

A Link Between the Four Noble Truths and the Brahma-viharas

<i>The Four Noble Truths</i>	<i>Brahma-viharas or Boundless States (appamanna)</i>
<p><u>Suffering</u> ("disease"): This refers to the existence of <i>dukkha</i> (the unsatisfactory nature of all conditioned phenomena). <i>Dukkha</i> includes suffering, unsatisfactoriness, dissatisfaction, anxiety, and stress. Three types of suffering: suffering of suffering, suffering of change, and pervasive suffering (everything in existence carries the germ of suffering). Task: To <i>understand</i> suffering. This dispels the personality-view.</p> <p>Suffering also includes <i>not</i> understanding the three marks of existence: impermanence, no stability (<i>anicca</i>); suffering, unsatisfactoriness (<i>dukkha</i>); and not-self, empty of any inherent existence (<i>anatta</i>).</p> <p>The truth of suffering includes understanding the five aggregates, or groups of existence, that form the objects of clinging – (1) form, (2) feeling, (3) perception, (4), mental formation, and (5) consciousness. (<i>Samyutta Nikaya</i>, LVI. 13)</p>	<p><i>Metta</i> – goodwill; the wish for true happiness, directed first to oneself and then to others.</p> <p>Understanding suffering, and being aware of the reality and commonality of suffering, one will by contrast desire to express the following empathetic wish: May _____ experience true happiness and come to know the causes of genuine happiness.</p> <p>Note: According to the <i>Visuddhi-Magga</i>, a person should first of all consider the evil consequences of hatred, and the blessing of all-embracing kindness. For as long as one has not understood the evil consequences of a thing, one will not be able to overcome it. Similarly, one cannot reach a noble state of mind, before first understanding its blessing.</p>
<p><u>Origin</u> (cause of "disease"): This refers to the cause of <i>dukkha</i>. The origination of suffering is <i>tanha</i> ("thirst"), that is, craving (desire), and also ignorance.</p> <p>It is craving for sensual pleasures (seeing/hearing/smelling/tasting/touching/thinking; that is, sensual desires and attachment to sensual objects), for becoming (craving for existence, connected with the eternity view – the belief in an eternal Ego that continues after death; may include wanting to be this, wanting to be that, struggling to escape from the state one is in), and for not-becoming (craving for self-annihilation or extermination, that is, the materialistic belief in a temporary self that will become annihilated at death). Task: To <i>abandon</i> suffering. This dispels the self-annihilation-at-death view.</p> <p>The origin of suffering also involves Dependent Origination: (1) ignorance, (2) karma formations (or fabrications), (3) consciousness (in a new birth), (4) physical and mental existence (body and mind), (5) six bases (five sense organs and mind), (6) sensorial and mental impressions, (7) feeling (feeler acting on objects, leading to feeling, perception or labelling in the mind, leading to fabrications or thinking), (8) craving (<i>tanha</i>), (9) clinging (to the five aggregates: form, feeling, perception, fabrications, consciousness), (10) becoming (that is, the karma process and rebirth process of becoming), (11) birth (re-birth), and (12) aging and death (old age, decay and death; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, despair). (See <i>Samyutta Nikaya</i>, XII. 17)</p>	<p><i>Karuna</i> – compassion; the desire for suffering to stop.</p> <p>Aware of the burden of the misery, pain, and grief of suffering of others, and its causes, as well as the need to abandon those causes, one will desire to express the following: May _____ be free from the heavy burden of suffering by understanding the true causes of suffering.</p> <p>Note: "Through hate, by hate overwhelmed, and fettered in mind, one leads an evil life in bodily deeds, words, or thoughts, and understands neither one's own welfare, nor the welfare of others, nor the welfare of both sides, according to reality." (<i>Anguttara-Nikaya</i>, III, 55)</p> <p>There are five means of overcoming hatred. To a person against whom hatred might arise, one should develop (1) all-embracing kindness, (2) compassion, and (3) equanimity; or, (4) one should not pay them any attention; or, (5) one should picture to oneself the law of the ownership of <i>kamma</i>, that is, that this person too is the owner and heir of their deeds. (<i>Anguttara-Nikaya</i>, V, 161)</p>

