

The Four Noble Truth

(චතුරාර්ය සත්‍යය)

The Four Noble Truth, the heart of Buddhism, includes all kinds of doctrines that the Buddha explained to deities and humans in his entire life, 45 years. His main effort was to point out the path of liberation from all kinds of sufferings. The Buddha said very clearly, he preached in the past and preaches in the present only two things which are suffering and the cessation of suffering. Also these four things are centered in one theme that is suffering or unsatisfactoriness. If someone can understand only suffering according to the Buddha's advice, he is qualified to realize all four things. As much as he can realize the unsatisfactoriness, he has overcome suffering at that level. They are:

1. The unsatisfactoriness or Suffering (දුක්ඛ සත්‍යය)
2. The cause of unsatisfactoriness (සමුදය සත්‍යය)
3. The cessation of unsatisfactoriness (නිරෝධ සත්‍යය)
4. The path that leads to get rid of unsatisfactoriness (මාර්ග සත්‍යය)

The main goal of every person is happiness. They do all things in their lives in the name of happiness. They learn, do jobs, raise children, earn money and wealth. Even though they do all of them for happiness, they only lost happiness. When they earn everything and grow up with wealth day by day, unfortunately their happiness goes away. The main reason of this situation is they mostly trust in external things such as children, money, education, health, physical appearance, properties. When those things change and go out of control, they worry, they are upset. They think that happiness comes from outside. That is why they fully trust in sensual pleasures. In this situation, the Buddha has explained the nature of suffering and how to overcome it.

The Buddha pointed out if we suffer about something, the nearest reason is big attachment, desire or craving. If we like something greedily, when it changes, when it is out of control, when someone steals it, we worry, we suffer, and we get angry. If we have no big attachment with anything, when they change or stolen, it is nothing to suffer or get angry. Further, the Buddha explained what the reason of big attachment or craving is. It is said as ignorance or delusion. What is the nature of our experience? We receive all experiences in our life through our senses which are eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. When objects such as matters, sounds, smell, tastes, touching on senses and contact mind, we have experience about the world. The nature of this experience is suddenly arises and ceases. After the experience we only have the memory as we think about it. Because of ignorance after experience we think it is still happening. When we think as our previous experience, we suddenly run to the past. This misunderstanding brings us suffering. If we have real knowledge, mindfulness and wisdom to

see this reality according to the Buddha's guide, we are able to overcome suffering. The nearest cause of suffering is craving or desire, and the major reason is ignorance that inability to see this nature. As the result of understanding of this truth, if we can live every moment with mindfulness and intelligence reflecting impermanence, we can reach the real happiness.

When the Buddha explained the four noble truth, he analyzed what we should do in every steps. The very first thing that we should do is listening to this message with good attention, reflect on it wisely and practice it in our day to day life promptly. According to four steps of the truth, we have to do four things. First we have to understand what unsatisfactoriness is. Then cease its cause. After that we acquire liberation as the result of cessation from unsatisfactoriness. Finally, we practice its path that the Noble Eight fold path. The very especial thing here is we practice this path with clear understanding about every step.

1. The unsatisfactoriness or Suffering (දුක්ඛ සත්‍යය)

The Buddha explains all kinds of sufferings in this first step. Birth (ජානිති දුක්ඛා), aging (ජරාති දුක්ඛා), sickness (ව්‍යාධිති දුක්ඛා), death (මරණමිති දුක්ඛං), union with what is displeasing (අප්ප්‍රියෙහි සම්පයෝගෝ දුක්ඛෝ), separation from what is pleasing (ප්‍රියෙහි විප්පයෝගෝ දුක්ඛෝ) and not to get what one wants are sufferings (යම්පිච්ඡං න ලභති තම්පි දුක්ඛං). These are the negative things that we dislike in our life. When they come to our life, we suffer, worry, upset, lament or get angry. All of these sufferings depend on only one, that is five aggregates. Finally It is said as "In brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering" (සංවිත්තේන පඤ්චුපාදානක්ඛන්ධා දුක්ඛා). First seven things are not difficult to understand as suffering. Anybody, who is wise, can understand as they are suffering. The especial reason of suffering, that is never understood without a Buddha's advice, is the five aggregates. Five aggregates are;

