

# The Four Noble Truths & the Noble Eightfold Paths

A compilation of sutta passages by Bhante Sujato, based on the previous work of Bhante Tejadhammo. All translations by Bhante Sujato.

Now this is the noble truth of suffering. Rebirth is suffering; old age is suffering; illness is suffering; death is suffering; association with the disliked is suffering; separation from the liked is suffering; not getting what you wish for is suffering. In brief, the five grasping aggregates are suffering.

Now this is the noble truth of the origin of suffering. It's the craving that leads to future rebirth, mixed up with relishing and greed, taking pleasure in various different realms. That is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving to continue existence, and craving to end existence.

Now this is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering. It's the fading away and cessation of that very same craving with nothing left over; giving it away, letting it go, releasing it, and not clinging to it.

Now this is the noble truth of the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering. It is simply this noble eightfold path, that is: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right immersion.

— [SN 56.11](#)

## The Noble Truths and Rebirth

Mendicants, not understanding and not comprehending four noble truths, both you and I have wandered and transmigrated for such a very long time. What four? The noble truths of suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering. These noble truths of suffering, origin, cessation, and the path have been understood and comprehended. Craving for continued existence has been cut off; the attachment to continued existence is ended; now there are no more future lives.

— [DN 16](#)

## The Noble Truths Include All the Buddha's Teachings

The footprints of all creatures that walk can fit inside an elephant's footprint, so an elephant's footprint is said to be the biggest of them all. In the same way, all skillful qualities can be included in the four noble truths. What four? The noble truths of suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering.

— [MN 28](#)

## For One Who Feels

“These are the four noble truths”: this is the Dhamma I've taught ...’ That's what I said, and why did I say it? Supported by the six elements, an embryo is conceived. When it is conceived, there are name and form. Name and form are conditions for the six sense fields. The six sense fields are

conditions for contact. Contact is a condition for feeling. It's for one who feels that I declare: 'This is suffering' ... 'This is the origin of suffering' ... 'This is the cessation of suffering' ... 'This is the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering'.

— [AN 3.61](#)

## **How We Are to Respond**

'This is the noble truth of suffering.' Such was the vision, knowledge, wisdom, realization, and light that arose in me regarding teachings not learned before from another. 'This noble truth of suffering should be completely understood.' Such was the vision that arose in me ... 'This noble truth of suffering has been completely understood.' Such was the vision that arose in me ...

'This is the noble truth of the origin of suffering.' Such was the vision that arose in me ... 'This noble truth of the origin of suffering should be given up.' Such was the vision that arose in me ... 'This noble truth of the origin of suffering has been given up.' Such was the vision that arose in me ...

'This is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering.' Such was the vision that arose in me ... 'This noble truth of the cessation of suffering should be realized.' Such was the vision that arose in me ... 'This noble truth of the cessation of suffering has been realized.' Such was the vision that arose in me ...

'This is the noble truth of the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering.' Such was the vision that arose in me ... 'This noble truth of the practice that leads to cessation of suffering should be developed.' Such was the vision that arose in me ... 'This noble truth of the practice that leads to cessation of suffering has been developed.' Such was the vision, knowledge, wisdom, realization, and light that arose in me regarding teachings not learned before from another.

— [SN 56.11](#)

## **The First Noble Truth—suffering**

Now this is the noble truth of suffering. Rebirth is suffering; old age is suffering; illness is suffering; death is suffering; association with the disliked is suffering; separation from the liked is suffering; not getting what you wish for is suffering. In brief, the five grasping aggregates are suffering.

— [SN 56.11](#)

## **Sensual Pleasure, their gratification, drawbacks, and escape**

And what is the gratification of sensual pleasures? There are these five kinds of sensual stimulation. What five? Sights known by the eye that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing. Sounds known by the ear ... Smells known by the nose ... Tastes known by the tongue ... Touches known by the body that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing. These are the five kinds of sensual stimulation. The pleasure and happiness that arise from these five kinds of sensual stimulation: this is the gratification of sensual pleasures.

And what is the drawback of sensual pleasures? It's when a respectable person earns a living by means such as computing, accounting, calculating, farming, trade, raising cattle, archery, government service, or one of the professions. But they must face cold and heat, being hurt by the

touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and reptiles, and risking death from hunger and thirst. This is a drawback of sensual pleasures apparent in this very life, a mass of suffering caused by sensual pleasures.

That respectable person might try hard, strive, and make an effort, but fail to earn any money. If this happens, they sorrow and pine and lament, beating their breast and falling into confusion, saying: 'Oh, my hard work is wasted. My efforts are fruitless!' This too is a drawback of sensual pleasures apparent in this very life, a mass of suffering caused by sensual pleasures.

That respectable person might try hard, strive, and make an effort, and succeed in earning money. But they experience pain and sadness when they try to protect it, thinking: 'How can I prevent my wealth from being taken by rulers or bandits, consumed by fire, swept away by flood, or taken by unloved heirs?' And even though they protect it and ward it, rulers or bandits take it, or fire consumes it, or flood sweeps it away, or unloved heirs take it. They sorrow and pine and lament, beating their breast and falling into confusion: 'What used to be mine is gone.' This too is a drawback of sensual pleasures apparent in this very life, a mass of suffering caused by sensual pleasures.

Furthermore, for the sake of sensual pleasures kings fight with kings, aristocrats fight with aristocrats, brahmins fight with brahmins, and householders fight with householders. A mother fights with her child, child with mother, father with child, and child with father. Brother fights with brother, brother with sister, sister with brother, and friend fights with friend. Once they've started quarreling, arguing, and fighting, they attack each other with fists, stones, rods, and swords, resulting in death and deadly pain. This too is a drawback of sensual pleasures apparent in this very life, a mass of suffering caused by sensual pleasures.

Furthermore, for the sake of sensual pleasures they don their sword and shield, fasten their bow and arrows, and plunge into a battle massed on both sides, with arrows and spears flying and swords flashing. There they are struck with arrows and spears, and their heads are chopped off, resulting in death and deadly pain. This too is a drawback of sensual pleasures apparent in this very life, a mass of suffering caused by sensual pleasures. ...

Furthermore, for the sake of sensual pleasures, they conduct themselves badly by way of body, speech, and mind. When their body breaks up, after death, they're reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell. This is a drawback of sensual pleasures to do with lives to come, a mass of suffering caused by sensual pleasures.

And what is the escape from sensual pleasures? Removing and giving up desire and greed for sensual pleasures: this is the escape from sensual pleasures.

— [MN 13](#)

## **The Senses as A Raging Fire**

Mendicants, all is burning. And what is the all that is burning? The eye is burning. Sights are burning. Eye consciousness is burning. Eye contact is burning. The painful, pleasant, or neutral feeling that arises conditioned by eye contact is also burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fires of greed, hate, and delusion. Burning with rebirth, old age, and death, with sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress. The ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... The mind is burning. Thoughts are burning. Mind consciousness is burning. Mind contact is burning. The painful, pleasant, or neutral feeling that arises conditioned by mind contact is also burning. Burning with

what? Burning with the fires of greed, hate, and delusion. Burning with rebirth, old age, and death, with sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress, I say.

— [SN 35.28](#)

## **Aspects of Suffering and How it is Overcome**

‘Suffering should be known. And its source, diversity, result, cessation, and the practice that leads to its cessation should be known.’ That’s what I said, but why did I say it? Rebirth is suffering; old age is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress are suffering; association with the disliked is suffering; separation from the liked is suffering; not getting what you wish for is suffering. In brief, the five grasping aggregates are suffering.

And what is the source of suffering? Craving is the source of suffering.

And what is the diversity of suffering? There is suffering that is severe, mild, slow to fade, and quick to fade. This is called the diversity of suffering.

And what is the result of suffering? It’s when someone who is overcome and overwhelmed by suffering sorrows and pines and cries, beating their breast and falling into confusion. Or else, overcome by that suffering, they begin an external search, wondering: ‘Who knows one or two phrases to stop this suffering?’ The result of suffering is either confusion or a search, I say. This is called the result of suffering.

And what is the cessation of suffering? When craving ceases, suffering ceases. The practice that leads to the cessation of suffering is simply this noble eightfold path, that is: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right immersion.

When a noble disciple understands suffering in this way ... they understand that this penetrative spiritual life is the cessation of suffering. ‘Suffering should be known. And its source, diversity, result, cessation, and the practice that leads to its cessation should be known.’ That’s what I said, and this is why I said it.

— [AN 6.63](#)

## **The Second Noble Truth—the origin of suffering**

Now this is the noble truth of the origin of suffering. It’s the craving that leads to future rebirth, mixed up with relishing and greed, taking pleasure in various different realms. That is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving to continue existence, and craving to end existence.

— [SN 56.11](#)

### **Craving is the weaver**

The Buddha said this: “Mendicants, I will teach you about craving—the weaver, the migrant, the ubiquitous, the clinging. This world is choked by it, engulfed by it. It makes the world tangled like yarn, knotted like a ball of thread, and matted like rushes and reeds, not escaping the places of loss, the bad places, the underworld, transmigration. Listen and pay close attention, I will speak.” “Yes, sir,” they replied. The Buddha said this:

“And what is that craving ...? There are eighteen currents of craving that derive from the interior,

and eighteen that derive from the exterior.

What are the eighteen currents of craving that derive from the interior? When there is the concept ‘I am’, there are the concepts ‘I am such’, ‘I am thus’, ‘I am otherwise’; ‘I am fleeting’, ‘I am lasting’; ‘mine’, ‘such is mine’, ‘thus is mine’, ‘otherwise is mine’; ‘also mine’, ‘such is also mine’, ‘thus is also mine’, ‘otherwise is also mine’; ‘I will be’, ‘I will be such’, ‘I will be thus’, ‘I will be otherwise’. These are the eighteen currents of craving that derive from the interior.

What are the eighteen currents of craving that derive from the exterior? When there is the concept ‘I am because of this’, there are the concepts ‘I am such because of this’, ‘I am thus because of this’, ‘I am otherwise because of this’; ‘I am fleeting because of this’, ‘I am lasting because of this’; ‘mine because of this’, ‘such is mine because of this’, ‘thus is mine because of this’, ‘otherwise is mine because of this’; ‘also mine because of this’, ‘such is also mine because of this’, ‘thus is also mine because of this’, ‘otherwise is also mine because of this’; ‘I will be because of this’, ‘I will be such because of this’, ‘I will be thus because of this’, ‘I will be otherwise because of this’. These are the eighteen currents of craving that derive from the exterior.

So there are eighteen currents of craving that derive from the interior, and eighteen that derive from the exterior. These are called the thirty-six currents of craving. Each of these pertain to the past, future, and present, making one hundred and eight currents of craving.

This is that craving—the weaver, the migrant, the ubiquitous, the clinging. This world is choked by it, engulfed by it. It makes the world tangled like yarn, knotted like a ball of thread, and matted like rushes and reeds, not escaping the places of loss, the bad places, the underworld, transmigration.”

— [AN 4.199](#)

## **Not All Desire is Craving**

At one time Venerable Ānanda was staying near Kosambi, in Ghosita’s Monastery. Then Uṇṇābha the brahmin went up to Venerable Ānanda, and exchanged greetings with him. When the greetings and polite conversation were over, he sat down to one side and said to him: “Master Ānanda, what’s the purpose of living the spiritual life with the ascetic Gotama?” “The purpose of living the spiritual life under the Buddha, brahmin, is to give up desire.”

“But is there a path and a practice for giving up that desire?” “There is.”

“What is that path?” “It’s when a mendicant develops the basis of psychic power that has immersion due to enthusiasm (or desire) ... energy ... mental development ... inquiry, and active effort. This is the path and the practice for giving up that desire.”

“This being the case, Master Ānanda, the path is endless, not finite. For it’s not possible to give up desire by means of desire.” “Well then, brahmin, I’ll ask you about this in return, and you can answer as you like. What do you think, brahmin? Have you ever had a desire to walk to the park, but when you arrived at the park, the corresponding desire faded away?” “Yes, sir.” “Have you ever had the energy to walk to the park, but when you arrived at the park, the corresponding energy faded away?” “Yes, sir.” “Have you ever had the idea to walk to the park, but when you arrived at the park, the corresponding idea faded away?” “Yes, sir.” “Have you ever inquired regarding a walk to the park, but when you arrived at the park, the corresponding inquiry faded away?” “Yes, sir.”

