

## **The Four Noble Truths**

The Lord Buddha describes the fruits of the practice, the process of progressive insight and freedom from suffering as ‘The Four Noble Truths’. Let us consider first the practical context in which these were offered. The Buddha discovered these while he was meditating according to the Middle Way. He was not practising any kind of weakening austerities but rather gathering all his strength to sit for long periods, patiently enduring the pain.

### **First Noble Truth**

If we after much exertion, when the whole body hurts still stay with the practise – like the Buddha – then we may see the suffering of the body with a Noble heart, one empowered with the compassion that sees suffering and yet does not withdraw. Then we will momentarily let go of our craving in relation to the body – a craving that either wants to hold on to it, or to get away. When this happens we naturally let go of the body to enter the deepest *samādhi*. As we let go of the body, we find we have let go of all the rest, all of the khandas, and suffering ceases completely and we understand for the first time that the source of suffering was not the khandas themselves but just the result of the sensual clinging and identification associated with craving all along.

### **Second Noble Truth**

We are not surprised that both craving and suffering come back into the mind in relation to feeling and that these cravings still remain to be abandoned – the desire for pleasant feeling draws us back into wanting to become a feeling being, while the desire to escape unpleasant feeling compels us to want to get away from this same mode of being. But the Noble heart, having found itself freed from the body, will find itself naturally abandoning this craving in order not to get drawn back into the suffering of the body, into another birth. The heart now knows how to remain with the greater pleasure of *samādhi*, letting go of pain and suffering. The heart gradually comes to realize fully that the pleasures of the senses are low, coarse and unprofitable compared to those of *samādhi*. This fact and the wisdom that sees the connection between the body and the senses continue to cut away at sensual craving.

### **Third Noble Truth**

We see that all mental and emotional suffering ceases to arise whilst craving is abandoned and non-attachment to the body is maintained. We realize that we have won through to a more lasting solution and yet the pains of the body, of ageing and sickness, still remain.

### **Fourth Noble Truth**

The Noble heart now sees clearly the Noble Eightfold Path, the need to live a life not of desire but of wisdom and compassion to make no more karma in the direction of becoming, birth and death. This is where non-attachment to the body finds its full expression in all aspects of life. Although all four truths are seen together in a single path moment, we realize that all we need to do is to keep letting go of craving and attachment to the body, the practitioner then needs to continue to apply effort to the path more and more fully to achieve this moment by moment in the face of sensual craving.

The Lord Buddha tells us how this is achieved in the next Sermon ‘The Discourse on Not-self’. Here the Lord Buddha describes the contemplation or right mindfulness that enables us to abandon craving. This begins with us seeing the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and not-self in relation to the body. Through letting go of identification with the body the identification with all other phenomenon ceases, suffering ceases and is seen by the meditator over and over as dependent on attachment to the body. This is underlined in the next discourse, ‘The Fire Sermon’ where the objects of the senses are similarly pointed out as arising dependent on the organs of the senses as though burning with the same mortal fire.

I offer this for your reflection.

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