- i. Matter (රූප)
- ii. Feelings (වේදනා)
- iii. Perception (සඤ්ඤා)
- iv. Mental formations (සංඛාර)
- v. Consciousness (විඤ්ඤාණ)

When we experience through our senses about the world, these five aggregates arise together. They can't be separated. As the result of arising of these five things, we have an experience. These five aggregates suddenly arise and cease instantly. When we experience something, they have not only arisen but ceased also. When we experience something through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue or body, these five senses can't get pleasure or pain. Those experiences ceased instantly, we get pleasure or pain in sense of mind as a past experience.

However, we think that we experience in the present because of ignorance. That is why we suffer. If we can understand as these five aggregates arise and cease at the moment with the condition, we are able to understand its impermanence. Then we know we have nothing to desire or hate. It means we have overcome suffering. As much as we have this understanding we have liberated from unsatisfactoriness.

2. The cause of unsatisfactoriness (සමුදය සත්‍යය)

The second step of the four noble truth is the cause of suffering. We mostly desire because of no understanding of the nature of the five aggregates. If we have a clear knowledge about five aggregates in our experience, we can get rid of desire and cravings which disturb our peace of mind. The Buddha pointed out the closed reason of suffering as desire. If somebody can overcome suffering, he has no anger as well.

3. The cessation from unsatisfactoriness (නිරෝධ සත්‍යය)

We already know the cause of suffering as desire and major reason as ignorance. With this understanding if we can reflect on impermanence, we are ready to overcome desire. We have liberation from unsatisfactoriness. Seeing liberation, we enter the path that leads to liberation in next step.

4. The path that leads to get rid of unsatisfactoriness (මාර්ග සත්‍යය)

With the full understanding of the above three steps in suffering, the Buddha's disciple enters the real path to get rid of suffering. The Buddha emphasized the real path as the noble eight fold path with his experience. As the result of listening to the Buddha's message, our view becomes clear. It is said in Buddhism as 'Right Understanding'.

When we have 'Right Understanding', we don't stop since we have to practice other seven steps too. Then we meet a path to follow 'The Eight Fold Path'.

The Noble Eight Fold Path –

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|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Right Understanding | (<i>Sammà Ditthi</i>) |
| 2. Right Thoughts | (<i>Sammà samkappa</i>) |
| 3. Right Speech | (<i>Sammà Vācā</i>) |
| 4. Right Action | (<i>Sammà kammantha</i>) |
| 5. Right Livelihood | (<i>Sammà ājīva</i>) |
| 6. Right Effort | (<i>Sammà Vāyāma</i>) |
| 7. Right Mindfulness | (<i>Sammà sathi</i>) |
| 8. Right Concentration | (<i>Sammà samādhi</i>) |

Here the most important thing that we are compulsory to do is to develop mindfulness. At the very beginning of practicing mindfulness, we have to identify 'the sign of mindfulness' (Sati Nimitta). By focusing our attention on the tip of our nose or upper lip, we try to do all our acts not only breathing meditation but other meditation techniques and all our daily activities. Our success of meditation depends on how much we practice this sign of mindfulness. Every day we have to try to increase the time that we practice mindfulness. When we practice this, we can see the result that is happiness. The very important thing of the practice of mindfulness is the visible results. Seeing the results we can go forward on the path getting rid of suffering towards the purification of mind in this short life itself. That is one of the qualities of the Dhamma which is with immediate results (*Akàlika*). If we can put this knowledge into practice and get the result, we are the most fortunate people in the world. The reason is that this is the happiest thing among everything in our life such as money, relatives, education, properties, etc. For that we have to be diligent. We should dedicate our time for that than we do for other things.

May the Triple Gem Bless You!

(නෙරුවන් සරණයි)

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