“In the same way, take a mendicant who is perfected—with defilements ended, who has completed the spiritual journey, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, achieved their own true goal, utterly ended the fetters of rebirth, and is rightly freed through enlightenment. They formerly had the desire to attain perfection, but when they attained perfection the corresponding desire faded away. They formerly had the energy to attain perfection, but when they attained perfection the corresponding energy faded away. They formerly had the idea to attain perfection, but when they attained perfection the corresponding idea faded away. They formerly inquired regarding attaining perfection, but when they attained perfection the corresponding inquiry faded away. What do you think, brahmin? This being the case, is the path endless or finite?”

“Clearly, Master Ānanda, this being the case, the path is finite, not endless. Excellent, Master Ānanda! Excellent!”

— [SN 51.15](#)

## **Dependent Origination**

And what is the noble truth of the origin of suffering? Ignorance is a condition for choices. Choices are a condition for consciousness. Consciousness is a condition for name and form. Name and form are conditions for the six sense fields. The six sense fields are conditions for contact. Contact is a condition for feeling. Feeling is a condition for craving. Craving is a condition for grasping. Grasping is a condition for continued existence. Continued existence is a condition for rebirth. Rebirth is a condition for old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress to come to be. That is how this entire mass of suffering originates. This is called the noble truth of the origin of suffering.

— [AN 3.61](#)

## **The Third Noble Truth—the cessation of suffering**

Now this is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering. It’s the fading away and cessation of that very same craving with nothing left over; giving it away, letting it go, releasing it, and not clinging to it.

— [SN 56.11](#)

## **Ending is the best**

Fading away is said to be the best of all things whether conditioned or unconditioned. That is, the quelling of vanity, the removing of thirst, the abolishing of clinging, the breaking of the round, the ending of craving, fading away, cessation, extinguishment. Those who have confidence in the teaching of fading away have confidence in the best. Having confidence in the best, the result is the best.

— [AN 4.34](#)

## **When nothing is left, what is there to suffer?**

Ānanda, as long as there’s a body, the intention that gives rise to bodily action causes pleasure and pain to arise in oneself. As long as there’s a voice, the intention that gives rise to verbal action causes pleasure and pain to arise in oneself. As long as there’s a mind, the intention that gives rise



to mental action causes pleasure and pain to arise in oneself. But these only apply when conditioned by ignorance.

By oneself one instigates the choice that gives rise to bodily, verbal, and mental action, conditioned by which that pleasure and pain arise in oneself. Or else others instigate the choice ... One consciously instigates the choice ... Or else one unconsciously instigates the choice ...

Ignorance is included in all these things. But when ignorance fades away and ceases with nothing left over, there is no body and no voice and no mind, conditioned by which that pleasure and pain arise in oneself. There is no field, no ground, no scope, no basis, conditioned by which that pleasure and pain arise in oneself.

— [SN 12.25](#)

## **Dependent origination**

And what is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering? When ignorance fades away and ceases with nothing left over, choices cease. When choices cease, consciousness ceases. When consciousness ceases, name and form cease. When name and form cease, the six sense fields cease. When the six sense fields cease, contact ceases. When contact ceases, feeling ceases. When feeling ceases, craving ceases. When craving ceases, grasping ceases. When grasping ceases, continued existence ceases. When continued existence ceases, rebirth ceases. When rebirth ceases, old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress cease. That is how this entire mass of suffering ceases. This is called the noble truth of the cessation of suffering.

— [AN 3.61](#)

## **The Fourth Noble Truth—the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering**

Now this is the noble truth of the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering. It is simply this noble eightfold path, that is: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right immersion.

— [SN 56.11](#)

## **Half the spiritual path**

At one time the Buddha was staying in the land of the Sakyans, where they have a town named Nagaraka. Then Venerable Ānanda went up to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and said to him: “Sir, good friends, companions, and associates are half the spiritual life.”

“Not so, Ānanda! Not so, Ānanda! Good friends, companions, and associates are the whole of the spiritual life. A mendicant with good friends, companions, and associates can expect to develop and cultivate the noble eightfold path.

