

A STUDY OF THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS IN DHAMMACAKKAPAVATTANA SUTTA

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Abstract

More than two thousand and five hundred years ago, an enlightened person was born and found a way to free all beings from suffering; that is Buddha Gotama. Although he was born a prince, he could see the pain and suffering sentient beings had to endure. Therefore, he sacrificed his happiness to help all sentient beings free from suffering. After attaining enlightenment, he saw the true nature of life, its cause, its cessation, and the way to that cessation. This is also all that the Buddha wanted sentient beings to see and practice. In this article, the writer will analyze the four truths taught by the Buddha in his first sutta.

Keyword: *distress, the origin of distress, the end of distress, the way lead to the end of distress*

INTRODUCTION

After attaining enlightenment, the Buddha with compassion had considered the quality of beings and determined the first being who would be heard and understood the *Dhamma*. The Buddha went to His first two teachers but they passed away. So He went to Sarnath where He taught the first sermon to the group of five ascetics who had practiced austerity with the Buddha six years before He attained enlightenment. In this sermon, namely *Dhammacakkapavattana sutta*, in this, the Buddha explained the Four Noble Truths. So what are the four Noble truths according to the Buddha's teachings?

Content

There are four Noble Truths according to Buddhism, they are distress (*dukkha*), the origin of distress (*dukkha samudaya*), the end of distress (*dukkhanirodha*) and the way lead to the end of distress (*dukkha gaminipatipada*).

Dukkha is the first of the four Noble truths, in this, the Buddha taught:

*"Now this, monks, is the noble truth of stress: Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are stressful; association with the unloved is stressful, separation from the loved is stressful, not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful."*¹

This teaching emphasizes the evil of life to contract the human's natural inclination to live with ignorance dwell on pleasant and forgot disagreeable. The Buddha said he had undergone both happiness and pain in their most extreme form. If life is only suffering beings will not cling to it. On the other hand, if life is only happiness, there would be no need to search for a way to escape it.

Three types of pain exist aggregate suffering (*sankhara-dukkhata*), transient suffering (*viparinama-dukkhata*), and the inherent suffering of the mind and body (*dukkha-dukkhata*). The most obvious types of pain are those that are mental and physical, but the overall state of suffering is the constant state of disease, unrest, and instability that is inherent in the arising and dying of momentary phases of existence but that we are typically unaware of. The sadness of transience results from the fleeting nature of enjoyment, which entails both the possibility and reality of pain due to the knowledge that it will cease.

Moreover, the Buddha also said that everything exists with three characteristics as impermanence (*anicca*), pain (*dukkha*), and soullessness (*anatta*) including human beings. At the same time, the aggregates are the result of antecedent and coincidental mental and physical situations that are the root of clinging to life. They are the grasping aggregates (*upadanakkhandha*) because of their role of maintaining and continually recreating the life urge.

Buddhism also divides suffering into four types as follows: un-manifested, manifested, indirect and direct pain. Un-manifested suffering is the pain in which the suffering and its source do not show, just like the mental suffering which comes with anger, passion, and lust. The manifested suffering is the suffering in which both the pain and the source of suffering are evident, such as torture. Indirect suffering is presented as sensory pleasures, and carries seeds of future misery, but direct suffering in pain as it is experienced instantly.

So the first truth of the world is suffering, even if we are wealthy or poor, healthy or ill, when we exist in this world we are living with suffering. Where is the cause that leads beings to suffer? To answer this question, the Buddha taught about the origin of distress, He said:

*"And this, monk, is the noble truth of the origination of stress: the craving that makes for further becoming – accompanied by passion and delight, relishing now here and now there- i.e., craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for non-being."*²

Therefore, the three different types of pain that have been stated have their roots in desire. This needs for pleasure in the six senses—pleasurable sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and mental experiences—is brought on by the interaction between the sense organs and their objects. There are three different manifestations of the desire for existence: the want for existence in the sensuous realms (*kāmma-loka*), the desire for existence in the fine-material spheres (*rūpa-loka*), and the desire for life in the formless spheres (*arūpa-loka*). The false idea that the components of phenomenal personality combine to form a soul that is destroyed after death gives rise to a number of desires, including the desire to destroy oneself.

Another categorization divides craving into two categories: *vatta-mūla-bhūta-purimatanhā*, the primordial longing at the foundation of rebirth, and *samudācāratanhā*, craving exhibited in behavior. The first is the need that supports and perpetuates the cycle of existence, as stated in the Dependent Origination formula. For instance, awareness is conditioned by *karma-formations* and originates as a result of ignorance-based *kamma-formations*. the circle is closed by decay and

¹ "Notes," Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion, accessed May 18, 2023, <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.than.html>.

