



Wibha Senanan Kongkanandana



THE FOUR
NOBLE TRUTHS
THE HEART OF BUDDHISM

Wibha Senanan Kongkanandana



The Noble Truth is the truth of human life,
comprised of four aspects called

The Four Noble Truths

1. Suffering (*dukkha*)
2. The causes of suffering (*samudaya*)
3. The complete extinction of suffering
(*nirodha*)
4. The way to the complete extinction of
suffering (*maggā*)

SUFFERING (*DUKKHA*)

- ◆ Birth, old age, death is suffering
 - ◆ Physical and spiritual sickness, grief, sorrow, frustration is suffering
 - ◆ Interacting with undesirable things is suffering
 - ◆ Parting from love is suffering
 - ◆ Disappointment, losing is suffering
-
- When one can see that the existence of suffering is a natural phenomenon, one may be able to accept it.
 - The acceptance of suffering as such can help one to minimize its intensity.

- Or one may find effective tools to manage it constructively.
- The suffering of the rising number of the aged and their families today needs restorative treatment.
- Or one may look for ways and means to get rid of suffering itself completely.

You are now invited to turn to the following pages.

The Causes of Suffering

(samudaya)

1. Ignorance (*avijja*)

2. Craving or desire (*tanha*)

- Craving or desire to have material things (*kamatanha*)
- Craving or desire to be (*bhavatanha*)
- Craving or desire not to be (*vibhavatanha*)

3. Defilements : (*kilesa*)

- Greed (*lobha*)
- Anger (*kohda*)
- Delusion (*moha*)

The Extinction of the Causes of suffering ***(nirodha)***

When ignorance, craving or desire and defilements are all completely eliminated,

When all the causes are put to a complete end, suffering is extinguished completely.

This is like taking away all the fuel in order to put a complete end to fire.

After the causes have been extinguished, after the spiritual stain has disappeared, a new phase of life begins.

Brightness, cleanliness, peace, and loving kindness gradually fill the mind.

One begins to live a new life, a better life that leads to nirvana in the end.

**The Way Leading to the Complete Extinction
of the Causes of Suffering
(*magga*)**

There are other names by which The Way
is called

1. The Path
2. The Noble Path
3. The Eight-fold Path
4. The Middle Way

The Middle Way *(majjhima patipada)*

This Way is found between two extremes: the rigid and the loose.

Self- torture is one of the two extremes; extravagance is the other.

The Middle Way is composed of eight elements:

1. Wisdom
2. Thought
3. Speech
4. Action
5. Occupation
6. Effort
7. Mindfulness
8. Concentration

1

WISDOM

(sammaditthi)

Wisdom or right understanding is the first element of The Way. It enables one to have the right understanding of things. There are two levels of things to be rightly understood: the mundane and the spiritual.

At the mundane level, one's wisdom enables one to understand, for instance, the virtues of one's mother and father, the merit of alms-giving, of supporting those who are worth being supported, there are such things as this life and the future life.

At the spiritual level, wisdom enables one to see the truth of life, to have the right understanding of The Four Noble Truths.

2

THOUGHT

(sammāsankappa)

The thought, which is another element of the Way, is that which enables one to see human suffering, their causes, the complete extinction of the causes, and the way leading to the complete extinction of all the causes.

That is, the Right Thought is the thought of the Four Noble Truths.

Consequently, one with the right thought will not bring suffering of any kind to oneself or to others.

3

SPEECH

(sammavaca)

Sammavaca or Right Speech, another element of The Way, is true, useful and constructive speech, speech that inspires one to do good and useful things for one's own sake and for that of others.

Right Speech is far removed from lies and harsh, rude, abusive, destructive or nonsensical speech.

To speak words that finally lead to the realization of the Four Noble Truths is Right Speech .

4

ACTION

(sammakammanta)

Action that is considered right in The Middle Way is the action that brings about usefulness and inspiration for physical and spiritual well-being of one's self and for others.

The actions that abstain from destroying life, abuse, intrusion, taking away things dear to their owners, and misconduct in matters of sensual desire or behaviour, are considered Right Action.

To act constantly in following the above principles is to take Right Action.

To walk constantly along the Middle Way is the Right Action.

5

OCCUPATION

(sammaajiva)

Right Occupation which is regarded as The Right Livelihood is one that does not involve destroying life, stealing, cheating, bringing harm to one's self or others, or degrading human dignity.

Right Occupation is one that is useful, respectful, creative, constructive.

Right Occupation, like other elements of the Path, leads one to realize the value of the Four Noble Truths.

6

EFFORT

(sammavayama)

The effort to stay away from all kinds of evil, ignorance, craving and defilements;

The effort to constantly practice or hold all kinds of virtue and righteousness;

The effort to constantly develop a better life onto perfection leading to the state of enlightenment;

All are the Right Efforts.

7

MINDFULNESS

(sammāsati)

To be rightly mindful is to be fully aware of what is going on in one's behaviour at the present time and place in the following movement of body and mind:

- physical activities: walking, driving, eating, breathing in, breathing out
- feelings: calm, happy, annoyed, joyful, bored,
- thoughts: creative, angry, stupid, selfish, desire to be rich, to be loved, or void of any desires,
- emotions: melancholy, love of mankind, non-violence, worldly detachment, spiritual renunciation.

It is to be aware of what physical activities, feelings, thoughts and emotions are going on in one's body and mind at every moment and place, including the present.

8

CONCENTRATION

(sammāsamadhi)

Right Concentration is a state of mind that focuses on the following conduct:

- staying away from craving or desire of any kinds,
- decreasing, eliminating and ceasing all kinds of defilements, such as anger, greed, jealousy, stubbornness, snobbery, carelessness,
- constantly practicing loving kindness (*metta*).

Right Concentration brings peace of mind and light for the brain, which helps to enable one to clearly see the value of the Four Noble Truths.

One can develop the Right Concentration through practicing meditation.

IN CONCLUSION

All eight components mentioned above work altogether to become the Middle Way, the Path, the Noble Path, the Eight-fold Path for human beings who see the value of the Four Noble Truths, to walk along in order to attain freedom of the mind from all kinds of ignorance, craving, desire and defilements; to attain brightness and tranquility in the spirit, and finally to attain enlightenment.

The Four Noble Truths is the summation of the body of the Lord Buddha's profound knowledge known as his Enlightenment. It is the first lesson he gave to his first group of five students, namely the *Pancavaggi* (ปัญจวัคคีย์).

EPILOGUE

The content of this little book comes from my own understanding of Buddhism as a result of my learning experience, both systematically and in my own way. Through my more than eighty years, I have found the study of Buddhism very inspiring, very useful in my life and very precious.

And I would very much like to share this precious experience of mine with my beloved friends and those who might begin to be interested in Buddhism.

Buddhist ethics affords me constructive tools to go through hard but essential work, lightens the heavy burdens of my feeble heart, reduces

my weaknesses, soothes my grief, trims and buttresses my ideals, and expands my vision in seeing life as it is, to view the world as it exists, from more than one or two perspectives - from seven perspectives (*sap-purisa-dhamma*) to be precise.

The content of this booklet should hopefully be a practical guide for beginners as an introduction to further study of Buddhism and the practice of meditation.

At the same time, it might also be good for students of Buddhism, like myself, as a summation and reminder of what has been studied on and off in fits and starts for several years, and to renew their practices in following **The Way**.

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And with them, I happily wrote

The Noble Truth: The Heart of Buddhism.

Books for further reading:

1. **Tripitaka**, Thai version, esp. Vol. 4 and 14, Bangkok: Maha Chulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya, 2539 ,
2. Somdech Pra Yanasangvon, Somdech Pra Sangharaja, the Supreme Patriarch, **Huachai Praputthasasna (The Heart of Buddhism)**, Bangkok:Mahamakuta Rajavidyalaya, 2559,
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- Editor of Pra Rajanirodharansi's (เทศก์ เทศรังสี) last work, Sin Lok Lua Dhama (สิ้นโลก เหลือธรรม: The World Ends, Dhama Remains).1994.

- Editor of M.R. Kukrit Pramoj's lecture on "Thai Literature and Society," first published in serial form in Siam Rath Daily. 1995; 2nd edition 2010.
- Contributor to Asiaweek and many journals and magazines in Thailand since 1963.
- Contributor to the Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th Century, New York. 1984.
- Representative of the World Fellowship of Buddhists Headquarters in Thailand to attend the centenary of Mahatama Gandhi in India. 1970.
- Representative of International P.E.N., Thailand Centre to attend International P.E.N. congresses and conferences in Edinburgh, Dublin and London. 1970 -1972.
- Awarded Narathipphongraphan Prize from The Writers' Association of Thailand, 2017.

- The author of 14 books and numerous writings in various forms, such as, short stories, essays, poetry, travelogues, satires, memoirs, and academic articles.

Acclaimed Works

- The Genesis of the Novel in Thailand, 1975.
- Wannakhadi Suksa (The Study of Literature) 4th edition 2013.
- Phra Ek nai Wannakhadi Thai (Heroes in Thai Classical Literature), 4th edition 2002.
- Kamnoet Nawaniyai nai Prathet Thai (The Origin of the Novel in Thailand) 2nd edition 2018.
- Chotmai chak Sarana (Letters from Sarana, quasi-novel, from the International Writers Conference on Roles of Writers in the Community in Edinburgh, Scotland, 1970) 3rd edition 2019.

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