And how does a mendicant with good friends develop and cultivate the noble eightfold path? It’s when a mendicant develops right view, which relies on seclusion, fading away, and cessation, and ripens as letting go. They develop right thought ... right speech ... right action ... right livelihood ... right effort ... right mindfulness ... right immersion, which relies on seclusion, fading away, and cessation, and ripens as letting go. That’s how a mendicant with good friends develops and cultivates the noble eightfold path.

And here's another way to understand how good friends are the whole of the spiritual life. For, by relying on me as a good friend, sentient beings who are liable to rebirth, old age, and death, to sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress are freed from all these things. This is another way to understand how good friends are the whole of the spiritual life."

— [SN 45.2](#)

## **An Ancient City**

Suppose a person was walking through a forest. They'd see an ancient path, an ancient road traveled by humans in the past. Following it along, they'd see an ancient city, an ancient capital, inhabited by humans in the past. It was lovely, complete with parks, groves, lotus ponds, and embankments. Then that person would inform a king or their minister: 'Please sir, you should know this. While walking through a forest I saw an ancient path, an ancient road traveled by humans in the past. Following it along I saw an ancient city, an ancient capital, inhabited by humans in the past. It was lovely, complete with parks, groves, lotus ponds, and embankments. Sir, you should rebuild that city!' Then that king or their minister would have that city rebuilt. And after some time that city was successful and prosperous and full of people, attained to growth and expansion. In the same way, I saw an ancient path, an ancient road traveled by fully awakened Buddhas in the past.

And what is that ancient path, the ancient road traveled by fully awakened Buddhas in the past? It is simply this noble eightfold path, that is: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right immersion. This is that ancient path, the ancient road traveled by fully awakened Buddhas in the past. Following it along, I directly knew old age and death, their origin, their cessation, and the practice that leads to their cessation. Following it along, I directly knew rebirth ... continued existence ... grasping ... craving ... feeling ... contact ... the six sense fields ... name and form ... consciousness ... Following it along, I directly knew choices, their origin, their cessation, and the practice that leads to their cessation. Having directly known this, I told the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. And that's how this spiritual life has become successful and prosperous, extensive, popular, widespread, and well proclaimed wherever there are gods and humans.

— [SN 12.65](#)

## **In detail**

And what is right view? Knowing about suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering. This is called right view.

And what is right thought? It is the thought of renunciation, love, and kindness. This is called right thought.

And what is right speech? Avoiding speech that's false, divisive, harsh, or nonsensical. This is called right speech.

And what is right action? Avoiding killing living creatures, stealing, and sexual activity. This is called right action.

And what is right livelihood? It's when a noble disciple gives up wrong livelihood and earns a living by right livelihood. This is called right livelihood.



And what is right effort? It's when a mendicant generates enthusiasm, tries, makes an effort, exerts the mind, and strives so that bad, unskillful qualities don't arise. They generate enthusiasm, try, make an effort, exert the mind, and strive so that bad, unskillful qualities that have arisen are given up. They generate enthusiasm, try, make an effort, exert the mind, and strive so that skillful qualities that have not arisen do arise. They generate enthusiasm, try, make an effort, exert the mind, and strive so that skillful qualities that have arisen remain, are not lost, but increase, mature, and are fulfilled by development. This is called right effort.

And what is right mindfulness? It's when a mendicant meditates by observing an aspect of the body—keen, aware, and mindful, rid of desire and aversion for the world. They meditate observing an aspect of feelings—keen, aware, and mindful, rid of desire and aversion for the world. They meditate observing an aspect of the mind—keen, aware, and mindful, rid of desire and aversion for the world. They meditate observing an aspect of principles—keen, aware, and mindful, rid of desire and aversion for the world. This is called right mindfulness.

And what is right immersion? It's when a mendicant, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, enters and remains in the first absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of seclusion, while placing the mind and keeping it connected. As the placing of the mind and keeping it connected are stilled, they enter and remain in the second absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of immersion, with internal clarity and confidence, and unified mind, without placing the mind and keeping it connected. And with the fading away of rapture, they enter and remain in the third absorption, where they meditate with equanimity, mindful and aware, personally experiencing the bliss of which the noble ones declare, 'Equanimous and mindful, one meditates in bliss.' Giving up pleasure and pain, and ending former happiness and sadness, they enter and remain in the fourth absorption, without pleasure or pain, with pure equanimity and mindfulness. This is called right immersion.

— [SN 45.8](#)