

"The Four Noble Truths"

The Buddha said,

"And I discovered that profound truth, so difficult to perceive, difficult to understand, tranquillizing and sublime, which is not to be gained by mere reasoning, and is visible only to the wise."

"The world, however, is given to pleasure, delighted with pleasure, enchanted with pleasure. Truly, such beings will hardly understand the law of conditionality, the dependent origination of everything. Yet there are beings whose eyes are only a little covered with dust: they will understand the truth."

What now is the Noble Truth of Suffering?

Birth is suffering; decay is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering; not to get what one desires is suffering; in short the five groups of existence are suffering.

What, now, is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering?

It is craving, which gives rise to fresh rebirth, and, bound up with pleasure and lust, now here, now there, finds ever-fresh delight. But where does this craving arise and take root? Wherever in the world there are delightful and pleasurable things, there this craving rises and takes root. Eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind are delightful and pleasurable: there this craving arises and takes root.

Visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily impressions, and mind objects are delightful and pleasurable: there this craving arises and takes root.

Consciousness, sense impression, feeling born of sense impression, perception, will, craving, thinking, and reflection are delightful and pleasurable: there this craving arises and takes root.

What, now, is the Noble Truth of the Extinction of Suffering?

It is the complete fading away and extinction of this craving, its forsaking and abandonment, liberation and detachment from it. The extinction of greed, the extinction of hate, the extinction of delusion: this, indeed, is called Nirvana.

And for a disciple thus freed, in whose heart dwells peace, there is nothing to be added to what has been done, and naught more remains to do. Just as a rock of one solid mass remains unshaken by the wind, even so

neither forms, nor sounds, nor odors, nor tastes, nor contacts of any kind, neither the desired nor the undesired can cause such a one to waver; one is steadfast in mind, gained is deliverance.

And one who has considered all the contrasts of this earth, and is no more disturbed by anything whatever in the world, the Peaceful One, freed from rage, from sorrow, and from longing, has passed beyond birth and decay.

This I call neither arising, nor passing away, neither standing still, nor being born, nor dying. There is neither foothold, nor development, nor any basis. This is the end of suffering.

Hence, the purpose of the Holy Life does not consist in acquiring alms, honor, or fame, nor in gaining morality, concentration, or the eye of knowledge. That unshakable deliverance of the heart: that, indeed, is the object of the Holy Life, that is its essence, that is its goal.

What, now, is the Noble Truth of the Path that leads to the extinction of suffering?

To give oneself up to indulgence in sensual pleasure, the base, common, vulgar, unholy, unprofitable; or to give oneself up to self-mortification, the painful, unholy, unprofitable: both these two extremes, the Perfect One has avoided, and has found out the Middle Path, which makes one both see and know, which leads to peace, to discernment, to Nirvana.

It is the Noble Eightfold Path, the way that leads to the extinction of suffering, namely:

1. Right Understanding
2. Right Thought
3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood
6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration

This is the Middle Path which the Perfect One has found out, which makes one both see and know, which leads to peace, to discernment, to enlightenment.

(from the Samyutta Nikaya, translated by Nyanatiloka)