

The Four Noble Truths

Friends of the Western Buddhist Order

four, the truth of the path leading to the end of suffering

the middle path

As a youth, Prince Siddhartha enjoyed the indulgent life of pleasure in his father's palace. Later, when he renounced the worldly life and became an ascetic, he experienced the hardship of torturing his mind and body. Finally, not long before attaining Enlightenment, he realized the fruitlessness of these two extreme ways of life. He realized that the way to happiness and Enlightenment was to lead a life that avoids these extremes. He described this life as the Middle Path.

These three ways of life may be compared to the strings of different tensions on a lute. The loose string, which is like a life of indulgence, produces a poor sound when struck. The overly tight string, which is like a life of extreme asceticism, similarly produces a poor sound when struck and is, moreover, likely to break at any moment. Only the middle string, which is neither too loose nor too tight, and is like the Middle Path, produces a pleasant and harmonious sound when struck. So those who follow the Middle Path which avoids the extreme of indulging one's desires and the opposite extreme of torturing one's mind and body unreasonably, will find happiness, peace of mind and Enlightenment. This is the Fourth Noble Truth of the path leading to the end of suffering.

So these who follow the Middle Path which avoid the extreme of indulging one's desires and opposite extreme of torturing one's mind and body unreasonably, will find happiness, peace of mind and Enlightenment. This is the Fourth Noble Truth of the path leading to the end of suffering.

the noble eightfold path

Like a wise and experienced doctor, the Buddha recognized the sickness of suffering. He identified its caused and discovered its cure. Then, for the benefit of mankind, the Buddha put his discovery into a systematic formula that can be easily followed in order to rid ourselves of suffering. The formula includes both physical and mental treatment, and is called the Noble Eightfold Path.

From The Pali Canon

And what is that Middle Path, O bhikkhus, that the Tathagata has realized? It is simply the Noble Eightfold Path, namely: Right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. This is the Noble Eightfold Path realized by the Tathagata. It produces vision, it produces knowledge, it leads to calm, to higher knowledge, to enlightenment, to nibbana.

THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS are essentially a "path of purification." The Buddha never intended that people should worship him or accept his teachings on faith alone. He wanted all beings to be free from the bondage of greed, anger, and delusion. Liberation in Buddhism means freedom from all kinds of mental impurities. In order to accomplish this, one must develop the Noble Eightfold Path. During his forty-five years as a fully enlightened one, the Buddha imparted the Dhamma according to individual capacities, aptitudes, and depths of understanding. But the essence of all the discourses recorded in Buddhist scriptures are to be found in the teachings on the Noble Eightfold Path, which are:

1. right understanding (*samma ditthi*)
2. right thought (*samma san kappa*)
3. right speech (*samma vaca*)
4. right action (*samma kammanta*)
5. right livelihood (*samma ajiva*)
6. right effort (*samma vayama*)
7. right mindfulness (*samma sati*)
8. right concentration (*samma samadhi*)

The order in which the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path are listed is not to be understood as successive stages of practice. They are all to be developed together. Since each factor is linked to the others, and all are mutually supportive, the path constitutes a method of training which must be practiced as a whole in order to be effective.

The Bodhisattva's Wish

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Shantideva

This excerpt is from a translation of the Dedication Chapter of the Bodhicaryavatara (Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life) composed by Shantideva in the 8th century C.E. Apologies to the translator whose name has been lost.

May all beings everywhere plagued with sufferings of body and mind, obtain an ocean of happiness and joy

For as long as they remain in cyclic existence, may their mundane happiness never decline, and may all of them uninterruptedly receive waves of joy

May those feeble with cold find warmth, and may those oppressed with heat be cooled by the boundless waters that pour forth from the great clouds

May all animals be free from fear of being eaten by one another

May the hungry ghosts be as happy as the people of the northern continent

May the blind see forms, may the deaf hear sounds, may pregnant women give birth without any pain

May the naked find clothing, the hungry find food: may the forlorn find new hope, constant happiness and prosperity

May all who are sick and ill quickly be freed from their illnesses, and may every disease in the world never occur again

May the frightened cease to be afraid and may those bound be free; may the powerless find power, and may people think of befriending one another

May all travelers find happiness everywhere they go, and without any effort may they accomplish whatever they set out to do

May those who sail in ships and boats obtain whatever they wish for, and having safely returned to the shore may they joyfully reunite with their relatives

May the troubled wanderers who have lost their way meet with fellow travelers, and without any fear of thieves and tigers, may their going be easy without any fatigue

May those who find themselves in trackless, fearful wildernesses, the children, the aged, the unprotected, those stupefied and insane, be guarded by beneficent celestials

May pregnant women give birth without any pain, just like the treasury of space, and without it being the source of dispute or harm, may they always enjoy it as they wish

May all embodied creatures uninterruptedly hear the sound of Dharma issuing from birds and trees, beams of light, and even space itself

May celestials bring timely rains so that harvests may be bountiful.

May kings act in accordance with Dharma and the people of the world always prosper

May no living creature ever suffer, commit evil or fall ill: may no one be afraid or belittled or their minds ever be depressed

May beings not experience the misery of lower realms, and may they never know any hardships.

With a physical form superior to the gods, may they swiftly attain Buddhahood

For as long as space endures and for as long as living beings remain, until then may I too abide to dispel the misery of the world

May all the pains of living creatures ripen solely upon myself, and through the might of the Bodhisattva Sangha, may all beings experience happiness