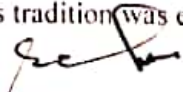


## Four Noble Truths : Buddhism

In Buddhism, the **Four Noble Truths** (Sanskrit: *cattvāri āryasatyāni*; Pali: *cattāriariyasaccāni*; "The four Arya satyas") are "the truths of the Noble Ones", the truths or realities for the "spiritually worthy ones". The truths are: *dukkha* (suffering, incapable of satisfying, painful) is an innate characteristic of existence in the realm of *samsara*; *samudaya* (origin, arising, combination; 'cause'): together with *dukkha* arises *tanhā* ("craving, desire or attachment, lit. "thirst"). While *tanha* is traditionally interpreted in western languages as the 'cause' of *dukkha*, *tanha* can also be seen as the factor tying us to *dukkha*, or as a response to *dukkha*, trying to escape it; *nirodha* (cessation, ending, confinement): *dukkha* can be ended or contained by the renouncement or letting go of this *tanhā*; the confinement of *tanha* releases the excessive bind of *dukkha*; *maggā* (path, Noble Eightfold Path) is the path leading to the confinement of *tanha* and *dukkha*.

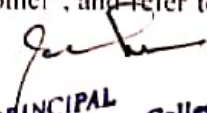
The four truths appear in many grammatical forms in the ancient Buddhist texts, and are traditionally identified as the first teaching given by the Buddha. While often called one of the most important teachings in Buddhism, they have both a symbolic and a propositional function. Symbolically, they represent the awakening and liberation of the Buddha, and of the potential for his followers to reach the same spiritual experience as him. As propositions, the Four Truths are a conceptual framework that appear in the Pali canon and early Hybrid Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures, as a part of the broader "network of teachings" (the "*dhamma* matrix"), which have to be taken together. They provide a conceptual framework for introducing and explaining Buddhist thought, which has to be personally understood or "experienced". As a proposition, the four truths defy an exact definition, but refer to and express the basic orientation of Buddhism: unguarded sensory contact gives rise to craving and clinging to impermanent states and things, which are *dukkha*, "incapable of satisfying" and painful. This craving keeps us caught in *samsara*, "wandering," usually interpreted as the endless cycle of repeated rebirth, and the continued *dukkha* that comes with it, but also referring to the endless cycle of attraction and rejection that perpetuates the ego-mind. There is a way to end this cycle, namely by attaining *nirvana*, cessation of craving, whereafter rebirth and the accompanying *dukkha* will no longer arise again.

The function of the four truths, and their importance, developed over time and the Buddhist tradition slowly recognized them as the Buddha's first teaching. This tradition was established

  
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when *prajna*, or "liberating insight", came to be regarded as liberating in itself, instead of or in addition to the practice of *dhyana*. This "liberating insight" gained a prominent place in the sutras, and the four truths came to represent this liberating insight, as a part of the enlightenment story of the Buddha. The Pali terms *ariyasacca* (Sanskrit: *aryasatya*) are commonly translated as "noble truths". This translation is a convention started by the earliest translators of Buddhist texts into English. According to K.R. Norman, this is just one of several possible translations. There is no particular reason why the Pali expression *ariyasaccani* should be translated as 'noble truths'. It could equally be translated as 'the nobles' truths', or 'the truths for nobles', or 'the nobilising truths', or 'the truths of, possessed by, the noble ones' [...] In fact the Pali expression (and its Sanskrit equivalent) can mean all of these, although the Pali commentators place 'the noble truths' as the least important in their understanding. The term "Arya" was later added to the four truths. The term *Ariya* (Sanskrit: *Arya*) can be translated as "noble", "not ordinary", "valuable", "precious", "pure".

The Arya's are the noble ones, the saints, those who have attained 'the fruits of the path', 'that middle path the Tathagata has comprehended which promotes sight and knowledge, and which tends to peace, higher wisdom, enlightenment, and Nibbana'. The term *sacca* (Sanskrit: *Satya*) is a central term in Indian thought and religion. It is typically translated as "truth"; but it also means "that which is in accord with reality", or "reality". The four truths are "four 'true things' or 'realities' whose nature, we are told, the Buddha finally understood on the night of his awakening." They function as "a convenient conceptual framework for making sense of Buddhist thought." probably the best translation is "the truth[s] of the noble one (the Buddha)". It is a statement of how things are seen by a Buddha, how things really are when seen correctly. It is the truthful way of seeing. Through not seeing things this way, and behaving accordingly, we suffer. As a proposition, they are part of the matrix or "network of teachings", in which they are "not particularly central", but have an equal place next to other teachings, describing how release from craving is to be reached. A long-recognized feature of the Theravada canon is that it lacks an "overarching and comprehensive structure of the path to *nibbana*." The sutras form a network or matrix, and the four truths appear within this "network of teachings", which have to be taken together. Within this network, "the four noble truths are one doctrine among others and are not particularly central", but are a part of "the entire *dhamma* matrix". The four noble truths are set and learnt in that network, learning "how the various teachings intersect with each other", and refer to

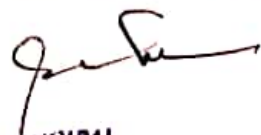
  
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the various Buddhist techniques, which are all explicitly and implicitly part of the passages which refer to the four truths.

As a proposition, the four truths defy an exact definition, but refer to and express the basic orientation of Buddhism: sensory contact gives rise to clinging and craving to temporary states and things, which is ultimately unsatisfactory and painful, *dukkha*, and sustains *samsara*, the repeated cycle of *bhava* (becoming, habitual tendencies) and *jāti* ("birth", interpreted as either rebirth, the coming to be of a new existence; or as the arising of the sense of self as a mental phenomenon. By following the Buddhist path, craving and clinging can be confined, peace of mind and real happiness can be attained, and the repeated cycle of repeated becoming and birth will be stopped.

The truth of *dukkha*, "incapable of satisfying", "painful", is the basic insight that *samsara*, life in this "mundane world", with its clinging and craving to impermanent states and things is *dukkha*, unsatisfactory and painful. We expect happiness from states and things which are impermanent, and therefore cannot attain real happiness. The truth of *samudaya*, "arising", "coming together", or *dukkha-samudaya*, the origination or arising of *dukkha*, is the truth that *samsara*, and its associated *dukkha* arises, or continues, with *tanhā*, "thirst", craving for and clinging to these impermanent states and things. In the orthodox view, this clinging and craving produces karma, which leads to renewed becoming, keeping us trapped in rebirth and renewed dissatisfaction. Craving includes *kama-tanha*, craving for sense-pleasures; *bhava-tanha*, craving to continue the cycle of life and death, including rebirth; and *vibhava-tanha*, craving to not experience the world and painful feelings. While *dukkha-samudaya*, the term in the basic set of the four truths, is traditionally translated and explained as "the origin (or cause) of suffering", giving a causal explanation of *dukkha*, Brazier and Batchelor point to the wider connotations of the term *samudaya*, "coming into existence together": together with *dukkha* arises *tanha*, thirst. Craving does not cause *dukkha*, but comes into existence together with *dukkha*, or the five skandhas. It is this craving which is to be confined, as Kondanna understood at the end of the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*: "whatever arises ceases".

The truth of *nirodha*, "cessation," "suppression," "renouncing," "letting go", or *dukkha-nirodha*, the cessation of *dukkha*, is the truth that *dukkha* ceases, or can be confined, when one

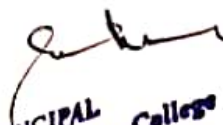
  
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renounces or confines craving and clinging, and nirvana is attained. Alternatively, tanha itself, as a response to dukkha, is to be confined. Nirvana refers to the moment of attainment itself, and the resulting peace of mind and happiness (khlesa-nirvana), but also to the final dissolution of the five skandhas at the time of death (skandha-nirvana or parinirvana); in the Theravada-tradition, it also refers to a transcendental reality which is "known at the moment of awakening". According to Gethin, "modern Buddhist usage tends to restrict 'nirvāṇa' to the awakening experience and reserve 'parinirvāṇa' for the death experience. When nirvana is attained, no more karma is being produced, and rebirth and dissatisfaction will no longer arise again. Cessation is nirvana, "blowing out", and peace of mind. Ajahn Buddhadasa, a well-known Thai master of the last century, said that when village people in India were cooking rice and waiting for it to cool, they might remark, "Wait a little for the rice to become nibbana". So here, nibbana means the cool state of mind, free from the fires of the defilements. "The cooler the mind, the more Nibbana in that moment". We can notice for ourselves relative states of coolness in our own minds as we go through the day.

The truth of magga, refers to the path to the cessation of, or liberation from dukkha c.q. tanha. By following the Noble Eightfold Path, to moksha, liberation, restraining oneself, cultivating discipline, and practicing mindfulness and meditation, one starts to disengage from craving and clinging to impermanent states and things, and rebirth and dissatisfaction will be ended. The term "path" is usually taken to mean the Noble Eightfold Path, but other versions of "the path" can also be found in the Nikayas. The Theravada tradition regards insight into the four truths as liberating in itself.

The well-known eightfold path consists of the understanding that this world is fleeting and unsatisfying, and how craving keeps us tied to this fleeting world; a friendly and compassionate attitude to others; a correct way of behaving; mind-control, which means not feeding on negative thoughts, and nurturing positive thoughts; constant awareness of the feelings and responses which arise; and the practice of dhyana, meditation. The tenfold path adds the right (liberating) insight, and liberation from rebirth. The four truths are to be internalised, and understood or "experienced" personally, to turn them into a lived reality.

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