a net benefit for society?

6. **Right Effort:** Putting ourselves to the task of generating wholesome states. Accomplishing this through the restraint of our senses, concentration of our energy, and the cultivation of enlightenment factors.

These enlightenment factors are interesting. In Buddhism these are referred to as the Seven Factors of Awakening:

- **Mindfulness:** Maintain awareness of truth & reality (The *dharma*)

- **Investigation:** On the nature of reality
- **Energy:** Determination, effort
- **Joy / Rapture**
- **Relaxation / Tranquility:** Both body and mind
- **Concentration:** A calm, one-pointed state of mind
- **Equanimity:** Accepting reality as-it-is, without craving or aversion

These factors of awakening lay out a pretty solid list of wholesome efforts that can help anyone orient their efforts towards creating a better world.

7. **Right Mindfulness:** Maintain qualities that guard and strengthen the mind. Weaken unwholesome states of mind that risk dominating our thoughts, words, and actions. Avoid being absent minded, encouraging conscious awareness. Understand that our bodies, feelings, and our minds are impermanent and fallible.

Being thoughtful and aware, keeping strong qualities in our mind is great advice, regardless of the religious aspects. Buddhism loves its lists, and provides several for guidance on this topic. I'll have some links in the show notes but won't get into them here.

- a. The five aggregates (*skandhas*)
- b. The five hindrances
- c. The four True Realities and seven factors of awakening.

8. **Right Meditative Awareness:** Meditating with the goal of insight, equanimity and mindfulness. Concentration or one-pointedness of the mind.

For those who don't meditate, this can feel like one to gloss over. But there's wisdom to be had in cultivating focus in our life. To be aware of the direction

of our mind - and orient our thoughts and feelings towards positivity & goals that support the other elements of our paths through life.

What are some of the applications of these philosophies?

1. It's a path, not a destination

- Walking down a path is different than going all the way down it:
 - One philosophy can lead to a journey to explore others.
 - You can chart your own course towards a framework that works best for you.
- It's important to have a concept of our capacity, our potential, for liberation or enlightenment.
 - We all have the capacity for change and growth.
 - By exploring paths, we're accepting the path that who we are tomorrow can be different than who we are today.
- Who are we, when we sit in a space, between actions? Can we define ourselves as someone/something separate from our accomplishments, perceptions, relationships, and the material world around us?
 - Is this where we form the basis for right thought & action with which we interact with all that?
 - It's important to give ourselves regular opportunities to have that space, to contemplate our lives away from distractions.

2. A problem-solving framework

- I find the framing of the Four Noble Truths interesting. They're a great example of how to address an issue:
 - It presents an issue: our existence is temporary & it involves suffering
 - It identifies the source of that issue: Our attachment to existence

- Next, it teaches us a solution to that source: Confining or letting go of that attachment
 - Finally, it provides us a method to achieve that solution
- We face many issues, problems, and opportunities in our lives. Not all of them are existential moments, but this framework can still help:
 - To address these more tractable issues in our lives, a great start is clearly identifying and presenting the issue in as straight-forward a way as possible.
 - Then by fully exploring the issue, we can uncover sources, root causes, and conditions that have caused it to exist. Some of which may not have been obvious at the start.
 - Only then, when the issue has been fully defined and its causes known, does it make sense to develop a solution to the issue.
 - And it's not enough to just identify a solution: Come up with a tractable plan to achieve that outcome.
- Not every issue or problem necessarily needs a long, drawn-out analysis. But there's plenty of wisdom in such a problem-solving framework.
 - One such popular framework is the OODA loop: Observe, Orient, Decide, Act - which has some similarities with the process followed by the Four Noble Truths.

3. Everything is changing all the time - Including ourselves

- The present moment is a pivot point: Between our past memories/actions & the path we're taking going forward.
- We can get too focused on narrow slices of who we are, since we're multi-faceted beings:
 - Right now I'm Chris the podcaster, but I can also be the hockey player, the father, the employee, the boss, the husband, the game player, the writer, the thinker, the citizen, the brother, etc...

- Who is this Chris, integrated with (or underneath) all of these facets?
- Who balances these roles? Their impact on the world & people/communities I interact with within each of these facets?
- Applying the advice of the Noble Eightfold Path is an excellent way to bring all your facets into better balance.
- Others may have control over things that impact ourselves externally, but only we have control over our internal world
 - Embrace how much is out of your control by maintaining awareness of our internal mindset, thoughts, and feelings.
 - And be open to external experiences that can help us transcend: Awe, flow, inspiration & gratitude.
- I mentioned before that Buddhists love lists. One I like lists the 5 spiritual faculties that we all possess, and have the capacity to develop throughout our lives:
 1. Faith / conviction / belief
 2. Energy / persistence / perseverance
 3. Mindfulness / memory
 4. Concentration / stillness
 5. Wisdom / understanding / comprehension

4. There's no scoreboard

- Nowhere in these noble truths and eightfold path is there anything to compare oneself against.
- Life isn't something that is won or lost, where a score is kept.
 - This doesn't mean we can't play the game well.
 - We get to choose the manner in which we interact with this "rat race"... The nature of our lives.
 - We get to choose the scoreboards that matter:

- Wealth, experiences, fame, impact, likes, quality of thoughts, arts created, awards, commitments upheld, people helped, etc...
- You can't take your wealth & material possessions with you when you die.
 - These are tools, not deserving of our focus or obsession.
 - They are attachments to the reality of our existence, therefore they lead to varying degrees of suffering.
 - Recognizing this can help us set realistic goals & expectations from our 'stuff'.
- Consider what others are going to reflect on when we leave this world:
 - Was he loving, caring?
 - How did we impact their lives?
 - What was the quality of our character?

Episode 72 Quote:

There's no shortage of suitable quotes for an episode like this. But I wanted something simple & practical that reflected my approach of continuous improvement in life. Ralph Waldo Emerson doesn't disappoint with this gem:

Finish each day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely and with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense.