

7 Buddha

The Pali Canon (Buddhism) – Exam Preparation Notes

1. The Four Noble Truths

1.1 The Structure: Disease, Cause, Cure, Path

1. **There is suffering** (the disease)
2. **Suffering is caused by desire** (the cause)
3. **To eliminate suffering, eliminate desire** (the cure)
4. **The Eightfold Path eliminates desire** (the path)

You do **not** need detailed Eightfold Path content here; just know it is the method of mental/ethical training that gradually removes craving.

1.2 First Noble Truth: There is Suffering

- Buddhism claims: **recurring suffering is inevitable until nirvana.**
- “Suffering” (Pali: *dukkha*) = not only intense pain, but:
 - dissatisfaction, restlessness, anxiety
 - the fact that pleasant things are fragile and pass away
 - a subtle sense that things are “not quite right” or secure

Why internalizing this can reduce suffering: - Lowers **unrealistic expectations** (e.g., that life should be smooth and always pleasant).

- When pain, loss, or frustration occur, you are **less shocked and outraged** (“This shouldn’t be happening!”), which reduces secondary distress.
- Knowing “suffering is part of human life” can:
 - make it less personal (“not just me, this is the condition of beings”)
- encourage compassion for yourself and others
- motivate practice rather than resentment

Key idea: accepting the reality of suffering **prevents extra mental resistance**, which itself is a major source of misery.

1.3 Second Noble Truth: Suffering is Caused by Desire

Here “desire” primarily means **craving / clinging**: intense, grasping “I must have this / I cannot bear losing that.”

Mechanism: - Wanting what you don’t have □ frustration, envy, restlessness.

- Getting what you want doesn’t settle things: - pleasure fades
- new desires arise
- fear of loss appears
- So craving keeps the mind agitated and never satisfied.

Objection: “It’s not the wanting; it’s the not having.”

- Claim: the problem is simply deprivation; if we got what we wanted, no problem.

Reply: Having would not solve the problem - Many people get what they think they need and **remain dissatisfied**: - wanting more, or better

- fearing loss
- adapting quickly so the thing no longer feels special
- Buddhism: the root problem is the **mental habit of craving**, not any particular object.

Suggested method: **personal experiment** – carefully observe: - your mood while strongly wanting something

- your mood after you get it, over time
- whether craving actually brings lasting peace or more restlessness.

Objection: “Desire causes some suffering, but not all (e.g. physical pain).”

Reply: The Two Darts of Suffering - First dart: unavoidable, physical or immediate pain

- e.g., illness, injury, hearing bad news
- **Second dart:** our **mental reaction**: - anger, resentment, “Why me?”, self-pity, fear, replaying the event
- this is fueled by craving (wanting reality to be other than it is)
- Buddhism: we may not avoid the first dart, but we can **minimize or avoid the second** by changing how we relate to desire and aversion.

So “suffering is caused by desire” is mainly about reducing or eliminating the **second dart** and the ongoing dissatisfaction that craving generates.

1.4 Third Noble Truth: To Eliminate Suffering, Eliminate Desire

- If craving is the **root** of ongoing suffering, then eliminating craving eliminates that suffering.
- This does **not** mean:

- becoming a rock or a zombie
- losing all motivation, care, or enjoyment
- It means eliminating **clinging** (obsessive, possessive, “must-have” attitude).

This leads directly to the key distinction: **attachment vs mere preference** (next section).

2. Preference vs Attachment (Clinging / Craving)

The worry: “If I eliminate desire, I’ll do nothing and die.”

Buddhist reply: distinguish **attachment** (harmful) from **preference** (healthy).

2.1 Attachment / Clinging / Craving

- A **grasping, rigid** mental attitude:
 - “I absolutely must get this”
 - “I cannot be OK if I lose this”
 - “This outcome defines my worth / safety / happiness.”
- Involves **identifying** with desires and fears:
 - “If this fails, I’m a failure.”
- Consequences:
 - anxiety before events
 - anger and despair when blocked
 - ongoing fear of loss even when you have what you want
- This is what Buddhism targets for elimination.

2.2 Mere Preference / Intention / Project

- A **calmer, flexible** mental attitude:
 - “I’d like this to happen; I’ll act toward it.”
 - “If it doesn’t work out, that’s unfortunate, but I’ll be OK.”
- You still:
 - have goals and plans
 - care about people and projects

- act with energy and commitment
- But your **basic well-being** does not hinge on success.

2.3 Why Preference Is Compatible with Buddhist Practice

- You can **pursue goals** (health, education, justice, kindness) with preference, not clinging.
- You can **love others deeply** without making their behavior your rigid condition for being OK.
- Buddhism aims to transform:
 - **From:** possessiveness, desperation, identity wrapped up in outcomes
 - **To:** caring engagement without inner compulsion

So the claim: **eliminate attachment**, not all desires. This removes much suffering but preserves meaningful, motivated action.

3. Practicing Letting Go (Non-Clinging) and the Lake Metaphor

Non-clinging is a **practical skill**: learning to release thoughts, emotions, and sensations instead of gripping them or pushing them away.

3.1 Basic Two-Step Practice

Step 1: Notice - Become aware of: - a craving (“I need them to like me”)

- an aversion (“I can’t stand this discomfort”)
- a repetitive thought (“He hurt me...”) - Key: see it as a **mental event**, not a command: - “This is a thought / feeling appearing in the mind.”

Step 2: Let Go / Release - Gently **relax the mental grip**: - don’t feed the story, don’t rehearse it

- drop the chewing-over, even for a moment
- You **let the thought or feeling be there** without: - adding commentary
- acting it out
- identifying with it (“this is me”).
- If it comes back (it will), repeat: - notice □ relax □ return to simple awareness (e.g., breath, body).

This is a **repeated experiment**, not a one-time decision.

3.2 What Letting Go Is Not

- Not suppressing (“I must not feel this!”).
- Not pretending it’s fine when it isn’t.
- Not becoming indifferent or uncaring.

It is **changing your relationship** to experiences: from gripping and resisting to allowing and observing.

3.3 Start with Weaker Attachments

- Strong attachments (to identity, close relationships, big fears) are hardest.
- Begin with small ones:
 - mild impatience when waiting
 - slight annoyance at noise
 - urge to check your phone
- Practice noticing and releasing those first. This:
 - builds skill and confidence
 - makes it easier later with deeper patterns.

Also: avoid **cultivating new attachments** (e.g., don't habitually feed resentment, bragging, envy in your thoughts).

3.4 The Lake Metaphor

Ideal mind = **a calm, clear, still lake.**

- Normally, mind is like **choppy water**:
 - waves of craving, fear, anger, anxiety
 - constant stirring by thoughts and reactions
- With practice:
 - disturbances (waves) still **arise**, but
 - the “lake” no longer amplifies or clings to them.
- Thoughts, feelings, and sensations:
 - appear like ripples
 - are seen clearly
 - then naturally fade without being chased or resisted.

A calm lake: - reflects things accurately (clear perception, wisdom)

- is not **dominated** by storms (strong emotions) even when surface ripples occur.

4. Awareness Without Resistance:

“Don't Cling, Don't Push Away, Don't Ignore”

This is a practical summary of the attitude to cultivate.

4.1 Don't Cling (No Grasping)

- When something pleasant arises (praise, pleasure, good mood):
 - notice the urge to hold onto it (“I need this to last!”)
 - instead, allow it to be pleasant **without** grabbing it.
- Consequence of clinging:
 - fear of loss
 - jealousy, possessiveness
 - disappointment when it inevitably changes.

In the readings:

- Acting with a **pure mind** (free of grasping, hatred, delusion) □ happiness follows “like your shadow.”
- Clinging to grudges (“He abused me, he struck me...”) □ hatred does not end.

4.2 Don't Push Away (No Aversion / Resistance)

- When something unpleasant arises (pain, criticism, boredom):
 - avoid adding “I cannot bear this!” or rage.
 - let the unpleasant sensation or emotion **be there** without extra hostility.
- This addresses the **second dart**:
 - you still feel the first dart (pain, loss)
 - but you don't add resistance, hatred, or self-attack.

In the readings: - “Hatred is never appeased by hatred; by non-hatred alone is hatred appeased.”

- Recognizing mortality (“we all must die”) helps people settle quarrels, letting go of hostility.

4.3 Don't Ignore (No Numbing / Distraction)

- Avoid simply **shutting down**:
 - compulsive distraction
 - denial (“this isn't happening”)
 - emotional numbness
- Ignoring prevents:
 - learning from experience
 - seeing how craving and aversion operate
 - genuine letting go, because you never fully acknowledge what is there.

So the recommended stance is **open awareness**: - fully aware of what is arising (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral)

- without: - clinging to it

- pushing it away
- spacing out or denying it.

4.4 Meditation Experiments (The “Six Nails” Theme)

You don’t need technical details, but understand the **task description**:

- Sit quietly and observe whatever arises in body and mind.
- Apply the threefold instruction:
 - **Don’t cling** to pleasant sensations or thoughts.
 - **Don’t push away** unpleasant ones.
 - **Don’t ignore** neutral or subtle ones; remain present.
- This is like “nailing down” the mind in the present, so it doesn’t:
 - rush after desire
 - run away in aversion
 - drift into dullness.

Repeated practice gradually: - weakens attachment and aversion

- clarifies the mind (like improving the thatched roof so rain [passion] can’t penetrate)
 - supports living with virtue and non-hatred (as praised in the readings).
-

Core Takeaways for the Exam

- **Four Noble Truths**: suffering, its cause in craving, its cessation via ending craving, and the path as the method.
- **Suffering vs desire**: distinguish first and second dart; recognize *dukkha* as pervasive dissatisfaction.
- **Preference vs attachment**: eliminate clinging, not all desires; you can act and care without inner compulsion.
- **Letting go**: notice □ release; start with small attachments; aim for a mind like a calm lake.
- **Awareness without resistance**: “Don’t cling, don’t push away, don’t ignore” is the central practice attitude that reduces the second dart and leads toward lasting peace.