



Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center

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The Noble Truth of Suffering

The Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths during his first teaching two months after he realized enlightenment. The Four Noble Truths is a foundation teaching of the Buddha. This essay expounds on the First Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of Suffering; subsequent essays will expound on the Second, Third and Fourth Noble Truths.

“The Dhamma is an incontrovertible fact of life. Whether buddhas arise or not, these truths exist. A buddha reveals the Dhamma to the deluded world. These are called Noble Truths because they were discovered or realized by the ariyas or noble (enlightened) ones.”¹

The Four Noble Truths are:

1. The Noble Truth of Suffering (dukkha)
2. The Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering (samudaya)
3. The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (nirodha)
4. The Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (magga)

The Buddha diagnosed that the world is dis-eased by suffering, the First Noble Truth. The cause of the dis-ease is craving, the Second Noble Truth. The cure for the dis-ease is nibbāna, the Third Noble Truth. The medicine or treatment for the dis-ease is the Noble Eightfold Path, the Fourth Noble Truth.

Dukkha is a Pāli term and means “suffering, pain, unsatisfactoriness, ill, sorrow, and misery ... also includes the deeper meaning of impermanence, imperfection, emptiness, and insubstantiality.”²

The Buddha taught dukkha as having three components: ordinary suffering, suffering due to change, and suffering due to conditioned states.

The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi
Part IV.38.14 Suffering

“There are, friend, these three kinds of suffering: the suffering due to pain, the suffering due to formations, the suffering due to change. These are the three kinds of suffering.”

The first component of dukkha is ordinary suffering due to painful bodily and mental feelings. Ordinary suffering or pain has two components. The first component of ordinary suffering is composed of mental and material elements which constitute the person defined by the Buddha as five aggregates. The five aggregates are:

1. material form,
2. feeling,
3. perception,
4. mental formations, and
5. sense consciousness.

The second component of ordinary suffering is dis-ease. The five aggregates are experienced as suffering during birth, ageing, illness, death, union with what is displeasing, separation from what is pleasing, not to get what one wants, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair.

The second component of dukkha is the suffering due to change. Pleasant feelings naturally diminishes and ends, produce unpleasant feelings and is experienced as suffering. The world is composed of impermanent components that constantly change, disintegrates and ends, this results in unpleasant feelings and suffering. The Buddha taught that whatever is impermanent is dukkha.

The third component of dukkha is the suffering due to conditioned states. To be conditioned is to be dependent on or affected by something else. All phenomena are conditioned. The conditions that make up the world whether they be physical or mental, are themselves composed of or conditioned by subtler parts that are impermanent. All conditioned states or formations arise, change, disintegrate and die, this produces unpleasant feelings and suffering.

The Noble Truth of Suffering is dukkha that results from an unskillful relationship with the five aggregates, described in the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering. The five aggregates are not dukkha in themselves but when the mind identifies with the aggregates, attaches to and craves the aggregates, then dukkha is the result because the aggregates are impermanent and insubstantial. In addition, the unskillful habits and conditions of the ignorant mind turns away from understanding dukkha for temporary relief by forming an unskillful relationship with other aggregates that result in more dukkha.

Each of the Four Noble Truths has three phases:

1. the knowledge of each truth, e.g., "This is the noble truth of suffering";
2. the knowledge of the task to be accomplished regarding each truth, e.g., "This noble truth of suffering is to be fully understood"; and
3. the knowledge of accomplishment regarding each truth, e.g., "This noble truth of suffering has been fully understood."

The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi Part V.56.11(1) Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma

"This is the noble truth of suffering': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

"This noble truth of suffering is to be fully understood': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

"This noble truth of suffering has been fully understood': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

"The first kind of knowledge recognizes that the Noble Truth is indeed true. The second kind of knowledge recognizes what is the appropriate action to take with regard to that particular Noble Truth. And the third kind of knowledge recognizes that the appropriate action has indeed been done with regard to that particular Noble Truth. When one has fully realized all twelve aspects of knowledge with regard to the Noble Truths, one has attained enlightenment."³

When the Buddha mastered each phase of the Four Noble Truths he experienced the five aggregates and the sense bases in terms of the three characteristics of existence: impermanence, suffering and not-self.

- The six internal sense bases are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.
- The six external sense bases are visible forms, sounds, odors, flavors, touch and mental objects.
- Sense consciousness arises dependent on an internal and an external sense base.
- Contact is the meeting of an internal sense base, external sense base and sense consciousness.
- Feeling is dependent on contact.
- Craving is dependent on feeling.
- Suffering is the result of craving, the Second Noble Truth.

Therefore, when the Buddha realized the danger and escape from identifying and attaching to the five aggregates and sense bases:

- Vision arose: clear seeing of the five aggregates and sense bases as arising and passing away.
- Knowledge arose: that rooted out ignorance, ill will and greed in regards to the five aggregates and sense bases.
- Wisdom arose: understanding that the five aggregates and sense bases are impermanent, suffering and insubstantial (not self).
- True knowledge arose: penetrative insight into the ignorance that misconstrues the five aggregates and sense bases to be permanent, pleasurable and self.
- Light arose: illuminating all phenomena to have the three characteristics of existence.

Dukkha is to be acknowledged and investigated by not running away from the experience. The investigation of dukkha will uncover ones' unskillful relationship with the five aggregates and sense

bases, and with ones' unskillful habits that respond to the unpleasant experience. A skillful relationship is to perceive the five aggregates and sense bases in terms of the three characteristics of existence. With understanding obtained from investigation there is an opportunity to form a skillful relationship with the aggregates and sense bases, described in the Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering and for liberation from dukkha, described in the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering.

Dukkha is hidden by postures. There is dukkha in the body and the pain is concealed by changing postures. Therefore, it is preferable to adopt a meditation posture that can be maintained without moving for the duration of the meditation in order to investigate and understand dukkha. When pain arises investigate the pain and observe how it changes in intensity and location. Observe your reaction to the pain and be the observer above and beyond the pain. There is the watcher, the consciousness of the pain, that is separate from the pain. The intensity of the pain increases by identifying with it. By identifying with consciousness and not with the pain, the mind is liberated from suffering.

The following excerpts are from suttas in the Pāli Canon that will provide teachings in how the Buddha and his closest disciples explained the First Noble Truth.

Definition of The First Noble Truth.

The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi
Part V.56.11(1) Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma

"Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering, union with what is displeasing is suffering, separation from what is pleasing is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering, in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.

Elaboration of The First Noble Truth.

The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi
141 Saccavibhanga Sutta: The Exposition of the Truths

7. Then, soon after the Blessed One had gone, the venerable Sāriputta addressed the bhikkhus thus: "Friends, bhikkhus." — "Friend," the bhikkhus replied to the venerable Sāriputta. The venerable Sāriputta said this:
8. "At Benares, friends, in the Deer Park at Isipatana the Tathāgata, accomplished and fully enlightened, set rolling the matchless Wheel of the Dhamma... and exhibiting of the Four Noble Truths. Of what four?"
9. "The announcing... and exhibiting of the noble truth of suffering... of the noble truth of the origin of suffering... of the noble truth of the cessation of suffering... of the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering."
10. "And what, friends, is the noble truth of suffering? Birth is suffering, ageing is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering, not to obtain what one wants is suffering, in short, the five aggregates affected by clinging are suffering."
11. "And what, friends, is birth? The birth of beings into the various orders of beings, their coming to birth, precipitation [in a womb], generation, the manifestation of the aggregates, obtaining the bases for contact — this is called birth."
12. "And what, friends, is ageing? The ageing of beings in the various orders of beings, their old age, brokenness of teeth, greyness of hair, wrinkling of skin, decline of life, weakness of faculties — this is called ageing."
13. "And what, friends, is death? The passing of beings out of the various orders of beings, their passing away, dissolution, disappearance, dying, completion of time, dissolution of aggregates, laying down of the body — this is called death."
14. "And what, friends, is sorrow? The sorrow, sorrowing, sorrowfulness, inner sorrow, inner sorriness, of one who has encountered some misfortune or is affected by some painful state — this is called sorrow."
15. "And what, friends, is lamentation? The wail and lament, wailing and lamenting, bewailing and lamentation, of one who has encountered some misfortune or is affected by some painful state — this is called lamentation."
16. "And what, friends, is pain? Bodily pain, bodily discomfort, painful, uncomfortable feeling born of bodily contact — this is called pain."
17. "And what, friends, is grief? Mental pain, mental discomfort, painful, uncomfortable feeling born of mental contact — this is called grief."
18. "And what, friends, is despair? The trouble and despair, the tribulation and desperation, of one who has encountered some misfortune or is affected by some painful state — this is called despair."
19. "And what, friends, is 'not to obtain what one wants is suffering'? To beings subject to birth there comes the wish: 'Oh, that we were not subject to birth! That birth would not come to us!' But this is not to be obtained by wishing, and not to obtain what one wants is suffering. To beings subject to ageing... subject to sickness... subject to death... subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair, there comes the wish: 'Oh, that we were not subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair! That sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair would not come to us!' But this is not to be obtained by wishing, and not to obtain what one wants is suffering."
20. "And what, friends, are the five aggregates affected by clinging that, in short, are suffering? They are: the material form aggregate affected by clinging, the feeling aggregate affected by clinging, the perception aggregate affected by

clinging, the formations aggregate affected by clinging, and the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging. These are the five aggregates affected by clinging that, in short, are suffering. This is called the noble truth of suffering.

Definition of The First Noble Truth in terms of the internal sense bases.

The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi
Part V.56.14(4) Internal Sense Bases

“And what, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of suffering? It should be said: the six internal sense bases. What six? The eye base, ear base, nose base, tongue base, body base, and the mind base. This is called the noble truth of suffering.”

Definition of dukkha in terms of a burning fire.