² "Notes," Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion, accessed May 18, 2023, <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.than.html>.

death emerging from both becoming and becoming again. The Dependent Origination formula illustrates the causal link between three cycles—a past, a present, and a future existence—with hunger acting as the main motivating factor. However, in order for the experience to exist, the mind and body must first exist, and those minds and bodies must have been caused by prior desiring in order for the cause and effect to proceed forever into the past.

Now we can see the main cause of suffering according to the Buddha's teaching is craving. On the other hand, ignorance is also the cause that makes beings go round and round in the circle of samsara and suffer a lot. The question is having or not the place where only happiness exists? And can the suffering come to an end? Answering those questions, the Buddha taught about the end of distress.

Buddha taught: *“And this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of stress: the remainderless fading and cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, and letting go of that very craving.”*³

The Buddha underwent three phases before becoming fully enlightened. He learns about earlier stages of existence during the first watch of the night. He learned during the second watch of the night how beings transition from one state of existence to another based on their actions. He had also comprehended the facts of pain in this state. He comprehended the philosophy of dependent origination and the knowledge of the causes of existence during the final watch of the night.

Then he understood both the mechanism by which the process might be stopped and the origin of conditioned existence, which was based on ignorance and want. As a result of His compassion for sentient beings, He focused on Dependent Origination in the final watch of the night and meditated on it both in order of being and order of cessation until dawn. The verse that the Buddha used to express His enlightenment is as follows:

“I, who have been seeking the builder of this house, failing to attain Enlightenment which would enable me to find him, have wandered through innumerable births in samsara. To be born again and again is, indeed, dukkha!”

*“Oh, house-builder! You are seen, you shall build no house again. All your rafters are broken, your roof tree is destroyed. My mind has reached the unconditioned; the end of craving has been attained.”*⁴

Therefore, the end of suffering that the Buddha achieves is the extinction of all suffering in its entirety, which is known as Nibbana. The word "Nibbana" in Pali derives from the root "v," which means "to blow," and the prefix "nir," which means "no." Nibbana, according to Buddhist tradition, refers to the end of the becoming process, much like when a fire goes out due to a lack of fuel or when the wind stops blowing on it. When the fire runs out of fuel, the life-affirming impulses perish and there is no longer any rebirth. The fire is a three-fold inferno of lust, malice, and illusion.

Nibbāna can only be experienced; it cannot be articulated. The problems it raises—as well as those related to the essence of being in general—are revealed to have never been before it manifested. They are made-up stories that were created under the mistaken belief that the ultimate truth could be understood through conceptual thought that was restricted to the concepts and language of sense data. Because of this, philosophers have never been able to offer a complete and adequate explanation for reality despite their profound and sophisticated attempts.

There are two types of *Nibbāna* according to Buddhist tradition, are *saupādisesa-nibbāna* and *anupādisesa-nibbāna*. The first one is the state of *Nibbāna* in which the mental and corporeal aggregates remain but are no longer related to clinging. It is complete tranquility, peace, and fulfillment. There is no sorrow for someone who has completed his path and is free of all suffering, who is liberated in every way and has eliminated all attachments. The second one talks about the *Nibbāna* in which none of the factors of individualized personality remain.

So how we can attain *Nibbāna*? The Buddha taught the way to lead to the cessation of suffering or *Nibbāna* as follows:

*“And this, monks, is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: precisely this Noble Eightfold Path – right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.”*⁵

The Buddha explained to the five ascetics in the first discourse that there are two extremes that should be avoided. The first is indulging in sensual pleasure, which is based on low, vulgar, unclean, and unprofitable standards. The other is the

³ “Notes,” Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion, accessed May 18, 2023, <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.than.html>.

⁴ *Dhammapada verse*, chapter 11, verse 153 -154, Translated by Daw Mya Tin, M.A, Edited by Editorial Committee, Burma Tipitaka Association Rangoon, Burmar, 1986.

⁵ “Notes,” Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion, accessed May 18, 2023, <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.than.html>.

painful, immoral, futile, and fruitless practice of extreme physical asceticism. In contrast, the Enlightened One's discovery of the Middle Path is the route that leads to Nibbāna, calm, insight, and full knowledge.

Conclusion

To sum up, the four Noble Truth is the basic teaching of Buddhism. One who can understand and practice according to this teaching will attain liberation. But it is not easy to understand and practice it. We may understand the theory but we are not deeply understanding and go into practice. So to be free from suffering we must truly go into practice and experience the Buddha's teachings.

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