<p><u>Cessation</u> (cure of "disease"): This refers to the cessation of <i>dukkha</i>. "It is the complete fading-away and extinction of this craving, its forsaking and abandonment, liberation from it, detachment from it" (<i>Digha Nikāya</i> 22). The positive meaning of this is Nibanna. Task: To <i>realize</i> the extinction of suffering. This dispels the eternalism-view.</p> <p>Cessation pacifies the torment of suffering which brings true peace. It results in health and happiness. Also, cessation leads one out of <i>samara</i>, the endless rounds of rebirth. (The characteristics of each Noble Truth are studied in Tibetan Buddhism.)</p>	<p><i>Mudita</i> – empathetic joy; the desire for happiness to continue and even expand.</p> <p>Aware that there are times of real joy and happiness in life (and that one can be, in a sense, momentarily liberated from suffering), one will desire to express the following: May _____ continue to experience joy, gladness and happiness in life, and may it even increase, as success and achievement are seen and rejoiced in.</p>
<p><u>Path</u> (medicine for "disease"): This refers to the Path leading to the cessation of <i>dukkha</i>. "It is the noble Eightfold Path, namely: Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration" (<i>Digha Nikāya</i> 22). Right understanding, that is, right view, denotes "seeing things as they really are" and involves understanding intentional action (<i>kamma</i>). Task: To <i>develop</i> the Eightfold Path in one's life. This dispels the resultlessness-of-action view.</p> <p>Characteristics of the Path are that it leads to full understanding of the root of cyclic existence (<i>samsara</i>) and the means to be delivered from the bondage of conditioned existence.</p>	<p><i>Upekkha</i> – equanimity; the discernment to see where one can truly be of help; not cold-heartedness or indifference.</p> <p>Aware that like all beings, each of us is also ever-changing in all aspects; suffers and seeks an end of suffering; and is not a fixed, permanent entity. Therefore, one will desire to express the following: May _____ abide in equanimity, free from attachment and aversion, and discover the true Path that leads to a definite end of suffering.</p>
<p><u>Supplementary Notes:</u> One may be gripped by one of two incorrect views: (1) the Eternity-View or (2) Annihilation-View). The Buddha, however, avoided these two extremes and showed the truth of impersonality and conditionality that keeps in the middle between the two, namely, Dependent Origination. (<i>Samyutta Nikaya</i>, XII, 17)</p> <p>In the <i>Visuddhi-Magga</i> it states that in the highest sense all the four truths may be regarded as empty, for the reason that there is (1) no sufferer, (2) no doer, (3) no liberated one, and (4) no pursuer of the Path. "Mere suffering exists, no sufferer is found. The deed is, but no doer of the deed is there. Nibbana is, but not the man that enters it. The Path is, but no traveller on it is seen."</p>	<p><u>Supplementary Notes:</u> On the value of <i>metta</i>: If all-embracing kindness, the liberation of mind, has been cultivated and developed, made one's vehicle and foundation, is firmly established, brought to greatness and full perfection, one may expect an eleven-fold blessing: (1) one sleeps peacefully; (2) awakens peacefully; (3) has no evil dreams; (4) is dear to men; (5) is dear to spirits; (6) heavenly beings protect one; (7) fire, poison and weapons cannot do any harm; (8) the scattered mind becomes composed; (9) one's features brighten up; (10) one will have an untroubled death; and (11) if one does not penetrate higher, one will be reborn in the Brahma-World. (<i>Anguttara-Nikaya</i>, XI, 15)</p>
<p>Source: Nyanatiloka, Mahathera. <i>The Buddha's Path to Deliverance in Its Threefold Division and Seven Stages of Purity</i> (being a systematic exposition, in the words of the Sutta-Pitaka, compiled, translated and explained by Nyanatiloka), 3rd edition. Colombo, Sri Lanka: Lake House Printers and Publishers, 1969.</p>	<p>© 2014 Alexander Peck Note: Pali terms used throughout. Version: 12th December, 2014 Email: aepeck77@gmail.com</p>