The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi
Part IV.35.28(6) Burning

“Bhikkhus, all is burning. And what, bhikkhus, is the all that is burning? The eye is burning, forms are burning, eye-consciousness is burning, eye-contact is burning, and whatever feeling arises with eye-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant—that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of delusion; burning with birth, aging, and death; with sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair, I say.

“The ear is burning ... The nose is burning ... The tongue is burning ... The body is burning ... The mind is burning ... and whatever feeling arises with mind-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant—that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of delusion; burning with birth, aging, and death; with sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair, I say.

Dukkha is to be understood.

The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Complete Translation of the Anguttara Nikaya translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi
6.63(9) Penetrative

(6) “Suffering should be understood; the source and origin of suffering should be understood; the diversity of suffering should be understood; the result of suffering should be understood; the cessation of suffering should be understood; the way leading to the cessation of suffering should be understood.

“Birth is suffering; old age is suffering; illness is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and anguish are suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.

“And what is the diversity of suffering? There is extreme suffering; there is slight suffering; there is suffering that fades away slowly; there is suffering that fades away quickly. This is called the diversity of suffering.

“And what is the result of suffering? Here, someone overcome by suffering, with a mind obsessed by it, sorrows, languishes, and laments; he weeps beating his breast and becomes confused. Or else, overcome by suffering, with a mind obsessed by it, he embarks upon a search outside, saying: ‘Who knows one or two words for putting an end to this suffering?’ Suffering, I say, results either in confusion or in a search. This is called the result of suffering.

Notes:

1. The First Discourse of the Buddha: Turning the Wheel of Dhamma by Dr. Rewata Dhamma; 1997; p. 55
2. The First Discourse of the Buddha: Turning the Wheel of Dhamma by Dr. Rewata Dhamma; 1997; p. 56
3. The First Discourse of the Buddha: Turning the Wheel of Dhamma by Dr. Rewata Dhamma; 1997; p. 83

Announcements

- A recording of a Dhamma Talk from an experienced Thai Forest Teacher will be played on the third Sunday of each month. Sitting meditation starts at 4:30PM and the Dhamma Talk will be played afterwards. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email mittameditation@gmail.com if you are planning to participate.
- There is a Library at the Meditation Center. You may browse for books to borrow at 5:00PM and check out the books for three weeks.
- Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center has a presence on Meet-Up social media and we ask that you please sign-up for every event that you are planning to attend at www.MeetUp.com. Some people are intimidated by a small number of attendees and a larger number will be encouraging.
- Please help advertise Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center by providing a review at www.google.com/maps.

Activities of the Meditation Center

- Sitting meditation is held everyday at 6:30AM and 5:30PM. After meditation, Ajahn Kumāro is available to answer questions and discuss the Dhamma. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email mittameditation@gmail.com on the days and time you would like to participate.
- The days of the full moon, new moon and the two half moons are called in Pāli: The Uposatha, and is a Buddhist day of observance. A lunar calendar is available at <https://cal.forestsangha.org>. Ajahn Kumāro will perform the ceremony of giving the eight precepts on the full and new moon days after the 5:30PM meditation. You may elect to take the five precepts instead of the eight and may determine to keep the precepts as long as you see fit (one night, a week, a lifetime, etc).
- Meditation Workshop is held on the first Sunday of each month between 11:00AM and 1:00PM. The workshop will provide instruction and practice for sitting and walking meditation. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the Dhamma. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email mittameditation@gmail.com if you are planning to participate.
- Every Saturday at 4:00PM the Meditation Center will be cleaned. Please join us in maintaining a clean space for practicing and discussing the Dhamma.
- Everyday at 8:40AM Ajahn Kumāro leaves for alms-round in order to give residents of Asheville the opportunity to earn merit by practicing generosity of giving food and placing it into the alms bowl. Ajahn does not accept or handle money. Ajahn usually arrives at the Whole Foods Market, 70 Merrimon Ave. just before 9:00AM and stands in front of the store for alms.
- Ajahn is available at other times during the day to meet with individuals or groups when requested.
- For more additional information please send an email to mittameditation@gmail.com. We also have a presence on Facebook and Meet-Up social media.

Request for Support

The Meditation Center is in need of support in order to accomplish its' mission and vision. The support may take various forms. You will support the Meditation Center by:

- Being present at the Meditation Center for group meditation.
- Giving alms during alms-round.
- Bringing to the Meditation Center items that are listed on the support page of the website www.mittameditation.com.
- Volunteering your skills, energy and time at the Meditation Center.
- Informing your family and friends about the Meditation Center and encouraging them to participate in the activities.
- Donating financial contributions for the Meditation Center's expenses. Kalyana-Mitta Meditation Center is recognized as a tax-exempt organization by the IRS under section 501(c)(3). Donations are deductible in accordance with IRS regulations. Financial contributions may be made on the support page of the website www.mittameditation.com and additional means for making financial donations may be discussed with Elisha Buhler at (910) 922-1549.